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The train is a-comin' and here's the scoop

As Chair of SMART, I am excited to report that our Board has been working diligently toward beginning service later this year. The tracks are laid, platforms ready, ticket machines ordered, and as of June 1 the fares for the first year of service determined.

The Board kept two goals in mind in looking at the myriad of choices for setting fares: SMART's financial sustainability and affordability for riders.

The SMART Board has a fiduciary responsibility to the public to ensure that service is sustainable well into the future. SMART has three sources of revenue: State Transportation Funds, Measure Q sales tax revenue and rider fares. SMART's Strategic Plan identified an annual fare revenue target of \$5M over the next 20 years for operating revenues.

It was important to balance SMART's financial needs, with the needs of our community. The Board adopted the following principles and fare program elements to help guide fare policies: provide financial sustainability in fare programs; provide a service that is affordable to the public; and approve the principle of incentivizing the business community and other institutions to select SMART and public transit as their transportation choice.

As a result, the SMART Board approved a 50 percent fare discount for seniors 65 and older, youth, veterans, and passengers with disabilities. In addition, we approved an Eco-Pass program for businesses, educational and social service institutions – where SMART Eco-Passes can be purchased in bulk with discounts up to 50 percent for employees and patrons.

In looking at how to structure fares, we adopted a base fare, plus a zone fare program - meaning an initial flat rate for riders, plus an additional fee for each zone traveled. We adopted five zones of travel for the SMART line, including the future phases of SMART. The zones are broken down as follows: Zone 1 includes Larkspur (future phase), Downtown San Rafael, and Marin Civic Center; Zone 2 includes Novato Hamilton, Downtown Novato (potential future station) and Novato San Marin/Atherton; Zone 3 includes Downtown Petaluma, Petaluma North, Cotati and Rohnert Park; Zone 4 includes Downtown Santa Rosa and Santa Rosa North; and Zone 5 includes Sonoma Airport, Windsor (future phase), Healdsburg (future phase) and Cloverdale (future phase).

In establishing fares, our Board considered many things: public meeting feedback, community surveys, and costs comparisons of other transit agencies. After much debate, we voted for a one-way base fare of \$3.50, plus a \$2 fare for each zone traveled. SMART survey results show that the majority of riders will travel two to three zones per trip.

To give you an idea of some travel and pricing examples, a ride from: the Novato Hamilton station to the Downtown San Rafael station (two zones) would cost \$5.50 or \$2.75 if you qualify for half fare discount; the Downtown Santa Rosa station to the Downtown San Rafael station (four zones) would cost \$9.50 or \$4.75 for half fare discount; and for shorter trips such as Marin Civic Center station to the Downtown San Rafael station the cost would be \$3.50 or \$1.75 for half fare discount.

To make transit transfers seamless for our riders, SMART will use Clipper, which is used by transit agencies throughout the Bay Area. SMART passengers will receive a transfer credit of \$1.50 for full fare paying customers and \$0.75 for half fare discount customers. This means if you are a Golden Gate Ferry passenger and transfer to the SMART train, full fare customers will receive \$1.50 off their SMART ticket – and vice versa, if you start on SMART then transfer to the ferry, you receive \$1.50 off your ferry ticket.

After one year of service, the Board will re-evaluate our fare program, ridership numbers and revenue. Because the adopted fare schedule does not bring in the \$5M in fare revenue identified in our Strategic Plan, we may need to make adjustments in the future, but with a healthy budget reserve on-hand and interest in making the SMART train as accessible as possible to our community, the SMART Board felt comfortable in implementing these rates.

I believe SMART will be a game-changer for the North Bay. SMART offers commuters a choice between Highway 101 traffic and unpredictable commute times – and a comfortable, predictable and stress-free train commute with Wi-Fi, coffee and wine! By SMART's calculations, a trip on SMART will take half as long as a non HOV lane trip down 101.

Remember, my door is always open to you. You can reach me at: (415) 473-7331 or jarnold@marincounty.org.