



CLOVERDALE STATION

Marin / Sonoma

ON TRACK

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Favorable Poll Boosts SMART Project

by Steve Birdlebough

Before they place any measure on the ballot, public officials normally survey the citizenry to be sure there is a reasonable chance for approval. The SMART Directors asked the highly respected J. Moore Methods agency to conduct such a survey respecting the passenger rail project, and saw the results at the March Board meeting. The poll showed strong support in both counties.

The strength of the poll results was not just a local story. *The San Jose Mercury News* reported:

Support jumped to 71 percent in Sonoma County and 72 percent in Marin County when people heard a description of the proposed rail line, which would run 70 miles from Cloverdale to Larkspur.

"There is strong support up and down the line," said San Rafael Mayor Al Boro, the chairman of SMART. "I think we have a very informed electorate. I am just very, very pleased with the result."

Dick Spottswood, columnist for the *Marin Independent Journal* commented that the poll "makes it clear that North Bay voters have made up their minds on this long-simmering issue." He explained that "With about 24 percent of respondents opposed, only 5 percent of Sonoma respondents and 3 percent of those in Marin had "no opinion" on the plan."

He compared this poll's results with the statistics from a similar April 2004 survey, and observed that: "Two years ago support for SMART and its accompanying sales tax increase ranged from 63 percent to 77 percent. That's consistent with findings in the current poll. Voters have performed their own analysis, mullied it over and arrived at a conclusion. By a sizable super majority, they support SMART."

Examining the demographics of the poll, Spottswood concluded: "commuter rail supporters are 'strong environmentalists,' Democrats, independent "declined to state" voters and younger residents."

The questions used in the poll are available on the web at <http://www.sonomamarintrain.org/>.

SMART supporters must remember, however, that the only poll that really counts is the election next November. While rail advocates can be more certain of their ground, it will still take a lot of effort to succeed in the election.

Quiet Zones

by Walter Strakosch

The Environmental Impact Report for the SMART Project points out that the sound of train horns will affect some communities, especially where roadways cross the tracks at grade. It is possible to establish Quiet Zones at grade crossings where the tracks are not curved, if the crossing gates and roadway configuration prevents automobiles from getting in the way of the approaching train. The gates must cross the entire width of the crossing street, so that motorists are prevented from driving around the gate to cross the track. Usually this requires four gates at the crossing, or a substantial curb in the median of the roadway that "channels" the traffic so that it cannot evade the gate.

Quiet Zones are established by joint action of the city or county, the railroad, and the Federal Railway Administration. The SMART Board has been asked to adopt a policy supporting the establishment of Quiet Zones where appropriate. Where curved tracks or other conditions would make a Quiet Zone inappropriate, the use of advanced sound technology may be an alternate solution. Brigade Electronics, a company in the UK claims to have developed a broadband horn that tunnels sound directly in front of the train. Unlike conventional horns most of the sound is restricted to the danger area in front of the train, so that neighbors to the side are less affected.

Engine and wheel noise from the self-propelled DMU's would not exceed locally adopted standards (60dBA Ldn) at a distance of more than 25 feet from the track (the distance from the nearest residence to the rail). Advancing technology may further reduce the amount of engine and wheel noise. For example, the Cummins Engine Company has been working on low noise diesel engines for European Railways. It will be important to follow these developments as the SMART Project proceeds so that it can do its best to be a good neighbor.

On June 24, 2005 the Federal Railway Administration's Final Rule on the use of train horns went into effect. The new rule preempts State and local laws and prescribes minimum and maximum horn noises (96dBA-110dBA).

For an explanation of technical terms and concepts related to noise, see the Draft Environmental Impact Report, for the SMART Project, Section 3.7. On the Web at:

<http://www.sonomamarintrain.org/>



MISSION STATEMENT

FRIENDS OF SMART IS
A CITIZENS GROUP
DEDICATED TO
INFORMING THE PUBLIC
OF THE BENEFITS
OF RAIL AND SMART
GROWTH IN MARIN AND
SONOMA COUNTIES.

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Book Review

The High Cost of Free Parking

by Donald Shoup (American Planning Assn. 2005)

Reviewed by Joel Woodhull

As I entered the transit industry in the early 70s, I found that public parking policies were a huge problem for public transportation. When a property or service costs a lot to provide, but is given away, society can suffer from the results.

It is easy to see that wherever people pay for their own parking, transit is pretty well utilized. The greatest weakness of the private auto is that it is in storage most of the time. Generally, the storage costs more than the vehicle, so giving away parking space is largesse for drivers. The average parking space in a structured parking lot can cost from \$20,000 to \$50,000 to construct and maintain, depending on the cost of the land. And yet there is usually no return to the builder for this cost.

Although parking can be a topic of heated discussion, it has attracted little serious study. The prominent exception has been Donald Shoup, a professor in the Planning and Public Policy School at UCLA. After studying and writing about parking for over 20 years, he recently put his collected thoughts into a single book. It is undoubtedly the first comprehensive exposition on the subject of parking policy.

Shoup proposes three policy reforms:

- charge fair-market prices for curb parking,
- return the resulting revenue to neighborhoods to pay for public improvements, and
- abolish zoning mandates that require developers and property owners to provide off-street parking.

In the context of a market economy, this is pretty ordinary. But in the tradition of parking, it is radical, even unthinkable.

Many drivers think they shouldn't ever be charged anything to park their car. Downtown business owners urge that they need plentiful free parking, because they think that without it shoppers will go elsewhere. And in cities where it is free downtown, it must be free everywhere else.

In the face of such thinking, Shoup points out that serious harm has been done to cities by excessive parking areas that turn them into dull or hostile places for pedestrians. He uses some striking analogies to make his case. One is lead therapy, a medical treatment once used for a variety of ailments. Doctors used lead to poison the germs and failed to notice that they were slowly killing the patients as well. He likens this to requiring off-street parking space that provides minor local parking relief while killing the city.

Shoup has recognized the need for political innovation to gain acceptance for economic reforms. He devised the concept of Parking Benefit Districts that allow parking meter revenues to compensate a neighborhood for the use that drivers make of available street parking. This addresses "parking spillover anxiety" experienced by residents near shopping centers and sports venues. The idea has been refined by the creation of Parking Permit Districts where residents are not required to pay for street parking near their own homes.

This book is a new departure in the evolution of city planning, a discipline that has been dominated for decades by the question, "where shall we store the cars?" For anyone interested in re-shaping our communities to be less auto-focused, this book is a must-read.

What's Up with the Depot?

By Jerry Peters

Downtown Novato is looking great, why not the depot? Construction is all but complete on Novato's main downtown street, Grant Avenue. The old town portions of this beautiful redo is now done except for certain small details. But the old Northwestern Pacific Railroad Depot buildings at the start of Grant Avenue are still eyesores. How could Novato have this quaint and charming downtown topped off by these ugly buildings, people ask? Why can't Novato have charming, historic and useful Depots like San Rafael's, or Santa Rosa's, and the new redone Petaluma Depot? Why hasn't anything been done for the last 23 years – the time since the Freight house, the larger of the two buildings, burned?

Novato Save-The-Depot Task Force

The Novato Save-The-Depot Task Force is the community group that has been working on the Depot problem. It was formed in 1996, a year after the fire that damaged the roof of the smaller building, the Passenger Depot. Its founders figured a forceful community action group could clean up the area, clean up the buildings, find a good business or community use



Novato Depot in disrepair

for the property and dissolve itself in about six months.

So much for forceful community efforts, but ten years later this dream promises to arrive this year.

The landmark Northwestern Pacific Passenger Depot, built in 1916, is visible down more half the length of Grant Avenue. The two Depot buildings are also visible as you drive into Novato via the Delong freeway exit, although most of the view is of the badly burned warehouse portion of the Freight House building. Built in 1916 as well, the Freight house was also abandoned in the late 1970's and badly burned in a 1982 fire.

In pre-Task Force days, the depot buildings and

What's Up with the Depot?

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grounds were in far worse condition than today. Covered by trash, old mattresses, abandoned cars, and yards and yards of weeds, the depot buildings had graffiti on the walls, homeless types camped inside, and most of the windows and doors were broken out. In 1995 Novato Police broke up a drug selling operation in the Passenger Depot.

Work Starts in Earnest

In 1996 the Task Force started painting over graffiti, covered some doors and windows with plywood and held work parties on Saturday mornings to clean up the area. The first work parties numbered more than 20 people, and included some city staff managers and city council members. The first work party filled a 20-cubic yard dumpster donated by Redwood Sanitary Landfill.

“Every year it was ‘just a few months and we’ll have a deal’ and then another year would go by...”

The City Council later directed city workforces to put a temporary plastic cover on the Passenger Depot roof. They also hauled away about 10 cubic yards of debris from inside the Depot and used plywood to cover the remaining door and windows not previously boarded up.

Who Owns What?

But real correction efforts were stymied by the ownership problem. In the beginning the problem was the NWP – an all but bankrupt railroad, barely operating and for sale by its owner, Southern Pacific. The state, and many local governments, wanted to buy it. It had a perfect right of way for an urban transit line from the north into Marin. Right of ways are huge costs for freeways or transit lines. Buying the NWP could later save taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars.

But the SP did not want to disturb anything that might affect the sale, so it did almost nothing with most of the depots on the NWP route. The state did not have enough money to complete the sale. So nothing happened. The Task Force did apply for and received permission from the SP to clean up the property, hence it, and later the city, started the work parties to clean up the depots and the surrounding area.

By 1996, after a twenty-year sales process, the sale of the NWP from Cloverdale south to Lombard near Vallejo was completed by Southern Pacific to a newly formed interim group called the Northwestern Pacific Railroad Authority (NWPR) which consisted of the counties the railroad ran through plus the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway Transportation District.

Eight Years of “in a few months”

After a short time the NWPR built a cyclone fence around both the Depot and the Freight House. It also gave Right to Entry Permission to the Task Force to do

minor clean up and maintenance work. It entered into discussions with the City of Novato to lease the property. Everything was “in a few months” the parties were to have an agreement to do something, but for the next eight years no agreement to lease or change the property was ever completed by the City and NWPR.

On March 2004, the NWPR transferred the railroad property to SMART (Sonoma Marin Rail Transit), a newly formed bi-county agency that has some state funding to begin planning for the new rail transit line. (The actual start up of the transit line will happen only if Marin and Sonoma voters approve a tax to build the transit line and operate it. That vote may happen this November.)

Lillian Hames, the head of SMART has indicated the SMART Board of Directors is very concerned about the condition of the Novato Depot buildings. The City of Novato and SMART have been in discussions about the Depot property. But cash-strapped City officials have said the City has no funds for Depot work, and are hoping the developers of the adjacent Whole Foods development will take action.

In the meantime, the Task Force has continued to work on the Passenger Depot. Last fall SMART hired a contractor to install another plastic roof, this one a brown plastic fiber tarp, over the Passenger Depot in time for winter rains. This is the seventh plastic roof to be placed on top of the Depot.

No work is done on the Freight House any more. It has been judged too dangerous to even walk near, even to cut the weeds around it.

Volunteer Painting Begins

In the summer of 2003 Task Force volunteers painted the Depot in historic NWP colors. “We just could not wait any longer,” said Chip Young whose Pini Ace Hardware donated the gallons and gallons of top grade paint and trim. “Every year it was ‘just a few months and we’ll have a deal’ and then another year would go by and the Depot would still look bad and there was still no deal.”

Pini Hardware, a long time contributor, has also donated many of the blue roof tarps, and boxes and boxes of screws, and other fittings and materials and its expert advice to keep the winter weather out and the paint on. Other contributors include Steve Stoke of Steve Stoke Construction, Novato Rent All, and Greg Andrews of Allstate Insurance. Recent volunteers working on the Passenger Depot include Steve and Billy Ussery, Jim and Marg Galbraith, Austin Morris, Mike Read, and Bill Cardoza. Jerry Peters is chair of the Task Force.

The Freight House Is a Loss

The Freight House has continued to deteriorate, and this year the roof in the middle of the building, after falling a few inches each week for years, reached the floor. It is a total loss, City of Novato building officials’ point out. It will be torn down if it doesn’t fall down first.

Last month the Novato Chamber of Commerce gained approval from the SMART board to loan funds to remove the Freight House. The loan is to be repaid when the Depot is restored. Work is set to begin this year.

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Travel Preferences – Fast Facts

A recent study of travel preferences in the Bay Area shows that people feel more strongly about Bus than Rail, and their feelings about bus are predominantly negative. David Ory and Patricia Mokhtarian asked over a thousand commuters about their travel preferences, and found 63.4% disliked riding a bus, while 71.2% either liked riding a train (31.4%), or were “neutral” (39.8%) about train travel.

■ See: *When is Getting There Half the Fun? Modeling the Liking for Travel* by David T. Ory and Patricia L. Mokhtarian, of the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering and Institute of Transportation Studies, University of California, Davis. Transportation Research 39A(2-3), 2005, pp. 97-124.

On the web at: <http://repositories.cdlib.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2177&context=postprints>



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■ More than half, or 54 percent, of all public transportation trips are made to commute to work, while 46 percent are trips to school, shopping, medical appointments, entertainment facilities and for other purposes.

■ Nearly 20 percent of all transit trips are taken by people over the age of 65 or under 18.

■ The need for public transportation is great. One in four households have no access to public transportation, and one half have limited service.

■ Every \$1 invested in public transportation projects generates from \$4 to \$9 in local economic activity.

■ Every \$1 billion invested by the federal government in public transportation infrastructure supports approximately 47,500 jobs.

■ For every mile traveled, public transportation uses about one half of the fuel consumed by automobiles, and about a third of that used by sport utility vehicles and light trucks.

■ Riding a transit bus is 79 times safer than car travel.

– excerpted from www.publictransportation.org/facts/

CALENDAR OF EVENTS - SPRING/SUMMER 2006

| | | | |
|-----------------|-------|----------|---|
| April 1 | Sat | 9:30 am | TALC Summit, Oakland, Unitarian church |
| April 5 | Wed | 6:30 pm | Station Area Planning, Santa Rosa Hyatt |
| April 13 | Thurs | | Grand Tour of Rail & Ferry Services (<i>see below</i>) |
| April 19 | Wed | 11:30 am | Friends of SMART meeting, Env. Center, Santa Rosa |
| | Wed | 1:30 pm | SMART Board meeting, Sonoma Co. Administration Bldg. |
| May 2 | Tues | 7:00 pm | North Bay Rail Forum Petaluma Community Center |
| May 10 | Wed | | Grand Tour of Rail & Ferry Services (<i>see below</i>) |
| May 17 | Wed | 11:30 am | Friends of SMART meeting LWV San Rafael |
| | Wed | 1:30 pm | SMART Board meeting, San Rafael City Hall |
| June 6 | Tues | 7:00 pm | North Bay Rail Forum with Mayor Al Boro in San Rafael (TBA) |
| June 8 | Thurs | | Grand Tour of Rail & Ferry Services (<i>see below</i>) |
| June 21 | Wed | 11:30 am | Friends of SMART meeting, Env. Center, Santa Rosa |
| | Wed | 1:30 pm | SMART Board meeting, Santa Rosa Co. Administration Bldg. |
| July 7 | Tues | 7:00 pm | North Bay Rail Forum Petaluma TBA |
| July 9 | Thurs | | Grand Tour of Rail & Ferry Services (<i>see below</i>) |
| July 15 | Wed | 11:30 am | Friends of SMART meeting TBA |
| | Wed | 1:30 pm | SMART Board meeting, San Rafael City Hall |

For more information, go to www.fos.org

Grand Tour of Rail and Ferry Services in the Bay Area

Save the dates: **Thursday, April 13, Wednesday, May 10, 2006 ■ 9:45 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.**

Beginning and ending at the Larkspur Ferry Terminal

Relax and experience the following services:

- Larkspur Golden Gate Ferry • San Francisco Light Rail-N Judah Line
- CalTrain Station and equipment-4th & King St. • Alameda/Oakland Ferry
- AMTRAK Capitol Corridor • Altamont Commuter Express • BART

Details: Carpools between Santa Rosa and the Larkspur Ferry Terminal can be formed at the CalTrans Park'nRide.

Trains and Ferries are accessible for bicycles and wheelchairs.

For further information call 707/578-9133 (days) 837-8814 (evenings) or e-mail: fos@pacbell.net

Reservations: \$50 includes fares on ferries and trains other than BART, as well as a lunch salad at Scott's Sea Food, Jack London Square; does not include cost of beverage. Make checks payable to "SCT" and send with your e-mail address and phone number to: Willard Richards, Treasurer, 1009 Hyland Dr., Santa Rosa, 95404

HURRY! Space is limited. Make your reservation now.

This tour sponsored by Friends of SMART • Sonoma Marin Area Rail Transit