

# Opinion

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## MARIN VOICE

# Transit progress or stagnation?

**W**ITH ALL the opponents of Sonoma-Marín Area Rail Transit coming out of the woodwork lately, it is important to remember why 70 percent of us in Marin and Sonoma voted for Measure Q, and why the disgruntled letter writers are still wrong.

Many of us tire of sitting in traffic. Many of us look forward to the bike-pedestrian path. Some want a more reliable way of getting up and down the Highway 101 corridor, and some want to strengthen the local economy.

Nearly everyone appreciates the idea of using commute time to catch up on work (or get ahead) instead of struggling in traffic.

The day is fast approaching where private automobiles cannot serve as the backbone of our transportation system.

We cannot pave our way out of congestion and energy dependency. It took us 60 years to develop our near-exclusive dependency on oil and freeways. A car is convenient when alone on the road — but that only exists in TV commercials.

The price of our auto mobility is counted in traffic deaths, environmental damage, congestion, sprawl and dependence on imported oil. SMART's critics offer no practical alternative to the Highway 101 freeway congestion and ongoing costs.

Moreover, car ownership costs represent the second largest

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household expense.

The average U.S. household spends approximately 17 percent of its total income on transportation — almost as much as for food and health care combined.

With an improved transit system, many households will need fewer cars.

Workers who live on the Peninsula have long been able to work while commuting on Caltrain, and their productivity is higher as a result. SMART can help do the same for the North Bay.

At the same time, the project will create hundreds of jobs in the North Bay — thousands if we include construction. With SMART, we can enhance our quality of life and our economic competitiveness.

As does anything of value, SMART has a price tag. But good decisions require consideration of more than price alone. And the long-term consequences of bad decisions like sticking ex-

clusively with highways will be considerably pricier.

More and more U.S. cities and regions are rediscovering that multimodal transit systems provide great return on investment.

The train and pathway will be essential elements of our mobility in the 21st century.

So how does SMART make the best use of available money in the present economy? Realism requires that we place all the facts on the table and consider them thoroughly, while holding on to a vision of a better future for our region.

It may yet be possible to open the entire system between Larkspur and Cloverdale, but realism requires that we consider building SMART in increments (just like BART, LA Metro, and Highway 101) — with shuttle buses to the ferry and downtown San Rafael.

We won't know for certain how far the line will extend until all the construction bids are in.

SMART is a key to a better future — meaning less time wasted in traffic, lower environmental impacts, reduced fossil fuel consumption and better access to the North Bay for business and tourist alike.

We hold to the vision of rail service that in time will reach Napa, Fairfield and Sacramento.

SMART is the first step to restoring mobility, recovering lost time and increasing competitiveness.