

## Marin Voice: Effective multi-modal transportation

By Steven B. Krivit  
Guest op-ed column  
Marin Independent Journal

Posted:01/02/2011 01:18:00 AM PST

I AM perplexed by the letters from critics of the Sonoma-Marín Area Rail Transit program concerned about the project's financial challenges.

It is hypocritical for opponents of SMART to threaten legal action on the grounds that the current plan is shorter than promised, and in the same breath, try to stop the project because there isn't enough money to complete a longer line.

What is their proposed alternative "effective transportation"?

Buses?

How many people, having the means to afford and drive a car, will voluntarily abandon the convenience of a car for a bus? Certainly not enough to ease congestion on Highway 101.

Because Marin is one of the most affluent counties in America, I have a hard time taking the critics' financial concerns seriously.

Phase One must terminate at least in downtown San Rafael. Anything short of this -- considering the existing transit center and local business opportunities -- seems misguided.

Remain steadfast to connect the last leg to the ferry.

I have traveled around the world talking with experts on energy and resources, I have recently completed work on two energy encyclopedias. The scientists agree: Worldwide demand for energy is growing; easy worldwide availability of energy resources is dwindling. It is a recipe for disaster.

The scientists also know that there is no silver bullet. Even if a miracle were discovered tomorrow, it would take decades to integrate into the energy industry and distribution system.

Considering this time factor, we don't have much wiggle room.

The two biggest energy challenges are baseload electricity for stationary applications, and liquid fuels for transportation. Nuclear technology can give us the wiggle room for electricity baseload, but it will take many decades to build new plants.

Regardless, the storage and transmission challenges of nuclear-produced electricity make it unlikely to power buses on any freeway.

The liquid fossil fuels we guzzle took millions of years to form; we are burning through them in a relative blink of an eye. We have built an industrialized civilization on the naive assumption that energy sources are limitless.

Perhaps a miracle will occur in the coming decades, but in the meantime, wise planners will focus on what is possible: energy efficiency. From physics, energy-efficiency and environmental perspectives, rail is a superior mode of transportation.

As I drive once a month to Napa, I see the old rail lines and wish I could bike into downtown San Rafael, take the train to Napa, then hop into my friend's all-electric car. This is an effective multimodal transportation model.

In 50 years, people will look back and see what decisions we made to become more energy-efficient and the vision we demonstrated. Or they will look back at us and consider how short-sighted we were.

Let us not be penny-wise and pound-foolish. Wisdom and prudence calls for understanding the long-term relationships among society, science and technology.

SMART may not be perfect, but we can work together to make it as good as possible. Or do nothing.

Four years ago, I left Los Angeles, after 24 years. That city's planners allowed the rail lines to be ripped up. Living in Los Angeles, with no practical way to get from point A to point B aside from the freeways, felt like living in a prison. Venturing onto the freeways felt like entering a battlefield.

That is an ineffective uni-modal transportation model. I don't want to see this happen to Marin.

SMART requires teamwork, vision, thoughtful decisions and community spirit.