



April 16, 2021

Sonoma-Marín Area Rail Transit
Board of Directors
5401 Old Redwood Highway, Suite 200
Petaluma, CA 94954

Dear Directors,

The SMART Board of Directors faces a crucial choice during its April 21, 2021 Board meeting to approve the Capital Improvement Plan to include in the FY 21-22 budget and the Short Range Transit Plan. Will you allocate money to the SMART Pathway, completing the promise made to the voters of Marin and Sonoma Counties in 2008? Or will you choose to spend the limited funding on comparatively minor improvements to the already-running train?

As presented by staff at the April 7, 2021 meeting, SMART has \$21.6M available for capital projects through FY29. However, at this same meeting the Board was presented with \$2.6 billion in potential needs, a daunting amount. It is our firm stance that there is no better use of the limited funds than advancing progress on the SMART multi-use pathway. Such an amount, if prioritized in the areas where it is most needed, and fully leveraged with state and regional grants, could substantially complete the pathway in Marin and Sonoma Counties.

Completing the unbuilt segments between Larkspur and Windsor would use only *two percent* of the total \$2.6 billion wish list; completing it to Cloverdale, four percent.

The Marin County Bicycle Coalition (MCBC), the Sonoma County Bicycle Coalition (SCBC), and Transportation Alternatives for Marin (TAM) urge the SMART Board to approve a Capital Improvement Plan on April 21, 2021 that includes the following capital investments and commitments:

1. Invest \$4 million per year for 5 years in the unbuilt SMART Pathway segments (except the Marin-Sonoma Narrows) and use such funds to:
 - a. Complete all outstanding environmental clearances, both CEQA and NEPA
 - b. Bring all unbuilt segments to at least 30% engineering design
 - c. Provide matching funding for external grants
2. Ensure the construction of at least one pathway segment in each county per year in each of the next 5 years starting in 2022.

Ideally, the funds would be fully leveraged against outside grants, as advised by staff at the April 7, 2021 meeting. However, material progress on the pathway is also of critical importance. The

everyday rider does not particularly care which segments have been designed or cleared - she only notices a segment once she and her family can ride or walk on it. If grants cannot be secured to leverage funding, pathway construction should be self-funded.

Though exigencies may dictate the order in which pathway segments are completed, MCBC, SCBC, and TAM have prioritized unbuilt segments based on pathway connectivity and the benefits that their completion would bring about. The highest priority pathway segments in Marin County, as specified by MCBC and TAM, are as follows (in descending order of priority):

1. Highway 37 Bay Trail (northern connection)/Hannah Ranch Road to Rowland Boulevard (south of Costco)
2. State Access Road to Highway 37 Bay Trail (southern connection).
3. Rowland Boulevard (north of Costco) to North side of Novato Creek
4. Puerto Suello Hill to North San Pedro Road
5. McInnis Road to Smith Ranch Road

The highest priority pathway segments in Sonoma County, as specified by SCBC, are as follows (also in descending order of priority):

1. Lakeville to Payran (Petaluma)
2. Petaluma River to Lakeville (Petaluma)
3. Guerneville Road to Airport Boulevard (Santa Rosa)
4. Third Street to Sixth Street (Santa Rosa)
5. Main Street to Railroad Ave (Penngrove)

Commuters on the SMART train are presented with a seamless experience. Riders of the pathway have nothing comparable. If the train had as many gaps as the SMART Pathway, riders traveling from Downtown Novato to Civic Center Station would have to exit and reboard the train three times! No one can doubt that this would affect the transit experience, and yet this is the reality that riders of the pathway experience.

It is said that a budget, more than anything, is a statement of values. At the upcoming Board meeting, SMART can firmly demonstrate that it values the riders of the SMART Pathway, and help build back the trust of the community upon which it depends. Approving a Capital Improvement Plan that invests \$20 million to complete the SMART Pathway is the best action the Board can take to gain the public support needed to pass the sales tax reauthorization.

Respectfully,


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