

# Chapter 2

## VISION FOR THE RAIL SERVICE

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### INTRODUCTION

The SMART Commission created an implementation plan for commuter rail service in Sonoma and Marin Counties. In undertaking such an effort, the first step was to articulate a vision for the service. A vision would answer the following questions:

- Who will the service be designed for?
- What will the service consist of?
- When will it start?
- Where will it run?
- Why is it needed?

Guiding principles for the Commission's answers to each of these questions appear below.

### A SERVICE FOR COMMUTERS AND OFF-PEAK RIDERS

In the context of ever worsening congestion in the US 101 corridor and ever longer commutes, it was clear that the Sonoma – Marin rail service would be primarily a commuter rail service. It would be aimed at attracting persons currently driving in the corridor. At the same time, the Commission recognized that off-peak riders, though typically fewer than commuters, constitute a significant market that should be accommodated.

### SERVICE LEVEL ELEMENTS

At a minimum, commuters require reasonably frequent and regular headways during peak commute periods. As an attractive and efficient commuter rail alternative, the service:

- Would have shorter headways during peak morning and evening commute periods.
- Would have transit times that would be superior to driving times during peak commute periods with heavy traffic congestion.
- Would serve commuters in both Sonoma County and Marin County.
- Would provide limited mid-day service for off-peak riders.
- Would not operate long after peak commute periods in the evenings, or offer service on weekends or on holidays.

## **EMPHASIS ON START-UP IN THE SHORT TERM**

Because of routine congestion on US 101 that will only get worse, the Commission recognized that a short-term implementation was imperative. For planning purposes, a start date of 2002 was originally envisioned and later changed to five years after the passage of a transportation sales tax in both counties in order to reduce the overall cost of implementing the service.

## **ROUTE OPTIONS**

The Commission would consider routing alternatives within the study area bounded by Cloverdale in the north and Larkspur in the south. Alternatives would include routes serving both Sonoma County and Marin County, as well as Sonoma County-only alternatives.

## **THE NEED FOR RAIL**

A Sonoma – Marin rail service using an existing rail right-of-way would significantly expand mode choices for commuters who now have no alternatives to automobiles, buses and ride sharing in the US 101 corridor. All three modes must use the highway, which is heavily congested during peak commute periods. As a result, all existing modes experience recurring and significant delays. Rail would provide the means to avoid these delays for its riders.

The Commission's work, therefore, would be to explore ways in which increasing numbers commuters in the congested corridor can reach their work destinations by an efficient and effective rail alternative to US 101.