



FRIENDS OF SMART

July 28, 2021

Board of Directors
Sonoma-Marín Area Rail Transit

Board of Directors
Sonoma County Transportation Authority

Representative Mike Thompson

Representative Jared Huffman

Senator Mike McGuire

Farhad Mansourian
General Manager, SMART

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Friends of SMART is disappointed that MTC places so little emphasis on developing rail transportation in our region. Rail is far more efficient in moving goods than any roadway vehicle. We believe the future of surface transportation should emphasize railways ahead of highways. (Back to the Future!)

Planners at all levels of government give lip service to reducing VMT (vehicle miles traveled) by roadway, but they are mostly silent on how that is to be achieved. Building more lanes on highways will not do it; in fact, that inevitably leads to *increased* VMT.

SMART could enable freight and some passenger service all the way from the Larkspur Ferry Terminal to Willits Business Park (five miles north of Willits). It can provide an alternative to shipping freight (such as lumber—and now—water) on trucks, which would simultaneously make highways safer and simultaneously reduce GHG (Green-House Gas) emissions.

The North Coastal Rails with Trails Coalition has signed letters from twenty-one legacy Northwestern Pacific RR customers, including all the lumber companies along the route, who want the return of rail service between Cloverdale and Willits. This includes two in Cloverdale, four between Ukiah and Calpella, and one in Willits. All the outbound traffic presently moves via U.S. 101; and in addition to reducing congestion and wear-and-tear on the *newly renovated* 101 roadway, freight trains will be three to five times more energy-efficient than trucks.

Moreover, development of the existing rail line in the Highway 37 Corridor, presently used for freight service between the 101 and the Capitol Corridors, would invite rail travel between the North Bay and the entire U S rail network. North Bay residents



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would have the option to travel by train to Sacramento, Seattle, LA, Reno, Salt Lake City, Denver, Omaha, and Chicago.

The railbed would have to be upgraded to accommodate heavier traffic and probably require raising in some places in anticipation of possible flooding due to sea-level rise. But it would provide a more efficient and lower-cost alternative to merely expanding Highway 37, which would encourage more driving of cars instead of incentivizing less driving.

At least one of these issues is already urgent: delivering water to Mendocino, Sonoma, and Marin Counties. The rail line can be restored as far as Willits much faster than permitting and building a new desalination plant. We recognize that two hurdles must be surmounted for the rail option: replacing the bridge across the River at Healdsburg; and converting petroleum tank cars that don't meet new FRA safety Hazmat standards into water carriers. These obstacles are surmountable with straightforward application of technology. But if the rail line is abandoned north of Cloverdale, the water solution goes with it.

It doesn't have to be "rail to trail" all the way. "Rail with trail" as far as Willits is a better option.

The members and associates of Friends of SMART thank you for weaving these insights into your planning. They are fundamental to reducing energy consumption and GHG production.

Yours Truly,

Jack Swarengen

Jack Swarengen, Chair
Friends of SMART