

## **Yosemite buses attracting local riders, tourists**

By SCOTT PESZNECKER -Merced Sun-Star

[Modesto Bee, Tuesday, Aug. 3, 2004](#)

The 4-year-old public bus system linking Yosemite National Park with Merced, Mariposa and Mono counties is experiencing its most successful year ever.

In the first six months of this year, 27,531 people used the Yosemite Area Regional Transportation System to get from Merced and Mariposa counties to Yosemite. That was up from the 25,343 people who rode the buses in the first half of last year.

A round-trip ride on YARTS between Merced and Yosemite costs up to \$20 per rider and takes about 2½ hours -- about an hour longer than driving.

Like other public bus systems, YARTS relies heavily on taxpayer money to continue operations. But the system recovered 25 percent of its operating expenses through fare box revenue last year.

"We felt pretty good about that," said Dick Whittington, spokesman for the Merced County Association of Governments.

YARTS buses travel between Yosemite Valley and Merced and Mariposa year-round. In the summer, when Tioga Pass is open, the buses connect Yosemite Valley and Mono County, with stops in the Tuolumne Meadows area.

The program costs about \$800,000 annually and is financed mostly by federal transit money.

In addition to busing park tourists, Whittington said YARTS is popular among Yosemite National Park employees. Also, Mariposa residents take the buses to and from work and school in Merced.

[The system helps cut down on air pollution and reduces wear and tear on the roads.](#)

"The 50,000 people who rode YARTS last year didn't drive their cars into the park," Whittington said.

YARTS has one more added benefit -- it promotes tourism in Merced.

After spending a week in Los Angeles on a visit from England, Ian and Katryna Ruddick took a bus to Merced on Monday so they could catch a YARTS ride to Yosemite. During their daylong stop, they walked and shopped around downtown.

Ian Ruddick said it would have been easier to take one bus from Los Angeles to Yosemite.

"But we quite liked stopping in Merced," he said.

**More information about YARTS is available online, [www.yarts.com](http://www.yarts.com).**

## **Council to hear acquisition input Hearings focus on 140-, 150-acre annexations**

By Anita Stackhouse-Hite, Staff writer

[Tulare Advance-Register, Monday, Aug. 2, 2004](#)

Two large annexations are scheduled for public hearings during Tuesday's City Council meeting.

If approved by the council, the two annexations would add more than 280 acres to the city.

The first annexation up for discussion is 140 acres south of Bardsley Road between Mooney Boulevard and Oakmore Street.

City planners met with 10 residents who live near the Bardsley Road project in July to hear concerns. Some were for the project; others were against it.

The second annexation is 150 acres north of Tulare, west of Mooney Boulevard between Cartmill Road and Avenue 252 (East Pacific), is also scheduled for discussion.

Referred to as East Tulare No. 27 Reorganization and North Tulare No. 26 Reorganization, respectively, if approved by the council, the annexation process will begin immediately.

In the case of the Avenue 252 project, the land-use designation along Mooney Boulevard will need to change to include commercial and single family and multifamily residential dwellings.

Thirteen residents near the Avenue 252 project in June signed a petition protesting the annexation.

Residents, in part, stated they purchased their Tulare County properties, mostly one-acre parcels, so they could live in the "country" and have animals. Excessive noise was another complaint they registered.

If approved, the next step encompasses environmental studies, [including air and water quality](#), biological resources and the impact of increased traffic.

## **Cleaner air for kids**

### **Rules that shut down idling school buses should have the force of law.**

[Fresno Bee, Editorial, Tuesday, Aug. 3, 2004](#)

Rules governing how long school bus drivers may idle their engines near schools have been in effect for about a year now. A bill in the Assembly would give those rules the force of law. It's a good idea.

There are no statistics yet on air quality improvement in the vicinity of schools because of the rule, but the anecdotal evidence is clear. State air officials say they have received fewer complaints about noise and exhaust since the rules were put in place.

What's more, there is little or no opposition to the bill from school officials who must enforce it.

So why fix it if it isn't broken? Because a state law that codifies the practice would be harder to weaken than simple rules issued by a state agency, in this case the California Air Resources Board.

The problem is real. The state has more than 26,000 school buses, most of them with diesel engines. And they tend to be older, which means dirtier, even when kept in tune. Budget woes that afflict the state's schools may mean, in some cases, that needed maintenance is being postponed or eliminated. Diesel exhaust is full of tiny particulate matter that works its way deep into the lungs, causing cardiovascular and respiratory illness.

Children -- who are, of course, found in great numbers around school buses -- are much more susceptible than adults.

Assembly Bill 2644, by Assembly Member Jenny Oropeza, D-Long Beach, just makes sense. This should be one the Legislature passes easily. We've thought that before, though, so keep your eyes open.