



**Yosemite Area Regional Transportation System (YARTS)
Joint Powers Authority
MINUTES**

DATE

Monday, June 8, 2020

The regular meeting of the Yosemite Area Regional Transportation System (YARTS) Joint Powers Authority (JPA) Board was held on Monday, June 8, 2020 via teleconference/videoconference and was called to order by Chair Menetrey at 1:03 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Miles Menetrey, Mariposa County Supervisor, Chair
Scott Silveira, Merced County Supervisor, Vice Chair
Stacy Corless, Mono County Supervisor
Bob Gardner, Mono County Supervisor
Daron McDaniel, Merced County Supervisor
Rosemarie Smallcombe, Mariposa County Supervisor

MEMBERS ABSENT

Rhonda Armstrong, Council Member, City of Kerman
John Gray, Tuolumne County Supervisor
Tom Wheeler, Madera County Supervisor

OTHERS PRESENT

Peggy Arnest, Fresno Council of Governments
Denise Demery, VIA Adventures
Jim Donovan, Yosemite National Park
Sandy Hogan, Mono County LTC
Kathleen Morse, Yosemite National Park
Curtis Riggs, VIA Adventures
Tyler Summersett, Tuolumne County Transportation Council

STAFF PRESENT

Christine Chavez, Transit Manager
Kate Molthen, Assistant Transit Manager
Xavier Garcia, Transit Administrative Assistant
Stacie Guzman, Executive Director
Nav Bagri, Finance Director
Eva Garibay, Public Programs Specialist II
Emily Haden, Legal Counsel
Adam Perez, Multimedia Specialist
Mary-Michal Rawling, Public Affairs Manager

1. Roll Call

Chair Menetrey led the introductions and called the meeting to order at 1:03 p.m.

2. Public Comment

Denise Demery commented that the agenda for the prior JPA meeting stated that staff had collaborated with the contractor to determine ridership options but she wanted to clarify that the contractor only provided data to staff and staff determined ridership options internally. She also provided an additional ridership option that was not mentioned at the last meeting. This option would seal off seats behind the driver, use full remaining seating capacity, required masks for drivers and passengers, continue with enhanced sanitization practices and encourage reservations but allow walk-ons.

3. Minutes of the May 22, 2020 YARTS Joint Powers Authority meeting

No questions. So noted.

Director Corless moved to approve the minutes of the May 22, 2020 YARTS Joint Powers Authority meeting. Seconded by Director Gardner.

Ayes - Directors Corless, Gardner, McDaniel, Menetrey, Silveira, Smallcombe

Noes - None

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

4. COVID-19 Situational Update

a. National Park Service

Kathleen Morse reported that a press release will be going out to notify the public that the Park will be opening day-use reservations and some overnight accommodations beginning June 11, 2020.

Director Gardner asked about for an update on the opening of the Tioga Road.

Kathleen Morse replied that Tioga Road is scheduled to open on June 15, 2020.

Director Smallcombe asked how drive-through traffic is going to be handled and what hours the gates will be open.

Kathleen Morse replied that residents will be allowed to pass through by presenting an identification card at the gates and the gates will remain open, with Park staffing occurring at certain hours.

Director Menetrey asked how the Park plans to handle visitors who arrive at the gates without a reservation.

Kathleen Morse replied that Caltrans will display signs to let people know that reservations are required. Park staff will also be handing out business cards with information on how to make a reservation to visitors who arrive at the gate without one. The Park plans to hold 20% of available reservations open on a 48-hour rolling basis for those travelers who are unaware that a reservation is needed.

b. YARTS Operations Strategy in Response to COVID-19

Christine Chavez, Stacie Guzman and Nav Bagri gave a PowerPoint presentation on situational factors related to COVID-19, ridership data and analysis, social distancing strategies and budget impacts due to COVID-19.

Director McDaniel asked how the half capacity limit for the buses was determined.

Stacie Guzman explained that the Board decided on the half capacity social distancing strategy at the previous meeting, but the strategy can be modified at the Board's discretion.

Director McDaniel suggested reconsidering that decision given that other bus systems have not limited their capacities.

Christine Chavez added that the Board requested that staff evaluate the half capacity social distancing strategy to determine if modifications are needed, but staff has not been able to do so since the Park remains closed. She also mentioned that it is easier to limit capacity initially and modify as needed than it would be to start at full capacity and then have to reduce capacity later.

Director Smallcombe commented that she assumed the capacity limitations were requirements from the state or federal level. She asked for legal counsel to provide their opinion on what YARTS' legal exposure would be for not complying with industry standards.

Emily Haden replied that insurance companies are typically not providing coverage for liability related to COVID-19. She stated there is a potential for liability if a passenger were to contract the virus on a bus, so some attempt at social distancing measures is better than having nothing.

Director McDaniel asked what the fuel savings are considering YARTS is operating on a reduced schedule.

Stacie Guzman stated that there are fuel savings due to reduced operations, but those savings are essentially neutralized by the reduction in farebox revenue and the loss of the thruway agreements. Some Board members expressed concern about the fuel budget being overstated, so Stacie suggested that staff can reevaluate and provide additional detail at the next meeting.

Director Silveira asked if the additional \$115,000 in costs for providing trailhead stops in the Valley would be funded by the Park.

Kathleen Morse responded that it would be difficult for the Park to come up with funds to pay for that additional service. It is not considered an essential service, so it is understandable if YARTS is not able to make those extra stops.

At this time, Chair Menetrey opened this item for public comment.

Denise Demery commented that the figures used on page 21 of the agenda to estimate the costs of summer service per corridor are higher than the actual costs. She also mentioned that the contractor is receiving a lot of calls from hikers concerned about having to make reservations when they are unsure of their travel date, so she suggested allowing for walk-on service to accommodate for that.

Sandy Hogan asked if the recommendation in the Short Range Transit Plan to eliminate the Sonora to Groveland leg were implemented, could those cost savings be used to fund the extra trailhead stops in the Valley or be applied to the budget deficit.

Jim Donovan replied that allocated funds can be moved from one service to another if needed.

At this time, Chair Menetrey closed public comment and opened the item for Board discussion.

Director Corless asked if the half capacity strategy could begin as a pilot program and if the Board could set a date to review ridership and increase capacity if needed.

Director Silveira asked if a ride-at-your-own risk clause could be added to the terms of service and whether drivers might be able to allow walk-ons if they know there is seating available.

Christine Chavez stated that the staff recommendation includes allowing for limited walk-ons. Staff could evaluate service and ridership and present that data at the July board meeting to help determine if capacity should be modified.

Stacie Guzman suggested reducing the number of reservation spots to allow for a greater capacity for walk-ons, but there is a concern with drivers being responsible for handling any conflicts that may arise with passengers.

Christine Chavez agreed that placing that responsibility on the drivers may pose a problem since the contractor has expressed concern about drivers being asked to do too much already.

Director Silveira added that he understands that drivers may be uncomfortable with taking on additional responsibilities, but it is in everyone's best interest to do a little bit more work if the alternative is shutting down the whole system.

Director Smallcombe asked if multiple reservations can be made for a single individual and if the June 22nd summer service start date can be moved up.

Christine Chavez replied that multiple reservations can be made. The June 22nd date was selected to allow time for staff to populate the reservation system as well time for contractor staff to be trained on how to make reservations for passengers.

Chair Menetrey commented that travelers are making the personal decision to travel during this pandemic, so they understand that there is a level of risk involved. With that in mind, he would support increasing the capacity of the buses sooner rather than later.

Emily Haden responded that in the interest of protecting the agency, it would be easiest for passengers to sign a waiver of liability through the reservation system. For walk-on passengers, drivers would have to be asked to have those passengers sign that waiver.

Chair Menetrey suggested that the waiver should include wording to inform passengers that they are boarding the bus at their own risk.

Emily Haden stated that wording to that affect can be added to the waiver, but there is a possibility that courts will not enforce it.

Stacie Guzman suggested starting with 22 reserved seating capacity while allowing up to 8 walk-on passengers for a maximum capacity of 30 passengers per bus.

Director Smallcombe asked if staff could engage with the contractor about their budget proposal and provide an update to the Board at the next meeting.

Director Gardner moved to direct staff to:

1. Upon the opening of Yosemite National Park, begin the implementation of the social distancing strategy that limits passengers to half capacity (22 + 2 wheelchair passengers) with the ability to adjust ridership as needed, requires passengers to wear masks, and to agree to terms of service at the time of a reservation; AND
2. Modify summer service schedules on all corridors to maximize ridership into Yosemite National Park; AND
3. Authorize staff to populate the reservation website to include summer schedules on all corridors and include a \$1 surcharge fee for masks.

Seconded by Director Corless.

Ayes - Directors Corless, Gardner, McDaniel, Menetrey, Silveira, Smallcombe

Noes - None

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

5. Management Update

Stacie Guzman asked if the Board is comfortable with the next scheduled meeting being on July 20, 2020.

Chair Menetrey replied affirmatively, with the option for staff to call a special meeting if necessary.

Stacie Guzman noted that the next meeting will be in a new fiscal year and thanked Director Menetrey for serving as Chair during this unprecedented time.

6. Board Member Remarks

Directors Corless and Silveira also thanked Director Menetrey for serving as chair.

Director Silveira added that considering the budgetary constraints that YARTS is facing due to COVID-19, all possibilities to increase revenue should be on the table, including a possible fare increase. He also commented that he understands that the National Park Service is facing budget issues as well, but he hopes that it views YARTS as a valuable partner and will take that into consideration when determining funding levels moving forward.

At the request of Director Smallcombe, Chair Menetrey allowed Curtis Riggs to make a public comment.

Curtis Riggs commented that he is disappointed that his budget proposal was not included in this meeting's agenda. He stated that his proposal would result in the total contract cost being significantly under budget and would like a meeting to be scheduled prior to July 20, 2020 to discuss it.

Stacie Guzman responded that now that staff has Board direction on how to operate service, the number one priority is to sit down with the contractor to discuss the proposal.

Chair Menetrey thanked staff for working hard to provide information to the Board to help make these important decisions.

7. Adjournment

THERE BEING NO FURTHER BUSINESS OF THE YARTS JOINT POWERS AUTHORITY, THE MEETING WAS ADJOURNED AT 3:23 p.m.