San Miguel Authority for Regional Transportation (SMART) support for HB17-1242

The residents of the Telluride region approved the creation of the San Miguel Authority for Regional Transportation (SMART) last November funded by a regional sales tax and a property tax. The Towns of Telluride and Mountain Village will continue to separately fund and operate transportation services within the two towns until SMART builds the revenue and administration to assume all regional operations. SMART will operate inter-community transportation services extending down the San Miguel River valley to Norwood, van-pool services to surrounding communities, and multi-modal connections to trails and services within our region. We will also start long-range planning for extending transportation beyond the existing limited bus services. Seeking to create options to reduce the use of individual vehicles and their associated parking challenges, and with a broader goal of reducing our carbon footprint, SMART is just getting started.

The social and economic health of the Telluride region depends on having reliable transit. Rural areas have unique challenges that make it important to have flexible and dependable transit funds that allow us to address these needs. San Miguel County and neighboring Montrose County, whose west end relies on many San Miguel County services due to its remote location, has seniors and veterans spread across the vast rural landscapes, low-income families in need of transportation to medical facilities and shopping, the constantly changing challenges of tourism and workers commuting up to 160 miles a day. We know that SMART will have unmet needs for a long time, but we must begin to address today’s needs and plan for future challenges now.

We will use our tax-based revenues carefully to plan and operate the rudiments of regional transportation, but we will be unable to grow and meet our infrastructure needs without assistance from the State of Colorado. We will need new more efficient vehicles to run additional routes for existing riders. We hope to connect to more communities including Ophir, Rico, Dolores, Ridgway, and Ouray, which house our workers now. And eventually connect to cities with hospitals, medical services and shopping including Durango, Montrose and Grand Junction. We look at the model of the Roaring Fork Transportation Authority as we envision SMART growing to service over 50,000 residents throughout San Miguel, Ouray and Montrose Counties. Most of these people have no access to public transportation today and only through cooperation and funding from the State will this become a reality. HB17-1242 is critical in helping communities in Western Colorado provide transit.

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