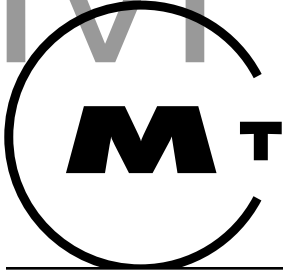


MTC REPORT



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Express Bus Program Expands North Bay Commute Options

MTC in mid-September took a big step forward in its efforts to make transit a more attractive option for Bay Area travelers when it teamed with nine different transit agencies to kick off Phase 1 of the new Regional Express Bus program. Using \$40 million in funds from Gov. Gray Davis' Traffic Congestion Relief Program, MTC has purchased 94 new state-of-the-art buses that its transit agency partners will deploy over the next 18 months to supplement existing express services and whisk thousands more travelers around the Bay Area each day.

The Regional Express Bus initiative is part of the Regional Transit Expansion Program that MTC adopted last year. The buses are a cost-effective way to combat Bay Area traffic congestion because they can help fill gaps in the regional rail network without requiring the capital investment of building new rail lines. Taking advantage of the growing network of freeway carpool lanes, transit operators will use the new vehicles both to increase service on existing express bus routes and to run new routes in select corridors. All of the new buses are low-emission vehicles that use diesel particulate filters and low-sulfur fuel. Passenger amenities include reclining seats, extra legroom, overhead reading lights and luggage racks.

The first 13 of the new Regional Express Bus vehicles already have been delivered to County Connection in Contra Costa County. Golden Gate

Transit is scheduled to receive six new buses in January 2003. Marin County is now considering whether to participate in the program to provide faster, more comfortable service for its employees.

SMART Legislation Could Smooth Track for Commuter Rail

Long-planned efforts to introduce commuter rail service along the U.S. 101 corridor between San Rafael and northern Sonoma County took a critical step forward in early September when Gov. Gray Davis signed AB 2224 — spon-



sored by Assemblyman Joe Nation — into law. The legislation establishes a new Sonoma-Marina Area Rail Transit District (SMART) that, beginning Jan. 1, will be authorized to own, operate and maintain a passenger rail system, and to put a sales tax measure before voters in both counties. The program also includes plans for a parallel bicycle/pedestrian path.

While the Traffic Congestion Relief Program signed into law by Gov. Davis in 2000 includes \$37 million for instituting commuter rail service in Sonoma and Marin counties, money from the

sales tax would be necessary to cover operating costs for the new service. Passage of the measure also would make SMART eligible for some \$28 million in funds from Proposition 116, the rail bond initiative approved by California voters in 1990.

The sales tax measure could be on the ballot as early as 2004, and if it is approved by two-thirds of voters in the two-county SMART territory, trains could begin rolling along the roughly 68 miles of track between San Rafael and Cloverdale as early as 2007. Because the right of way is already under public ownership, SMART will not have to pay any land acquisition costs. But several other issues must still be addressed. These include environmental reviews, station development, and the selection of locomotives and passenger cars. Current plans call for the use of diesel multiple-unit vehicles.

SMART's plan would put as many as 12 to 16 trains on the track between San Rafael and Cloverdale each day, with service as frequent as every 30 minutes during peak morning and afternoon commute periods. Marin County stations likely would include sites in downtown San Rafael, downtown Novato and near the Marin County Civic Center.

The new SMART district will be governed by a 12-member board of directors that will include two members of the Marin County Board of Supervisors; a Novato city councilmember; a San Rafael city councilmember; and a mayor or councilmember of another Marin County city. The remainder of the board will include two members of the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors; three mayors or councilmembers from Sonoma County cities; and two directors appointed from the Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District.

TransLink[®] Passes Customer Test, Moves Toward Wider Rollout

The TransLink[®] universal fare card proved to be a resounding success with Bay Area transit riders during the six-month pilot program that concluded this summer. Some 3,000 passengers tested the "smart card" system on all Golden Gate ferries, and on Golden Gate Transit's 8, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 34 and 40 bus routes, as well as on portions of the route networks operated by San Francisco Muni, BART, AC Transit, Caltrain and Santa Clara County's VTA. Fully 10 percent of all Golden Gate ferry riders are now using TransLink[®] to pay their fares.

An MTC-commissioned evaluation of the TransLink[®] demonstration that was released in September shows that trial user satisfaction is very high, no insurmountable technical problems emerged, and that passengers and transit agencies alike found the accounting to be accurate. Customers liked TransLink[®] so much that the biggest complaint by far was that the system isn't available on every route and in every station.

Due to the overwhelmingly positive response, all six agencies have now agreed to keep accepting TransLink[®] cards while working with MTC on how and when to implement the system throughout their route networks. The schedule for Phase II calls for two or three of the region's biggest transit operators to have TransLink[®] equipment installed on all their vehicles and in all their stations by the end of 2003, with the

remaining operators likely to move toward full rollout during 2004.



Court Ruling May Help Pave Way For New Funding Program

MTC's commitment to plan and provide funding for a balanced transportation system in the Bay Area got a shot in the arm Nov. 13 when the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit ruled in favor of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's approval of the motor vehicle emissions budget in the *Bay Area 2001 Ozone Attainment Plan*. The court action removed a key hurdle blocking MTC's adoption of the *2003 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)* — the latest version of a detailed funding program for both transit and highway projects that the Commission approves every two years. While a number of legal loose ends will have to be tied up in the weeks ahead, MTC may be able to adopt the TIP as early as January.

MTC released the new TIP for public review six months ago. But the process bogged down in July after local groups filed suit against the EPA and the Appeals Court ordered a temporary injunction against the agency's approval of the Ozone Attainment Plan. Though MTC was not a party to the suit, the injunction put the Bay Area into an air quality "conformity lapse." This prevented the Commission from meeting an early October deadline for adopting the TIP and led to a temporary freeze on federal funding for a wide range of transportation projects.

MTC sought to avert significant delays to many of these projects by adopting an "interim TIP" on Oct. 23 that focused on maintenance and rehabilitation of the region's existing transportation system, plus transit and carpool lane improvements. MTC now plans to withdraw the interim TIP and submit the more comprehensive original TIP for approval by Caltrans and the Federal Highway Administration. Eight separate road and highway projects around the Bay Area already have been held up by the legal wrangling over the Ozone Attainment Plan.

When it comes to federal ozone standards, the Bay Area actually is one of the cleanest large metropolitan areas in the country. Since the beginning of 2000, the region has been in compliance with air quality guidelines over 99 percent of the time, with the only exceedances at a small number of inland monitoring stations for a few hours on a few hot afternoons (there have been no ozone level exceedances in Marin County during this time). And while only 6 percent of all trips in the Bay Area are



made on public transit, MTC's commitment to increasing this number continues. The 2001 Regional Transportation Plan directs 77 percent of the region's total transportation funding over the next 25 years to transit investments. That's a higher percentage than any other large metro area in the country.

The challenge of how to increase transit ridership has found its way into federal court as well. The saga began with the 1982 Bay Area air quality plan, which required MTC to cut emissions by improving transit systems' productivity. Calculations made at the time assumed these improvements could increase transit ridership by 15 percent. When the ridership increases did not reach 15 percent by 1987, MTC moved to fulfill its air quality obligations with additional control strategies, which were adopted in 1990.

A U.S. District Court decision in July 2002, however, held that MTC is obliged beyond the air quality plan to deliver a 15 percent increase in transit ridership, and that this goal must be

achieved by November 2006. Agency staff also have drafted an amendment to the *Regional Transportation Plan* adopted in late 2001 that spells out how the Commission will meet the ridership target if the appeal is denied.

While transit certainly plays a role in regional clean air efforts, the actual impact of a 15 percent increase in ridership would be negligible, reducing total emissions by only about one-tenth of 1 percent. Existing regulations that mandate cleaner cars and cleaner fuels account for the biggest share of the emissions reductions projected in the Ozone Attainment Plan.

Traffic, Transit, Carpool and Bicycling Information to be as Easy as 5-1-1

Bay Area residents will get an early Christmas present when the 511 traveler information system is officially activated at a Dec. 6 ceremony. The new 511 number will take its place alongside 411 and 911 — easy-to-remember, three-digit phone numbers that provide important services to the public. In the case of 511, callers can use the toll-free service to get the most current reports on road conditions and traffic incidents, as well as transit fare and schedule information, and information about carpooling, vanpooling and bicycling. Information also is available online at www.511.org.

The 511 service is being rolled out in stages nationwide. The Bay Area is the largest metropolitan area in the country, and the first in California to activate the service. The launch is the result of a partnership between MTC, Caltrans, the California Highway Patrol, 35 different transit operators, 20 providers of para-transit services for elderly or disabled riders, and RIDES for Bay Area Commuters Inc. — which supplies carpooling, vanpooling, bicycling, and other commute option information, including information about transportation to airports.

511 is a free call from any conventional phone, including pay phones, in the nine Bay Area counties. Charges from cell phones depend on the caller's plan. One of the biggest upgrades to the 511 phone service from the Bay Area's established regional transportation information number is a state-of-the-art voice response system. An innovative transit trip planning and information service will be available



Your Bay Area travel guide. on the 511.org Web site in early 2003. Also available in 2003 — via both phone and Web — will be a service providing actual travel times from point to point along key freeway routes.

Marin County to Refine Transit Plan, Take Closer Look at Hubs

With funding assistance from MTC, Marin County over the next several months will refine its Bus Transit Futures Plan to include a study of county transit hubs. The purpose is to make sure that bus, ferry — and perhaps commuter rail — services effectively and efficiently improve mobility for the people who live and/or work in Marin, and that bicycle and pedestrian access to the hubs is maximized.

Among the tasks for the Bus Transit Futures Plan is to identify the type and amount of bus service that will be necessary at each of the four Marin County stations proposed for the SMART commuter rail service (see story on page 1). The study also will determine whether it makes sense for major bus hubs to be located at one or more commuter rail stations, and will define the physical needs for top-quality bus transit operations not only at or near the proposed rail stations in northern and central Marin, but for a bus hub in southern Marin.