

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

My name is Max Stauffer

I am the president of the Yosemite Sierra Visitor's bureau, the lead tourism agency for Madera County, located in Oakhurst.

I also served on the technical citizen's advisory committee for YARTS.

Our bureau has a deep concern over your plans to operate a taxpayer funded transit system to and through our community.

We recognize the similarity to YARTS, which serves Mariposa and Mono Counties. As you may know, in 1999, by board action, the counties of Madera and Tuolumne withdrew from YARTS. Both the Oakhurst Chamber of Commerce and the Yosemite Sierra Visitors Bureau supported this action and voted not to support YARTS. These positions have not changed. In 2007, Madera Board Chairman Vern Moss reiterated Madera County's position in opposition. Oakhurst chamber president Angelo Pizelo did the same this week.

We understand that YARTS is a viable contender to administer the proposed route.

With the goal of totally eliminating private vehicle access to Yosemite Valley, the 1980 General Management Plan states: "As additional bus service from outlying areas on the periphery of the park and in gateway communities becomes feasible, all day visitors and ultimately all overnight visitors will be able to enjoy the Valley without their cars."

Another quote, this from the 1997 Valley Implementation Plan says to "develop a public transportation system that would allow the eventual elimination of private vehicles from the valley". Your proposed transit plan would help accomplish this goal. National Park Service plans document that once a totally regional transit system is in place, the opportunity to eliminate day use parking in Yosemite Valley will exist and eventually become reality.

Park documents from 1980 to the present state that the valley car ban continues to be part of National Park Service planning for Yosemite. This would be devastating to the economies of the gateway communities on the Hwy 41 corridor. We strongly believe that the vast majority of visitors to Yosemite prefer to drive their personal vehicles. If bussing became mandatory, many visitors would opt to vacation elsewhere. Just the notion that bussing might be required has lead to many questions from potential visitors asking "can we drive into the park"?

One of the critical factors of your feasibility study is local support. Had the study interviewed our visitors bureau as suggested by Yosemite Superintendent Neubacher and Madera Supervisor Wheeler you would have discovered that there is a tremendous

amount of opposition in the mountain area to a YARTS transit system. Over the past years, petitions circulated among business owners, residents and tourists overwhelmingly supported this position. Your study assumes that auto parking will be made available at the visitor's bureau site for transit riders. If discussions had taken place with bureau staff, it would be known that the bureau plans are to rent space on Hwy 41 north of downtown Oakhurst. Parking there is limited and may be restricted to visitors to the bureau. No concrete plans are in place for a "civic center" project as described in your study.

Another critical factor is financial sustainability. After discussions with Madera Supervisor Wheeler, it was very clear that Madera County has no intention of contributing any resources to your transit plan. I believe that contributions from the National Park Service could be challenged as contributing to an unwanted service. The farebox recovery for YARTS is a mere 23% of expenses including the subsidized fares for employees. Is this a model that should be followed in this day of severe government cutbacks?

The third critical factor is ridership. At the outset, YARTS projected 220,000 one way riders. Almost 11 years later ridership is around 70,000, 40% of which are park employees. Mariposa and El Portal areas on Hwy 140 house most park employees that live outside Yosemite. According to your feasibility matrix, you would capture less than 6% of the travelers through the Hwy 41 south entrance. The Fresno airport marketing manager was quoted in the study interview that since they make money on car rentals, transit service may be in competition with their service. We believe that most tourists flying into Fresno would prefer to rent a car to travel to Yosemite. This is especially true since many people enter the park on one entrance and leave at another. It appears that your biggest potential for ridership is to the Chuckchansi Casino. The Casino already provides bus transportation for their customers.

In summary, the implications of your proposed transit system could be devastating to the tourism economy of the 41 corridor and require a huge tax funded investment. Before making any final decisions, our bureau encourages you to further investigate presumed local support by interviewing citizens on both sides of the issue. The future planning for Yosemite Valley and its effect on day use parking especially needs to be investigated as well as the true economic feasibility of this transit system. The Yosemite Sierra Visitor's bureau stands ready to provide assistance whenever needed.

