



**Yosemite Area Regional Transportation System (YARTS)
Authority Advisory Committee
MINUTES**

DATE

Wednesday, February 3, 2021

The regular meeting of the Yosemite Area Regional Transportation System (YARTS) Authority Advisory Committee (AAC) was held Wednesday, February 3, 2021 via teleconference/videoconference and was called to order by Chair O'Donel-Browne at 1:35 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Candy O'Donel-Browne, Mariposa County Economic Development Corp., Chair
Karen Baker, Merced Regional Airport, Vice Chair
Jim Donovan, Yosemite National Park
Dana Hallett, Private Citizen, Mariposa County
Lisa Mayo, Tuolumne County Visitors Bureau
Matthew McClain, Private Citizen, Mono County
Jeff Simpson, Mono County Economic Development
Steve Smallcombe, Upper Merced River Watershed Council
Hilda Sousa, Caltrans, District 10 for Tom Dumas
Nanette Villegas, Merced Mall

MEMBERS ABSENT

Jonathan Farrington, Yosemite/Mariposa County Tourism Bureau
Moses Stites, Fresno Rural Transit
Terri Peresan, Mariposa County Department of Community Services

OTHERS PRESENT

Peggy Arnest, Fresno Council of Governments
Denise Demery, VIA Adventures
Michael Draper, Mono County LTC
Gerry LeFrancois, Mono County LTC
Selena McKinney, LSC Transportation Consultants, Inc.
Gordon Shaw, LSC Transportation Consultants, Inc.

STAFF PRESENT

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

1. Roll Call

Chair O'Donel-Browne led the introductions and called the meeting to order at 1:35 p.m. She also explained that the cancellation of the January 6, 2021 AAC meeting was due to the events taking place at the Capitol building that day.

2. Public Comment

None.

3. Minutes of the October 7, 2020 YARTS Authority Advisory Committee regular meeting

No questions.

Jeff Simpson moved to approve the minutes from the October 7, 2020 YARTS Authority Advisory Committee regular meeting.

Seconded by Steve Smallcombe.

Ayes – Members Baker, Donovan, Hallett, Mayo, McClain, O'Donel-Browne, Simpson, Smallcombe, Sousa, Villegas

Noes – None

Absent – Members Farrington, Peresan, Stites

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

4. Minutes of the January 11, 2021 YARTS Joint Powers Authority regular meeting (to be approved at the April 12, 2021 JPA meeting)

No questions.

5. Discussion: YARTS Strategic Plan – Current Conditions Update and Discussion

Christine Chavez introduced Gordon Shaw to lead the discussion.

Gordon Shaw gave a presentation with an overview of the Strategic Plan Working Paper and posed key strategic questions regarding capital needs, fleet expansion and service changes.

Christine Chavez noted that the Strategic Plan will help answer fundamental questions regarding the YARTS service when the time comes to bid out for an operations and maintenance contractor in November 2022.

Jim Donovan asked for a summary of why YARTS is not eligible to apply for Federal Transit Administration (FTA) funds.

Gordon Shaw replied that YARTS is not eligible to receive federal capital funding directly because it is designated as a Joint Powers Authority (JPA) rather than a transit district or county. Instead, member counties of the JPA can receive federal funding that they can distribute to YARTS. However, local match funding is a bigger issue for YARTS than federal funding.

Christine Chavez added that the Transit Joint Powers Authority for Merced County receives direct apportionments of funding based on reported factors including population. Since YARTS is not directly tied to an agency, it cannot receive an allocation of funds because it is not tied to a concentrated population to which it provides service.

6. Discussion: Evaluation of Role of AAC in accordance with YARTS Bylaws

Christine Chavez invited Chair O'Donel-Browne to lead the discussion.

Chair O'Donel-Browne explained that this item came about as a result of some AAC members expressing concern that their input is not being taken into consideration.

Steve Smallcombe commented that one of the concerns is the AAC meetings contain many information only items, which makes it seem that the AAC is simply reviewing items prior to the JPA meetings. He added that the Bylaws state the AAC should be advising the JPA, but he asked whether the AAC should also be advising staff. He also questioned what the communication mechanism should be between the AAC and the JPA.

Chair O'Donel-Browne noted that the AAC offers a history of the YARTS service that the JPA does not necessarily have due to turnover in County Supervisor positions. She commented that YARTS is being run more professionally today than when the service first began and suggested evaluating the necessity of the AAC. She also added that she has concerns about running a bus line without having tourism industry experts available to provide information.

Stacie Guzman asked if the AAC would be interested in adding this discussion again to the meeting agenda in April so the AAC members who are not present at this meeting can provide their input. She also noted that the COVID-19 pandemic and several changes in staff over the past year could have resulted in some disconnects or miscommunications, but it was never the intention to exclude the AAC. She suggested providing the AAC with discussion topics a quarter ahead of the meetings so AAC members have ample time to provide input. She also proposed adding a discussion item about the timing of the electrification of the YARTS fleet to the April meeting agenda.

Steve Smallcombe agreed with Stacie Guzman's comments and suggested forming subcommittees to have discussions outside of the formal AAC meetings.

Chair O'Donel-Browne complimented staff for their hard work and ability to adapt to the difficulties of the past year.

7. National Park Service Update

Jim Donovan reported that there was a significant wind event that occurred on January 19, 2021 and 15 semi-mature giant sequoias were lost in the Mariposa Grove. The restroom that was opened in 2018 at the Mariposa Grove was also destroyed. Portable toilets will be available for visitors until it is rebuilt. The Park does intend to operate the Mariposa Grove shuttle this summer, but not the Yosemite Valley shuttles due to concessionaire staffing issues. Tioga Road will likely have a difficult reopening this season due to heavy snow fall and possible downed trees caused by the wind event, but the goal is to have it open by Memorial Day weekend. The Park will begin operating under a day-use reservation system again beginning February 8, 2021 and is expected to last at least through the end of the month. Many visitors are expected in February due to the Horsetail Falls phenomenon, so the Park felt it was prudent to reestablish the day-use system to avoid overcrowding.

8. Transit Manager Update

Christine Chavez reported that Tuolumne County is on track to become an official voting member of the JPA by April. Staff is in the process of finalizing summer service schedules and calculating service hours for the annual agreements. Since the Yosemite Valley shuttles will not operate this summer, staff recommends continuing with current COVID precautions including limited capacity and a primarily reservation-based system. Staff is also in the process of finalizing an amendment with Amtrak to provide them a reduced rate. Amtrak has had to cut a number of trains due to the COVID pandemic which has affected their ability to contribute to the agreement they previously executed with YARTS. Additionally, staff is considering opportunities for the Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP) grant that previously provided free days to the Park. Since that project is no longer eligible, staff is thinking of other projects for which they can apply for the grant. Lastly, staff is working to promote free tickets for Merced County and Mariposa County residents which is funded through a grant from the Low Carbon Transit Operations Program (LCTOP).

9. Member Remarks

None.

THERE BEING NO FURTHER BUSINESS OF THE YARTS AUTHORITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE, THE MEETING WAS ADJOURNED AT 2:44 P.M.