All aboard SMART Train

Tuesday, April 7 was a momentous day for the Sonoma Marin Area Rail Transit (SMART). The two-car pilot train set arrived in Cotati to the cheers of hundreds of supporters who lined the Cotati Transit Center.

As Chair of SMART, I had the pleasure of introducing the SMART Board of Directors, dignitaries, and special guests – who included: Congressman Jared Huffman, Congressman Mike Thompson, and the California Deputy Secretary of Transportation Chad Edison. The State Legislature was in session so Senator McGuire and Assemblymember Levine sent staff to represent them as did U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein.

The new train, appropriately nicknamed Rainmaker for bringing us much needed rain upon its arrival, is the most fuel efficient diesel train in the North Bay and has a state-of-the-art safety design. It is the first new train set to be compliant with Positive Train Control law (an automated braking control system) conforming to the Rail Safety Improvement Act of 2008. In addition, it fulfilled the “Buy America” federal requirement, includes added safety features such as crash-energy management equipment, is much quieter than a locomotive, and has excellent fuel economy compared to locomotives or driving alone.

The event included a tour of the inside of the train which has a beautifully designed interior and features: large windows to see our gorgeous Marin and Sonoma views, comfortable seats (some of which recline) and work tables, power outlets for passenger use, Wi-Fi, lots of interior storage space, and twelve bicycle racks per train car. There is a capacity for 310 passengers sitting and standing.

The pilot train will be tested this year in anticipation of passenger service starting in 2016. So don’t be surprised if you see a train rolling down the tracks! Testing is anticipated to begin in May.

Six more two-car train sets will arrive in the coming year, for a total of seven two-car train sets. Phase 1 of the SMART project includes 43 miles of service from Downtown San Rafael to Airport Blvd north of Santa Rosa and will include 10 stations: three in Santa Rosa (Airport Blvd, Guerneville Rd and Railroad Square), one in Rohnert Park (Rohnert Park Expressway), one in Cotati (East Cotati Ave), one in Petaluma (Downtown), two in Novato (San Marin/Atherton and Hamilton), and two in San Rafael (Marin Civic Center and Downtown). Trains will operate in both directions every thirty minutes during peak commute hours, with a mid-day trip and weekend service planned as well.

A big thank you is owed to the General Manager of SMART, Farhad Mansourian, and the entire SMART staff who put on an exciting and memorable event. Every single member of the SMART team has been instrumental in bringing us another step closer to providing passenger service in Marin and Sonoma Counties.

Three years ago SMART published an announcement that said: There’s a Train Coming to Town. Last Tuesday it did!

For more information about SMART, visit: http://sonomamarintrain.org/.

As always, my door is open to you. I welcome your suggestions and ideas. You can reach me at: (415) 473-7331 or jarnold@marincounty.org.