

SMART train to partner with county bus to connect to Cloverdale

By Tony Landucci Staff Writer

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Train service is \$200 million short of connecting to Cloverdale

With the SMART train scheduled to begin service by the end of this year without reaching north past the county airport, the train service is partnering with Sonoma County Transit (SCT) to provide an express bus service. About 30 people met with SMART train board members and General Manager Farhad Mansourian at the Cloverdale Fire District building last week to discuss bus routes.

Cloverdale City Council member and SMART board member Carol Russell, along with board member Deb Fudge, also spoke with audience members at the meeting.

Lacking the \$200 million needed to get the train to Cloverdale, Mansourian said the train service is in contract with SCT to run a total of five daily buses that will connect riders with the train. Mansourian and SCT Transit Systems Manager Bryan Albee presented a list of possible times for buses to run riders to and from the Santa Rosa airport depot, the farthest point north that the train currently will stop.

According to the current plan, two buses will depart Cloverdale at different times of the morning. One bus will also carry riders south to the train midday and two buses will run north, from the airport depot to Cloverdale. The express bus service will make two stops, one in Healdsburg and one in Windsor, to keep time on the road to a minimum. As long as riders connect to the train on their trip, the bus ride is free in both directions. The buses will depart and arrive at the Cloverdale train depot on Asti Road near Citrus Fair Drive.

The times for the buses will not be decided until after meetings are held in Healdsburg and Windsor. "This is our plan, we're planning it together," said Mansourian. Suggestions that found some popularity at the March 29 meeting were at 6:19 and 7:19 for the morning buses south. North bound buses at 6:36 and 7:06 in the evening were considered. The timing of the midday bus headed south was originally proposed to be at 1:19 p.m. but audience members rallied around the suggestion of a man that was concerned that it was too late to be of any use.

"If I'm thinking about doing a day trip to the city for lunch, or something, that doesn't work well at all. I'm thinking that for a lot of people, from a recreational perspective would want some bus later than 8:19 and earlier than 1:19," the man said. Mansourian nodded and suggested a bus run from Cloverdale to the airport depot closer to 10 or 11 a.m., rather than after 1 in the afternoon. Many people in the audience voiced their agreement with the comment and the newly suggested time. "And that's why we're here," said Mansourian, "to learn."

Information based off the U.S. Census that was provided at the meeting showed a breakdown of potential ridership for the SMART train. According to the data, Cloverdale has 3,388 employed people living in the city. Of that number only 16.4 percent work in Cloverdale with the rest travelling outside of town for their jobs. The data

shows that 1,091 people commute into Cloverdale for work. Most people that commute out of town (474, or 14 percent) go to Santa Rosa. In the other direction, 126 people commute from Santa Rosa to Cloverdale for their jobs, the largest amount from anywhere outside of Cloverdale, according to the data.

Many people in the audience complained that the meeting had not been well advertised. "I've been a friend of the SMART train on Facebook and I sent my email in so you all have it but I only heard about this meeting through Nextdoor (a website and smartphone app). I did not get a direct email, I didn't get any direct communications from you all about this meeting; I got it through basically a third party," one audience member said.

Russell and Mansourian acknowledged that more needed to be done to reach out to people about the meetings.

Russell addressed audience criticism of the train ever reaching Cloverdale despite taxes being paid for it by Cloverdale residents.

"The board and the staff are 100 percent determined to complete every single inch of this railroad. But, we have to look in different pots of money and we have to compete with everybody. One thing that is really important to all of us is that we have great (state) representatives like Mike McGuire, Jim Wood and others who get out there and find money for each of the cities that they represent. We need to back them up too, we have to let them know that this is important to us, and that means our votes and that means our support and the more you do that the more they're armed to go and help us. But, the money often comes from grants and those are highly competitive," Russell said to the audience.

"Keep the pressure on me, I mean that," said Mansourian.

To suggest bus times or request more information, email info@SonomaMarinTrain.org or call the SMART public outreach line at 794-3330.