

Please note that this is a high-level executive summary of comments made by the forum participants. Not every comment or topic may be reflected in this summary.

SMART Board of Directors Listening Tour

League of Women Voters, August 7, 2020

On August 7, 2020, the SMART Board of Directors met with the League of Women Voters (LWV) to discuss the league's viewpoints on the results of the sales tax renewal Measure I.

Representing the Marin LWV were President Ann Wakeley, John Eells, and Kevin Hagerty, and representing the Sonoma County LWV were President Deborah McKay and Willard Richards. Representing the SMART Board of Directors and staff were SMART Board Chair Eric Lucan, Vice-Chair Barbara Pahre, Directors Damon Connolly and Debora Fudge, and General Manager Farhad Mansourian and Chief Financial Officer Erin McGrath.

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Expand the Citizens Oversight Committee

- Both the Marin County and Sonoma County LWV have been long-time supporters of SMART. Unfortunately, in the last election, we felt that we could not actively support Measure I, which was very disappointing to us. But one of the things the league stands for is transparency; we believe it's very important for the public to be involved in their government and for government to be transparent and have a transparent process. We perceive that there have been some things that have eroded, and this has cost SMART the trust of the public. So, I think of this listening forum as beginning the initiative to win the public's trust back.
- One opportunity to win back the public's trust is with the Citizens Oversight Committee (COC). The COC could be a real asset to SMART if you restructured it to provide the kind of public input that reflects transparency and public involvement. If you look at the transportation agencies in your own backyard, you'll see that they have community advisory boards that are structured differently than the SMART COC. Those community advisory boards are structured to have representation from various key stakeholder groups, such as someone from the taxpayer's associations, the bicycle coalitions, environmental organizations, and the LWV.
- So, if you looked at your own COC a little differently, you could structure it so that you could automatically get public input from the constituency groups that care about SMART and care about what you are doing.
- It is instructive to look at how the Transportation Authority of Marin (TAM) put its expenditure plan together for the renewal of their sales tax. They established a committee with broad representation consisting of 23 members representing various stakeholder groups from the community. They met for 6-9 months, putting the expenditure plan together. Stakeholders were intimately involved in every aspect of the

expenditure plan development; every issue that came up was resolved, and by the time the ballot measure was up for the vote, there was no real organized opposition.

- So, we believe that SMART should create a committee made up of a wide range of community stakeholders to prepare the expenditure plan for the next sales tax extension measure.
- You could also form a subcommittee of the COC to go out on a quarterly basis and gather public input from groups that are not a part of the COC.
- This can't be a one-shot deal. For people to feel heard, you have to find a way to build regular public input gathering into your governance process, and you need to let the public know that you hear them by taking their priorities into consideration.
- Without the public's trust, you're not going to get the funding you need. We urge you to make this (Listening Forum exercise) an ongoing process rather than a one-shot effort and look to the successes of other agencies and how they structure and use their community advisory boards as a guide to what SMART does.

Public Information Requests

- We know that public information requests were huge during the recent campaign. There needs to be a shift in thinking about the public and requests for information. When a member of the public makes a request for information, it's because they care about SMART, and they care about transportation. SMART should not automatically think that people who are critical of SMART are the enemy because they make a request for information. They are most often concerned about transportation or concerned about their tax dollars.
- SMART needs to see everyone as a potential SMART supporter and think about how you can move them over to seeing things from SMART's point of view, and how you handle requests for information is a part of how you start getting people to shift their viewpoints on SMART.
- I know you have a policy on responding to public requests for information. When you you're not able to handle requests for information routinely, then I think it needs to come to the attention to the SMART board.
- The public needs to see that there is a process for handling public requests for information, and I think that the board needs to be seen as a part of that process.
- A good place to start on changing perceptions is to report out on public requests for information. You could say, "this is how many requests we received, and this is how many we responded to within 10-days." You could post this information in the General Managers Report. This would be a good way to begin rebuilding trust.

Communication and Relationship Building

- There are a lot of people you need to win back to your side. It's not just your riders; it's people who never ride the train. Instead of building bridges over creeks and rivers, you now need to focus on rebuilding bridges to the community. I think it's helpful to recognize how much work went into building these community bridges over the past 20

years. Think of the effort between the first sales tax in 1990 and when we passed the tax in 2008, we have to go back to that level of community bridge-building effort. You need to rebuild bridges with the chambers, city councils, and particularly the bicycle community.

- Unfortunately, a lot of public opinion is baked-in. You will have to change peoples minds to regain their trust and confidence, and you do that by engaging with them – collaborating with them.
- We think that the most important thing to do right now is to improve your communication with the community at large and with specific groups like the bicycle coalitions, and the cities along the rail line.
- Initiating dialogues with the cities along the rail line from Larkspur to Cloverdale is an important step to rebuilding relationships with the city councils. There are perhaps 55 or more city council members – less than one half actually endorsed Measure I – yet all the cities benefit from SMART stations in their cities. I was especially struck by the fact that only one council member each from San Rafael, Petaluma, and Santa Rosa endorsed Measure I. So, there is obviously work to be done in re-establishing partnerships and collaboration with these cities and council members.
- It's also important that you let the public know about the things you're working on, because SMART is doing many things that the public doesn't know about. Because SMART is in a position where rebuilding confidence and trust a critical priority, I would start doing regular press releases. The media may not pick them all up, but if you start doing regular, brief press releases about the things you are doing, the press will start to pick some of them up – on a slow news day at first, but then the press will start to look for your press releases when they need to fill a hole.