

# Career Opportunity



## General Manager

Sonoma-Marín Area Rail Transit District (SMART)  
Petaluma, California

*How would you like to work alongside a committed staff, in a vibrant and engaged community, in one of the most dynamic areas of the country? KL2 Connects LLC has been retained by the Sonoma-Marín Area Rail Transit District to identify candidates for the career-defining position of General Manager.*

### SMART: Who We Are

Sonoma-Marín Area Rail Transit (SMART) is the Bay Area's newest passenger rail service providing a safe, reliable, and congestion-free transportation option for Marin and Sonoma counties. Beginning operations in 2017, SMART is a young and energetic public agency with an expectation of expansion and growth. The current 45-mile system includes stations in the Sonoma County Airport area, Santa Rosa, Rohnert Park, Cotati, Petaluma, Novato, San Rafael, and Larkspur. SMART's system also includes a bicycle and pedestrian pathway connecting all stations that the agency is continuing to build.



SMART's rail service includes a Windsor extension and, pending funding availability, extensions are planned for Healdsburg and Cloverdale. The full project will provide 70 miles of passenger rail service, connecting SMART passengers with jobs, education centers, retail hubs and housing along the Sonoma-Marín corridor. At the southern end of the line in Larkspur, SMART provides a connection to the Golden Gate Ferry system and all that San Francisco has to offer.



SMART is governed by a 12-member Board of Directors, who are appointed by several public agencies. There are approximately 145 employees including administrative and all operating personnel. All SMART services are directly provided by the agency, many represented by one of 4 labor unions.

SMART faces many challenges in the upcoming years as it relates to operating a transit district in post-pandemic times. Unique to SMART is the expiration of its

1/4 cent Sales Tax in 2029, which provides over 68% of SMART's total revenue stream. To reauthorize SMART's sales tax, it must be approved by two-thirds of the voters in Marin and Sonoma Counties. SMART went to a vote in March 2020 and received 53% in favor, but unfortunately fell short of the two-thirds vote required. SMART has several more opportunities to reauthorize its Sales Tax prior to expiration.

The current General Manager is retiring after 10 years of service to SMART. He was instrumental in taking SMART from a voter-approved concept along a lightly-used freight rail corridor to a modern passenger rail system operating on 45 miles of rebuilt track between Larkspur in Marin County and Santa Rosa in Sonoma County.

## **Key Strategic Duties of the General Manager**

The General Manager provides overall leadership by:

- Developing and implementing short- and long-term goals and business plans to support the achievement of the district's strategic vision.
- Cultivating an external presence in the community, fostering official and informal relationships with elected officials, public agencies, the business community, and civic organizations.
- Supervising and directing preparation of the SMART's overall financial plan and budget.
- Formulating policy recommendations for the Board of Directors in a timely and transparent manner and executing decisions made by the Board.
- Representing SMART in meetings with legislative bodies, governmental agencies, the media, other transit organizations, the business community, and the public.
- Ensuring adequate programming of state and federal funds district-wide to implement transportation and expansion plans.



As the leader of the Sonoma-Marín Area Rail Transit District, the General Manager plays a pivotal role in providing a first-class public transportation system in the Northern San Francisco Bay Area. This is an at-will position, appointed by and reporting to the SMART Board of Directors. The position will:

- Manage all aspects of the district and be responsible to the Board for the proper administration of all day-to-day business affairs of the district commensurate with the authority established by the Board.
- Appoint, supervise, and evaluate executive and professional staff; oversee and coordinate activities of executive managers and other staff who are responsible for implementing and administering activities in their functional areas.
- Administer through subordinate managerial staff the personnel system adopted by the SMART Board of Directors including, but not limited to, equal employment opportunity, affirmative action, and labor relations.
- Act as liaison with funding agencies, regulatory and other outside governmental agencies, political bodies, and professional organizations.

## **The Ideal Candidate**

SMART is seeking an exceptional Rail Transportation professional with a proven track record of success in public transit leadership. Experience with commuter rail operations and capital project construction is highly desirable. The ideal candidate will be a confident, growth-oriented, collaborative leader who has good judgment, curiosity, a confident professional presence, and a deep understanding of how to succeed in a politically diverse region. This person will have an inspiring demeanor, be someone who can develop and sustain a highly functional staff, and be able to work successfully with a large and diverse Board of Directors. This individual will be politically astute

and a quick learner. This candidate will have extensive experience in strategic and financial planning in order to maintain a fiscally responsible organization while delivering a safe, efficient, and effective service to the public. They will be a systems thinker, acknowledging and incorporating both the daily details of the operation and the larger landscape of issues associated with train operations in diverse settings. They will be committed to diversity in all aspects of the organization and evidence a strong commitment to transparency and accountability in public administration. The ideal candidate will focus on building trust at all levels of the organization, both internally and externally.

The candidate will have:

- Extensive knowledge of the principles, programs, and practices related to transit operations. Commuter rail experience is highly preferred.
- Demonstrated success directing, managing, and inspiring staff at all levels of the organization.
- Experience implementing complex capital projects.
- Sensitivity to the interests of a wide range of stakeholder groups, strategic partners, elected officials, regulatory agencies and administrative colleagues.
- Excellent organizational development and fiscal management skills.
- Knowledge of State and Federal laws and regulations governing transportation funding and operations.
- Experience working successfully with both transit system supporters and detractors by being open to new ideas and perspectives.
- Excellent oral and written communication skills and be comfortable as the public face of SMART within its many communities.
- Experience working in a complex environment made up of multiple transportation funding, planning, regulatory/oversight, and operating agencies.
- A strong leadership style that is collaborative and inclusive, building upon the current positive relations with both represented and non-represented staff.
- A passion for public service.

## **Major Challenges Facing New Leader**

SMART is funded through a one-quarter percent sales tax that must be renewed before 2029 in order to continue operations into the future. As with all transit services, COVID-19 has impacted ridership significantly. A return of previous riders coupled with new riders is critical. Expansion of the SMART line northward to Windsor and Coverdale as well as development of an adjacent bike path were promised in the early days of SMART's formation and strategies must be developed to meet these expectations. SMART is also being considered as the public agency responsible for freight operations along the entire corridor. Another new opportunity may be the expansion of SMART eastward to connect with the Capital Corridor train service and early studies are currently underway.



## **Education and Experience**

Any combination of education and experience that is equivalent to the following minimum qualifications: 1) Education (equivalent to graduation from a four-year college or university with a degree in public administration, finance, accounting, engineering, planning, or a related field. Master's degree desirable). 2) Experience (10 years of increasingly responsible professional experience managing complex programs in a transit related environment, with at least 5 years of high-level executive experience. 3) Public agency experience including significant interaction with a policy board is a must.

## Compensation and Benefits

The salary for this position is between \$290,000 - \$330,000 dependent upon the experience and qualifications of the selected candidate. The District also offers a competitive benefits package including medical, dental, vision, life and long-term disability insurance, deferred compensation, flexible spending accounts and participation in the California Public Employees Retirement System. The retirement formula for new CalPERS members is 2% at 62. Employees currently contribute 6.75% of pre-tax wages.

## Marin and Sonoma Counties, California

SMART headquarters are located in the City of Petaluma in Sonoma County and service is provided through both Sonoma and Marin Counties. The current northern terminus is Santa Rosa and the southern terminus is in Larkspur.



Sonoma and Marin Counties enjoy a stunningly beautiful wine country, charming small towns, internationally-acclaimed food and wines, towering redwoods, and a rugged Pacific coastline that offers an experience like no other. Marin County which links San Francisco via the Golden Gate Bridge with the delights of astounding outdoor recreation opportunities and Sonoma County with its amazingly prolific wine country make for a beautiful place to live and work.

In 2019, Sonoma County's population was estimated at 494,336. Its county seat and largest city is Santa Rosa, and it has nine incorporated municipalities: the cities of Cloverdale, Cotati, Healdsburg, Petaluma, Rohnert Park, Santa Rosa, Sebastopol, Sonoma, and Windsor. U.S. Route 101, the westernmost Federal highway in the U.S., links seven of these cities. SMART provides direct service to Santa Rosa and Petaluma at this time.

Marin County has a 2019 population of 258,826. It's county seat in San Rafael is located in the famous Frank Lloyd Wright public administration center. It has 11 incorporated municipalities. Direct SMART service is provided to Novato, San Rafael, and Larkspur.

Sonoma County includes the Mayacamas and the Sonoma Mountain. It is bordered on the west by the Pacific Ocean and has 76 miles of coastline. In California's Wine Country region, which also includes Napa, Mendocino, and Lake counties, Sonoma County is the largest producer. Winemaking—both the growing of the grapes and their vinting—is an important part of the economic and cultural life of Sonoma County. With over 1100 growers, about 80 percent of non-pasture agricultural land in the county is for growing wine grapes. Sonoma County is home to more than 350 wineries with eleven distinct and two shared American Viticultural Areas.



Marin County is home to the northern portion of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area including the Marin Headlands as one of the GGNRA's highlights. The Point Reyes National Seashore is located in Marin County as well as several notable state, regional and local parks. A charming combination of small and medium sized towns and outstanding rural areas of dairy farms and small coastal delights, Marin charms all who live and visit here.

Due to the varied scenery in Marin and Sonoma Counties and their proximity to the city of San Francisco, a large number of motion pictures have been filmed using venues within the counties. Many of these films are classics in American cinematography, such as the 1947 film *The Farmer's Daughter* and two Alfred Hitchcock films (*Shadow*

of a Doubt and The Birds). Dirty Harry is a famous movie filmed in Marin County and American Graffiti shares locations in both counties.

Other places of interest include Muir Woods, the coastal communities of Stinson Beach and Bolinas, Muir Beach and the Golden Gate National Recreation Area that spreads from south of San Francisco to the Marin Headlands and Muir Woods areas. Additional parks of note include Samuel Taylor State Park with its redwood forests and the Point Reyes National Seashore. Not only have movies been filmed in Marin County but there are several notable entertainment and literary celebrities who make their home in this County. In 2015 the State renamed the commonly referred to Rainbow Tunnel to The Robin Williams tunnel, in honor of the late actor and comedian who grew up and lived in the area.

## **How To Apply**

This is an excellent executive opportunity that offers attractive compensation, benefits, and relocation.

To be considered, go to [www.KL2connects.com/openings](http://www.KL2connects.com/openings), select the Sonoma-Marin Area Transit District listing, and upload a letter of interest, resume, and 4-5 professional references (preferably supervisory and including each reference's name, title, email, phone, and relationship to you). The position will remain open until filled.

The Sonoma-Marin Area Rail Transit District is an equal opportunity employer. All qualified applicants are considered in accordance with applicable laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, religion, color, gender, age, national origin, sexual orientation, physical or mental disability, marital status, veteran status or any other legally protected status.

For additional information, contact KL2 Connects LLC's Celia Kupersmith at [Celia@KL2Connects.com](mailto:Celia@KL2Connects.com). To learn more about SMART visit [www.sonomamarintrain.org](http://www.sonomamarintrain.org).

Thank you for your interest in an exciting career opportunity with SMART!