

EDITORIALS This is rich

February 1, 2008

Marin sues to block rail repairs, then complains about line's upkeep

First, Marin County endorses a Novato lawsuit that seeks to block repair work on railroad tracks through the North Coast. Now, at least one Marin County supervisor is blaming the North Coast Railroad Authority, which oversees the rail line, for creating a flooding problem in Novato last week. Why? Because the rail line and a trestle in the area weren't properly maintained.

This would qualify as one of those "only in Marin" items.

According to the Marin Independent Journal, Marin County Supervisor Judy Arnold this week blamed poor maintenance of the NCRA's bridge over Novato Creek for creating a dam that caused the creek to back up and flood parts of Novato.

According to NCRA Executive Director Mitch Stogner, the NCRA, which sent out crews and equipment to resolve the flooding problem last week, has been wanting to raise that 100-foot bridge as part of its \$25 million track improvement plan. But that project is being blocked -- by Novato's lawsuit.

"If we can ever get out there and fix it, we will raise (the bridge) and reduce the propensity for flooding," Stogner said.

This just points out the absurdity of this lawsuit which is preventing king an upgrade of the 62 miles of track through Sonoma County. How, exactly, is this helping the environment?

Novato's main contention is that the NCRA should have to do a full environmental impact report on the entire stretch of the rail all the way to Eureka before freight service could begin in just Sonoma County. If the judge agrees, it could delay rail service for years. A trial on that issue is set to begin later this month.

Such a twisted interpretation of state environmental laws is akin to demanding that an EIR be done on Highway 101, from the Golden Gate Bridge to the Oregon border, for a highway expansion in Sonoma County.

But let's be clear. This is not about Novato's concern about the environment. This is about Novato's concern about Novato and its real estate values. The city hasn't had freight trains coming through town for seven years, and it wants to pretend they never existed. So some officials want the court system to make the NCRA go away -- except, of course, when they need help with flood problems.