



August 2, 2024

Via Email

Marin Transit Board of Directors
711 Grand Avenue, Suite 110
San Rafael, CA 94901

To the Marin Transit Board and General Manager Whelan:

The City of San Rafael and Marin Transit have a long history of partnership and collaboration, and it is in that spirit that this letter is sent. I am prompted by Marin Transit's August 5, 2024 agenda item to purchase a property at 1075 Francisco Blvd East in the Canal neighborhood. Marin Transit's plan would have a substantial impact on the Canal neighborhood and there has been minimal public input in the process thus far. I request that you delay acting on the item until Marin Transit and the City can first jointly design and facilitate a public process that will address all regulatory and permitting issues and encourage robust community input. In the alternative, if you are unwilling to delay your decision on this item, I request that Marin Transit agree to a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the City that will ensure that such a process will be completed before Marin Transit takes any further action on the site. (The City has successfully entered into MOUs with Sonoma Marin Area Rapid Transit (SMART) and Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transit District (GGBTD) for both the new SMART station and the Bettini Transit Center project.)

Marin Transit has been looking for a site to park electric and non-electric buses for many years. As the former chair of Marin Transit (MT), I understand the challenge of finding a suitable site for this parking lot. Fortunately, there is a win/win solution: the co-location of Marin Transit on an existing, underutilized and available GGBTD site in northern Marin County. A collaboration between local and sister transit agencies - who both operate routes in Marin County - would epitomize good governance with efficient use of existing facilities and be beneficial to both agencies as well as transit riders. Such a project also aligns well with the goals of the ongoing Marin and Sonoma Transit (MAST) regional planning effort. Simply put, this is the common sense solution and we believe that Marin County residents would support this approach.

Transit-related projects are complicated for their host City due to the infrastructure requirements and the often challenging impacts caused by their physical size and traffic generation. Members of the public and the surrounding community inevitably will have strong opinions. An MOU between Marin Transit and San Rafael would ensure the creation of an orderly forum to address impacts and promote the positive aspects of the project. Absent an MOU with the City, Marin Transit risks making a significant land use and capital investment decision in isolation from understanding the depth of the community impacts, which in this case are undeniably significant.

We are concerned about negative impacts on the residents of the Canal neighborhood and the City of San Rafael overall. For members of the Canal community, this proposed project does not directly benefit them and runs the risk of perpetuating systems of inequity in the Canal neighborhood, a disadvantaged community. For the City, there will be a significant loss of tax revenue, strain on the local infrastructure (including electricity capacity), and additional traffic congestion at the 580/101 interchange and along Bellam Blvd. Addressing these issues in a process required by an MOU will help the community balance the environmental and economic impacts of a bus storage facility against whatever benefits to the community the project may provide. Ultimately, both Marin Transit and the City will bear an ongoing burden of mitigating and managing the impacts of this project, on the surrounding community.

Marin Transit's \$35 million grant from the federal government includes approximately \$2 million to support economic-related initiatives, specifically workforce development and childcare support. The City requests that these initiatives be designed and memorialized as permanent community benefits because if these benefits don't run in perpetuity with the bus storage lot, there will be a point in time when there is no direct benefit to the surrounding community. There are many possible community benefits that could be pursued including transit-specific job training, funding local childcare centers, creating a micro transit hub on the site, upgrading local bus stops or incorporating a day laborer center. Additional visionary ideas include providing housing above the storage facility – a similar project is currently being constructed in San Francisco. Through a robust public engagement process, we will be able to ensure authentic community input is incorporated for the future project.

We know that Marin Transit understands the role government agencies have in addressing systemic inequities. On the operations side, Marin Transit has been a leader in providing reduced fares and designing bus routes to serve those residents who rely on public transit the most. With this project, Marin Transit can build on this work, by fully recognizing and evaluating the equity impacts of this long-term land use decision. Decisions like this demand community input. The City would welcome the opportunity to work with Marin Transit to directly engage with our community for input on this project.

In closing, I recognize that Marin Transit requires an electric bus parking lot to achieve both the agency and state goals around reducing carbon emissions. As set forth above, I strongly believe that the most cost effective and land use efficient solution is co-locating Marin Transit at the GGBTD facility. The City stands ready to assist Marin Transit in its negotiations with GGBTD to find a shared path forward. If Marin Transit continues to seek a site in San Rafael, the City requests that Marin Transit agree to an MOU that will mitigate the negative impacts and enhance the positive benefits of a bus storage facility.

Respectfully,



Kate Colin
Mayor, City of San Rafael

CC:
Rob Epstein, City Attorney
Cristine Alilovich, City Manager