

Transportation Solutions Defense and Education Fund

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“Solutions Is Our Middle Name”

April 1, 2011
By E-Mail

Dianne Steinhauser
Transportation Authority of Marin
750 Lindero Street, Suite 200
San Rafael, CA 94901

Re: TAM RTP Submission Comments

Dear Ms. Steinhauser:

I wanted to offer you more thorough responses to your survey questions than would fit on the form:

Question 1. What would you say is the most important transportation problem facing Marin County today?

The affluence of Marin residents enables most of them to have personal vehicles for accessing Marin County's dispersed suburban land uses, as well as destinations around the region. This freedom and convenience has led to ever-increasing VMT and inevitable congestion. GHG emissions from this driving produce the lion's share (62%?) of the County's GHG footprint. Trends in global oil production (Peak Oil) strongly suggest that the cost of driving will increase dramatically in the future. That will leave many people unable to afford their currently preferred mode of transport. When added to the school children and the ever-larger number of seniors that will no longer be able to drive, this will result in serious mobility problems for Marin. On top of that, dependence on oil is unsustainable environmentally.

While electric vehicles will be helpful in reducing GHGs, focusing on them as Marin's Silver Bullet solution would ignore the future mobility problems identified above. Given this strategic landscape, TRANSDEF believes Marin's most important transportation problem is the absence of a convenient alternative to the single-occupant vehicle. We believe that Marin needs a convenient, fast, inexpensive-fare transit system, coupled with economic incentives that make driving alone less attractive in comparison.

Whatever growth that actually does occur in Marin will have lower overall impacts if it is concentrated around transit nodes. That is the reason TRANSDEF supports SMART over enhanced bus alternatives, which would not provide similar foci for growth, thus giving in to the inertia of continuing sprawl.

Question 3. What is the best way to reduce VMT in Marin?

1. Acknowledge that roadway expansion is not a viable response to congestion anymore, as it encourages more driving, which is incompatible with reducing VMT and GHG emissions. Acknowledge that TDM and TSM are the only forms of congestion relief that are climate-protective.
2. Stop spending money to make it easier to drive alone. That would mean defunding the widening portions of the MSN Project, Greenbrae Interchange and Aux lanes.
3. Public transit in Marin is inadequate and slow. Prioritize spending money to provide more frequent and better transit service. This could involve swapping STIP capital funds with sales tax counties like LA in order to receive operating funds.
4. Institute interjurisdictional countywide charges on all commercial parking spaces (including privately owned spaces) via a tax, mitigation fee, or other creative mechanism. The charge would provide funds for enhanced transit service and lower transit fares, and would serve to make transit more attractive compared to driving alone.
5. Implement the project recommendations below.
6. Please note that several of the options on Question 2 of the survey prevent the articulation of a comprehensive implementation of the strategic approach above: “Improving transportation serving recreational travelers in Marin” implies an automobile-based approach, while one based solely on transit is not offered. “Supporting new transit systems like streetcars in local commute corridors” forces one to support an overly expensive mode in order to show support for more cost-effective ones like BRT.

There is a comprehensive set of reasons why this strategic approach best responds to the needs of today. A strong and convenient transit system, coupled with surrogate road pricing via countywide commercial parking charges, will provide:

1. A viable means of reducing VMT and GHG emissions.
2. Greatly increased viability for future TOD, as household members are able to get around with fewer personal vehicles per Household, thus requiring less parking.
3. A viable alternative to driving alone, critically needed when gasoline prices inevitably become prohibitive for many, due to Peak Oil. This will increase Marin’s resilience.
4. A viable mobility alternative for school children and seniors that don’t drive.
5. Strong connections to a regional transit network, making long-distance trips by transit the preferred mode (thus reducing average trip lengths).
6. A strong message to residents, elevating sustainability over other values and making it possible for one’s lifestyle to be in harmony with larger environmental concerns.
7. A targeting of available funds to lower-cost projects. Substantially reduced transit fares could potentially pull enough people out of their cars to make a noticeable dent in congestion and GHG emissions, if the transit network is convenient and complete.

8. A model of a successful alternatives-based transportation strategy for the rest of the region, state and nation.

Question 4. Any project recommendations?

1. In addition to the comments above, institute TDM programs to greatly increase the use of HOV lanes. The County committed to developing and implementing a TDM plan as a Countywide Plan mitigation measure.
2. Fund the full buildout of SMART.
3. Provide 15-minute service backbone service on Highway 101.
4. Install peak period HOV lanes between Fairfax and the San Rafael Transit Center using existing lanes and overhead lane indicator signal. Put 15-minute BRT service on these lanes.
5. Fund the operation of neighborhood circulators using a lower-cost contractor than GGT. Let's work towards implementing the Measure A Strategic Plan as it had been conceived, before GGT modified its cost-structure and made MCTD pay far more for the same or less service.
6. Do not add more parking to the Larkspur Ferry Terminal. Provide ferry feeder service to the Terminal instead. Institute a parking charge for use of spaces at the terminal, to encourage use of the feeders, and to fairly allocate the cost of the parking resources to their users, rather than all ferry passengers.
7. The signalization of the ESFD Blvd. - Andersen Dr. Intersection should be dropped, due to the lack of adequate sight distances for queues. Cars stopped for a light would be in danger of being rear-ended.

Comments on the Workshop Process

1. The acoustics of the Community Center are terrible, making interactive meetings like this one very difficult. Staff presentations were too painful to pay attention to.
2. The workshop process had varied results, with some tables getting rather localized input (e.g., the Canal), while others just rehashed the items on the survey without working towards any kind of consensus. The latter was not a good use of time.
3. The first breakout groups were not given a regional policy context, so they collected opinions based on current conditions. The constraints coming in the future, that will require profound changes in behavior, were not considered at all. The talk prior to the second set of breakouts would have been useful as framing for the first breakouts.
4. I was quite impressed with the diversity of the turnout for the workshop. Outreach was far more effective than is typical for agencies such as the Air District.

5. I was exceedingly pleased to see TAM personnel consistently ask the question "Are these projects still our top priorities?" The issue of legacy projects has been contentious at MTC for decades. Given the dramatic shift in regional needs resulting from climate change and Peak Oil, inquiry into the appropriateness of legacy projects is long overdue. I commend TAM for its good faith efforts in this direction. If only MTC had created a schedule that supported a comprehensive reconsideration of priorities...

All things considered, I congratulate TAM for its best workshop ever.

Sincerely,

/s/ DAVID SCHONBRUNN

David Schonbrunn,
President

cc: Supervisor Kinsey
David Rzepinski, MCTD
Amy Van Doren, MCTD