



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

DATE

Monday, March 23, 2020

A special meeting of the Yosemite Area Regional Transportation System (YARTS) Joint Powers Authority Board was held on Monday, March 23, 2020 via teleconference and was called to order by Chair Menetrey at 3:00 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
John Gray, Tuolumne County Supervisor
Daron McDaniel, Merced County Supervisor
Rosemarie Smallcombe, Mariposa County Supervisor
Tom Wheeler, Madera County Supervisor

MEMBERS ABSENT

Rhonda Armstrong, Council Member, City of Kerman

OTHERS PRESENT

Denise Demery, VIA Adventures
Jim Donovan, Yosemite National Park
Tom Dumas, Caltrans, District 10
Rick Franz, Caltrans, District 9
Kathleen Morse, Yosemite National Park
Curtis Riggs, VIA Adventures

STAFF PRESENT

Christine Chavez, Transit Manager
Xavier Garcia, Transit Administrative Assistant
Stacie Guzman, Executive Director
Emily Haden, Legal Counsel
Mary-Michal Rawling, Public Affairs Manager

1. Introductions

Chair Menetrey led the introductions and called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m.

2. Public Comment

None.

3. YARTS Operations Plan in Response to COVID-19

Christine Chavez explained that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Yosemite National Park has closed as of March 20, 2020 at 3:00 p.m. and YARTS has defaulted to its Emergency Operations schedule in response to said closure.

Stacie Guzman stated the purpose of this meeting is to determine if the Board is interested in continuing service between Merced and El Portal during the park closure.

Director Gray requested to hear from the National Park Service whether they feel there is a need for transportation for essential service staff who are working in the park.

Kathleen Morse replied that work in the park is being limited to critical functions and given the low ridership numbers and the Park's desire to prevent people from moving from one place to another, the Park's opinion is YARTS is not providing an essential service at this time.

Director McDaniel asked if YARTS' funding would be discontinued if the service is deemed nonessential.

Kathleen Morse replied that the Park's main goal is to keep people safe and very few services are considered essential.

Christine Chavez added that there is a funding agreement in place for the remainder of the fiscal year so the funding allocation should not be impacted by a reduction of service.

Jim Donovan stated that the Park has never interrupted funding during other crises, such as natural disasters and government shutdowns.

Director Wheeler asked if unused funding for this fiscal year can be carried over to next year.

Jim Donovan replied that no funding can be carried over, but the funding is set for a five-year agreement so it is the same amount from year to year.

Director Wheeler asked if service to Yosemite is funded fully by the Park.

Christine Chavez replied that YARTS' funding comes from a mix of grants, local contributions from member counties, the National Park Service and farebox recovery. There may not be a direct impact to YARTS' funding for the remainder of the fiscal year as a result of reduced service beyond the loss but we should be conscious of how funds are spent given that YARTS has a limited budget.

Chair Menetrey opened the public comment period at 3:20 p.m.

Curtis Riggs stated that, despite low ridership numbers, YARTS is part of the critical infrastructure sector and provides essential transportation to many Mariposa County residents. Fresno and Madera counties may need to depend on the YARTS service as well. This could be an opportunity for YARTS to play a humanitarian role in assisting those communities. If the YARTS service is shut down, VIA may not be able to bring it back up. He would like YARTS to keep the service operating and for everyone to work together to contact state and federal elected officials to request more stable funding and grants to make up for any losses that are suffered during this crisis.

Rick Franz asked if any Park employees depend on YARTS to get to and from work.

Jim Donovan replied that most transit-dependent employees can work from home or take allowable emergency leave.

Tom Dumas asked if any ridership data is available that shows if there are any transit-dependent passengers who utilize YARTS to get between places to access vital services.

Chair Menetrey closed the public comment period at 3:27 p.m.

Chair Menetrey stated that the Mariposa County Human Services Department is prepared to provide transportation to its residents to access vital services. He appreciates the need to keep the YARTS service running, but Mariposa County is in favor of reducing the number of outside visitors as much as possible.

Director Gray stated that Mariposa County would be most affected and if the County can cover the need for essential transportation, then he agrees with Chair Menetrey on suspending the service. However, he is open to the possibility of reducing service if needed.

Vice Chair Silveira stated his main concern is that the YARTS contractor might go out of business if they do not receive payment while the service is suspended. Offering some type of reduced service would help the contractor to continue with its operations.

Director McDaniel stated that despite low ridership numbers, there are still passengers who need to utilize YARTS to commute to work and access essential services. There is a contract in place and we should consider the needs of the contractor at this time.

Director Smallcombe asked for Curtis Riggs to explain what the consequences would be to his business if the YARTS service were to be suspended.

Curtis Riggs explained that VIA depends on YARTS' busy summer season to make a profit that will sustain the business during the slower winter months. He also had other business lines, such as charter service, that would help support the YARTS infrastructure during the winter when YARTS revenue did not cover the costs, but those business lines are not currently operating. VIA has had to stop making bank payments and has laid off as many people as they could. They are concerned they may have to close their doors about losing their remaining employees to other jobs if the YARTS service stops running.

Director Smallcombe agreed that there are likely passengers who still utilize YARTS to access essential services. She mentioned that Mariposa County may be able to cover some of that transportation need but perhaps not all of it. Additionally, social distancing requirements would be easier achieved on a bus than in smaller County vehicles. The goal should be to find a balance between providing critical transit needs and the survival of the YARTS contractor.

Director Wheeler agreed with Director Smallcombe and suggested that if there will be no interruption in funding, YARTS should continue to operate to help keep the YARTS contractor solvent.

Director Gray asked if the service could be restricted to local transportation use only.

Christine Chavez replied that public transit cannot be made exclusive and must be open to the public.

Director Gray asked if reducing service would mean reducing the current 6 routes per day to 3 routes.

Christine Chavez replied the recommended service reduction would bring down the number of runs to 4 in each direction per day. She also mentioned she has requested information from the contractor on where passengers are boarding and alighting but has yet to receive that information.

Curtis Riggs stated that VIA will provide the requested information as soon as possible.

Denise Demery clarified that VIA only collects boarding information, not where passengers alight.

Curtis Riggs added that VIA can ask drivers to collect that information from passengers.

Denise Demery mentioned that drivers can collect that information if needed, but the extra time that would take would increase the service hour cost.

Chair Menetrey mentioned that about 60% of Mariposa County's population is over 55 years of age and they are fearful of buses bringing outside travelers into their community. The town of Mariposa is completely shut down so there really is no reason for people to be traveling there.

Vice Chair Silveira requested that an update on this item at the April 6, 2020 JPA meeting.

Chair Menetrey mentioned that information from the contractor on who is actually using the service would be helpful.

Christine Chavez stated that information can be provided at the April 6, 2020 meeting.

Director Silveira moved to direct staff to continue with reduced service operating between Merced and El Portal.

Seconded by Director Corless.

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

Noes - Director Menetrey

MOTION CARRIED.

**THERE BEING NO FURTHER BUSINESS OF THE YARTS JOINT POWERS AUTHORITY, THE MEETING WAS
ADJOURNED AT 3:52 p.m.**