



P.O. Box 1115
Fairfax, CA 94978
voice (415) 456-3469
fax (415) 456-9344
www.marinbike.org

March 31, 2009

Carey Lando
Marin County Department of Public Works
3501 Civic Center Drive
San Rafael, CA 94903
Email to clando@co.marin.ca.us

Re: Mill Valley to Corte Madera Bicycle and Pedestrian Corridor Study

Dear Ms. Lando:

The Marin County Bicycle Coalition is pleased to provide comments for the County of Marin's Mill Valley to Corte Madera Bicycle and Pedestrian Corridor Study, which is being funded with \$225,000 in federal Nonmotorized Transportation Pilot Program (NTPP) funds.

We are excited about the study's potential to develop safe travel alternatives for this corridor that can ultimately be constructed. A key element of the NTPP and the intention of the federal legislation (attached) relates to how projects can shift people from cars to walking and bicycling, so mode shift should be a key focus of the evaluation criteria for the study.

Existing Conditions

We feel that through the County's field work, the March 4 public workshop, and the public letters you've received, that the County already has good documentation of existing conditions, so the MCBC will not go into details about each route. However, we do want to ensure that consideration of the following issues for each of the three routes appears in the final document's existing conditions analysis:

- ✓ Altitude climb for the route
- ✓ Distance needed to travel out of the way to get to destinations
- ✓ Minutes of time for travel for bicyclists and pedestrians (will be a range)
- ✓ Air quality for bicyclists and pedestrians
- ✓ Roadway safety issues including intersections

Key Issues

There are several issues which we urge the County to study and include in the final report.

- 1) *Structural issues to study:* An issue that we didn't hear addressed by the County of Marin at the March 4 workshop is the fact that since the Alto Tunnel is already deteriorating, homes and roadways could already be at risk due to structural problems. We respectfully request that the County of Marin evaluate this situation. Repairing the tunnel might be necessary to actually prevent damage to existing structures.

Board of Directors

Jerry Edelbrock, *President*
Scott Klimo, *Vice President*
Don Magdanz, *Secretary*
Julia Violich, *Treasurer*
Matt Adams
Maureen Gaffney
Celia Graterol
Stephen Hesson
Vince O'Brien
Alexander Price
Tom Woolley

Advisory Board

Mark Birnbaum
Joe Breeze
Tom Hale
Deb Hubsmith
Jim Jacobsen
Patrick Seidler

Staff

Kim Baenisch
Executive Director
Tom Boss
Membership Director
Jo Ann Richards
Database and Activities Coordinator
Bob Trigg
Administrator
Deb Hubsmith
Advocacy Director
David Hoffman
Director of Planning
Andy Peri
Advocacy Outreach Coordinator
Wendi Kallins
Safe Routes to Schools Director
Laura Kelly
Safe Routes Project Coordinator
Peggy Clark
Safe Routes Project Coordinator
Aviva Joseph
Safe Routes Teen Coordinator
Frances E. Barbour
Safe Routes Instructor
Heather Crawford
Safe Routes Instructor

There could be a cost and liability to the County of Marin for doing nothing to improve this situation when there are known problems. The cost of making needed repairs on deferred maintenance should be quantified. For more information regarding technical issues about damage to surface structures from tunnel failure and to see cost estimates from a 1981 investigation/assessment, please refer to the Copple Foreaker Associates letter in Volume 1 of the Alto Tunnel Scoping Study, August 31, 2001. It should be further noted that if repairs to the tunnel are pursued to prevent collapse, that this added expense would not provide transportation benefits.

- 2) *Bicycle/pedestrian use facts to include:* From 1999 until 2008 bicycle commute trips in Marin increased 103% while pedestrian trips increased by 48%. This rise in use has taken place mostly through promotion and education, and will continue to rise with investment in bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, which is taking place now, and we hope will continue into the future. We recommend that the County of Marin analyze and include excerpts from the attached studies from European communities in your final report. A key finding from the studies is that investment in separated infrastructure facilities leads to increases in use and improvements in safety. Some comparisons from the documents include: bicycle and pedestrian mode share rates in the U.S. are on average 7% as compared to 12% in Canada, 41% in Denmark and 46% in The Netherlands, showing the huge potential to shift people out of their cars with improved infrastructure. In addition, U.S. pedestrians are three times more likely to be killed than German pedestrians and six times more likely to be killed than pedestrians from the Netherlands, while U.S. bicyclists are twice as likely to be killed than German bicyclists and three times as likely to be killed than bicyclists from the Netherlands.
- 3) *Traffic facts to include:* Car traffic increases on average in Marin from 2-3% each year. This leads to the potential for more conflicts on Marin's roadways between motorists, bicyclists and pedestrians. While some bicyclists will always choose to use roadways, the projected continued increase in traffic, coupled with an analysis of safety, data argues for the construction of separated facilities that are safe for accommodating all nonmotorized modes wherever possible, so that Marin residents and visitors have more choices in terms of how they commute.

Criteria for Evaluating Routes

MCBC chose to focus the bulk of our letter on the evaluation criteria for the routes, which was proposed at the March 4 meeting. Our comments analyze the criteria that the County has already proposed, and includes recommendations for new criteria that we recommend be used in the route evaluation.

Comments on the Proposed Criteria:

* **Safety and liability/security:** Safety and liability/security are two very distinct issues and should be evaluated separately. Safety issues for the roadways largely relate to traffic issues, as both Horse Hill and Camino Alto routes have a lot of potential conflicts with automobiles. Traffic safety related to Alto Tunnel would not be an issue, as the tunnel is separated from automobiles. Liability/security issues for the Alto Tunnel can be extrapolated from the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy's *Tunnels on Trails* document, where very little was found related to liability or security problems. Additional information can be garnered through lessons learned from the current Cal Park Hill Tunnel project. In addition, as mentioned above, there could be liability issues for the cost of doing nothing, as the tunnel is already collapsing and this could cause damage to existing roads, property and homes.

- * **Bikeway and community connections:** These are important criteria and should also include an analysis related to the directness of the community connections that each route offers, and the minutes of time that it takes to make those connections, as time is an important consideration in terms of choices people make for utilitarian trips.
- * **Pedestrian and ADA connections:** The evaluation of this criteria should show that the only way to encourage pedestrian access is to open the Alto Tunnel, as pedestrians can not safely travel over Camino Alto and the Horse Hill route is simply too long and out of the way.
- * **Functionality/efficiency for users:** These criteria should include an evaluation of the ease with which people of all ages and abilities can use each of the three routes:
 - ✓ children
 - ✓ people with disabilities
 - ✓ bicycle commuters
 - ✓ recreational bicyclists
 - ✓ novice bicycle riders who are looking to start riding more often for utilitarian purposes
 - ✓ pedestrians
 - ✓ seniors
- * **Environmental Impacts:** As noted above, a listing of the environmental impacts should also account for structural issues related to the Alto Tunnel and the potential impacts from further collapse.
- * **Neighborhood/private property impacts:** MCBC has heard that some neighbors have put fences and other structures in the public right of way, which is slated to be preserved for transportation purposes. We request that the County investigate these violations and report on this in the document. In addition, the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy report *Tunnels on Trails* (attached) has provided information on ways to mitigate neighborhood impacts while opening tunnels, which should be cited in the County report.
- * **Roadway Crossings:** This is a critical piece to evaluate, as roadway crossings discourage bicycling and walking, and are typical conflict locations.
- * **Cost:** The cost for the three alternatives MUST be balanced with the number of people who will use the facilities. As such, the cost should become a cost per user analysis, not just a straight cost analysis. In addition, the cost should also evaluate factors such as the costs related to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and providing for an opportunity for safe emergency egress. These are tangible benefits that must be quantified in the cost analysis.
- * **Permitting Requirements:** When evaluating the permitting requirements for the Alto Tunnel, it will be important to note what type of construction might have to be done anyway as a result of the deferred maintenance issues with the tunnel such as the collapse of support beams (which may have no transportation use benefits), and how this type of construction compares to actually opening the tunnel (which would have many user benefits). Any repair or reconstruction of the tunnel will require permits, so these considerations will be important to analyze.
- * **Consistency with Local Plans:** It is our understanding that the County of Marin's Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan (2008) and Countywide Plan Update (2007) discuss the need to study all three routes and to encourage construction of the North-South Greenway, of which Alto Tunnel is a component. In addition, the Town of Corte Madera's adopted Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan (2008), and Mill Valley's adopted (2003) and pending (2009) Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plans also

both list the three options and reference the County's current study. We recommend including this information in the final report.

Comments on New Criteria Needed:

MCBC also requests that the County add the following criteria to your evaluation process:

* **Mode Shift:** For each of the three routes, the County should estimate the number and types of users, and the potential for each route to increase the number and types of people walking and bicycling. Mode shift was a key criteria used by the County for selecting projects to be funded by the NTPP, as the purpose of the NTPP directly relates to mode shift. *Mode shift is likely the most important criteria for the evaluation.*

* **Emergency Egress:** The three routes should be studied for their potential to serve as an emergency egress in the event of:

- ✓ A fire
- ✓ An earthquake
- ✓ Another natural disaster, and
- ✓ For ambulances to use the route in the event of a medical emergency

A value should be assigned for the ease with which each of the routes could serve as a method to evacuate people. This should also be figured into the cost analysis.

* **Tourists:** Marin County is a tourist destination, and more and more tourists are choosing to explore the County by bicycle. Bicycle rental companies estimate that from 1000 to 1500 bicyclists travel on rented bicycles to Marin County from San Francisco each weekend day during the peak season. The number of tourist bicyclists will grow considerably as there are more and more ways for people to travel safely between communities and to access tourist destinations in Marin. Safety will be an important issue related to tourism.

* **Economic Impacts:** The study should evaluate the potential for the different routes to attract more bicycle riding in Marin County, the resulting money that residents and tourists will spend (food, hotels, equipment, clothes, souvenirs, etc.), and how these new revenues can boost sales tax revenues for the cities. It's noteworthy that Sausalito is the only city whose sales tax revenues increased in recent years; the fact that Sausalito is a bicycle tourist destination has undoubtedly contributed to this.

* **Greenhouse gas emissions:** There is growing public awareness through the County of Marin and its cities and towns about the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. In Marin County, 62% of greenhouse gas emissions come from the transportation sector. The study should evaluate, based on the number of people that will use each of the routes, the potential for each of the routes to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from trips that would have been made in automobiles. This type of analysis will become increasingly important as the state, the region and the County will need to comply with state climate change legislation, AB32 and SB375.

* **Cumulative riders on the entire bikeway system:** As part of the analysis, we request that the County of Marin evaluate how each of the routes will have cumulative affects on the potential to add more bicycle riders to the overall transportation system in Marin County. For example, if the Alto Tunnel route is improved, this will have contributing benefits to increasing the use of routes further to the north and south (as well as from the east and the west), as more bicycle riders will be able to get to these locations more easily, and go longer distances without an automobile.

* **Health:** In the U.S., 67% of adults are overweight or obese, and a significant part of this epidemic is related to the lack of opportunities for safe physical activity. The study should evaluate the potential for each route to generate healthy physical activity for children and adults, including seniors, and how this might help to offset other county costs related to health care expenses associated with obesity and a lack of physical activity.

Final Report

We respectfully request that the County Department of Public Works provide ample time (45-60 days) after the next public meeting on this study to allow for additional comments on the draft report. In addition, we feel that the Marin County Board of Supervisors, as the governing body for the Pilot Program, which authorized the allocation of funds for this study and is required to report to Congress, should formally accept the final report, after receiving public comments at a public meeting.

* * * * *

Thank you very much for your attention to our comments. We look forward to your reply and to working with the County of Marin further on this high profile and important study which has the potential to lead to solutions that will improve mobility, health, safety and traffic, while decreasing greenhouse gas emissions.

Best regards,



Deb Hubsmith, Advocacy Director
Marin County Bicycle Coalition

Cc: Supervisor Charles McGlashan
Supervisor Steve Kinsey
Craig Tackabery and Dan Dawson, Marin County Department of Public Works
Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

Enclosed:

Section 1807 from SAFETEA-LU, the authorizing legislation for the Nonmotorized Transportation Pilot Program

Making Cycling Irresistible: Lessons from the Netherlands, Denmark and Germany, by John Pucher and Ralph Buehler.

Promoting Safe Walking and Cycling to Improve Public Health: Lessons from the Netherlands and Germany, by John Pucher and Lewis Dijkstra, published in the American Journal of Public Health

At the Frontiers of Cycling: Policy Innovations in the Netherlands, Denmark and Germany, as published in World Transport Policy and Practice, Volume 13, Number 3.

Tunnels on Trails, published by the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy