

September 6, 2024

Dr. Caryl Hart, Chair  
California Coastal Commission  
455 Market Street, Suite 300  
San Francisco, CA 94105

RE: Application 3-23-0288 for MST SURF! Project

Dear Chair Hart and Coastal Commissioners:

LandWatch Monterey County reiterates its strong support for the Monterey Salinas Transit (MST) SURF! Busway and Bus Rapid Transit Project within the Monterey Branch Line corridor. LandWatch joins Congressmembers Panetta and Lofgren, Senator Laird, Assemblymembers Rivas and Addis, Monterey County Mayors, the Monterey Bay Aquarium, CSUMB, CHISPA, Caltrans, the California Transportation Commission, California Air Resources Board and many other community and educational organizations in support of MST's SURF! Project. We urge the Coastal Commission to support your staff's recommendation and approve the project.

This rapid transit service will improve public transportation options for the residents of our county needing access to jobs, schools, colleges, and the university, as well as healthcare services and recreational activities, specifically in the form of coastal access. Importantly, SURF! increases mobility for underserved communities and individuals who can only afford public transportation - people who would not otherwise be able to access jobs and coastal resources on the Peninsula. A SURF! passenger survey found that 72% would use it for coastal recreation access, 68% to go shopping, 46% to commute to work, and 25% to go to school. The project also includes four new stops with direct access to ADA-accessible trails along with one mile of new pedestrian/bicycle trails. And, of special importance to LandWatch's work, SURF! will play a role in alleviating the current housing crisis by connecting current and planned affordable housing with public transportation, including 20 affordable housing opportunity sites in Marina.

The SURF! project also mitigates climate change. SURF! will eliminate nearly 545,000 car trips/year and use zero-emission buses. According to the Commission staff report, "MST analyzed the impact of GHG reductions and concluded that over 1,200 metric tons of CO2 equivalent will be reduced with this Project. This amount is equivalent to sequestering over 1,900 acres of forest each year

with increases over time as ridership increases.” Additionally, SURF! includes partnerships with State Parks, the Coastal Conservancy, and the Monterey Peninsula Regional Park District to restore habitat and preserve areas of the Marina Dunes Preserve and Fort Ord Dunes State Park.

This project confers numerous benefits, and, for that reason, enjoys widespread support from varied stakeholders. And there has been positive momentum in recent weeks - momentum that we hope will continue through the Coastal Commission’s consideration of the project next week. A carefully negotiated compromise between TAMC staff, MST staff, and Coastal Commission staff made it possible to co-locate the SURF! Busway on the existing train tracks.

We want to commend the Coastal Commission, TAMC, and MST staff for working together to find a creative and legally viable solution that meets MST’s funding requirements and is consistent with the Coastal Act. Now we urge the Coastal Commission to take the final step of approving the project, in order to enable a faster, cheaper, and more environmentally friendly coastal transportation option.

As Assemblymember Addis and Senator Laird stated so effectively in a recent OpEd in the Monterey Herald, “As state lawmakers, we work to fight climate change, [to] do it in a way that helps the local economy and provide[s] access to our precious California coast – particularly to those living and commuting from disadvantaged communities. All those goals are met by SURF! Busway and Bus Rapid Transit Project.”

The choice before the Commission is either the MST SURF! project and its climate and equity benefits, or the unsustainable and inequitable status quo. Your approval today will pave the way for SURF to provide a rapid transit solution for low income and other riders. The project will also have near immediate results - reducing greenhouse gasses and easing traffic congestion within two to three years.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael D. DeLapa". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Michael D. DeLapa  
Executive Director