

# County Connection

February 2009



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District 5

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the County Budget.*

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## Update – County Budget

There is no doubt that the economy is first and foremost in everyone's minds. In the midst of the current uncertainty, we are all not only concerned with our personal situations, but also rightly devoting additional scrutiny to how our public funds are being spent.

The County of Marin is fortunate to be in a situation that is better than 90% of California counties. Through prudent and proactive management of county finances over the past several years, along with cuts already undertaken or being studied, the County anticipates having adequate reserves for the current budget year, even with the likely severe midyear cuts from the state.

Even prior to the current economic downturn, the Board of Supervisors and the County Administrator's Office (CAO) have been actively preparing to address forecasted structural budget deficits. As previously planned, this year we have launched a long-term restructuring effort.

This effort, currently in progress, will include a wide range of public input-gathering approaches over the next several months that will provide many opportunities and options for public participation and collaboration. These elements will augment the internal reviews already begun by the CAO and the annual public Budget Workshops conducted by the Board of Supervisors which will begin in March for the next fiscal year.

As a first step in public outreach, the County is currently collecting input on our website, [www.co.marin.ca.us](http://www.co.marin.ca.us), regarding cost saving and/or revenue generating measures. This spring the County will analyze feedback from a statistically valid county-wide survey that is representative of our population, which will focus on the community's public budget priorities. The County is looking at then hosting a series of public "town-hall"-type meetings to offer information on the County budget elements and process, answer questions, and receive input. Also under consideration is the formation of a public advisory committee to help manage the public budget input received.

I'd like to share part of a recent memo circulated to all Marin County employees by Matthew Hymel, our County Administrator, on this topic:

*(continued on Page 2)*

## County Budget *(continued from Page 1)*

“As we all know, our nation is experiencing one of the most severe economic downturns in decades. Though Marin is comparatively better off than most counties, we still feel the impacts of this downturn given the slowdown in property tax growth, continued State budget reductions, and increased healthcare costs. Over the next several years, the County will need to reduce spending to live within our means and close our budget shortfall.

At the same time, County government serves as a safety net for many residents adversely impacted by the economy. County programs help put food on a family’s table, assist individuals recently laid off in finding new jobs, and provide health services to residents without adequate health insurance. County employees are on the front lines every day helping residents meet the challenges of this new reality.

Like many organizations, our revenues are not keeping pace with our costs of providing services. The County faces a structural budget deficit of at least \$5 million next year and \$27 million over the next five years. Over the past year, we have already taken several steps to reduce our spending, including implementing a hiring freeze, reducing our budget by \$7 million, putting \$9 million in project spending on hold, and eliminating over 35 vacant positions. Given next year’s projected shortfall, we will need to consider additional reductions to balance next year’s budget. Given this situation departments are submitting reduction scenarios, and we are evaluating countywide savings options. We are also continuing our hiring freeze, and our hope is to avoid layoffs to the extent possible.

To ensure that our financial decisions are consistent with our community values, priorities and long-term vision, we have begun a long-term restructuring process to help guide our budget reductions over the next few years. This process will help us match our resources to our ongoing costs and redesign our services and structure to reflect our new reality. We will consider all options including additional revenues, opportunities for countywide savings, incremental reductions through attrition, and program reviews to identify cost savings. By planning ahead, we hope to reduce the risk of more significant service cuts.”

Tough decisions are required, and all options will be considered. I invite you to be part of this process by attending public meetings, submitting your ideas online, or emailing me your suggestions for County cost saving or revenue generating measures. My email is: [jarnold@co.marin.ca.us](mailto:jarnold@co.marin.ca.us). My office number is: 499-7331.

We have faced hard times before and come through them, and we will come through this difficult time if we work together. I look forward to hearing from you.

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*As a first step in public outreach, the County is currently collecting input regarding budget priorities on our website, [www.co.marin.ca.us](http://www.co.marin.ca.us)*

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## AB32 Mandates & Traffic in Marin: Thinking Outside the Box

If there ever was a time we needed to think outside the box, it is today in 2009. Given the mandate to achieve significant reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, we need to explore all options for improved transit.

I was intrigued by Unimodal's SkyTran during their initial public presentation in Marin in 2007. Over the past two years, SkyTran has progressed to the point where I and Supervisor McGlashan asked our Board colleagues to approve a letter asking for a pilot project proposal in Marin, with the hope that, if successful, it could be integrated in appropriate locations in Marin as a connector to SMART and our current bus and ferry services.

Our request is supported by Assemblymember Huffman and Senator Leno, who are working in Sacramento to acquire funding for this pilot from AB118, which allocates funding specifically for alternative fuels and vehicle technology programs administered by the California Energy Commission. AB118 will provide grants to develop and deploy innovative technologies that transform California's fuel and vehicle types to help attain the State's climate change policies.

It is important to know what SkyTran isn't; it is not a monorail with intensive infrastructure and need for many people to travel to the same place at the same time. Skytran travels on an automated electric guideway system that operates on demand 24/7. Each vehicle transports people directly to the destination chosen by the rider without intermediate stops.



### SkyTran consists of:

- **Pods** - small, private vehicles that accommodate one to four people with their belongings, including wheelchairs and bicycles
- **Guideways** - dedicated tracks for the Pods that have a small footprint and are typically elevated above ground on poles. Guideways can be easily integrated with existing roadways
- **Stations** - conveniently located boarding locations. Stations can be elevated, and some could be in existing buildings
- **Control System** - automatically moves the Pods to the rider's destination

A pilot project is by definition small in scope, involving about a mile of guideway. Even with this limitation there are several potential locations. The Civic Center has been mentioned – and we can imagine eventual growth with a loop traveling from the SMART station there to other large employers in the area, such as Kaiser or Autodesk, as well as commercial centers like Northgate. SkyTran could be a valuable connector to take passengers from the Cal Park station directly into the Larkspur Ferry Terminal with a prepaid Ferry ticket – with no additional “wheels on road” in that very congested area. Others no doubt have good ideas, and I look forward to public input on the best location for this initial implementation.

Lastly and perhaps most important in these difficult economic times is the fact that a SkyTran pilot project can be implemented in Marin with no need for County taxpayer funds. Pods are currently being assembled at NASA Ames in Mountain View, and Unimodal's private financing partner is interested in funding a pilot project that can be up and running as early as two years.

This is a first step in a process that will include many discussions and public meetings to identify a location and to analyze environmental impacts. It is worth our time and attention to work with private industry to bring innovative solutions like SkyTran to Marin.

Marin needs visionaries who aren't afraid to think creatively. I am reminded of a Yale University professor who wrote on a student's paper: “The concept is interesting and well-formed, but in order to earn better than a C, the idea must be feasible.” The paper was written by a student named Fred Smith, proposing a reliable overnight delivery service. Smith went on to found the Federal Express Corp. (FedEx).

## Is it a "Spare the Air" Day?

My office has been receiving inquiries from constituents wondering how they find out when it is a "Spare the Air" day, meaning Marin and other Bay Area residents are prohibited from using fireplaces and other wood-burning devices.

Through the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, residents can sign up for free email or phone alerts and be automatically notified when it is a Spare the Air day. To sign up for phone alerts, call 1-800-430-1515, or for email updates, visit <http://airalert.sparetheair.org/>.

The Spare the Air program was established to protect public health and to educate the public about pollution and how to prevent it. The Air District issues Spare the Air advisories on days when air quality is forecast to be unhealthy due to high ozone levels.

First offense violators will receive a written warning. A second violation could result in fines ranging from several hundred to several thousand dollars. Residents and businesses that burn wood as their only source of heat are exempt from the regulation. For more information, visit [www.sparetheair.org](http://www.sparetheair.org).

## Go Green with CYES!

I want to share with you a great program called [California Youth Energy Services](#) (CYES), operated by Rising Sun Energy Center. This program promotes energy awareness and resource conservation in the Bay Area through free services and programs. The staff is comprised of professional Energy Specialists, ages 15-22 years. These young adults visit residents' homes to provide an energy audit and installation of energy efficient materials including compact fluorescent bulbs, faucet aerators, low-flow showerheads and retractable clothes lines. These services reduce household electricity, gas and water consumption and are provided at no cost to home renters and owners.

I met the students who participated in the program last year and was impressed by the knowledge and enthusiasm that they demonstrated.

The 2009 summer program is scheduled to begin June 30 and will run for six weeks. CYES is booking appointments now and the slots fill up quickly. To make an appointment, or for more information about the program, call (510) 665-1501, ext 10.

## 2008 Year in Review

We accomplished a lot in 2008. Some of the highlights include:

- Sending a permit with greatly improved environmental and fiscal safeguards to the Integrated Waste Management Board for the Redwood Landfill
- Working with the City of Novato to host Novato's first Project Homeless Connect
- Partnering with the Novato Police Department to continue funding youth education on alcohol, including compliance checks of alcohol outlets
- Launching the Vial of L.I.F.E. Program to help our emergency responders save lives (see the Marin County Fire Department website at [www.xmrfire.org/mrn/community/vial\\_of\\_life.aspx](http://www.xmrfire.org/mrn/community/vial_of_life.aspx))
- Presenting a watershed stewardship plan to the Novato City Council for flood control and water quality
- Certifying six Green Businesses in Novato
- Launching a website where the public can access information on county restaurant inspections online
- Approving start up funding for the formation of a Marin business "roundtable", which will execute a work plan to finalize the structure and hire an Executive Director, and begin addressing business education, solicitation and entrepreneurial support county-wide
- Forming a JPA with participating cities to address AB 32 mandates, including looking at implementing Community Choice Aggregation or partnering with PG&E
- Supporting City of Novato and the Marin Bicycle Coalition to ensure that the promise of the SMART rail system passed by voters will be combined with clearly defined parameters for freight activity through Novato, as well as a reasonable approach to setbacks that will allow the pedestrian/bike path to run the full length of the rail line
- Preservation of the 64-acre Black Point Nature Preserve as county open space
- Stopping plans for aerial spraying in Marin for the Light Brown Apple Moth
- Opening the new County Health & Wellness Center (largely paid for with tobacco settlement money) and looking forward to the imminent opening of the new Novato Community Clinic

## Upcoming Events

<b>Board of Supervisors Meeting</b>	February 24
<b>Board of Supervisors Meeting</b>	March 3
<b>Board of Supervisors Meeting</b>	March 17
<b>Board of Supervisors Meeting</b>	March 24
<b>BOS Budget Workshop</b>	March 25, 1pm-5pm
<b>BOS Budget Workshop</b>	March 30, 9am-4pm
<b>Board of Supervisors Meeting</b>	March 31
<b>Board of Supervisors Meeting</b>	April 7
<b>Board of Supervisors Meeting</b>	April 14
<b>Board of Supervisors Meeting</b>	April 28

- All regular Board of Supervisors Meetings are held in the BOS Chambers in the Marin Civic Center at 3501 Civic Center Drive, Suite 329. BOS meetings are also webcast live. To watch:

Go to the County of Marin website at [www.co.marin.ca.us](http://www.co.marin.ca.us)  
 Click on "Board of Supervisors"  
 Click on "Live Video Broadcast" near the top of the page

- BOS meeting webcasts are also available online for replay by the next day. Click "Meeting Archive" from the Board of Supervisors page.
- The abovementioned Budget Workshops are scheduled to take place in the BOS Chambers.

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