

NOTICE OF PREPARATION

TO:

FROM:
Sonoma Marin Area Rail Transit Commission
520 Mendocino Avenue, Suite 240
Santa Rosa, CA 95401

SUBJECT: Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report/Statement
[References: Division 13, Public Resources Code, Section 21080.4 (State); 40
CFR 1501.7 and 15080.22 (Federal)]

This is to inform you that the Sonoma Marin Area Rail Transit (SMART) Commission, in cooperation with the Federal Transit Administration, will be the Lead Agency and will prepare an Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS) for the project described below. Your participation, as a responsible/cooperating agency, is requested in the preparation and review of this document.

Please provide us with the applicable permit and environmental review requirements of your agency and the scope and content of the environmental information which is germane to your agency's statutory responsibilities in connection with the proposed project. Your agency will need to use the EIR/EIS prepared by our agency when considering your permit or other approval for the project.

The SMART Corridor Project proposes introduction of commuter rail service along an existing railroad right-of-way extending approximately 75-miles from Cloverdale in Sonoma County to a San Francisco/East Bay bound ferry terminal in Marin County. Along the project route, the rail right-of-way generally parallels Highway 101. The project description, location, and the potential environmental effects are contained in the attached materials.

Due to the time limits mandated by State law, your response must be sent at the earliest possible date, but not later than 30 days after receipt of this notice.

A scoping process is being initiated with this notice. You are invited to participate in a series of project scoping meetings. Dates, times, and locations of agency and public scoping meetings are:

Agency Scoping Meeting:

November 20, 2002	10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.	Novato Council Chambers 917 Sherman Avenue Novato, CA 94947
<i>Public Scoping Meetings:</i>		
November 14, 2002	7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.	Margaret Todd Senior Center 1560 Hill Road Novato, CA 94947
November 16, 2002	10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.	San Rafael Corporate Center 750 Lindero Street San Rafael, CA 94901
November 16, 2002	2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.	Santa Rosa Council Chambers 100 Santa Rosa Avenue Santa Rosa, CA 95404

November 20, 2002

7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Petaluma Woman's Club
518 B Street
Petaluma, CA 94952

Please send your response and comments or questions regarding this project to Lillian Hames, SMART Project Director at the address shown above (telephone 415/461- 0630). We will need the name for a contact person in your agency. Thank you for your response.

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Title: _____

Notice of Preparation

Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report on the implementation of commuter rail service within Sonoma and Marin counties

Lead Agency: Sonoma Marin Area Rail Transit Commission

Project Overview

The Federal Transit Administration, as joint lead agency with the Sonoma Marin Area Rail Transit Commission, will prepare an EIS/EIR on a proposal to provide commuter rail service along an existing railroad right-of-way extending approximately 75-miles in Sonoma and Marin counties. The study area begins in Cloverdale in Sonoma County. The southern terminus of the project area is in Marin County at a San Francisco/East Bay bound ferry terminal. Along the project route, the rail right-of-way generally runs parallel to Highway 101. The rail right-of-way is currently under public ownership. South of Healdsburg, the right-of-way is owned by the Northwestern Pacific Railroad Authority (NWPRA) and the Golden Gate Bridge District (GGBD). Plans are underway to transfer the right-of-way south of Healdsburg to a new statutorily-created entity, the Sonoma Marin Area Rail Transit District. North of Healdsburg it is owned by the North Coast Railroad Authority (NCRA). The project area also includes the locations of up to 15 stations and maintenance facility sites. Conceptual engineering including the rail alignment, pedestrian and bicycle path alignment, and station locations will be included in a Draft EIS/EIR that satisfies both NEPA and CEQA requirements. In addition, a financial plan will be developed that examines the capital and operating funding needs and sources.

Highway 101 is the primary mode of north-south movement connecting Sonoma and Marin counties with the City and County of San Francisco. The existing congested conditions in this corridor are expected to worsen as the area's population and job base continue to grow. The SMART corridor offers an opportunity to provide additional transportation capacity along a currently congested corridor. Implementation of the proposed actions will provide transit service to key employment areas along the corridor, maximize and maintain the viability of residential communities, encourage smart growth in city centers along the corridor, and reduce reliance on private automobile usage and the congested Highway 101 corridor.

Alternatives

Alternatives proposed for evaluation include but are not limited to:

- 1) No-build alternative, which consists of the existing highway and transit systems plus any ongoing or programmed improvements. It serves as the baseline condition against which the transportation, environmental, and community impacts of the other alternatives are compared.
- 2) Introduction of commuter rail service along an existing railroad right-of-way extending approximately 75-miles from Cloverdale in Sonoma County to a San Francisco/East Bay bound ferry terminal in Marin County.
- 3) Enhanced bus service on Highway 101 from Cloverdale in Sonoma County to Larkspur in Marin County, including bus enhancements and capital improvements along the Highway 101 corridor.

Probable Environmental Effects

The purpose of the EIS/EIR is to fully disclose the environmental consequences of building and operating a major capital investment in the SMART corridor in advance of any decisions to commit substantial financial or other resources towards its implementation. The EIS/EIR will examine the extent to which the study alternatives and alignments result in environmental impacts. In addition, it will discuss actions to reduce or eliminate such impacts.

Environmental issues to be analyzed in the EIS/EIR include: potential consistency with local plans and policies with regard to possible station sites; possible flooding along portions of the rail line and stations; potential traffic delays and change in traffic levels of service at several rail crossings; potential impacts to wetland areas paralleling the corridor; increased noise to sensitive receptors adjacent to the track; changes in views and vistas due to elevated structures; and potential impacts to historic and cultural resources. In addition, the EIS/EIR will examine potential impacts to population and housing; air quality; energy and mineral resources; hazardous materials; public services; utilities; and recreation features; as well as cumulative and growth-inducing impacts. Impacts will be evaluated for both the temporary construction period and for the long-term operation of each alternative. Potential measures to mitigate any potential impacts will also be identified.

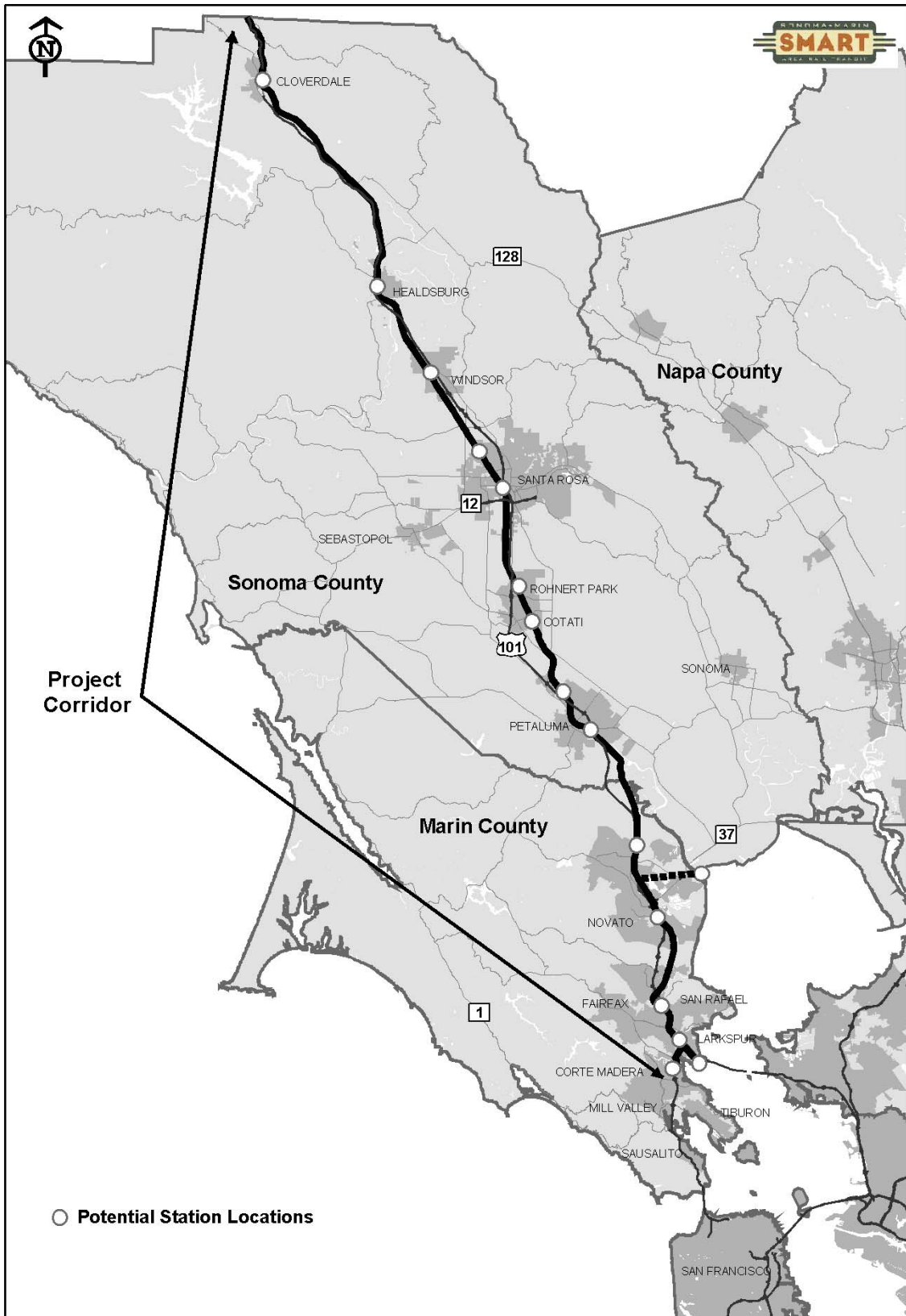
To ensure that the full range of issues related to this proposed action will be addressed and all significant issues identified, comments and suggestions are invited from all interested parties. Comments or questions concerning this proposed action and the EIS/EIR should be directed to the SMART EIR Outreach as noted below.

Public Scoping

Four identical public scoping meetings will be held on (1) November 14, 2002 from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. at the Margaret Todd Senior Center located at 1560 Hill Road, Novato, California 94947; (2) November 16, 2002 from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. at the San Rafael Corporate Center located at 750 Lindero Street, San Rafael, California 94901; (3) November 16, 2002 from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. at the Santa Rosa Council Chambers located at 100 Santa Rosa Avenue, Santa Rosa, California 95404; and (4) November 20, 2002 from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. at the Petaluma Woman's Club located at 518 B Street, Petaluma, California 94952.

Written comments should be sent to: Mr. Matt Raimi, SMART EIR Outreach, c/o Design Community & Environment, 1600 Shattuck Ave., Suite 222, Berkeley, California 94709. Phone: (415) 419-3510 or (707) 583-2323. Fax: (510) 848- 4315. Email: smart_train@hotmail.com. The scoping meetings will be held at the locations identified above. To be added to the mailing list, contact Mr. Matt Raimi at the address listed above. Please specify the mailing list for the SMART Alternatives Analysis/Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Report (SMART AA/DEIS/R). Persons with special needs should leave a message at either of the phone numbers as indicated above. All locations are accessible to people with disabilities.

For Further Information Contact: Ms. Lillian Hames, SMART Project Director, 520 Mendocino Avenue, Suite 240, Santa Rosa, California 95401. Phone: (415) 461-0630 Fax: (415) 464-1285.



Source: ABAG Smart Growth GIS Data

Figure 1
Project Corridor



SMART
Alternatives Analysis (AA)/Draft Environmental Impact
Statement (DEIS)/Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR)

SCOPING COMMENTS SUMMARY

Prepared for:
Sonoma Marin Area Rail Transit District

Prepared by:
Parsons Brinckerhoff Quade & Douglas, Inc.

JANUARY 2004

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Sonoma Marin Area Rail Transit (SMART) Board is preparing an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and preparing Preliminary Engineering (PE) for the study of passenger rail service along an existing railroad right-of-way extending approximately 70 miles in Sonoma and Marin counties. An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) satisfying the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) will be prepared at a later date. The study area begins in Cloverdale in Sonoma County. The southern terminus of the project area is in Larkspur, Marin County at the San Francisco/East Bay bound ferry terminal. Along the project route, the rail right-of-way runs parallel to Highway 101. The project area also includes the locations of 14 rail stations, two maintenance facility sites and a continuous bicycle/pedestrian path using both the railroad right-of-way and adjacent roadways. Conceptual engineering of the rail alignment, a pedestrian and bicycle path, the station facilities, and the maintenance facility will be included. In addition, a financial plan will be developed that examines the capital and operating funding needs and sources.

The first step in the project process was to notify interested individuals, organizations, and business entities, affected Native American Tribes and Federal, State, and local government agencies of the intent to prepare an EIR and to invite participation in the study. The notification included a Notice of Preparation (NOP) under CEQA and a Notice of Intent (NOI) under NEPA. Under CEQA, the lead agency for the project is SMART, while the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) is the lead agency under NEPA.

As part of the project scoping process, SMART held two series of scoping meetings related to the SMART project. The purpose of the public and agency open-house scoping meetings was to allow the public to provide input into the scope, focus, and content of the project's environmental review documents, including the alternatives to the proposed commuter rail service that will be discussed in the environmental review process. Five public open-house scoping meetings were held in November 2002 in Novato, San Rafael, Santa Rosa, and Petaluma. The official comment period for the November meetings ended December 12, 2002. Four additional public open-house scoping meetings were held in September 2003 in Novato, San Rafael, and Petaluma, and the official comment period ended on October 1, 2003. Although the scoping meetings provided the impetus for public comments, comments were still encouraged in the interim period.

In an effort to reflect community values to the extent possible, the SMART team invited and encouraged the public as well as meeting attendants to provide comments about the proposed project, environmental issues, and project alternatives. A Notice of Public Scoping Meetings was posted in county and regional newspapers including the *Marin Independent Journal*, *Pacific Sun*, *The Press Democrat*, *The Healdsburg Tribune*, *Sonoma West Times and News*, *The Windsor Times*, and *La Voz Bilingual Newspaper*. In addition, a Notice of Public Scoping Meetings was posted in the County Clerks Office in Marin and Sonoma counties. Comments could be submitted via a provided comment card at the scoping meetings, or comments could be made by phone, fax, email, or mail to SMART. SMART also maintains an active website as well as an email list-serve that interested citizens can subscribe to for periodic updates about the project.

2.0 NOVEMBER 2002 SCOPING SUMMARY

Within the scoping period from November 2002 to December 12, 2002, five identical scoping meetings were held on November 14, 16, and 20, 2002. The meetings consisted of four public meetings – two in Marin County (Novato and San Rafael) and two in Sonoma County (Santa Rosa and Petaluma) – as well as a public agency meeting for local, regional, and state officials in Novato. The official comment period for the November meetings ended December 12, 2002. There were evening and day meetings, and the meetings ranged in size from 14 to 43 attendees. At the four public meetings, the majority of the attendees came from Santa Rosa, San Rafael, Civic Center, Petaluma, and Novato, with the remainder from a wide geographic area in both counties.

The comments made at the public meetings included suggestions of additional environmental impacts to consider reviewing, questions about the SMART train, and broad positive and negative statements about the proposed service. The most common statements had to do with the cost of providing commuter rail service, alternatives to the proposed rail (including expanded bus service and an increase in highway capacity), the impact on traffic congestion along the corridor and around the proposed stations, safety at rail crossings, and impacts to wetland and other critical habitats.

Overall, 56 public comments were made at the five scoping meetings, and 35 written comments have been received by the SMART team.

The following is a summary of each scoping meeting:

NOVATO

Date: November 14, 2002

Location: Margaret Todd Senior Center

Attendees: 14 (mostly from Marin County and only a few from Novato)

Public Comments: 7

Summary of Comments:

- Support for a bicycle path along the corridor, but concerns raised about the compatibility of bikes and high speed rail, especially in terms of safety and noise at rail crossings
- Recommendation that total program costs and ridership studies be considered in the EIR/EIS
- Recommendation that the environmental review take into account various possible alternatives, including expanded roadway capacity, alternative vehicles, and alternate ferry terminal locations
- Smart Growth concepts should be considered when developing alternatives in the EIR
- Concerns regarding impacts to quality of life for residents near tracks

SAN RAFAEL

Date: November 16, 2002

Location: San Rafael Corporate Center

Attendees: 39 (approximately half from San Rafael and the other half from Marin County with a concentration around the Civic Center area)

Public Comments: 15

Summary of Comments:

- Conduct study with accurate information about ridership and source of funding for project.

- Concern about the impacts to quality of life for residents along tracks, including reduced property values, safety at road crossing, and division of neighborhoods
- Concerns about safety and noise
- Concern about the biological impacts of the service, especially at Port Sonoma
- Recommendation that there be coordination between the project and ongoing planning efforts in the cities
- Several comments expressing a lack of support for the project and their belief that the train is not a good option in San Rafael area
- Recommendation to explore clean fuel technology
- Support for expanded bus service as opposed to the commuter rail service

SANTA ROSA

Date: November 16, 2002

Location: Santa Rosa Council Chambers

Attendees: 30 (including 19 from Santa Rosa, 2 from San Rafael, and the rest from Sonoma County)

Public Comments: 18

Summary of Comments:

- Concerns regarding impacts of the project to the West End Neighborhood, which is near the proposed station in downtown Santa Rosa. Parking for the SMART train was the primary concern
- Several expressed the desire for community members to be able participate in station design and location; the process should be publicized as much as possible
- Overall support for commuter train including the benefits of reduced traffic congestion and providing alternatives for elderly
- Recommendation to consider the impacts of the project on freight service
- Recommendation to study the ridership and growth-inducing impacts in EIR/EIS

PETALUMA

Date: November 16, 2002

Location: Petaluma Women's Club

Attendees: 43 (22 from Petaluma, 8 from Santa Rosa and the remainder from Sonoma County)

Public Comments: 10

Summary of Comments:

- An emphasis should be placed on preserving historic structures and historic uses of corridor (eg, freight uses)
- Concern about the environmental impacts of a train station and ferry terminal at Port Sonoma.
- Support for Port Sonoma as the ideal location for a San Francisco-bound terminus.
- Support for a bicycle path along the corridor, provided that attention is given to safety issues.
- Recommendation to coordinate with Caltrans and with other on-going projects such as the Sonoma County Regional Parks Department's multi-purpose trail.
- Recommendation to look at transit-oriented development around the stations and long-term solutions for reducing congestion along the 101 corridor.

3.0 SEPTEMBER 2003 SCOPING SUMMARY

To further refine the alternatives for analysis, four additional scoping meetings were held. Within the scoping period from September 2003 to October 1, 2003, SMART held four public scoping meetings in both Marin and Sonoma counties on September 4, 10, and 17, 2003. The meetings consisted of three public meetings – two in Marin County (Novato and San Rafael) and one in Sonoma County (Petaluma) – as well as a public agency meeting in Novato. In response to public demand at the first two meetings regarding the open house format, the meeting in Novato on September 17 expanded the format to include an additional opportunity for testimonies.

The official comment period for the September meetings ended October 1, 2003. Public involvement helped identify issues not previously noted, and public input was used in developing the revised project alternatives.

With the exception of the meeting in Petaluma which had only three attendees, the meetings were relatively well attended and ranged in size from 11 to 38 attendees. The majority of the meeting attendees came from San Rafael, San Anselmo, Civic Center, Larkspur, Mill Valley, Novato, San Francisco, Petaluma, Santa Rosa, and Rohnert Park.

SAN RAFAEL

Date: September 4, 2003

Location: San Rafael Corporate Center located at 750 Lindero Street

Attendees: 38

Public Comments: 13

Summary of Comments:

- Recommendation to change the route of the rail alternative near the Civic Center to improve running times. Would also make available part of the ROW for sale
- Recommendation to study public's preference for rail over bus
- Recommendation to include use of the I-580 ROW in the San Quentin alternative
- Support for rail
- The Larkspur City Council opposes the alternatives to Larkspur Landing
- Concern about the levels of ferry service assumed in the future
- Recommendation to include the costs of the train station bus shuttles in the express bus and rail alternatives
- Recommendation to consider traffic delay on Highway 101 in the comparison of alternatives
- Recommendation to consider bus service levels that would be comparable in ridership to the rail alternative
- Recommendation that the continuous HOV lanes between Mill Valley and Windsor be considered as part of the "base case"
- Consider fixed guideway technology that can cross the Waldo Grade and the Golden Gate Bridge
- Support for paving the rail ROW as a truck highway

PETALUMA

Date: September 10, 2003.

Location: Petaluma Community Center, 320 N. McDowell Boulevard

Attendees: 3
No public comments

NOVATO

Date: September 17, 2003
Location: Novato City Council Chambers, 917 Sherman Avenue
Attendees: 11
No public comments

NOVATO

Date: September 17, 2003
Location: Hill Community Room, 1560 Hill Road, adjacent to the Margaret Todd Senior Center
Attendees: 25
Written public comments: 7
Verbal public comments: 15 speakers during the open microphone session

Summary of Comments:

- Recommendation to consider the placement of the maintenance facilities to minimize costs of transporting materials
- Recommendation to include a ferry connection in the MOS
- Recommendation to phase stations to meet demand
- Recommendation to establish minimum distances between stations to avoid an undue burden on cities
- Concern regarding frequency
- Recommendation to include an alternative with only a portion of costs of the HOV lane allocated to bus
- Recommendation to run a special excursion train to Sears Point

Summary of **Verbal** Comments:

Rail Alternatives

- Need to connect with ferry service
- Quality of the ride is important
- We need rail with feeder buses
- Need to focus on how the rail system effects the road system (e.g. how many people will get out of their cars to ride the train) and include a range of values (i.e. sustainability characteristics of air, water, land use)
- We need to have rail where it works better than buses or cars
- Rail will help revitalize the downtowns

Bus Alternatives

- Bus alternative needs cost of HOV as justification for HOV

Other Alternatives

- Need to include other enhancements (e.g. bus extensions to San Francisco), not just HOV

- We need both, trains and buses

Land Use/Growth

- Should focus on development issues
- Compare TOD enhancements of bus versus rail
- Need to modify the purpose and need statement to include land use
- Buses do not effect land use as much as rail, need to evaluate how buses impact land use versus rail
- Rail alternative to include “smart growth land use”
 - Need to look at impacts on sprawl and other land use patterns
- Need to take into account voter approved Urban Growth Boundaries (UGBs)
 - To make UGBs work, we need rail service between cities and UGBs
 - Also need to encourage and support transit oriented lifestyles

Funding/Cost

- Compare cost of train versus bus and also compare ridership estimates
- Baselines and assumptions are critical, especially baseline level of infrastructure of ferry, bus, train, etc.
- Allocation of HOV lane costs to bus should not be in just one alternative
- Given current high use of bus, rail would redirect dollars from buses

Environmental Issues

- Should look at fuel issues and energy efficiency in both the short-term and long-term
- Need to study all the alternatives against existing baseline impacts on water pollution, sustainability of air and wildlife, and freeway congestion

Traffic/Transit

- Mobility is critical especially as Highway 101 continues to impact mobility
- Congestion will grow regardless of Highway 101 expansion

Bike/Pedestrian

- Compare bus versus rail versus bicycle/pedestrian use
- Analyze how many bike trips to the train stations and the effects on parking and air quality
- Look at the Netherlands model
- Look at how marketing might effect train and bike path use (with goal of getting people out of cars)

Other Concerns/Recommendations

- Don't study so much that we continue to get bogged down. Make the decisions needed to move this project forward
- Consider the issues of elderly and young transit users
- People regard rail as a more attractive mode of transit

- Building highways subsidizes the automobile system
- Lack of diversity is a problem
- We need a four-county approach
- We need a survey/market research to find out what people want
- Promote greenway system
- The suburban way of life and getting around “at will” no longer works
- Trains to county line...then buses

4.0 OVERALL COMMENT SUMMARY

Throughout the series of the two scoping sessions, SMART received approximately 520 written comments (through November 2003). The majority of the comments were received via mail, fax, or email.

The comment topic areas include: rail alternatives, bus alternatives, other alternatives, bike/pedestrian path, ferry, shuttles, land use/growth, stations, noise/vibration, wetlands/hydrology, air quality, wildlife, visual, other environmental issues, traffic/transit, funding/cost, socioeconomic, safety, and ridership. The majority of comments received pertained to issues surrounding the rail alternatives, station planning, the bus alternatives, and funding/cost.

A number of recurring issues, concerns, and recommendations were raised by the opponents and proponents of the SMART project. The comments concerned many aspects of the project. A summary of the comment themes is provided below:

Rail Alternatives

- Recommendation to elevate part of the rail in order to avoid at-grade crossings, especially between San Rafael and Santa Rosa
- Concern about a one-track system
- Concern about access to trains
- Concern about impacts of rail transit along ROW to private property, including property values
- Concern about impacts of commuter rail at-grade crossings on traffic
- Recommendation that estimated commuter rail ridership projections be analyzed against estimated bus ridership

Bus Alternatives

- Concern about the issue of how to define the alternatives with respect to inclusion of the high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes and assignment of their costs
- Whether the alternatives should assume the San Francisco bound buses connect to the ferry terminal or continue into the city
- Support for an Express Bus lane along Highway 101

Other Alternatives

- Support for using buses on railroad right-of-way (ROW), and recommendation to compare use of rail and bus on ROW
- Support for monorail along Highway 101, and recommendation to do a study to see if this is feasible

- Recommendation to connect the rail service to a Ferry Terminal and the Richmond BART via the Richmond Bridge
- Support for another freeway lane along Highway 101, and concern that this is not being addressed as an alternative
- Support for alternative forms of transportation to the automobile
- Recommendation to pave ROW to make a road for trucks

Connections

- Consider the impacts of transfers on ridership
- No general consensus on location of ferry terminal; concern about how users would transfer from train to ferry
- Concern about shuttle operations – how do users get to their destinations from the train?

Land Use/Growth

- Land use assumptions around the stations – how do the assumptions vary between the bus and rail alternatives
- Concern about the growth-inducing impacts of rail transit in Marin and Sonoma County, and the impacts this growth will have on natural resources

Funding/Cost

- Opinion that light rail will be less cost-effective and flexible than bus service
- Recommendation that a cost-benefit analysis be conducted
- Opposition to increase in taxes to finance project; cost should be borne by users

Environmental Issues

- Recommendation to consider alternative fuels and hybrid technologies
- Support for diesel multiple units
- Opinion that the proposed alternatives will do little to relieve traffic congestion and delay
- Concern about rail noise and ground vibration – should explore dampening wheel noise
- Concern about aesthetics of a noise wall and where one will be located
- Concern about the impacts of fuel spills and toxics to wetland areas; recommend a buffer between the rail line and wetland areas
- Recommendation that anticipated air quality impacts be weighed against existing emissions from vehicles on Highway 101
- Concern about wildlife crossing tracks

Stations

- EIR should address parking at stations – do not want park-n-rides to dominate the landscape; perhaps have underground parking garages
- Support for using historic depots as stations
- City of Larkspur is strongly opposed to having a station at Larkspur Landing
- Concern about how cyclists and walkers would access stations

- Recommendation that transit-oriented development be examined around stations

Safety

- Concern about safety of bike/pedestrian path (especially where the path intersects roadway intersections); recommendation to construct a fence between the rail tracks and the bike path
- Concern about safety issues of people crossing the tracks, especially children

Bike/Pedestrian

- Support for bike path
- Concern about impact of bike/pedestrian path on wetlands and wildlife