

January 11, 2010

Sonoma Marin Area Rail Authority  
750 Lindero Street, Suite 200  
San Rafael CA 94901

Attn: Lillian Hames, Executive Director

*Via email and regular mail*

Subject: Right-of-Way Preservation Policy

Dear Ms. Hames:

The Marin Conservation League has monitored the SMART development of a Long Range Right-of-Way Preservation Policy, which was approved by the Real Estate Committee at their meeting of January 6, 2010.

We agree that a 40-year planning horizon is a helpful tool to guide rail expansion in the North Bay. We also believe that the wording of these planning tools should reflect the realities of actual conditions and the impacts of possible actions with supporting policies.

Of great concern is the inclusion of a ferry terminal and ferry service at Port Sonoma. The northern shores of San Pablo Bay are recognized as a valuable habitat for wildlife. Several organizations, including Sonoma Land Trust, have purchased much of this shoreline to preserve the unique qualities of this ecologically significant area.

The proposed Port Sonoma ferry operation has long been determined to be a questionable uneconomic proposition with significant environmental impacts. The Water Emergency Transportation Authority (WETA) has placed the Port Sonoma ferry on a wait-and-see status per the WETA Final Transition Plan June 18, 2009. There would be no interest in this location had it not been for a \$20 million federal earmark that was allocated without any public hearings on preferred alternatives for use of this funding.

Building a ferry operation at Port Sonoma will be growth inducing and promote sprawl in the North Bay that is totally contrary to current policy expressed in SB 375, which promotes growth in the city-centered transit corridor.

Our concerns are two-fold: environmental impacts and economic impacts.

Environmental Impacts:

- Ferry operations could damage the adjacent salt marsh, special-status species, sandy shoreline, tidal mudflats and shellfish beds.



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- Sensitive wetlands and shoreline areas would be disturbed in order to build a rail siding, get trains to a terminal near Highway 37, or build a roadway going to a terminal along the rail ROW.
- Repeated dredging would be required along the side of the Petaluma River to allow ferries access to a terminal. The dredging will disturb benthic organisms and shorebird and fish habitats.
- Anticipated sea level rise will require on-going construction and disturbance of habitats.
- Storm water runoff from a proposed 300 to 600 space parking lot will pollute adjoining waterways.
- Ferry operations will induce sprawl, contrary to the objectives of SB 375. Under this legislation, the Port Sonoma area should be designated a Priority Conservation Area (PCA).

### Economic Impacts

- Port Sonoma ferries will serve the same ridership pool as the SMART service to Larkspur. Splitting this ridership between the Port Sonoma ferry and the Larkspur ferry will increase operating losses for both systems and diminish ridership on SMART south of Highway 37.
- Traffic congestion on crowded Highway 37 will worsen around the times when ferries arrive and depart, creating traffic hazards. It may be necessary to connect the terminal access roads to the signaled intersection at Lakeville Highway, causing encroachment into wetlands.
- New infrastructure would be required for sources of fresh water and waste-water disposal.
- Supplying utilities to port area will induce further growth, in an effort to cover the cost of terminal and ferry service.

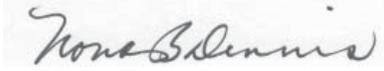
Therefore, MCL proposes that the ROW Preservation Policy for Port Sonoma should read as follows:

#### **Port Sonoma:**

**Along SMART's right-of-way, between the Highway 101 corridor and Schellville-Sonoma area, is Port Sonoma. The port is at the mouth of the Petaluma River, where Highway 37 crosses the river. There have been proposals for a commuter ferry system between Port Sonoma and San Francisco. Port Sonoma is surrounded by high-value habitat, adjacent salt marsh, special status species, sandy shoreline, tidal mudflats and shellfish beds. Creating a ferry system in this location would cause significant environmental impacts. A Port Sonoma ferry system would require expensive infrastructure, frequent dredging and traffic improvements. It would draw ridership away from service provided by SMART, reducing the economic viability of both systems. Any future planning of such a system should start with a comprehensive Environmental Impact Report that includes the evaluation of cumulative impacts and green-house gas emission. Any earmarks for Bay Area ferry systems should be applied to systems that support higher ridership while avoiding bayside environmental impacts. Earmarks should**

**not be granted to a Port Sonoma ferry system.**

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Nona Dennis", is written in black ink on a light-colored background.

Nona Dennis  
President

cc:

Representative Lynn Woolsey  
State Senator Mark Leno  
Assembly Member Jared Huffman  
Marin IJ, c/o Mark Prado  
Pacific Sun, c/o Peter Seidman