

Supervisor Valerie Brown, Chair  
SMART Board of Directors  
750 Lindaro Street, Suite 200  
San Rafael, CA 94901



Protecting Marin Since 1934

February 17, 2011

Re: Request for Reevaluation of the SMART Project and Public Transparency

Dear Chairperson Brown:

Marin Conservation League's (MCL) purpose in writing is to request that the SMART Board take advantage of this opportunity in which the organization is undergoing a shift in focus and management and dealing with a substantial funding shortfall to conduct rigorous project analysis and set new priorities before making further funding commitments. We also will welcome greater transparency from the new management.


MCL has been tracking transportation issues in Marin County for many years, with a particular interest in their relationship to land use and effects on the environment. The SMART project promised two major environmental benefits: directing new development away from "green space" and toward stations or transit hubs; and reducing greenhouse gas emissions from single-occupancy vehicles. Our concern now is that elements of the project intended to achieve these benefits, as described in the 2008 ballot measure, may not all be feasible or realistic under current conditions.

We believe that management during the planning stages has not been forthcoming to the public and that financial constraints have not been fully disclosed. As one example, the minimal line that the MTC (Metropolitan Transportation Commission) finally accepted for SMART to qualify for regional funding is from Santa Rosa to downtown San Rafael. In order to stretch funds to get to downtown San Rafael, SMART has proposed eliminating two stations, which will reduce ridership. Because of low ridership in comparison to other projects across the nation, SMART may not be eligible for FTA's Small Starts Program money.

Under new management, the SMART Board now has an opportunity to thoroughly evaluate productivity and costs for the different project segments, compare those with costs of bus transit for those segments, and determine which parts of the train line should have priority for construction. For example, it appears that the costs of the extension to Cloverdale from Santa Rosa or Windsor may not be justified. Until there is a financial plan that specifies what can be built, and a productivity study examining ridership and costs by segment between Larkspur and Cloverdale on which to base financial decisions, MCL believes that funding through the sale of bonds should be deferred.

Voters expressed their support for SMART in 2008. MCL urges you to find the most realistic means to meet their expectations.

Sincerely,

  
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