

Railroad car company stops production but SMART trains on track

By [BOB NORBERG](#)
THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

Published: Tuesday, January 6, 2009 at 8:40 a.m.

The Colorado manufacturer of the passenger railcars initially chosen by transit planners for the Sonoma-Marin commute train service has gone out of business.

Colorado Railcars, the only U.S. maker of passenger cars to meet federal crash specifications, shut down its Fort Lupton, Colo., manufacturing plant on Dec. 23.

"This doesn't come as a surprise, we have known they have been having problems for a while," said Chris Coursey, spokesman for the Sonoma Marin Area Rail Transit district. "We were aware they had serious financial problems."

Colorado Railcar on its Internet site says it has ceased operations and is going through liquidation.

The closure may have little effect on SMART, which can choose to run lighter, European-style, diesel-powered railcars instead.

If it chooses to stay with the heavier cars, however, Siemens Transportation Inc. of Germany is planning to develop and build such cars at its Sacramento plant, filling the void left by Colorado Railcar.

"It is part of our growth strategy and product development plan, we clearly see a niche market," said Frank Guzzo, business development director in Sacramento. "We are in the development stage."

Since passing a quarter-cent sales tax in Sonoma and Marin counties in November, SMART is now looking to start Cloverdale-to-Larkspur service in 2014.

SMART is planning to issue requests for proposals for its rail cars within the next two months and award a purchase contract next year.

The transit district has budgeted \$88 million for 14 self-propelled, diesel-powered rail cars. The cars will take two to three years to build.

SMART had initially specified the Colorado Railcar vehicles, which are classed as heavy rail, diesel-powered vehicles, in its 2006 environmental impact report.

However, in a 2008 supplemental report, SMART indicated that it could also use a light-weight, European-style railcars by running freight train service in off hours.

"The major difference between the two is how they operate in conjunction with freight on the same corridor," Coursey said. "To use the light cars, you need to have time separation, they cannot be operating at the same time as freight."

The most popular light-weight cars available are made by Siemens in Germany.

There are 12 of them in use by the North Coast Transit District in San Diego on its 22-mile Sprinter service from Oceanside to Escondido.

RAISING GOOD
HEALTH TO THE
NEXT LEVEL.

Our new Santa Rosa hospital
tower opens in October.

kp.org/santarosa

KAISER PERMANENTE. thrive

Spokesman Tom Kelleher said to meet the federal rules for running light-weight cars and freight together, the freight service runs at night.

SMART believes it can schedule freight service in the mid-morning and mid-afternoons, when the commute trains are not running.

Coursey said Siemens' plans would likely be taken into account as SMART decides what to buy.

"I think it is the case with any manufacturer, they have people on-site when a project starts up, but having the manufacturer 90 miles away rather than 6,000 miles away is an advantage," Coursey said.

Copyright © 2010 PressDemocrat.com — All rights reserved. Restricted use only.