



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

**DATE**

**Monday, February 8, 2021**

The YARTS Capital and Financial Needs of the Yosemite Area Regional Transportation System (YARTS) Joint Powers Authority (JPA) Workshop was held on Monday, February 8, 2021 via teleconference/videoconference and was called to order by Chair Silveira at 1:06 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Scott Silveira, Merced County Supervisor, Chair  
 Bob Gardner, Mono County Supervisor, Vice Chair  
 Stacy Corless, Mono County Supervisor  
 Daron McDaniel, Merced County Supervisor  
 Miles Menetrey, Mariposa County Supervisor  
 Rosemarie Smallcombe, Mariposa County Supervisor  
 Rey Leon, Mayor, City of Huron  
 Michelle Roman, Mayor, City of Kingsburg  
 Tom Wheeler, Madera County Supervisor

**OTHERS PRESENT**

Peggy Arnest, Fresno Council of Governments  
 Tony Boren, Fresno Council of Governments  
 Denise Demery, VIA Adventures  
 Jim Donovan, Yosemite National Park  
 Michael Draper, Mono County Local Transportation Commission  
 Kathleen Haff, Supervisor, Tuolumne County  
 Sandy Hogan, Private Citizen, Mono County  
 Gerry Le Francois, Mono County Local Transportation Commission  
 Selena McKinney, LSC Transportation Consultants, Inc.  
 Phil Moores, Eastern Sierra Transit Authority  
 Curtis Riggs, VIA Adventures  
 Gordon Shaw, LSC Transportation Consultants, Inc.  
 Tyler Summersett, Tuolumne County Transportation Council

**STAFF PRESENT**

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

## **1. Roll Call**

Chair Silveira led the introductions and called the workshop to order at 1:06 p.m.

## **2. Public Comment**

Phil Moores introduced himself as the Executive Director of the Eastern Sierra Transit Authority and stated he was available to answer any questions.

## **3. National Park Service Update**

Jim Donovan presented the National Park Service update in Kathleen Morse's absence. He reported that wind and snow events damaged fifteen buildings in Wawona and destroyed a comfort station in Mariposa Grove. Many roads in Yosemite were closed due to fallen trees, but all roads are now open except for Glacier Point Road between Wawona and Chinquapin. Tuolumne Meadows received 82 inches of snow and Park staff anticipate there will be downed trees blended in with the snow when Park staff clear Tioga Road in the spring. The Park concessionaire continues to face staffing challenges due to the pandemic. As a result, the Yosemite Valley shuttles will not operate this spring or summer. However, the Park does intend to operate the Mariposa Grove shuttle between mid-May and November.

At this time, Directors Wheeler, Menetrey and Smallcombe inquired about the status of reopening Highway 41. After a brief discussion, it was determined that Highway 41 would remain closed past Wawona to all but administrative staff, contractors and residents until February 11, conditions permitting.

## **4. Fresno Council of Governments Update**

Stacie Guzman introduced Tony Boren as the Executive Director of the Fresno Council of Governments.

Tony Boren provided a brief history on the Highway 41 service and its funding sources. He explained that the current funding sources will allow the service to operate this year and possibly next year. He expressed that the service has not been all it was initially hoped to be, and ridership is not where it needs to be to sustain the service. For these reasons, the Fresno Council of Governments Board does not have any interest in providing additional funding to continue operating the service.

## **5. Workshop: YARTS Capital and Financial Needs**

Christine Chavez invited Gordon Shaw and Selena McKinney from LSC Transportation Consultants, Inc. to lead the workshop.

Gordon Shaw opened the workshop by discussing the need to purchase buses, the funding needed to purchase those buses, and whether those buses should be battery electric or diesel.

Director Smallcombe asked what the cost of ownership is for battery electric buses versus diesel buses and whether a phased in approach should be taken while also considering the goals and objectives of partners such as the National Park Service.

Stacie Guzman replied that staff has worked to find a balance between what the funding partners want to achieve and what YARTS wants to achieve. However, the priority has now shifted to preserving as much service as possible. YARTS may need to reduce service to lower operating costs so it can recover its capital reserve. If YARTS can do one last round of diesel bus replacements, it can recover those reduced operating hours more quickly. Purchasing diesel buses would also provide staff time to develop a thorough electrification plan that addresses issues such as charging infrastructure.

Director Leon asked to see more data on carbon prevention for diesel versus electric vehicles and the results of the electric vehicle test that was conducted on Highway 140. He also suggested contacting the Air Resources Board to determine if they can provide any assistance.

Directors Menetrey and Corless agreed with Stacie Guzman's recommendation that YARTS take a hybrid approach to purchasing buses. Acquiring diesel buses one last time will allow time for concerns such as charging infrastructure and how electric buses will perform on the routes to be addressed.

Director Smallcombe asked if staff has reached out to Chris Lee from the California State Association of Counties (CSAC) for his ideas on how assistance might be obtained from the state and federal levels.

Stacie Guzman replied that MCAG has a federal legislative advocacy program called OneVoice and staff has proposed YARTS be included in the legislative package. However, tapping into existing resources is a great idea and she will put some thought into it.

Christine Chavez added that an additional challenge is that YARTS does not own land where infrastructure can be installed. The 5339(b) grant is not a zero-emission grant, so it could be worth asking if Caltrans and the Federal Transit Authority to modify the grant to allow for the purchase of diesel buses instead of electric buses. This would provide staff the opportunity to come up with an electrification plan to determine where infrastructure can be placed and which type of electric buses will perform best on the YARTS routes.

Phil Moores commented that the Eastern Sierra Transit Authority is partnering with CALSTART to apply for a Sustainable Transportation Planning grant through CalTrans and to assist with developing their zero-emissions transition plan. Some other issues to consider when transitioning to electric buses include the cleanliness of the electricity and the maintenance of new electric vehicles. He also suggested researching what it would cost to borrow money through loans, considering purchasing smaller buses and operating shorter runs, and determining whether rehabilitation of existing buses might be an option.

Director Wheeler agreed with Phil Moore's comments regarding the how cleanly the electricity is being produced. He also mentioned that he has tried for years to convince Madera County to join the YARTS JPA as a full voting member. Now that FCOG has decided not to no longer fund the Highway 41 service, he will push once again for Madera County to join the YARTS JPA to try to preserve that route.

At this time, Stacie Guzman requested that the Chair transition to discussing service alternatives.

Gordon Shaw presented service alternatives to reduce operating costs and provide local capital funding.

Chair Silveira asked Stacie Guzman to state exactly what is needed from this conversation so he and the other Directors can comment accordingly.

Stacie Guzman summarized the points that were made in the conversation so far, including pursuing diesel buses and providing staff the opportunity to draft an electrification plan and the interest from Director Wheeler in adding Madera County to the YARTS JPA. She also requested for the Board to provide feedback on the proposed service alternatives and whether staff is generally heading down the right path in trying to deal with these challenges.

Director Gardner supported delaying the purchase of electric buses as additional funding opportunities, better pricing of vehicles and improving technology might all be available in the near future. He also supported considering service reductions to help generate capital and stated that it would be very helpful for Madera County to join the YARTS JPA.

Director Corless supported the direction staff is going in and suggested operating the Highway 120/395 service from July 1 instead of June 15.

Director McDaniel supported staff's direction and commented that he believes funding for buses and infrastructure will be made available in the future.

Director Menetrey supported exploring Phil Moore's idea of utilizing smaller buses to operate shorter runs. He also appreciated Director Wheeler for offering to speak with Madera County about joining the YARTS JPA. There is a lot of potential ridership with the new hotels that are being constructed along Highway 41, so it would be beneficial to keep that route operating. He agreed with reducing non-productive runs as well.

Director Roman stated that the Fresno Airport is a hub for travelers from all over the world who are looking to visit Yosemite and having the Highway 41 service available to transport those travelers is important. She suggested looking at ridership data to determine if keeping that route operating is feasible. She also mentioned that a potential new contractor may already have buses that YARTS needs.

Director Wheeler appreciated everyone's comments and suggested exploring the possibility of operating a route from Oakhurst to Yosemite. He also stated it is important to consider the impact on employees when deciding to reduce service.

Stacie Guzman clarified for Director Roman that the current contractor does provide buses. Additionally, YARTS will bid out for a new contract that begins November 1, 2022 but that does not necessarily mean YARTS will have a new contractor.

Curtis Riggs explained that VIA Adventures, Inc. acquired buses for YARTS to operate the Highway 41 service as YARTS did not have the financial resources to purchase them. There might be an opportunity for YARTS to purchase those buses from VIA at a substantially reduced price to get YARTS through the near term. There also might be an opportunity to purchase some of VIA's property to establish a separate YARTS facility.

Phil Moore commented that hydrogen fueling could also be an option to consider.

Director Leon added that he sits on the California Energy Commission Investment Advisory Committee and \$115 million in funding was recently approved for hydrogen infrastructure.

Director Smallcombe supported staff discussing the option of purchasing buses from Curtis Riggs. She mentioned that PG&E has some programs available for charging infrastructure inclusive of buses. She also asked what the plan is for public engagement if service reductions were to occur.

Chair Silveira agreed with reducing service to eliminate underutilized runs. He also agreed that purchasing one more round of diesel buses makes financial sense and allows time for any issues that often occur with new technology to be worked out before YARTS purchases electric buses.

## **15. Adjournment**

**THERE BEING NO FURTHER BUSINESS OF THE YARTS JOINT POWERS AUTHORITY, THE WORKSHOP WAS ADJOURNED AT 3:09 p.m.**