

SMART FAQs

<http://www2.sonomamarintrain.org/index.php/faq>

Frequently Asked Questions

Here are some of the most frequently asked questions about SMART's 70-mile rail and trail project, followed by a short answer and a link to a more comprehensive discussion of the subject in one of SMART's White Papers:

If SMART doesn't go to San Francisco, isn't it a "train to nowhere?"

SMART will connect to Larkspur, across the street from the Larkspur Ferry Terminal, providing access to San Francisco. It's important to recognize, however, that most of the traffic on Highway 101 in the North Bay is not bound for San Francisco.

Commuting patterns in the 21st Century are much different from those of 50 years ago. The vast majority of North Bay commuters on Highway 101 are going to jobs in Marin and Sonoma Counties, and the number of commuters to San Francisco is shrinking. The Metropolitan Transportation Commission projects 130,000 new jobs along the Highway 101 corridor in Marin and Sonoma between 2000 and 2025 – none of which will require a North Bay commuter to cross the Golden Gate Bridge. Far from being a "train to nowhere," SMART is a train to where the jobs are, and where the people are.

For more information, see [SMART White Paper No. 1 – "SMART Travel in the 21st Century."](#)

How will SMART benefit the environment?

According to the project's Environmental Impact Report, SMART will prevent at least 30 million pounds of greenhouse gases from entering our atmosphere each year by removing 5,300 car trips daily from North Bay roads. But that hardly begins to describe the potential environmental benefits of SMART.

The greenhouse gas savings figure doesn't include an estimated 7,000 to 10,000 trips each day on SMART's parallel 70-mile bicycle-pedestrian trail. Nor does it calculate the environmental benefits of helping to change the transportation paradigm of the North Bay by creating the north-south backbone of an interconnected transit system that can transform the way people move around Marin and Sonoma Counties in the future.

For a discussion of these benefits, see [SMART White Paper No. 2 – "Climate Change and SMART."](#)

Is SMART the best use of the Northwestern Pacific Railroad corridor?

SMART's proposal to operate self-propelled passenger rail cars on the existing NWP right-of-way is the best use of the publicly owned corridor for a variety of economic, environmental and technical reasons.

A BART-style project (or a magnetic-levitation train or monorail, for that matter) would be vastly more expensive than SMART – probably more than \$100 million a mile. Light rail wouldn't be as efficient, and also would cost more. So would using buses or "dual-mode" vehicles that could run on or off the railroad tracks. SMART, at a cost of about \$7.7 million per mile, is by far the least expensive of many options suggested for the NWP corridor, using proven and tested technology that can be up and running in about five years.

For a closer look at the alternatives, see [White Paper No. 3 – "Alternatives for the NWP Corridor."](#)

Why not pave the tracks and run buses instead of trains?

A busway along the NWP corridor wouldn't be cheaper than SMART and it certainly couldn't offer the same environmental benefits of the proposed passenger rail project. Busways generally are built in short, urban corridors with closely spaced stations. Recent projects in Pittsburgh, PA, and Los Angeles have cost well over \$20 million per mile, compared to SMART's estimated cost of \$7.7 million per mile.

Because buses don't offer the same on-board amenities as trains and because busways can't offer the same travel speeds as trains, fewer riders will use them. Dedicated bus corridors are also not as safe as rail

corridors. And finally, paving the tracks for buses isn't currently legal in the SMART corridor, where state legislation requires SMART to provide safe and efficient passenger rail service in conjunction with the North Coast Railroad Authority's proposed freight rail service north of the Highway 37 turnoff.

For a detailed examination of this issue, see [White Paper No. 4 – "Why not Pave the Tracks?"](#)

What will a SMART train look like?

SMART's clean, efficient and modern rail cars will be a quick, quiet way to travel in the North Bay. Riders can bring bicycles on board, use wireless Internet and relax with a snack or a cup of coffee. Short two-car train sets will fit within a downtown city block, keeping cross streets unobstructed. At right is one type of rail vehicle under consideration.



For a more complete description of SMART's rail cars, see [White Paper No. 5 – "SMART's Rail Vehicles."](#)

What about diesel fuel?

Diesel isn't what it used to be, and modern pollution-control equipment will make SMART trains – on a per-seat basis – easily the cleanest vehicle traveling along the Highway 101 corridor. New regulations requiring the use of ultra low-sulfur diesel fuel allow high-tech pollution-control systems to be used on SMART trains.

Particulate emissions – the familiar "black smoke" produced by old-style diesel – are virtually eliminated with this technology, and other emissions are greatly minimized. As engine technology continues to improve, SMART will work toward using the cleanest energy possible to run its trains.

For more on this, see [White Paper No. 6 – "SMART's Clean Diesel Trains."](#)

How will SMART impact the air quality of the North Bay?

Besides reducing greenhouse gases, SMART also will help reduce other air pollutants along the Highway 101 corridor. Nitrogen oxides and reactive organic gases, major contributors to the gray pall that we usually refer to as "smog," will be reduced as SMART reduces vehicle trips in the region. Particulate matter, another significant air pollutant, also will be reduced.

SMART's Final EIR concludes: "Implementation of the proposed project overall would benefit air quality as levels of most criteria pollutants and greenhouse gases are reduced."

For more on SMART's benefits to our air quality, see [White Paper No. 7 – "Air Quality."](#)

Where will SMART's bicycle-pedestrian pathway go?

SMART's companion bicycle-pedestrian pathway will follow essentially the same route as SMART's passenger trains, linking all 14 stations and the 70-mile corridor from Larkspur to Cloverdale.

By fulfilling a long-term dream of a north-south greenway, it not only will provide key access to rail stations, but it will become a recreational jewel for Marin and Sonoma counties. SMART's environmental studies project it will be used by 7,000 to 10,000 walkers, joggers, bicyclists and others every day.

For more on SMART's Rail and Trail project, see [White Paper No. 8 – "SMART is Both Rail and Trail."](#)

How do I get from the station to my work place?

SMART stations are within easy walking or biking distance to and from tens of thousands of job destinations in the North Bay. To make access even easier, though, the SMART project includes free shuttles at many stations that will take train riders to office parks, hospitals, schools and shopping areas.

In Petaluma, for example, shuttles will serve Petaluma Valley Hospital, Santa Rosa Junior College's Petaluma campus and several business parks. In Larkspur, a shuttle will take train passengers to the Golden Gate Ferry, College of Marin or San Quentin State Prison, a major employer.

For more information on SMART shuttles, see [White Paper No. 9 – "SMART Shuttles."](#)

How will SMART mesh with existing transit services?

By combining a SMART ride with a bus trip, public transit riders will be able to go car-free just about anywhere in the North Bay, and beyond. SMART is working with North Bay transit operators – including Golden Gate Transit, Marin County Transit, Sonoma County Transit and local operators like Santa Rosa CityBus – toward a goal of ensuring that train service and bus service work in a complementary manner when SMART trains start rolling.

SMART already is planning its train schedule based on the timing of Golden Gate bus service in downtown San Rafael – the North Bay's busiest bus transit center. Conversely, local transit agencies may adjust their bus schedules and routes to better mesh with rail service when SMART starts running.

For more on how SMART will help riders make the transit connection, see [White Paper No. 10 – "Making the Transit Connection."](#)

What if I want to drive my car to the train station?

Most SMART train stations will have parking available for passengers who drive to the train, and in fact several stations will have large park-and-ride lots. But several stations, including the downtown depots in San Rafael and Santa Rosa, are not slated to have dedicated parking for the train. These are areas that are well-served by other transit or have a higher population density of residents who can walk to or otherwise access the train without using a car.

For a complete list of parking plans for SMART stations, see [White Paper No. 11 – "Park and Ride."](#)

Where, exactly, will SMART stations be?

SMART will revive rail service to historic depots in such cities as Healdsburg, Santa Rosa and Petaluma. It will enhance intermodal transit hubs in conjunction with bus terminals in Windsor and San Rafael. And it will create new stations at strategically chosen locations along the rail corridor in cities such as Novato, Cotati and Larkspur.

Depending upon station size and ridership, amenities at SMART stations will include electronic ticket machines, bike lockers, street furniture and information kiosks.

To find out what's planned at your stop, see [White Paper No. 12 – "SMART Station Planning."](#)

How will SMART go north in the morning, or south in the evening?

Because many people see just a single set of railroad tracks in most of the SMART corridor, they may mistakenly believe that trains can only run in one direction. On the contrary, SMART will run trains north and south every 30 minutes during both the morning and evening commute hours. This is possible because about 17 percent of the corridor includes "passing sidings" – sections where two sets of track allow one train to pull to the side while another train passes.

Rail systems throughout the country successfully operate in this manner; the "Sprinter" train between Oceanside and Escondido in San Diego County began such a service in March.

For more information on SMART's simultaneous north-south operations, see [White Paper No. 13 – "Two-Way Track Operation."](#)

Will SMART operate freight trains?

Freight train service and passenger train service have been intertwined on the Northwestern Pacific rail corridor since the 19th Century, but today they are governed by two separate entities. The North Coast

Railroad Authority has an easement that gives it the right to operate freight trains on SMART's tracks north of Highway 37 in Novato. Unlike SMART, NCRA does not need a vote of the people to begin service.

For a closer look at the differences, see [White Paper No. 14 – "Freight Trains and Passenger Trains."](#)

What other safety measures does SMART plan?

Safety will be a high priority for the SMART project. While trains are a remarkably safe way to travel, they represent a hazard to any persons or vehicles who venture into their path. To prevent accidents, SMART will install the latest safety measures including fencing, signs, gates and warning signals at rail crossings. There also will be a safety structure separating SMART's bicycle-pedestrian pathway from the tracks.

A computerized signaling and dispatching system will keep track of the location of trains at all times. Collision-avoidance technology will be built into the project. SMART also will implement Operation Lifesaver, a nationwide non-profit program designed to educate the public – and particularly school-age children – about the hazards that may occur on railroad property, especially at railroad crossings.

For more about SMART's safety measures, see [White Paper No. 16 – "Traveling Safely in the North Bay."](#)

Will SMART trains cause traffic jams?

By getting thousands of people out of their cars every day, SMART will reduce the number of cars using North Bay roads. Still, some wonder if SMART will cause traffic backups as its trains cross streets and roads and pull into downtown stations. In fact, SMART trains will cross streets in just a few seconds, and crossing gates will be closed only 35-40 seconds – shorter than most red lights.

Because they are only two cars long, SMART trains will not block any streets when they are stopped in downtown stations. Synchronized signal technology in downtowns such as San Rafael's will improve the flow of traffic – even when trains aren't present.

For more on SMART and traffic, see [White Paper No. 17 – "Downtown Traffic and SMART."](#)

How much will SMART cost?

SMART's funding plan estimates the capital costs of the train and pathway project at \$541 million, which will make it one of the least-expensive new transportation projects in California on a per-mile basis. Annual operating costs are estimated at \$19 million. Existing funding, fares and a dedicated ¼-cent sales tax will pay for the project.

SMART's Funding Plan is posted at <http://www.sonomarintrain.org>, described in [White Paper No. 18 – "SMART's Financial Plan."](#)