



Passing the SMART train tax helps employers comply with AB32

The Sonoma-Marín Area Rail Transit (SMART) District has tried for years to get North Bay voters to approve a one-quarter cent sales tax increase that would fund passenger rail service between Cloverdale in northern Sonoma County and Larkspur in Marin. In 2006 the train tax failed to pass by a mere 1.3 percent of voters. Once again appearing on the Nov. 4, 2008 ballot, and endorsed by the Novato Chamber of Commerce, the SMART tax's passage looks a lot more promising than it did in 2006. But then, a lot has changed in only two years:

- Gasoline that cost \$1.60 per gallon in 2006 hovers around \$4 per gallon in 2008. Experts estimate SMART's actual cost to a resident in additional sales tax paid will be less than \$1 per week. Commuters who sit in traffic jams while their hard-earned dollars evaporate out the tailpipe are considered much more likely to vote for SMART in 2008 than they were in 2006.
- AB32, the Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006, requires employers to demonstrate reductions of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. For most businesses this means a 25 percent reduction in GHGs.

"Approximately 60 percent of GHGs come from cars, and the biggest contributor to vehicle traffic is commuters," says Novato Chamber CEO Coy Smith. "As an employer AB32 will hold your company accountable for the miles traveled by your employees and the resulting amount of GHG emissions produced. For their own bottom lines, business leaders should get behind SMART," Smith states.

SMART's 2008 plan received a huge boost in July, when the Transportation Authority of Marin (TAM) voted to endorse SMART and its updated funding plan.

Under the 2008 plan, SMART trains will run north and south seven days a week, with trains every 30 minutes during weekday rush hours, with a noon round trip. The project will include weekend service, with four-round trips through the entire corridor each Saturday and Sunday. The plan proposed in 2006 had no weekend service.

Free SMART shuttle buses will make loop trips from train stations to major nearby shopping centers, schools, hospitals and employment centers. To see proposed shuttle loop maps, go online to: www.sonomamarintrain.org.

As part of their compliance with AB32, it is expected that businesses will also provide shuttles to and from stations for their employees.

Each train will be two or three cars in length. When the train is stopped at a station, it will not block city streets.

Riders will be able to bring bicycles and wheelchairs on board. They will further enjoy the use of wireless internet on board.

The 2008 Supplemental Environmental Impact Report (SEIR) allows more flexibility in selecting which kinds of train cars will be used. The 2006 EIR studied only one type of rail vehicle, a 'heavy' Diesel Multiple Unit (DMU). The 2008 plan includes analysis of 'light' DMUs that are lighter, quieter and slightly more fuel efficient than 'heavy' DMUs, but face more restrictions when used in conjunction with freight service.

Train crossings will take an average of 35 seconds – shorter than most red lights. Railroad crossing gates will be synchronized with regular traffic signals in downtown areas.

SMART is working with bus and ferry operators to ensure that schedules and fares mesh with trains.

Just as the BART system in the East Bay proved key to that area's ability to move workers to San Francisco, the existence of the SMART train will help employees reach San Francisco from the North Bay. SMART riders can travel by train to within a five-minute walk of the Larkspur Landing ferry terminal.

Moving workers to San Francisco isn't SMART's primary goal, however; statistics show that most commute traffic on Hwy. 101 consists of workers traveling to jobs in Marin or Sonoma counties.

SMART will help employers attract employees to the North Bay. "There is a looming labor shortage due to the retirement of the Baby Boomers, causing the North Bay to have a very competitive environment for a skilled workforce," states Smith. "Long, uncertain commute times cause companies to lose employees and make it more difficult to recruit qualified people. It's also more costly to do business when people and goods are caught in traffic.

"But perhaps most importantly," he notes, "demonstrating that employees are riding mass transit can go a long way toward helping an employer meet the requirements of AB32."

The North Bay Transportation Alliance (NBTA) is the group at work to pass the SMART tax in November. NBTA is a coalition of environmental groups, labor, business, train and bicycle advocates and others who recognize the need to invest in alternatives to Hwy. 101 and 'greener' forms of transportation.

"We believe there are even more compelling reasons to vote for SMART in 2008 than there were in 2006," says Chamber CEO Smith. "But no one is assuming that the tax will pass. Employers need to educate their employees about the necessity to pass the SMART tax. We've built our whole society and culture and transportation infrastructure around the automobile, and that has to change.

SMART is the beginning of that change for the North Bay; it will be the backbone of a more sustainable future transportation system for the entire region."

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