



August 26, 2005

The Honorable Lynn Woolsey
1050 Northgate Drive, Suite 354
San Rafael, CA 94903-2558

Re: \$20 million for private Port Sonoma Ferries and Facilities

Dear Rep. Woolsey,

I am writing on behalf of Bluewater Network's more than 1,500 North Bay and San Francisco members and as a constituent who resides in Sonoma, CA, to express concern about and opposition to the \$20 million in funding appropriated in the federal transportation bill for a private enterprise to construct Port Sonoma ferries and facilities.

Bluewater Network – a division of Friends of the Earth – is a non-profit environmental advocacy organization whose mission is to champion innovative solutions and inspire individuals to protect the earth's finite and vulnerable ecosystems. Bluewater Network promotes critical policy changes in government and industry to reduce dependence on fossil fuels and eradicate other root causes of air and water pollution, global warming, and habitat destruction.

Bluewater Network has been advocating for clean ferries and environmentally sound water transit systems since the late 1990s when a major ferry expansion was announced for San Francisco Bay. We released a groundbreaking report in 1999 that proved that today's diesel fast ferries produce 100 times or more the air pollution per passenger of cars, buses or other mass transit. In addition, we publicized the fact that fast ferries generate damaging wakes, disrupt rafting birds and other waterfowl, collide with marine mammals, stir-up bay sediments, and produce noise that disturbs people and wildlife. We will be happy to provide technical documents to back-up these facts, or you may wish to search our website, www.bluewaternet.org for more information.

As a result of our advocacy and collaboration with the San Francisco Bay Area Water Transit Authority (WTA), the San Francisco Bay's new ferry system will be the most environmentally sound in the country. Not only did the WTA mandate in legislation the most stringent ferry air emissions standards in the nation for its new vessels, it is also requiring that the vessels meet the highest standards for eliminating wake wash and protecting marine mammals and waterfowl.

During the environmental review process for the new ferry system, the WTA examined a number of potential terminal sites and eliminated those where environmental impacts would be too high and where ridership was not likely to be strong. Port Sonoma was considered a high risk for environmental damage and the ridership estimates were weak. As a result, the WTA did not recommend Port Sonoma as a terminal location for the roll-out of the new ferry system. Bluewater Network and other environmental groups supported this decision. However, due to political pressure from pro-development leaders in the North Bay, the agency earmarked \$1 million for further environmental studies in Port Sonoma.

You can imagine how stunned we were to learn that Congress had appropriated funds to a private company for this generally unpopular project. The lobbying that took place to secure these funds completely circumvented the public process and ignored the hundreds of comments made to the Water Transit Authority about environmental,

transportation and growth-inducing issues related to a ferry terminal at Port Sonoma. These public documents are available from the WTA.

A ferry terminal and service at Port Sonoma would create irreversible environmental damage in an area adjacent to protected wetlands where millions of dollars in federal conservation funds have been invested. Not only would a ferry terminal devastate the environment, but it would produce urban sprawl in one of the last greenbelts along San Francisco Bay. There are no public transportation connectors in this region and there are no plans for development—except perhaps those by private developer Skip Berg who owns Pt. Sonoma and has an option to buy the farmland across the highway (according to sources). It would be easy to conclude that this ferry project is part of a larger plan by private interests to develop the Highway 37 corridor. A ferry terminal and service at Port Sonoma would probably be about as popular as the recently defeated casino plan along this same stretch of wetlands.

We urge you to do everything in your power to ensure that \$20 million is never appropriated for the Pt. Sonoma ferries or facilities. However, we would also urge you to consider directing this funding to other water transit projects that would benefit the North Bay and San Francisco and beyond. There are a number of extremely worthy water transit projects that are need of federal funding.

For example, The Honorable Nancy Pelosi secured \$2.5 million for the WTA to build a hybrid fuel-cell ferry that could be operated on the bay. However, the government agencies that hold the purse-strings will not release the monies until operating funds are secured—even though it is a research and development project. Re-designating some of the \$20 million towards completing this ferry project would allow it to advance without further delay. It would be the first near-zero emissions ferry. It could be operated by the WTA on North Bay routes as well as proposed new park service ferry routes.

All the ferries on San Francisco Bay are conventional “dirty diesel” vessels (except for Vallejo’s Solano, which is the first to operate with advanced pollution controls). The \$20 million Pt. Sonoma ferry money could be used to build new cleaner boats for the existing commuter routes to the North Bay. In the unlikely event that Port Sonoma ever became a feasible ferry destination, the clean vessels would be ready to go.

Another use of the funds could be to help pay for conversion of the bay’s ferry’s fleet from diesel to biodiesel. No engine modifications would be needed, but the cost of biodiesel is slightly higher than regular diesel. Subsidizing a biodiesel program would go a long way towards cleaning up the ferries on San Francisco Bay.

I would like to meet with you and your staff at your earliest convenience to discuss the Port Sonoma ferry funding, other ferry projects and to provide additional background and technical information that I hope will assist you in making decisions about this and future ferry appropriations. I will call your office soon to set up a meeting.

Thank you so much for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Teri Shore
Clean Vessels Campaign Director

Cc: The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Steve Castleberry, Water Transit Authority
Barbara Salzman, Marin Audubon Society
Mike Daley, Sierra Club – San Francisco Bay Chapter
Margaret Pennington, Sierra Club – Redwood Chapter

