

Scott Valley Voice

February 25, 2003

Newsletter of Scott Valley

Vol. II, Num. 1

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR BY FRANCINE MILLMAN

The Scott Valley Board continues to work to prepare those in Scott Valley for emergencies, whether it be earthquakes, floods or those of the unnatural sort. Our Emergency Preparedness Coordinator, Barbara Jennings has been working directly with the Mill Valley fire department and those in the CERT program to determine what is needed by our valley for such emergencies in the way of volunteers and supplies. We will keep you posted on those needs as we compile them.

This issue brings to you the long awaited FINAL installment of John Palmer's contribution on the Alto Tunnel. John has worked tirelessly pulling together information, data and statistics from a multitude of locations, including numerous websites, to provide you with the history and information you may need in order to make an educated decision should the Alto Tunnel become an issue at the forefront of both Mill Valley and Corte Madera communities.

On behalf of the board, I would like to thank John for the hundreds of hours he has spent gathering the quotes and statistics and facts in order to make sure they are accurate before publication. You can find John's final tunnel article starting on Page 2 of The Voice.

We would still like to hear from **YOU**, the residents of Scott Valley on issues that continue to be of concern for YOU! Please send your issues, applause, criticisms and feedback to:

TheVoice@promptconsulting.com. What would YOU like to see in the next issues of The Voice? Let us know!!

BECOME A SVHA MEMBER

It's that time again! For \$40 a calendar year in tax-deductible dues, your board continues working on your behalf to keep you informed and to represent the interests of Scott Valley. We need both your community and financial support. Part of these funds is being targeted for our own emergency preparedness supplies, a list of which is presently being compiled. Please send your check to: Scott Valley Homeowners' Association, P.O. Box 392, Mill Valley, CA 94942.

SCOTT VALLEY SWIM & TENNIS CLUB DIRECTOR NEEDED

The Scott Valley Homeowners' Association is responsible for appointing two Scott Valley Swimming & Tennis Club proprietary members to the SCSRC Board of Directors. This is to ensure that neighborhood concerns are heard. The appointments are for two-year terms and require attendance at monthly evening meetings. If you have questions or are interested in being appointed for the term running from 3/03 through 2/28/05, please call Tom Ashley at 388-0109 by March 7th. This is a fun way to participate in your club and neighborhood!

GET CHARGED!!!

- Do you have a fire extinguisher in your home?
- Do you only have one for your very large home?
 - Have you ever used it?
- Do you know how to use it in an emergency?
- Did you know that after several years of non-use, an extinguisher needs to be recharged?

Your Scott Valley Board is arranging to have a MOBILE fire extinguisher expert come into Scott Valley so you can have your existing extinguisher recharged or if you don't own an extinguisher, you can make the purchase you are always putting off. He will even show you how to use your extinguisher and provide you with important safety tips! It will only take a few minutes to get recharged and improve your home safety!

Dates coming soon! Stay tuned!

The opinions expressed in the following article, both

pro and con, do not necessarily represent those of the Scott Valley Homeowners' Association Board, which has yet to take a position on the proposal to reconstruct the Alto Tunnel. The Article is not a traditional presentation of the pro and con sides of the issues involved, in that both positions were laid out by the same author, who chose the format as a means of presenting the opposing viewpoints side-by-side. All quotations used in the article are precise excerpts drawn from published articles, editorials, and letters. To request complete copies of those documents, please email The Voice at TheVoice@promptconsulting.com.

AN ALTO TUNNEL PRIMER by John Palmer

This is the fifth and final installment in a series of articles written for the benefit of Scott Valley and Chapman Meadows homeowners and their representatives in local government to provide background for evaluation of the proposal to reconstruct the Alto Tunnel.

PART V: RECONSTRUCTING THE ALTO TUNNEL - PRO AND CON

Publication of the Draft Marin County Bicycle Plan by Alta Transportation Consulting in June of 2000, including its recommendation that the Alto Tunnel be studied once again as a preliminary step toward its reconstruction for bicycle and pedestrian use, focused attention on the tunnel once again. Long a dream of bicycle enthusiasts, the possibility that the tunnel would be put back into use became a cause of concern for many residents on either side of its portals, particularly those whose homes lie along the route of what would become the "Bicycle Freeway", as it is described on the website of the Marin County Bicycle Coalition (MCBC) (website – www.marinbike.org). Board members of the Chapman Meadows Homeowners' Association, on the Corte Madera side, initially led the opposition to the reconstruction in the local media, and homeowners on the Mill Valley side soon joined them. Over the next year, several articles and editorials, pro and con, appeared in the Marin Independent Journal (IJ), the Mill Valley Herald, the Pacific Sun, and other local publications. When Corte Madera and Mill Valley civic leaders held public meetings to discuss whether or not to approve a study on the reconstruction, many on both sides of the issue spoke to their positions. The following arguments, for and against reconstruction of the tunnel were taken from those exchanges.

ISSUE A – TUNNEL USE

PRO: Bicycle Advocates claim that reconstructing the Alto Tunnel for bicycle and pedestrian use would encourage enough people to get out of their cars to help relieve automobile congestion on Highway 101. Reconstructing the tunnel is the "top priority multi-jurisdictional regional bicycle infrastructure project for Marin County" according to an MCBC press release dated 1/19/01. "Tunnels improve the flow of transportation. There are fewer cars on the road...", stated Debbie Hubsmith, Executive Director of MCBC, in the Mill Valley Herald on 12/12/00. "The tunnel would be used by students, seniors, pedestrians and bike commuters, providing an alternative to the automobile and helping to unlock gridlock", claimed Paul Carroll, Director of Transit Alternatives of Marin, in an IJ article in 2001. "Thanks to the bicycle industry, Marin's North-South Bicycle Freeway will be at the forefront of the evolution." (Debbie Hubsmith). "The Alto Tunnel holds promise as a positive solution to our increasing local automobile traffic problems", according to Paul Carroll in a letter to the Herald dated 11/14/00.

CON: There has never been a survey taken to determine how many people would actually use the tunnel to bicycle 15 or more miles each way to work. Tunnel opponents believe that for most people, commuting to and from Central Marin to work by bicycle is not a practical alternative to driving or using existing public transportation. Bicycles are impractical to use for anything more than light shopping, especially for families with children. Additionally, Corte Madera and Mill Valley have completely separate school districts, so it is unlikely that students would bike to and from school through the tunnel. Bicycle enthusiasts are trying to obtain federal and state funds earmarked for transportation uses for what is essentially a recreational use, promoted in large part by those who stand to benefit from it economically, claim tunnel opponents. The MCBC website lists the sources of its funding, most of which comes from Bikes Belong, a consortium of 61 bicycle manufacturers, bike parts and clothing manufacturers and suppliers, and bicycle-related publications. MCBC has also obtained several grants for consulting work on reconstructing the tunnel and other tunnels in Marin and for the North-South-Bikeway.

On the issue of funding the reconstruction of the tunnel, its opponents note that California law holds that state funds be used for commute as opposed to recreational travel. TDA (Transportation Development Act) funds "are to be used for transportation purposes for school, work or shopping, and not primarily for physical exercise or recreation without such a destination", according to the California Streets and Highways Code, section 890-894.2. Quentin Kopp, then the California Senate Transportation Chair, stated in a letter dated 9/98, quoted in an article in the Coastal Post dated 1/1/01, that "I don't believe the State Highway Fund, revenue from state owned toll bridges, or federal transportation funds are intended for recreational bicycle facilities".

ISSUE B – NEIGHBORHOOD IMPACT

PRO: Those who favor reconstructing the tunnel believe that homeowners and neighborhoods on both sides of the tunnel would derive a range of benefits from its redevelopment. "The reopening of the tunnel would be an incredible boon to the economy and to the residents. [Tunnels] are a welcome asset, improving property values", claimed Debbie Hubsmith in the Herald on 12/12/00. "Such 'greenway' corridors are often listed among communities' most treasured assets", according to bicycle enthusiast Joe Breeze in an IJ op-ed piece dated 11/30/01. Referring to other tunnels converted to bikeways, Mr. Breeze went on to say that "Property values increased and quality of life improved".

CON: Families who stand to lose their homes, and the homeowners alongside whose front and back yards the Bicycle Freeway would run, are very concerned about its impact on their neighborhoods. Unlike most of the rural and semi-rural tunnels to which Mr. Breeze refers,, access to the Alto Tunnel runs directly across streets and through quiet residential neighborhoods. In public meetings, bicycle enthusiasts consistently refer to existing multi-use paths as bike paths, an indication of their thinking about sharing these routes with dog walkers, joggers, pedestrians and parents with strollers.

ISSUE C – COSTS VS. BENEFITS

PRO: The cost of reconstructing the tunnel should be

weighed against the costs of freeway improvement say bicycle advocates, who believe the benefits to be derived from a re-opened tunnel would probably justify the expenditure. "Bicycle/pedestrian projects offer the highest bang for the buck", claimed Joe Breeze in the IJ on 11/30/01. "Those who oppose the re-opening of the tunnel say it wouldn't be cost-effective. It is impossible to prove something is cost effective before you've done it", according to Paul Carroll in an article in the Mill Valley Herald dated 12/12/00. In a statement promoting bicycle use, James Oberstar of Minnesota, the ranking Democrat on the House Transportation Committee, who has traveled to Marin to observe the tunnel firsthand, said "You should know that bicycle improvement construction costs \$189,000 a mile for 12-foot shared paths. You should also know that 1 mile of freeway costs \$46,000,000 a mile."

CON: Opponents claim that bicycle advocates are not realistic about costs. "MCBC and the Marin Bike Plan are asking for millions to be spent on a project with no verifiable demand", according to the Coastal Post article of 1/1/01. An IJ editorial from the autumn of 2001 stated "We're not convinced this is a worthwhile expenditure of the public's money. Couldn't this political energy and taxpayer cash be put to a better, more beneficial use, like creating and improving bike lanes across Marin?...the cost of re-opening the tunnel would be prohibitively expensive, especially for the benefit it would derive".

As was noted in the third installment of this series, the Brady Study of 1994 estimated the cost at that time to reconstruct the tunnel, which had collapsed once before, taking down a home with it, to be \$4,600,000; this estimate was done without entering the tunnel, which is 118 years old and supported only by the original timber bracing, and therefore without any direct study of its condition. Additionally, the Brady Study's estimate called for structurally reinforcing only about 2/3 of the tunnel's length with steel, not its entire length as recommended by the Harding Lawson Associates (HLA) study of 1981.

As a result of its low cost estimate, the Brady Study and the adjusted estimate in the Draft Bicycle Plan based on it are the ones most often quoted by bike enthusiasts. However, the estimate in the Brady study also omitted the cost of future engineering studies (\$398,000 for

the current study alone), the cost of acquiring rights of way not owned by the county, and all other real estate costs. The HLA study estimated a cost of \$5.2-\$6.2 million to reconstruct the tunnel in 1981, again not factoring in the cost of acquiring the real estate necessary to complete the project.

Reconstructing the 1,104 foot-long Cal Park Tunnel, which was estimated to cost \$2,400,000 in the Draft Bicycle Plan in June of 2000, is currently budgeted at \$6 million (IJ, 5/02), or 250% more than the 2000 estimate, and there's no real estate to acquire. Given the above, it's easy to imagine the cost to reconstruct the 2,172 foot-long Alto Tunnel rising to \$15,000,000 or more. That figure would put its cost at \$6,906 per linear foot, a number close to the \$8,712 per linear foot Mr. Oberstar quoted for freeway construction, far higher than the \$36 per linear foot he quoted to construct a bike path. In other words, even a \$10,000,000 tunnel reconstruction would cost the equivalent of 53 miles of bicycle/pedestrian paths.

ISSUE D - SAFETY

PRO: The safety of bicyclists riding on Camino Alto is a prime concern of the Bicycle Coalition. "We are very interested in re-opening the tunnel. If you bike on Camino Alto, for instance, it is very dangerous and has no shoulder. The tunnel would be flat, car-free, and straight", stated Paul Carroll in the Mill Valley Herald on 12/12/00.

CON: On the issue of safety, there seems to be unanimous agreement. People who drive on Camino Alto would love to see more separation between bicyclists and automobiles. However, opponents note that there are two alternatives to reconstructing the tunnel, namely widening Camino Alto, which could be done for a lot less than reconstructing the tunnel, or improving the existing bike path which already links Mill Valley and Corte Madera, which would cost just \$100,000 according to the Marin Draft Bicycle Plan. In fact, both of these projects could be completed for less than half the cost of reconstructing the Alto Tunnel according to the Draft Bicycle Plan, with minimal impact to residences and low on-going maintenance costs. Although the existing bike lane is considerably less steep than Camino Alto, it runs along Highway 101 for part of its length, and some bicyclists do not like this route; however, tunnel opponents point out that it's

hard to imagine that a dark, damp, half mile-long tunnel, would be more attractive. Opponents also believe that serious bicyclists would be reluctant to give up the exhilarating downhill ride on Camino Alto in favor of sharing a multi-use path crowded with other users.

ISSUE E - SECURITY

PRO: Tunnels are safe, relatively crime-free, and do not pose any greater security issues to the communities surrounding them than other transportation links such as open bicycle paths or paved highways, bicycle advocacy groups claim. In the pamphlet "Tunnels on Trails" by Amanda Eaken of the bicycle advocacy group Rails to Trails Conservancy (RTC) (website – www.railstrails.org), dated April, 2001, a publication discussing the conversion of several mostly short, rural railroad tunnels to bicycle/pedestrian use, we read that "the dozens of open tunnels around the country demonstrate their great potential to link communities and help create sustainable transportation alternatives". The pamphlet goes on to say that "Numerous studies have concluded that trails do not generate crime. Many studies show that, in fact, those facilities usually result in improvements in safety...", that 67% of surveyed [tunnel] managers did not report any negative impacts on the communities once tunnels were opened", and that "[any] negative impacts were minor, or were outweighed by the benefits of opening the tunnel".

Another pro-bike publication called "Rail Trails and Safe Communities" by Hugh Morris, also of the RTC, dated January, 1998, discusses rates of crime on rail trails in 1995 and 1996 and concluded that "overall results...indicate that rail trails are safe places to be", and that "crime on trails is not a common occurrence".

CON: In addition to the positive impacts attributed to the re-opened rail tunnels in those pro-bicycle publications, the writers admit that there can be significant negative impacts associated with them. In "Tunnels on Trails", we also read that "12 of 36 trail managers did report some negative impacts associated with the tunnel". "Rail Trails and Safe Communities notes 17% of suburban rail trails suffered graffiti vandalism, 24% had litter problems, 22% reported sign damage, and 14% noted unauthorized motorized use. The Draft Bicycle Plan itself states "...more experienced cyclists

often avoid bike paths because they are crowded and full of unpredictable users. There is some evidence that suggests that there are more conflicts on bike paths than riding on-street.”

Additionally, the Brady study of 1994 states that “the length of the tunnel would make it difficult to light and secure for bicycle use”. It further noted that “...some areas still have coastal wetlands on them”. “If the [railroad] right-of-way is used for expanded rail transit or a bikeway, right-of-way widening could require filling of wetlands...”. Tunnel opponents believe that constructing a Bicycle Freeway through Scott Valley and Chapman Meadows would have significant negative and environmental impacts on those neighborhoods, which currently have only local traffic, no through outlets, and negligible crime. Lighting, maintaining and policing the reconstructed tunnel would be an expensive burden, which neither the City of Mill Valley nor the Town of Corte Madera currently has the means to bear.

Opponents note that none of the studies to date have considered the impact on the quiet, residential neighborhoods on both sides of Corte Madera Hill which have been extensively developed since the railroad abandoned the tunnel. There are now homes and pools alongside the tunnel’s access routes, homes above the tunnel’s portals, and entire neighborhoods through which the MCBC’s envisioned Bicycle Freeway would run. With the reconstruction of the tunnel, these homes and neighborhoods would lose their privacy and character, several houses would be threatened by any movement of earth necessary to complete the task, and at least two and possibly three homes would have to be vacated, then either demolished or completely reconstructed in order to insure the safety of their inhabitants. Opponents note that conditions surrounding the potential reconstruction of the Alto Tunnel are different from those surrounding the much shorter Cal Park Tunnel, which will connect commercial developments and existing transit hubs with no impact to any residences.

CONCLUSION:

Section 5.3.3., page 69, 71, of the Marin County Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan states that “The

feasibility of reusing any of the tunnels is dependent on several factors”. It then goes on to list eight criteria, 1) local jurisdictions willing to take on the cost and responsibility of building and operating the facility; 2) local neighborhoods being willing to accept these revitalized corridors; 3) the lack of reasonable, less costly alternatives; 4) the expectation that they will significantly increase bicycling and walking; 5) there are no geological, drainage, or other physical problems with reconstruction; 6) the property owners can come to an agreement with local agencies; 7) the cost of reconstruction is within reason; and 8) safety and security issues can be effectively addressed. Availability of federal funding depends on a positive resolution of many of the same issues. Opponents of the reconstruction of the Alto Tunnel claim that the proposal fails on seven of the eight listed criteria, with the only passing grade given to the probability of increased recreational use. Although the Chapman Meadows Homeowners’ Association has come out squarely against the Tunnel in print and in public meetings, the Scott Valley Homeowners’ Association Board has not yet taken a formal position on the proposal, preferring to wait until this series was published in order to provide homeowners with sufficient background on the issues involved.

EDITORIAL POINT OF INTEREST:

Sometime in the next several months, the Scott Valley Homeowners’ Association Board of Directors will conduct a neighborhood survey regarding the reconstruction of the Alto Tunnel. We want to hear your opinions, based on the information you have read in this series of articles and on other information you may have gathered on your own, in order to allow the Board to make a decision about how to best represent our neighborhood’s interests to those governing agencies who will make the decision whether to proceed with reconstructing the tunnel. As more information becomes available, the Board will keep you updated via *the Scott Valley Voice*.

EMERGENCY PREVENTION BY SALLY PALMER

The residents of Stanton Place, 5 houses total, were ‘trapped’ after one of the big storms in December. A huge tree had fallen across their only access road. They banded together Thursday morning in the pouring rain, to manually chop the tree out of the way so they

could get to work. The electric chain saw that one resident had did not reach to the tree, so they used hatchets and axes, just like Pioneers. "It was really fun for the first half hour", Al Oppenheim said. Once they were soaked and cold it wasn't the joy it had started out to be. Eventually they were able to throw the huge tree pieces down the hill so they could use the road.

After I heard this story and huge limbs also filled my own yard that eventually had to be taken away, I became concerned about the enormous Eucalyptus trees that hang over Underhill Road. I made a few calls to the city and as it turned out, the trees were actually on city property. Within days they had trimmed the trees and hopefully prevented limb breakage that could have severely impaired the traffic flow for Scott Valley. If you think your trees are in danger of breaking and blocking the road, call City Hall and they will send out an inspector to determine if the tree is on city property and then take appropriate action.

Scott Valley Voice
This is a collaborative effort of the
Scott Valley Board of Directors

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BY BARBARA JENNINGS
EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS COORDINATOR

If you hear the sirens other than the one you hear on the first Saturday of every month at noon...here's what to do!

The continuous wailing of the City's emergency sirens does **NOT** mean that you must immediately evacuate or that you should call 911. **Please keep 911 phone lines clear if you or neighbors are not personally experiencing an emergency.**

To find out information, immediately turn your radio to the local media stations such as **KCBS 740AM** or

KGO810FM. We suggest you keep a battery-powered radio (with fresh batteries available) in case there is a power outage.

If ordered to evacuate, do so at once! Any delay can risk your safety.

If not ordered to evacuate, just sit tight and listen for further instructions you will hear on the radio stations.



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