

**Metropolitan Transportation Commission and Association of Bay Area Governments
Joint MTC Planning Committee with the ABAG Administrative Committee**

July 12, 2024

Agenda Item 7b

Plan Bay Area 2050 Amendment: Sonoma-Marín Rail Transit to Healdsburg

Subject:

Details on a proposed amendment to Plan Bay Area 2050 to include the Sonoma-Marín Rail Transit (SMART) passenger rail extension to Healdsburg.

Background:

SMART began initial operations between downtown San Rafael and northern Santa Rosa in 2017, and in 2019, service was extended south to Larkspur to enhance connections to the Golden Gate ferry terminal. Construction is currently underway on a northern extension to Windsor, which was included in the adopted Plan Bay Area 2050, providing additional connectivity to northern Sonoma County. Plan Bay Area 2050 also included an infill station in North Petaluma and significant investments necessary to protect the SMART corridor from rising sea levels. Earlier this year, MTC received a request from Caltrans to amend Plan Bay Area 2050 to further extend SMART passenger rail, with the next phase stretching from Windsor to Healdsburg. SMART has secured significant funding for this extension, including an expected \$40 million allocation identified in the Regional Measure 3 Expenditure Plan, but an estimated \$81 million funding gap remains. Pursuing additional near-term state funding sources to close this gap and move towards construction would require the Healdsburg extension to be included in the current fiscally-constrained regional plan, Plan Bay Area 2050.

Performance Findings and Past Investments:

As part of the Plan Bay Area 2050 Project Performance Assessment, staff evaluated the Windsor to Cloverdale extension, including Healdsburg. Overall, the analysis found that many of the region's commuter rail projects, like the proposed northern extension of SMART, had low cost-effectiveness with limited ridership gains relative to their project costs. Furthermore, these projects often had equity concerns, given ridership forecasts skewed toward higher-income demographics. As a result, this SMART extension was not included in fiscally-constrained Transportation Element of Plan Bay Area 2050. Preliminary results from the Transit 2050+ process currently underway are consistent with these prior findings as well.

Statutory Requirements and Path Forward:

Despite performance challenges, it is clear there is strong local support for amending Plan Bay Area 2050 to accommodate the Healdsburg extension project, and significant funding has been secured to-date. However, to advance such an amendment, key statutory requirements must be considered:

- **Fiscal Constraint:** Federal planning requirements mandate that the added costs of the project do not exceed the plan's transportation revenue forecast. To accommodate this requirement, staff propose removing an equivalent amount of Sonoma County projects (i.e., US-101/Railroad Avenue Improvements and Farmers Lane Extension) to keep the plan fiscally-constrained and compliant with federal law.
- **Greenhouse Gas Target:** State planning requirements mandate that the greenhouse gas target must continue to be met, consistent with the adopted plan. Given the relatively small magnitude of changes to the Transportation Project List, no issues are anticipated as a result of this amendment.
- **Public Review:** MTC's Public Participation Plan (2023) requires that an amendment to Plan Bay Area 2050 undergo public review and comment. Adequate time will need to be reserved this summer to fulfill this requirement to provide the public an opportunity to weigh in on the amendment.
- **Environmental Analyses:** Federal and State environmental requirements mandate the disclosure of the potential environmental impacts for amendments., Staff will prepare two companion environmental assessments in the coming months—one for state environmental requirements and one for federal transportation air quality conformity. These assessments will be included with the Commission and ABAG materials for the proposed amendment in late 2024.

July 12, 2024

Page 3 of 3

Next Steps:

MTC staff has started the process to amend Plan Bay Area 2050 to include the extension to Healdsburg. Preliminary analysis indicates that this amendment would slightly reduce regional traffic volumes. This suggests the amendment will likely have no impact on achieving regional greenhouse gas emission reduction targets or making a positive transportation air quality conformity finding. However, the necessary analyses will be finalized in the coming months. Staff will coordinate with SMART and SCTA to prepare the necessary amendment and statutory environmental documents. The public review process is expected to begin this summer. Following the review, MTC staff plans to present the item to the Commission and ABAG for action in the fall.

Recommendations:

Information

Attachments:

None



Alix Bockelman