

July 6, 2004

The Honorable Ellen Tauscher  
Transportation and Infrastructure Committee  
1034 Longworth HOB  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative Tauscher:

The Sierra Club recommends that no federal funds be allocated to extend BART south from Fremont. We oppose both proposals, the \$700 million BART project to go 5.4 miles to Warm Springs (WSX) and the \$5 billion Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) project to go another 16 miles into San Jose.

The San Francisco Bay Chapter, which includes the three original BART counties, joins the Loma Prieta Chapter in opposing both projects. They deliver too little and cost too much. The Loma Prieta Chapter includes Santa Clara County, home of VTA, and San Mateo County, where the BART extension to San Francisco Airport (SFO) runs.

We advocate off-the-shelf alternatives like buses and trains between Fremont and San Jose. They can be implemented quickly and gradually expanded as demand increases and technology improves. They would meet traveler needs at a fraction of the cost of building and operating BART. Federal funds for such alternatives would be prudently spent and bring prompt results.

Enclosed is a recent report by the Santa Clara County Civil Grand Jury. They, too, recommend that VTA delay expenditures for BART and provide more complete funding for other transit options. Their recommendation is based on comprehensive analysis of VTA finances.

(WSX) has always been viewed primarily as a link to VTA, not as a stand-alone project. In approving Measure B, a transportation sales tax, Alameda County voters conditioned expenditures for WSX construction on assurance of full funding for the VTA extension into Santa Clara County.

Arguments for the San Jose extensions are analogous to those made ten years ago by promoters of extending BART to SFO/Millbrae. That project is instructive. Costs ballooned far over initial estimates. Since service opened a year ago, ridership and fare revenue have been half what boosters had predicted. Deficits are so great that BART has decided to stop running trains along the San Bruno to Millbrae leg. Of the \$750 million committed to the project under a Full Funding Grant Agreement (FFGA), \$182 million in FY 04/05 and FY 05/06 funds have yet to be allocated. These federal dollars will pay for new track over which BART will already have abandoned service.

The absence of passengers on BART's SFO/Millbrae service should surprise no one. During the 1990's, many of us warned that the ridership forecasts were deceptively optimistic. Apologists blame the shortfall on the dot com collapse and subsequent economic downturn. This explanation is not credible. The original, overblown forecasts were made before the dot com bubble started.

Similar wishful thinking underlies enthusiasm for BART to San Jose. We urge you to avoid another debacle by curtailing funds for both projects. Let VTA and BART resubmit with proposals that are less profligate and more effective.

Respectfully,

Robert R. Piper, Ph.D.  
Co-Chair, Transportation Committee  
Sierra Club, San Francisco Bay Chapter

cc: Loma Prieta Chapter