



SONOMA COUNTY TRANSPORTATION & LAND USE COALITION

April 11, 2006

Gary Helfrich
PRMD
2550 Ventura Drive
Santa Rosa, CA 95403

RE: Circulation & Transit Element, GP 2020

Dear Mr. Helfrich,

The SCTLC has from its beginning been enthusiastic about development of a wider range of choices in transportation, as well as better coordination of transportation with land use. From its perspective, considerable policy evolution has come about in the 17 years since the 1989 General Plan.

We particularly appreciate certain facets of this Update of the General Plan, such as the introduction or increased emphasis on

- traffic calming
- stronger linkages between land use and transportation
- more credence given to rail transit service and its potential role in the transportation system
- Heritage Roads
- development of systems for measuring results

But in the years that have passed since the last General Plan update, we wonder if world events are now outpacing our ability to plan. The new update doesn't account for some of the global uncertainties that we are beginning to understand, e.g., climate change due to fossil fuel use, and fossil fuel production about to decline while demand continues to grow. These phenomena can only grow in importance during the period of time addressed by the updated General Plan.

The County has already made its commitment to reduction of VMT; it just isn't reflected in this GP update, not if the update is actually suggesting that population growth will inevitably lead to increased vehicle travel on the County's roads. How can VMT growth be inevitable if fuel becomes less and less available worldwide?

Unless we speed up the change in our transportation systems, we may soon be overwhelmed. In another 17 years, will we look back at this General Plan and wonder why we ignored the most important forcing factors that were evident while the plan was being written?

While the update clearly acknowledges the need for and importance of alternative modes, it doesn't say much about how that will happen, and sometimes seems to justify the inevitability of the status quo.

For example, in the second paragraph of the Introduction, it is said that the most important causal factor in the traffic congestion we are currently experiencing is that "... the public continues to prefer the automobile as the primary means of travel." When the public has no rail transit, a very low level of bus service, generally dangerous conditions for riding bicycles and for walking, while a very large portion of the cost of automobile use is paid for by people other than the driver, their "preference" for automobiles is easy to understand. They are not insane. But it is those underlying reasons for the preference that are important for the General Plan, not the resulting preference itself. Preferences will change as drivers begin to pay their own way and other modes of travel come to be treated comparably.

There is one funding concept included which could prove instrumental in remedying some of the counterproductive aspects of the current array of funding mechanism, i.e.,

Policy CT-1k: Develop and adopt regional/subregional traffic mitigation fees and/or require a fair share contribution toward major subregional highway and/or transit improvements that serve multiple jurisdictions but are affected by growth within both the cities and county.

If done right, it could make cities and subregions of the County responsible for the costs they impose on the transportation system, and indirectly make individual travelers more responsible for their choices.

While we note that there is a reference to Transit Oriented Development --

2.3 STRATEGY FOR THE PLANNED CIRCULATION AND TRANSIT SYSTEM, provision 3, "Coordinated city and county land use policies that support transit oriented development",

we believe this could be strengthened. We would like to see the cities and County establishing joint planning agreements for implementation of TODs where the land is currently unincorporated but intended ultimately to be annexed to a city. A greater emphasis on TOD will reduce car travel on the County's roads, and thereby reduce the need for measures that create harmful environmental impacts.

In 2.1 - TRANSPORTATION CONDITIONS IN 2000, there is an implication that real progress is being made on road-building, while rail progress consists of "long range planning". Yes, there are highway projects underway, and rail construction has yet to be fully funded. But if the sales tax for SMART is approved by the voters this year, rail service could actually be running before more than a couple of highway projects are completed. The nature of planning for rail today is short range. It is the primary benefits of rail that are long range: facilitating beneficial land use changes and a shift in mode choice that will bring reduced VMT.

Several detailed comments about goals, objectives and policies follow.

Objective CT-1.3: *Pay for the development of the circulation and transit system through a combination of funding sources, including federal and state programs, local bonds and taxes, development fees, and “fair share” formulae for cooperative funding of improvements by the County and Cities.* Something needs to be said here, about drivers paying directly for more of the costs they impose. In particular, they should be paying for their own parking instead of having it paid for by everyone *except* the driver.

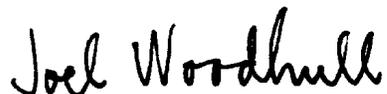
Policy CT-1f: *Each jurisdiction should take responsibility for accommodating future traffic within its jurisdiction as much as possible rather than relying upon roadways through surrounding communities or in the unincorporated area.*

This is good as far as it goes, but should be stated as "each jurisdiction should have the responsibility for the cost of the traffic it generates, whether inside or outside its own boundaries". Since this is so closely related to Policies CT-1j and CT-1k, perhaps the three can be combined or recombined.

Objective CT-2.10: *Seek legislative changes necessary to revise transit funding requirements to provide more flexibility in the available funding sources that can be used to supplement ~~fair~~ fare box revenues.* (This alternate spelling occurs in several places.)

Policy CT-2e: Require major employment centers/businesses to provide facilities and ~~Traffic~~ **Transportation** Demand Management programs that support alternative transportation modes, such as bike and shower facilities, telecommuting, flexible schedules, etc. (This mis-wording occurs in several places.)

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joel Woodhull". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Chair, SCTL
829-8335