



David Rabbitt, Chair
Sonoma County Board of Supervisors

Barbara Pahre, Vice Chair
Golden Gate Bridge,
Highway/Transportation District

Judy Arnold
Marin County Board of Supervisors

Kate Colin
Transportation Authority of Marin

Damon Connolly
Marin County Board of Supervisors

Debora Fudge
Sonoma County Mayors' and
Councilmembers Association

Patty Garbarino
Golden Gate Bridge,
Highway/Transportation District

Susan Gorin
Sonoma County Board of Supervisors

Dan Hillmer
Marin County Council of Mayors and
Councilmembers

Eric Lucan
Transportation Authority of Marin

Chris Rogers
Sonoma County Mayors' and
Councilmembers Association

Farhad Mansourian
General Manager

5401 Old Redwood Highway
Suite 200
Petaluma, CA 94954
Phone: 707-794-3330
Fax: 707-794-3037
www.sonomamarintrain.org

July 19, 2021

Therese McMillan, Executive Director
Metropolitan Transportation Commission
Association of Bay Area Governments
375 Beale Street
San Francisco, CA 94105

SUBJECT: *Plan Bay Area 2050* SMART Comment Letter

Dear Ms. McMillan:

On behalf of SMART, I am writing to request the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) amend the *Draft Plan Bay 2050* financially constrained transportation project list so that SMART can be eligible to compete for and receive outside grant funding to advance the completion of the SMART Rail and Pathway system. Specific projects requested for inclusion or amendment into *Plan Bay Area 2050* are:

- SMART Windsor to Healdsburg,
- SMART Healdsburg to Cloverdale, and
- SMART to Solano (Novato to Suisun)

Since we last requested inclusion of SMART's projects into Plan Bay Area 2050 in July 2020, progress has been made in several areas:

- SMART has completed 30% of the construction of the SMART to Windsor project, thanks to State and Federal fund support.
- The California Department of Transportation selected SMART Windsor Rail Extension to be one of only three official State submittals to the Federal Department of Transportation's Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) discretionary grant competition. If and when funding is secured, SMART will complete the Windsor extension within 16 months. Once that is completed, if no additional SMART projects are amended into the financially constrained project list, SMART will be precluded from competing for more grants for the term of *Plan Bay Area 2050*, through 2026.
- In March 2021, the State of California completed the transfer of approximately 21-miles of railroad right-of-way to SMART from the now defunct North Coast Railroad Authority (NCRA). This transfer from NCRA of the northern 21-miles of track means SMART is now the agency responsible for this currently underutilized interregional public asset.

- On July 11, 2021, SMART assumed freight operations and common carrier duties following a June 2021 Surface Transportation Board ruling supporting the transfer. SMART duties cover 89 miles from the Mendocino-Sonoma county line south and east to the freight interchange junction in Napa.
- SMART, with MTC's concurrence, has implemented the Clipper START means based fare program with a 50% discount (November 2020). Separately the SMART Board implemented a Welcome Back fare reduction campaign of 40% of all fares from May 2021 – May 2022. The result of this Welcome Back fare is Clipper START, Youth, Seniors and Passengers with Disabilities can ride the full 45-mile system for \$3.75, while retaining transfer credits to and from connecting bus and ferry services.

SMART's system is helping to fulfill many of MTC's and our local jurisdictions' mutual goals to reduce vehicle miles traveled and greenhouse gases, to develop low- and middle-income affordable infill housing, to support equitable access to economic opportunity, and to create resiliency.

- Passengers traveling on SMART emit 33% fewer greenhouse gases and travel an average of 25 miles on the SMART system.
- Development of affordable housing and infill is being addressed in local communities along the corridor because the existence of operating rail is sparking a real effort to create transit oriented development for the first time in much of the North Bay.
- By providing Clipper START and lowering rates with the Welcome Back campaign, SMART is expanding access to affordable, high-quality, time-competitive regional transit services that provide equal frequency of transit service in both the northbound and southbound directions during morning and evening commutes. For the first time ever Marin and Sonoma County are the beneficiaries of transit that serves all the commute markets along the corridor, whether you work in one of the 7,000 jobs within a short distance of the SMART Sonoma County Airport Station or in Downtown San Rafael or all the places in between.
- SMART is taking on the role of freight transport to help local businesses grow in an environmentally friendly manner and to encourage the transfer of freight traffic off our roads and onto rail.
- SMART has operated through too many federally declared disasters in our four short years of service, twelve national disaster declarations in Sonoma County alone from 2017-2020. Our services are available for evacuations, supply chain concerns (people and materials), to transport essential workers to their jobs, and as a warm community partner in time of need. Additionally, SMART has a public-private partnership with internet service provider Sonic to dedicate a dark fiber strand for broadband access to public agencies and schools along the railroad, a service that became more valuable during pandemic-induced distance learning.

We would like to be able to provide these benefits to other jurisdictions along our tracks not currently in our operating service area, both north to Healdsburg, Cloverdale, rural Sonoma County and adjacent Mendocino, as well as east to the City of Sonoma and Napa County. Our right-of-way is owned by the public and includes nearly 30 miles of unrehabilitated and unused track from Windsor to the Mendocino-Sonoma county line. If it is not being used to its full potential for public benefit, or if it is neglected and becomes a financial drain, then we are all not fulfilling our collective responsibility.


July 19, 2021

Page 3 of 3

We have been deemed through your process as a “Low-Cost Rail Investment” and we are proud of how efficient we are at delivering projects and how appropriately scaled and productive our services are for the communities we serve. We are ready to re-engage our voters to show them that we have not given up on completing the mission statement we were given by them with our 2008 Measure Q sales tax passage by over 70%. We heard their message in March 2020 when Measure I, the early extension of our sales tax, was defeated 54% to 46% and we engaged in community Listening Sessions in jurisdictions around Marin and Sonoma County. We need to work harder to finish what they asked us to complete in 2008 and we ask your assistance in that endeavor by allowing us to compete for state and federal grants in the next four years by including our projects in Plan Bay Area 2050’s financially constrained project list.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment and provide you with new information about our progress.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a series of loops and a long horizontal stroke, positioned above the printed name.

Farhad Mansourian
General Manager

Cc: SMART Board of Directors