



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

DATE

Friday, May 22, 2020

The regular meeting of the Yosemite Area Regional Transportation System (YARTS) Joint Powers Authority (JPA) Board was held on Friday, May 22, 2020 via teleconference/videoconference and was called to order by Chair Menetrey at 1:05 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
Tom Wheeler, Madera County Supervisor

MEMBERS ABSENT

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

OTHERS PRESENT

Peggy Arnest, Fresno Council of Governments
Denise Demery, VIA Adventures
Jim Donovan, Yosemite National Park
Michael Draper, Mono County LTC
Jonathan Farrington, Yosemite/Mariposa County Tourism Bureau
Scott Gediman, Yosemite National Park
Sandy Hogan, Mono County LTC
Candy O'Donel-Browne, Mariposa County Economic Development
Jamie Richards, 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 1:05 p.m.

2. Public Comment

Curtis Riggs commented that he had submitted a rate change proposal per staff request but did not see it as a topic for discussion on this agenda. He would like it to be added to the agenda for the next meeting.

Director Wheeler commented that Jay Varney, Madera County Sheriff, has been hired as the new Chief Administrative Officer for Madera County and Tyson Pogue has been appointed Sheriff until the next election. He also mentioned that he spoke with Samir Sheikh, Executive Director of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, about possibly receiving funding for YARTS and is awaiting a response.

3. Minutes of the May 11, 2020 YARTS Joint Powers Authority meeting

No questions. So noted.

Director Corless moved to approve the minutes of the May 11, 2020 YARTS Joint Powers Authority regular meeting.

Seconded by Director Silveira.

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

Noes - None

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

4. COVID-19 Situational Update

a. National Park Service

Scott Gediman reported that Yosemite National Park has developed a phased re-opening draft plan that has gone to their Washington office for review and will then be submitted to the Department of Interior for approval. He anticipates receiving feedback on the plan within the next week, at which time he will issue a press release with a status update on re-opening. He also stated that there will be no shuttle service in Yosemite Valley or Mariposa Grove this summer.

Chair Menetrey asked if the Park still intends to provide a two week notice before re-opening.

Scott Gediman replied that is still the intention, but it is contingent upon California moving to Stage 3 of its re-opening plan.

Director Smallcombe asked what the Park's position is with respect to through traffic on Highway 120.

Scott Gediman replied the Park is working on a pass-through policy for Highway 120, which is expected to be finalized by the time the Park re-opens. He also mentioned that Tioga Road will open one or two weeks after the Park re-opens.

Sandy Hogan commented that the Forest Service placed a hold on wilderness permits and asked if the Park is coordinating with the Forest Service to determine when hikers will be allowed to enter the Park.

Scott Gediman replied affirmatively and stated when the wilderness opens, the permits will all be handled online. He also stated that through-hikers are permitted to travel through the Park at this time.

b. YARTS Operations Strategy in Response to COVID-19

Christine Chavez gave a PowerPoint presentation on situational factors related to COVID-19's impact on YARTS' level of service and the considerations for future service options.

Stacie Guzman stated that the next board meeting on June 8, 2020 will be focused on discussing the budget. Implementing social distancing measures will limit the capacity on the buses, which will lead to a reduction in farebox revenue. It will also have effects on our agreements with partners such as Amtrak. She also mentioned that YARTS will be receiving about \$326,000 in CARES Act funding.

Director Smallcombe asked how customers would sign the waiver stating they agree to abide by the social distancing guidelines if reservations are done by phone.

Christine Chavez replied that would be one of the challenges with Option 3, but a solution could be to have the reservationist read the waiver aloud to the customer and ask them to agree or disagree.

Jonathan Farrington commented that he would like the JPA board to consider allowing the summer schedule to begin prior to the June 8, 2020 board meeting if the Park announces plans to re-open before then. He also stated that having a reservation system in place is important to avoid buses reaching capacity in Merced and to avoid passengers being stranded in the Park.

Curtis Riggs commented that he is in favor of masks being required but he does not see maintaining a 6-foot distance on a bus as feasible. He agreed that a reservation system is a good idea but was concerned about how it might affect local residents who may need to use the service on a walk-up basis. He also mentioned that he has received many calls from Park employees regarding their return to work and suggested modifying the existing runs to better accommodate them.

Director Silveira commented that the JPA board could hold a special meeting to address possibly starting the summer schedule prior to the June 8, 2020 meeting, if necessary. He also asked where funding would come from if YARTS is not able to collect the fares needed to break even.

Christine Chavez explained that farebox revenue makes up approximately 14% of the budget. If YARTS is not able to collect the necessary amount of farebox revenue, some decisions, such as raising fares or reducing service, would have to be made as to how cover that shortfall.

Stacie Guzman added that the figures presented are average costs and are intended to demonstrate the relationship between bus capacity and costs per passenger. They are also specific to the Hwy 140 route, so these figures will look different for the other service routes. She stated there needs to be a broader discussion about what revenue is being lost due to social distancing measure, what LTF contributions will look like from member agencies in the coming fiscal year, etc. to determine how those losses will be recovered.

Director Silveira asked why the Park's shuttle service was cancelled.

Scott Gediman replied that social distancing requirements could not be maintained on the shuttle buses.

Jamie Richardson commented that as a regular rider of YARTS, she likes the idea of a reservation system being used to book tickets and believes many Park employees would appreciate being able to reserve a guaranteed seat on the bus.

Director Smallcombe asked if Park employees who normally purchase monthly passes would find it difficult to adjust to a reservation system.

Jamie Richards responded that it would be appreciated if the reservation system could be set up to allow Park employees to make reservations for multiple days at a time since a majority of them have set schedules.

Chair Menetrey agreed that a reservation system is critical to guarantee that passengers are not left stranded. He stated that the implementation of the summer schedule should be dependent on the re-opening of the Park as well as the lifting of Governor's non-essential travel ban. He also expressed concern that the costs per run figures do not reflect the true total costs since fuel expenses are not included.

Director Smallcombe asked if there was any flexibility on the two-week time frame that is needed to implement summer service.

Christine Chavez replied that the two-week time frame is needed by the contractor to coordinate their operations for summer service and re-hire drivers. That time frame is also needed by staff to update the reservation system website and release marketing materials to educate the public on how the service will be operating. She also addressed Chair Menetrey's concern about the costs per run by explaining that YARTS is not built to fully recover all its expenditures. YARTS being able to recover approximately 15% of its expenditures would determine the success of that operational year.

Curtis Riggs clarified that the two-week time frame was the original estimate on the time needed to transition to summer service, but the contractor has reduced that needed time frame to four days.

Director Smallcombe moved to provide the following direction to staff and reassess conditions and service options at the June 8, 2020 JPA board meeting:

1. Continue with the current HWY 140 winter service levels at Minimum Schedule II; and
2. Implement Social Distancing Option 2 – Half Capacity with Masks with continued reservation suspension; and
3. Delay the roll-out of summer service.

Seconded by Director Corless.

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

Noes - None

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

5. Approve Refunding Existing Reservations

Chair Menetrey asked how customers will be notified of cancelled reservations.

Christine Chavez replied that all customers with existing reservations will be sent an email explaining why the reservations are being cancelled, informing them that new reservations will be available soon and letting them know we will contact them when those reservations go live so they have the first opportunity to schedule new reservations.

Director McDaniel moved to direct staff to issue refunds to the remaining pre-COVID-19 reservations through October 2020 in the amount of \$8,514.

Seconded by Director Smallcombe.

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

Noes - None

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

6. Management Report

Stacie Guzman asked for the board to consider keeping June 8, 2020 as the next board meeting date. She understands why the board might request to hold a special meeting before that date, but staff need time to analyze all the data that is coming in so they can provide the board with the most accurate information possible.

7. Board Member Remarks

Director McDaniel commended Christine Chavez for her thoroughness in presenting information to the board.

Director Silveira asked if Park employees would still be able to receive discounted rates using the reservation system.

Christine Chavez explained that Park employees are issued TRANServe cards by the National Park Service that they use to purchase their passes. They will be able to use those cards to purchase advanced reservations on the system.

Stacie Guzman added that staff is working to determine how best to maximize farebox revenue with limited seating capacity.

Director Silveira commented that YARTS was able to provide discounted rates in the past to encourage more ridership. Now with limited seating capacity, those discounted rates may have to be reconsidered in order to maximize farebox revenue.

8. Adjournment

THERE BEING NO FURTHER BUSINESS OF THE YARTS JOINT POWERS AUTHORITY, THE MEETING WAS ADJOURNED AT 2:59 p.m.