



At MCL's March 2025 meeting of its Land Use, Transportation, and Water Committee meeting, **Eddy Cumins, the General Manager of SMART**, and **Bill Gamlen, SMART's Chief Engineer** presented an update on SMART's recent initiatives and strategic plan, recent SMART grand openings and construction accomplishments, a preview of projects in SMART's pipeline, and challenges the SMART board and staff will look to address in the future.

GM Cumins reported that his priorities, since becoming GM in 2021, have been to align SMART staff and the SMART board, and to focus SMART's efforts on meeting the community's needs and expectations.

Cumins listed the following accomplishments over the last few years to meet demands identified by the community:

- Expanded weekday service to 42 trips/day and weekend service to 16 trips/day
- Expanded discount on fares to \$1.50/zone and reduced the cost of the 31-day pass to be cost effective for a 3-day/week commute to adjust to changes in commuter needs.
- Making daily parking in SMART lots free and reducing overnight parking to \$5/night
- Improved weekend Larkspur Ferry connections and Giants game-day service coordination
- Providing service to meet school field trip transportation needs weekdays between 9 am and 2 pm
- Introduction of two pilot programs – (1) a micro-transit on demand service and (2) a free-fares program for youth and seniors. The free-fare program has been in effect since April 2023.
- Installation of real-time message boards on train platforms and wayfinding signage on SMART's multi-use pathways.
- Increased train ridership above fiscal year 2024 by 30% and pathway use by 22%.
- Completed construction of the Petaluma North station (which drove an increase in ridership) and opened the McInnis multiuse pathway segment in North San Rafael.

Cumins reported on projects and service improvements that are in SMART's pipeline and recent funding that SMART has received.

- Three new multiuse pathway segments (9 miles) would be opening soon.
- Receipt of \$11.7 million pathways grants: a \$7 million federal grant to fund the Guerneville to Sonoma County Airport in Santa Rosa pathway segment (planned for construction in 2026) and \$4.7 million Regional Measure 3 programmed funds from Transportation Authority of Marin to build the Hanna Ranch to Rowland Blvd pathway segment in Novato.
- Expansion of the Larkspur shuttle to the ferry from a Thurs to Saturday schedule to a 7-day/week service.
- Extending rail service to Windsor.
- Receipt of a \$81 million grant from the State's Transit and Inner-City Rail Capital Program (TIRCP) for the Healdsburg extension. SMART is currently preparing design-build documents. Construction is planned for completion in 2028.
- Continued work on project development of SMART's East-West passenger rail service.
- Participation in the Marin Sonoma Coordinated Transit Service (MASCOTS) planning to better coordinate transit service among agencies along the Highway 101 corridor.

Cumins described the challenges SMART will focus on in the year ahead:

- Adapting to post-pandemic travel patterns in an agile way to meet the needs of the community.
- Adjustments to frequency and how early and late to run trains to better connect the system with local bus service.
- Building capacity to meet ridership needs.
- Meeting the needs for first and last mile transportation to and from train stations.
- Addressing SMART's staff capacity to complete all of the projects in the pipeline on time and on budget.
- Managing the increasing costs of construction.
- Passing a sales tax renewal before Measure Q expires in 2029.

Cumins closed his presentation reiterating SMART's interest in adapting to meeting the needs of the community and his desire that SMART be viewed as part of community solutions whether in planning for housing, moving essential workers, or in protecting the environment.

GM Cumins and Chief Engineer Gamlen responded to questions:

Does SMART have plans to electrify its trains to reduce its contribution to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions?

Cumins responded that analysis shows that average SMART riders emit 30-40% less GHG emissions and average 22 miles/ride. He stated that SMART is on pace for FY 2025 to take 22 million miles traveled off of Highway 101. He said while the SMART Board is interested in moving toward electric trains, the rail cars that were purchased in the 2016-17

timeframe have a life expectancy of 35-40 years. SMART will be tracking improvements to battery technology in the coming years and deciding whether battery or hydrogen technology will be best for SMART's future.

Is there an opportunity to switch SMART shuttles at the Sonoma County Airport and Larkspur Landing to autonomous vehicles (AV)?

Cumins replied that SMART reached out to autonomous vehicle manufacturers to understand that capability particularly for Larkspur Landing and they were told the technology is not ready for that type of use yet, but there may be potential in the future. SMART will continue to monitor the development of AV technology.

Does SMART record the number of passengers that ride free through the free-fare program for older adults and youth?

Cumins replied that the free fare for older adults was a response to feedback that for seniors the Clipper Card and app technology are a barrier. According to SMART, 44% of the population in Sonoma and Marin Counties are youth and seniors and only 24% of SMART's ridership prior to the free fares were of those age groups. Today's estimates of senior and youth ridership are 40-45% of SMART's overall from manual counts. Free fare riders are not captured in electronic data collected by SMART.

Regarding increases in ridership, if 40% of riders are currently free-fare and 60% are paid riders, that influences farebox recovery. How much of SMART's operations are paid for by fares and how much from sales tax? Is it 5% vs 95%?

Cumins responded that SMART was bringing in close to 6% in farebox recovery in FY 2024. Cumins stated that approximately \$2.2 million is currently farebox revenue and SMART's operating budget is roughly \$35 million/year. Cumins pointed out that farebox recovery for several other Bay Area transit agencies is also in the single digits.

How are SMART's freight operations growing and what freight is SMART hauling from Solano to Sonoma County?

Cumins clarified that the SMART-owned freight rail begins east of the Napa River near American Canyon. He said that SMART had moved record loads in early 2025 except during flooding due to heavy rain in February. Much of the freight is hops for Lagunitas Brewing Company, other is animal feed and grains. When the rail extension to Windsor is completed, there will be opportunity to pick up additional freight customers. SMART is working to procure additional freight locomotives.

The freight system operates at night between 10 pm and midnight, picking up at the interchange east of the Napa River, holding in Novato until the last passenger trains come through for the day, and then heading north to Petaluma. SMART is a "common carrier" of freight which means that whatever freight comes in, including hazardous freight, SMART must deliver it. SMART has a storage track near Schellville. SMART's board made the decision SMART would not store liquid petroleum gas (LPG) tankers on its storage track.

What are SMART's plans for future east/west passenger rail? Will SMART expansion plans be included as part of the future State Route 37 causeway project?

Gamlen said SMART is a member of the State Route 37 Policy Committee, and that SMART passenger rail is a component in overall planning. Caltrans is working on a project study review that will lay out rail options. One is using the existing SMART alignment to extend past SR 37, connecting a mainline station at Hamilton and extending to the national rail network in Suisun City. Another option is running rail parallel to SR 37 but that would be a major undertaking. The alignment was recognized in the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) Corridor Identification and Development (Corridor ID) program. [The program is a comprehensive planning initiative under the 2021 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to establish a pipeline of intercity passenger rail projects.] Gamlen reported that a large portion of the rail would have to be elevated and would be very expensive. Currently, the intersection of Hwy 101 and SR 37 and the Schellerville area are low-lying and have suffered from flooding during recent storms.

How will future projects lift the tracks out of wetlands and what are plans to adapt existing rail to sea level rise (SLR)?

Gamlen responded that SLR planning involves system planning for transportation infrastructure in Marin and Sonoma Counties. It's not usually as simple as raising the track to lift it out of a floodplain or to adapt it to future SLR. SMART crosses many roads and connects to lots of infrastructure. Raising tracks would require raising roads and road connections and vice versa. Gamlen said that SMART participates in SLR discussions in the Petaluma River watershed with Sonoma Land Trust and in the Novato Creek watershed. Planning an alignment east along SR 37 also requires SLR planning. SMART is working closely with Caltrans and local partners. Soil conditions are very poor in bay mud, so building a large structure becomes very expensive.

Is there a SMART citizens advisory committee or a sales tax renewal committee?

Cumins said SMART has a Citizens Oversight Committee that worked on SMART's strategic plan and that the committee provides feedback to staff and the Board on financial topics not on tax renewal.

Cumins concluded by saying that SMART staff and the SMART Board are not allowed to promote a ballot measure for SMART's sales tax renewal. However, he said, if a SMART sales tax extension does not pass, SMART will need to cease new construction by 2027 to save money in order to continue to operate as long as possible. That would require depleting reserves currently used to maintain the system in a state of good repair in order to get to 2030 at which time SMART would need to shut the system down.