MARIPOSA COUNTY
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

AGENDA ACTION FORM

DATE: March 11, 1997

DEPARTMENT: Visitors Bureau
BY: Steve Hayes
PHONE: 966-2456

AGENDA ITEM NO.: 9-8

RECOMMENDED ACTION AND JUSTIFICATION: (Policy Item: Yes ☑ No ☐)
Recommend to the Mariposa County Board of Supervisors the Mariposa County Visitors Bureau Report (to follow) and possible discussion regarding the National Park Service fast-tracking of the Day Use Reservation System, provide opportunity to receive public input and determine if the County should prepare a policy statement regarding the fast-tracking of the Day Use Reservation System in the form of letters and or a resolution.

The Visitors Bureau is preparing a report on the possible effects of fast-tracking the Day Use Reservation System which will be ready for the Board’s review no latter than 3/10/97.

A day use reservation system may be enacted in the future which could be part of a comprehensive transportation solution package for the Yosemite region. This potential future action should be evaluated on its own merit and its contribution to transportation solution at the time it may be proposed. It is the fast-tracking of the Day Use Reservation System which is the subject of this report and recommended action.

BACKGROUND AND HISTORY OF BOARD ACTIONS:
A preliminary report was presented to the Board of Supervisors on 2/18/97 under the flood impact agenda item. On 2/25 the Board of Supervisors approved by consensus that the Visitors Bureau prepare a report and return to the Board on 3/11/97. A related action regarding emergency enhancements of the County public transit system is scheduled for 3/4/97. If that action is approved it may provide the National Park Service with an alternative to fast-tracking the Day Use Reservation System for the 1997 season.

LIST ALTERNATIVES AND CONSEQUENCES OF NEGATIVE ACTION:
Request staff to prepare letters or resolution stating the County’s position regarding the National Park Service fast tracking the Day Use Reservation System.

There are no known negative consequences of a policy statement regarding the fast-tracking of the Day Use Reservation System. A County policy would assist staff to be consistent with the Board’s determination.

No action.

COSTS: (☐) Not Applicable
A. Budgeted current FY $____
B. Total anticipated costs $____
C. Required additional funding $____
D. Internal transfers $____

SOURCE: (☐) 4/5ths Vote Required
A. Unanticipated revenues $____
B. Reserve for contingencies $____
C. Source description: Balance in Reserve for Contingencies, if approved: $____

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS:
List the attachments and number the pages consecutively:

CLERK’S USE ONLY:
RES. NO.: 9-7 - 96
Vote: Ayes: Absent: Present: 4
Noes: _______________ _______________
Approved: ________ Denied: ________
Minutes Order Attached (☐) No action necessary

The foregoing instrument is a correct copy of the original on file in this office.
Date: _______________

ATTEST: MARGIE WILLIAMS, Clerk of the Board
County of Mariposa, State of California
By: _______________
Deputy

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER’S RECOMMENDATION:
This item is on agenda as:
(☐) Recommended
(☐) Not Recommended
(☐) For Policy Determination
(☐) Submitted with Comment

Comment: _______________

A.O. Initials: _______________

Action Form Revised 5/92
MARIPOSA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
MINUTE ORDER

TO: STEVE HAYES, VISITORS BUREAU DIRECTOR
FROM: MARGIE WILLIAMS, Clerk of the Board
SUBJECT: DAY USE RESERVATION SYSTEM

THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF MARIPOSA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA,

ADOPTED THIS Order on March 11, 1997

ACTION AND VOTE:

B) Request for Board Resolution/Position Clarification Regarding the National Park Fast-Tracking of the Day Use Reservation System (Continued from 2/25/97)

BOARD ACTION: The following persons provided input:
- Jerry Fischer/Yosemite Motels, stated he felt there are four issues facing the industry: 1) day use reservation (DUR) system and its impacts; 2) Highway 140 access and gate fees; 3) status of access for Highway 140 after September -- stated he feels the Board should take a position of what process would best serve the community; and 4) the ongoing relationship with the Park should be strengthened.
- Neal O’donel-Browne, KOA Campground, stated he supports the comments provided by Jerry Fischer; advised that they are not accepting reservations currently because they cannot tell their customers what is happening with regards to access to the Park; existing reservations are being canceled; stated he feels the issue of access to the Park by bus is important; he feels citizens need to be involved in what is happening; and stated he feels the focus should be on getting results.
- Harold Wesley/Yosemite Westgate and Tourism Advisory Board member, asked about the results from the meeting held last week with the Park Superintendent and the Board subcommittee -- report was given later during this discussion.
- Ann Sparks/Chamber of Commerce, advised of the Chamber’s letter to the Park Superintendent opposing the DUR system, and requesting that the Chamber be made a part of the process before any system is implemented.
- Jerry Fischer responded to Supervisor Reilly’s question relative to the preferred option for Highway 140 access, advising that he felt that a two hour period in the morning for entrance and a period in the evening for exiting is preferred.
- Candy O’donel-Browne, KOA Campground, noted that longer afternoon/evening hours would allow people to come to Mariposa and patronize establishments; and expressed concern with the unknowns relative to access to the Park.
- Supervisor Balmain asked that other routes to the Park be considered (i.e., Highway 120) when Highway 140 is not accessible.
- Supervisors Parker and Reilly reported on their meeting last week with Superintendent Griffin and advised that it was a good meeting; however, issues are still
unresolved; the Park has contracted with a traffic consultant to look at the transit system within their confines, they are proposing an entrance fee for those using public transportation of $6/person not to exceed $12/family, tour bus fee of $100 for this year and $300 for 1998, and effective March 15th a vehicle fee of $20; the Park proposes that staging areas tie in with Yosemite Concession Services; the DUR system was not discussed in any detail; with regards to Highway 140 -- the Park is proposing a 20-minute window period at 6:30 a.m. for up to 10 buses, with 2 to 3 buses designated for employees, and returning at 6:00 p.m., the Park intends to have Highway 140 open May 23rd to September 2nd for two lanes of unrestricted travel, and then close it again in September with a two-hour (6:30 to 8:30) window period for travel in the morning and a return period in the evening while they are working on a permanent fix of the seven bad curves/areas, and continue with this schedule until May 29, 1998.

- Steve Hayes reviewed recommendations, and discussion was held.

- (M)Parker, (S)Balmain, Res. 97-76 adopted: 1) opposing the fast-track implementation of the DUR system in the immediate future and offering to work with the Park Service for future implementation so that it can be a viable project; 2) supporting an incentive for public transit, such as a $2.00 entrance fee per person; 3) taking a position that Highway 140 should be open to all traffic by use of a pilot car system every day of the week for a two-hour period in the morning and evening, with a suggestion of keeping the Highway open until 8:00 a.m.; 4) lobbying for long-range funding for a transit and transportation system, whether it be in support of YARTS or another mechanism; and 5) requesting that a meeting be scheduled with the Park Service officials that have the authority to make decisions and provide answers with County representatives, our Congressman and State Senators or their representatives, and with representatives from the lodging industry and Yosemite Concession Services and VIA Adventures. Further discussion was held relative to asking that the Park participate in the transit funding and on-going participation and authority of the Board's subcommittee. Ann Sparks asked that the Chamber of Commerce be included in the meeting process. Jan Hamilton, Board of Realtors, stated she supports the proposed action. Motion was amended, agreeable with maker and second, to clarify in item 3 that this period commences March 15th and continues until Highway 140 is open to unrestricted traffic; item 4 was amended to state that the Board resolves to continue to support public transit alternatives; and item 5 was amended to include our legislative delegation/Ayes: Unanimous. Supervisor Reilly requested that a letter be sent to Superintendent Griffin thanking her for the meeting last week and advising of this further action taken as a result of that meeting, with the letter to be copied as appropriate -- Board concurred. Further consideration of the subcommittee's on-going participation and authority was continued to be scheduled on a future agenda. Ann Sparks asked for clarification of the motion with regards to participation by the Chamber of Commerce. It was noted that no meeting has been scheduled at this time.

cc: Supervisor Reilly, Board Subcommittee
    Supervisor Parker, Board Subcommittee
    Janet Hogan, County Administrative Officer
    Jeff Green, County Counsel
    Ed Johnson, Planning Director
    Mike Edwards, Public Works Director
    File
DATE: 3/4/97

TO: MARIPOSA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
Patti A. Reilly, District I
Doug Balmain, District II
Robert C. Stewart, District III
Garry R. Parker, District IV
Bob Pickard, District V

FROM: Stephen Hayes, Director


Background Summary:

Yosemite National Park has indicated previously that a Day Use Reservation System would be forthcoming. Yosemite National Park (YNP) personnel had indicated that the Day Use Reservation System (DUR) would be included in the Valley Implementation Plan release planned for the Spring of 1997 and consequently available for public review and comment at that time.

A release from YNP describing the DUR system is attached (page #5.) The lastest word from YNP is on page #12-13, an excerpt from the YNP, DAILY REPORT, 3/3/97.

Fast-tracking the DUR system rather than the concept of a DUR system is the primary subject of this report.

Summary of the Stated Yosemite National Park Rationale:

Yosemite National Park personnel have communicated that the rationale for implementing the DUR system for the coming season is due to flood impacts. Specifically, YNP personnel have expressed a concern that coupled with repairs and construction the YNP sewer and roads would not support the peak season visitorship. The need expressed by YNP personnel seems to range from having a system in place in case of an incidental failure of roads or septic system, to an uncertainty of the entire infrastructure. Further, YNP staff have indicated that the DUR is needed due to the private vehicle capacity that YNP plans to implement for the following season. A maximum of 5,100 private day use vehicles will be allowed into YNP when all areas of the park are accessible the starting threshold has been estimated by YNP personnel to be about 3,000. The tighter limitations could be in effect longer than usual due to the large snow pack and unknown damage on Tioga Pass Road.
Analysis of Yosemite National Park Rationale:

The Yosemite National Park rationale for the DUR system appears to be well intentioned. However, the fast-tracking of the DUR system unduly restricts the American public and international visitors, does not ensure public safety, nor does it ensure that the resources or infrastructure will be unaffected by peak visitation.

YNP has cited a survey which indicates that a large percentage (83%) of Californian’s are in favor a day use reservation system (pages 6-11). This survey sample is reportedly from ‘voters.’ This alone indicates that the sample for the survey was not random. The number of people surveyed does not appear to be a large enough sample given the lack of a purely random sample. In addition the reported standard deviation is unusually high. The survey has some questionable statistical validity.

DKS Associates, the consultant recently hired by the Yosemite Area Transportation System, a system supported by YNP and with concurrence from YNP staff writes in their proposal, “Past studies have examined a reservations system as a possible solution. Such a system has potential benefits, particularly during busy holiday periods. Still, such a system can be problematic unless another way of reaching the Park is available.” A DUR system may have long term benefits as part of well planned regional transportation solution such as is underway with YARTS (Yosemite Area Regional Transportation Strategy.) However, no matter when it is implemented it will have impacts on gateway communities and travelers.

Estimated Impacts:

There are many short term and long term impacts that will affect the Mariposa County Economy. A short term impact is likely to be worst than the flood impact. Most people can accept the random acts of Nature in inconveniencing their travel plans. However, when the government is part to their inconvenience the frustration is more likely to be translated into writing off Yosemite as a destination alternative. Currently the Mariposa County Visitors Center receives from 30-50 individuals on Saturdays and Sundays that do not know Yosemite is closed. Imagine how many more visitors will arrive here and not know about the reservation system.

If the fast-tracking of this important piece of the transportation solution causes it to die a pre-mature death then we may loose this as a future option.

At minimum the economic impact of the fast-tracked reservation system is estimated to be 15-20 percent by local lodging establishments because this is their normal non-advance reservation business. The economic impact to other segments of the hospitality industry would approximate the 15-20% anticipated losses of the lodging businesses.

Alternatives to Fast-Tracking the Day Use Reservation System:

- Restricting Employee Driving/Parking in the Park
- Enhanced Public Transit that is supported by real incentives for development and use
- Though not preferred and thorough communication with all gateway communities should be conducted by YNP before implementing - use the current system of restricting traffic on peak weekends when and if there is a need.
• Utilize campgrounds that will not be rebuilt for temporary parking for this season. The park has indicated that repairs in the park will take four years consequently temporary use for visitor temporary parking rather than construction staging might be an option.
• Since a large portion of camping will not be available in the Valley and since 350-400 lodging units in the Valley may not be available this may eliminate the need for fast-tracking the DUR for this season. Additionally, the traffic normally attributed to camping and Valley lodging will be absent as well.

Current Visitors Bureau Position:

The actions taken by Yosemite National Park regarding the apparent fast-tracking of the Day Use Reservation System are uncharacteristic of the overall efforts for communication and concern for the surrounding region that the YNP administration has recently promoted. The efforts of YNP to respond quickly in the repair of infrastructure, open areas of the park as quickly as possible and to release information regarding alternative recreational opportunities in the region is commendable and indicative of the overall inclusive tendency of the YNP administration. The apparent desire of YNP to receive public input about policies has allowed the Visitors Bureau to be generally positive about YNP policies.

The safety of visitors is a primary concern of the Visitors Bureau which actively supports the Yosemite Area Traveler Information (YATI). The mission of YATI clearly places the information and safety of regional visitors above the economic interests of the area. The Visitors Bureau looks for opportunities to communicate safety and traveling tip messages. In addition the Visitors Bureau would not support actions that led to resource degradation of YNP. However, the Visitors Bureau is also concerned about the impacts on the American public by any policy which would restrict access to their property. The impacts restricting the international admirers of YNP is also of concern to the Visitors Bureau. Some how the human benefits derived from visiting places like Yosemite must be balanced with the impacts. Perhaps a well conceived and implemented day use reservation system may aid in achieving that balance. Even though approximately 95% of Yosemite is wilderness area more can and should be done to protect the popular valley for all perpetuity. However, an ill conceived and implemented day use reservation system may cause a decline of those who currently and may in the future donate the private financial and personal resources which YNP currently depends upon to protect, restore, and interpret the resources.

The Visitors Bureau recognizes that it is important for Mariposa County to speak with one voice regarding an issue that is important by virtue of its potential impacts alone and that the Mariposa County Board of Supervisors establishes the policy and position for the County. Absent the direction of the Board, based upon the input from the local tourism industry, reports, and analysis of the potential impacts to the general public and the local economy the Visitors Bureau would oppose the fast-tracking of the DUR system.

The day use reservation system is an option that needs to be considered as part of a complete regional transportation solution. A DUR system is clearly a complicated and technical issue that will require the cooperation of a wide array of individuals and interests to be successful.
**Recommended Mariposa County Supervisor Actions:**

1) Vote and resolve to oppose the fast-track implementation of the Day Use Reservation System as proposed.

2) Resolve to continue to support public transit alternatives whether or not the DUR system is implemented in 1997.

3) Direct County Staff to prepare letters to Federal and State officials and representatives subject to approval of the CAO and Counsel:
   a) In opposition to fast-tracking the DUR system;
   b) In favor of providing significant incentives for developers and users of public transit options;
   c) Request to have input on the timing of the DUR system implementation;
   d) Request input on the design, field testing evaluation, and final implementation of the DUR system.

4) Authorize the existing Board sub-committee of Supervisors Reilly and Parker to work with the Mariposa County Tourism Advisory Council to develop a response that meets the need of the Tourism Industry to respond effectively to the fast-tracking of the DUR system should it continue to move forward. The response will most likely involve public/private mass transit. Consequently it could expedite the process if the Board authorized the Visitors Bureau Director, based upon the Board Sub-committee’s direction to prepare cost estimates, solicit bids, and develop contract(s) with the lowest responsible bidder(s) for the Board’s approval.

5) If the DUR system is not fast-tracked for 1997 it will represent significant impacts in the future when it comes up for the normal NEPA public input. Consequently the Board may wish to designate the individuals who shall represent the County in providing input to YNP staff on developing and implementation of the DUR system whenever it moves forward.
February 13, 1997

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK STATUS UPDATE

Yosemite Valley remains closed through February. As infrastructure repairs progress, a projected opening date will be announced as soon as possible.

Emergency repairs on Highway 120 are expected to be completed by noon on Saturday, February 15. At that time, Yosemite National Park will reopen to visitors through the Big Oak Flat Entrance to the Crane Flat area. There will be no access into Yosemite Valley. At Crane Flat (6192 feet), visitors can hike to the Tuolumne Grove of Big Trees, cross country ski, and snow play. The Visitor Center at the Big Oak Flat entrance will be open on weekends. There will be a $5 entrance fee charged at the Big Oak Flat entrance station.

Starting Monday, February 17, the 14-mile stretch of Highway 140 within the park which was severely damaged by winter storms will be used for restricted park employee travel only. Emergency repairs which are still underway will be halted once each morning and evening to allow buses to carry park employees to their work sites. These employees have been temporarily housed in Yosemite Valley, Yosemite West, and Wawona while they were engaged in recovery efforts. This limited opening of Highway 140 will allow workers to return home each evening. Private vehicles will not be permitted at any time on Highway 140.

Due to extensive infrastructure damage throughout Yosemite National Park, an emergency vehicle reservation system will be implemented for the summer tourist season. The system will affect day users to the park. Visitors with reservations for overnight accommodations or campgrounds will not be affected. The system is based on the number of private vehicles, not individuals. Details of the plan, the number to call for reservations, and other components will be forthcoming in the next several weeks.

The construction work currently in progress on Highway 140 is designed to provide the emergency repairs necessary to reopen the road to visitors by Memorial Day. Visitors may experience some delays when construction resumes after the Labor Day weekend.

The opening and continued use of Highway 140 by visitors may be affected by weather, spring run off, and other construction delays.
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: February 13, 1997
CONTACT: Brian Huse, (310) 839-5922 or Kevin Collins, (202) 223-6722 ext. 123

Public Supports Moving Yosemite’s Buildings Out of Harm’s Way
Poll Finds Strong Backing for Reservation System, Emergency Funding

Oakland, Calif. – More than 70% of Californians support efforts to move flood-damaged buildings and campgrounds in Yosemite National Park to safer, less ecologically sensitive areas near the edge of the park, the National Parks and Conservation Association (NPCA) announced today. "These results confirm that the Park Service has public support for its plan to return a large portion of Yosemite Valley to its natural state," NPCA Pacific Regional Director Brian Huse said. NPCA’s polling results were announced in conjunction with the release by the Park Service of a timetable for reopening Highway 140 into the park.

Early this year, a series of severe winter storms devastated Yosemite National Park, washing out roads, destroying buildings, and closing portions of the park. The effect of the flooding was magnified by the location of many park structures close to the Merced River. The Park Service had already been planning to move its facilities out of the heart of the park to more appropriate locations over the next few years. Now, however, the Park Service has the opportunity to accelerate that schedule.

In a statewide opinion poll commissioned by NPCA, 71% of Californians agreed that the Park Service should go ahead now with its plans to move the buildings, even though it might cost more and take longer to reopen some public facilities. “I think people realize that this is the best decision for the park and for visitors in the long run,” Huse said. “Returning the heart of Yosemite Valley to the condition that nature intended will make a visit to the park even more exhilarating than it is now.”

The Park Service estimates that it will cost $178 million to repair the damage done to the park by this winter’s storms. Bills to provide these emergency funds already have been introduced in Congress, and are likely to have strong public support. Polling results showed that 65% of Californians believe Congress should give the Park Service the money and the authority it needs to relocate facilities to the edge of the park.

The devastation in the park included major damage to Highway 140, one of the major routes into Yosemite. The National Park Service announced today that emergency repairs would allow the road to partially reopen by Memorial Day weekend, the traditional start of the summer season. After the high season ends on Labor Day, permanent reconstruction of the road will begin.

Because of this work, as well as other major construction projects needed to repair the flood damage, traffic into the park is expected to be worse than ever this summer. NPCA’s poll found that 83% of Californians agreed with a Park Service plan to ease congestion through a day-use reservation system that will allow only a limited number of private vehicles into the park. Shuttle buses would be available for visitors without reservations. Seventy percent of people polled said the day-use reservation system should be made permanent if it proves effective in controlling traffic and congestion.

“These poll results indicate that people are willing to risk a little personal inconvenience to help the Park Service make a visit to Yosemite more enjoyable for everyone,” Huse commented. For the poll, 811 registered California voters were interviewed by phone. The survey’s error rate is plus or minus 3.5%.

The National Parks and Conservation Association is America’s only private nonprofit citizen organization dedicated solely to protecting, preserving, and enhancing the U.S. National Park System. An association of “Citizens Protecting America’s Parks,” NPCA was founded in 1919 and today has 500,000 members.
Proposal for Transportation Planning Services

Yosemite Area Regional Transportation Strategy

Prepared for
Merced County Association of Governments and
Yosemite Area Regional Transportation Strategy Policy Board

by
DKS Associates
in association with
Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates
Dornbusch & Company, Inc.
Ed Perkins

January 1997
1. Project Understanding

OVERVIEW

Over the past decade no less than 10 studies have proposed various transportation improvement plans for the region in and around Yosemite National Park. The proposals have ranged from ridesharing to shuttles to rail to a complete ban on automobiles in the Park. One of the principal issues surrounding planning for the Park is the multitude of stakeholders that have a say in the future of this national treasure. In addition to the National Park Service and the United States Forest Service, stakeholders in the development of the region include five counties, several gateway cities, three Caltrans Districts, two federal bureaus, two air districts, and several Statewide agencies including the State Parks and the California Transportation Commission. Rounding out these stakeholders are a diverse set of environmental and commercial interests.

To consolidate planning efforts and resolve some of the most pressing transportation needs in the Yosemite region, the National Park Service allocated funding to initiate the Yosemite Area Regional Transportation Strategy (YARTS). This program is an attempt to consolidate all current transportation plans for the Park into three to five possible programs for further analysis and implementation. The current effort also brings to the table the diverse set of interests that have a say in the future of Yosemite National Park. The consultant chosen for this project must be able to produce three to five concepts that are financially and politically possible as well as environmentally and economically sound.

It is crucial that this study lead to a solid, implementable plan. During the summer of 1995, the Park was forced to limit access for seven weekends. The current visitation growth estimates suggest that most future growth will have to occur during the off-peak months with little or no growth in the number of August visitors. Most recently, the destruction of valuable transportation infrastructure brought on by this January's storms provides an opportunity to improve roadways in the region for improved transportation accessibility.

PROJECT UNDERSTANDING

Travel issues surrounding a setting of such natural beauty as Yosemite poses a different kind of transportation planning challenge. At the core of this challenge lies a range of emotions
which accompany such a place of beauty and recreation, so that ease of access to this resource becomes a major concern for both local residents and park visitors.

In approaching this challenge, DKS Associates has extensive experience in working with participants in a multi-agency environment in such complex areas as strategizing a solution for Doyle Drive within the Presidio (Golden Gate National Recreation Area) and in a number of critical travel corridors such as the Interstate 80 corridor between Sacramento and San Francisco.

We have experience in both transportation planning and intelligent transportation systems (ITS). In fact, DKS and Nelson\Nygaard participated in the Yosemite Area Traveller Information (YATI) project. We have also developed early deployment plans for ITS solutions for places as diverse as Portland, Oregon; the San Francisco Bay Area; Las Vegas; and Hartford, Connecticut. We understand the increasing intertwined relationships between these two areas in the project.

DKS is familiar with air quality issues. DKS has led many multi-disciplinary teams in major environmental impact analyses for EIR and EIS documents where air quality issues have been important considerations. The non-attainment status of the San Joaquin Valley Air Basin is an important consideration in evaluating alternative transportation strategies. Proposed alternatives need to reduce VMT and cold starts for gasoline driven automobiles. Proposals that address alternative modes for park related work trips as well as tourist travel can contribute to meeting air quality mandates.

DKS has assembled a strategic team of transportation planners to assist the various parties in devising optimum transportation systems which would respond to regional travel needs. Our team includes transit operations experts, economic and environmental impact specialists and recreational travel specialists. DKS staff have worked with our teaming partners in the past and look forward to working with them again for this study.

KEY ISSUES

DKS has identified four clear issues which surround the development of criteria and alternatives:

Yosemite Area Regional Transportation Strategy
DKS Associates
Issue: Trip Reduction or Mode Choice?

There have been many solutions presented and discussed since the 1970’s. These include ideas to both reduce the volume of trips into the Park, as well as to encourage other types of vehicles in the Park. Unfortunately, these two issues are often blurred.

One example is with the limitations of the number of entries into the Park. If there is a limit on actual park entrants, the result is trip reduction. However, if a limitation in the number of vehicles entering the Park is combined with an alternative method to access the Park (a "wait for three hours to get in or park your vehicle and hop on the shuttle bus now"), such a program becomes an element of mode choice. The concept of 600,000 visitors a month as a practical maximum for the Park is largely based on current private auto access characteristics. If major shifts occur in access characteristics away from the private auto to public transit, more visitors may be able to be accommodated in the Park without adversely impacting visitor experiences in the Park.

Our team believes it is important to present and evaluate the various options in terms of whether the option reduces trips or shifts mode. It may be more acceptable to combine a vehicle trip reduction action with a different mode of access, but such options require an effective operation. For example, a park-and-ride lot which is too small will not serve as a viable option, and a shuttle system which is under-utilized will likely not be financially sustainable. These issues become even more complex when variable travel demands must also be taken into account as a result of seasonal recreational travel behavior.

In developing transportation alternatives, it is important to present alternatives which will work. We will analyze the full efforts required to implement any shuttle bus or transportation alternative. This analysis needs to consider not only include capital costs, but also on-going operating costs. The breadth of our consultant team allows us to develop a vision of these systems and their costs.

We know that some visitors will consider mode shifts based on access limits and entrance fees. When making such a decision, visitors will choose trade-offs of time and money as well as convenience to hiking, bicycling and other recreational activities. The role of park entrance fees as a factor in getting visitors to switch modes needs to be considered.

Issue: Local or Long-Distance Access?

With limitations on the number of daily vehicles allowed to enter the Park, who gets into the Park becomes a sensitive issue. If visitors try to enter in the afternoons and cannot get in for
several hours, they are significantly inconvenienced. This inconvenience is heightened if they have journeyed for several hours or days to reach the Park, and/or if they have reservations in the Park at night. Further, many local residents live near the Park because they enjoy the Park’s beauty and recreational resources; their interests must also be considered.

Past studies have examined a reservations system as a possible solution. Such a system has potential benefits, particularly during busy holiday periods. Still, such a system can be problematic unless another way of reaching the Park is available.

Our study will include an assessment of different alternative access modes for local and long distance visitors to the Park.

Issue: What is the tourist’s perspective?

It is easy to become focused on resolving the collective needs of visitors to Yosemite and the interests of various agencies. In this process, the many disparate needs of individual visitors can sometimes be overlooked.

Our team proposes to include Ed Perkins, a nationally recognized travel consultant, to develop transportation strategies designed to respond to the varied needs of park visitors and to enhance options and experiences for visiting tourists.

Issue: What are the economic consequences of transportation alternatives?

Tourism is often both a blessing and curse for local residents. Local residents benefit from the flow of spending dollars, jobs and the additional amenities which result from tourism. However, local residents must experience higher traffic volumes and increased development activity which tourism also brings. In developing transportation solutions, the economic consequences, both positive and negative, must be analyzed.

For this reason, we have included Dornbusch & Company, Inc. on our team. They have extensive experience in studying economic impacts at Yosemite as well as several other major national parks, and are well prepared to address this issue.
YOSEMITE -- Beneath a breathtaking sky and the mammoth stone precipice known as Half Dome, the ravaged tent-style cabins in Yosemite Valley resemble boats tossed about in a raging sea.

As the waters have receded from the worst flooding in more than 40 years, workers are removing the capsized employee cabins along the Merced River. All human artifacts are being stripped away so the grounds can return to their natural state -- a wildflower meadow shrouded by black oaks, pines and cedars.

In many areas of Yosemite National Park, this scene is being repeated as humans acquiesce to a hostile takeover Mother Nature.

To the delight of environmentalists and the satisfaction of park officials, the floods of 1997 are forcing historic reforms in Yosemite.

Under a $178 million restoration plan receiving support from Congress and the Clinton administration, Yosemite officials hope to remove many employee quarters, tourist cabins, shops, offices and parking lots from the valley floodplain. They say they shouldn't have been built there in the first place.

Meanwhile, popular Upper River and Lower River tourist campgrounds on the Merced will be closed and additional campsites will be built at higher elevations. And in May, for the first time in the park's 107-year history, officials will implement a daily reservation program to minimize the number of cars in the park.

The $178 million Yosemite restoration program will cost nearly twice the amount it would take to simply put the park back the way it was, officials concede.

The rebuilding plan -- aimed at implementing long-sought improvements and avoiding another flooding catastrophe -- includes repairs and upgrades to a damaged park water and sewer system that was considered inadequate before the storm.

And it covers improvements to highways -- savaged by rock slides and raging water -- that were deemed too narrow and treacherous for increased use by the shuttle buses the park is banking on to reduce traffic.

"We believe it would have been unconscionable to just go back and simply replace in kind," said B.J. Griffin, Yosemite's superintendent. "Our feeling from day two of this (flooding) event was that we should get support for spending more money and taking a longer time to get it right."

Many of the Yosemite improvements under the recovery program actually were approved in a park general plan years ago. Environmentalists, upset over the failure to fund and implement most of the plan, have since warned that national treasure was deteriorating into a mess of traffic, smog and imperiled wildlife habitat.

Now, thanks to the fury of nature, Yosemite has vaulted to the top of the list of 374 national parks competing for money for environmental preservation and infrastructure improvements.

"I'm an old budget officer, and it's nothing to say that it would take another 20 years of standing in line for a pro such as this," Griffin said. "I can say safely that it wouldn't have occurred in my tenure."

U.S. Rep. John Doolittle, R-Rocklin, who co-authored legislation to fund the Yosemite repairs and improvements, said he believes there is "strong national support" for using the floods as an opportunity to make "proactive, positive changes."

"There was not only a silver lining in the flooding, but a golden opportunity," echoed Brian Huse, Pacific region director of National Parks and Conservation Association. "It clearly showed the park service that they shouldn't have put many facilities in the flood plain, and that it would be disastrous to put things back the way they were."

Huse said he believes nature has forced a compromise -- stirring support for a Yosemite recovery plan that addresses the delicate balance between preserving the environment and keeping the park accessible to the public.

He said he hopes the flood recovery will also provide a springboard for expanding bus service or other regional transportation programs to reduce the number of private vehicles in the park -- so people won't have to view Yosemite's beauty through a haze of automobile emissions.

"If they can redistribute the park and enhance the natural processes that exist in the valley, everyone benefits," Huse said. "It will be a better experience for people. And a way to polish one of the jewels of the crown."

In the wake of the floods, several interested investors in the park's future are coming by for a look-see. With the absence of traffic and tourists -- the park has been closed since the flooding began Jan. 1 -- wildlife is descending into Yosemite Valley.

"The week after the flood, there were two deer walking around the headquarters building," said park ranger
Cristine Cowles. "And then I saw a couple of bobcats near the Yosemite Lodge. They just seemed very calm and relaxed. Somebody said they must have been thinking, "We've won."

In many ways, the flood was a blessing for the park environment, scouring out creeks and rivers and replenishing meadows and woods with soil.

"In terms of infrastructure, the built-in environment took a devastating blow," Griffin said. "But for the park itself, the impact was nothing. Half Dome is still there. Yosemite Falls is still there... The park looks marvelous."

But the structural damage -- coupled with park officials' plan to reduce housing density in flood-prone areas -- will eliminate 55 cabins and other units at the Yosemite Lodge, where surging floodwaters damaged a total of 189 rental cabins and 172 motel rooms.

About half of the Yosemite Valley's 900 campsites were washed out in the flood. Of those, 100 won't be replaced, Griffin said.

But the park director claims the changes, and a new management approach, will be a plus for visitors, providing more pristine park and reduced competition for parking and services.

Since the early 1980s, attendance at Yosemite has ballooned from 2.5 million visitors a year to a record 4.1 million last year. Griffin vows the park can accommodate the same demand in the future.

However, she is banking on a new day-use reservation program to eliminate overflow crowds on holiday weeks and to spread attendance more evenly throughout Yosemite's peak spring and summer season. Beginning in May, visitors will be unable to drive to the park and gain entrance without a reservation.

And in a decision made before the floods, the entrance fee will be increased from $5 a car to $20 -- good for stay of one to seven days.

But the optimism of park officials over Yosemite's future contrasts sharply with the current suffering of employees and concession operators.

Ken Walket, spokesman for Yosemite Concession Services Inc., said 1,000 people -- including food service employees, retail clerks, housekeepers, ski instructors and ice rink attendants -- are out of work. With the park closed, its concessions are losing $150,000 per day.

"As we move closer to March, that number will get higher," Walket said.

Janet Hogan, administrative officer for Mariposa County, said the county expects to have lost $500,000 in hotel tax revenues by March 15. Park visitors account for nearly half of the county's $12 million yearly take from occupancy taxes on 3,000 hotel rooms, cabins and other lodging units.

But now Hogan says county officials are sitting "on the edge of their seats" in hope of working out a regional transportation plan and off-site parking for a restored Yosemite. Some believe plans to move Yosemite employee housing, and eventually administrative offices, out of the park could ignite a building boom and an economic bonanza for neighboring communities.

"The relationship between Mariposa County and its businesses to the park is very close and we all recognize the opportunities and the risks," Hogan said. "It's an exciting time to participate in the development of the future of Yosemite National Park."

While many facilities will be moved out, Yosemite officials plan to restore the park's oldest building -- the Valle Chapel, which has stood since 1879. Although it lies in the flood plain and has weathered many a challenge from the Merced River, it was deemed too historic to lose.

Park historian Jim Snyder said the chapel "has been damaged quite a few times" by floods. Eventually, crews built a rock foundation, raising the chapel three feet above ground. But in January, floodwaters surged over the pews, washing out hymnal books and wreaking havoc on the chapel.

"This valley is formed by two events and they're ongoing," said Snyder, awed by Mother Nature's latest statement. "One is flooding and the other is rock slides. The facilities and the people are caught between the devil and the deep blue sea. You can live with it. But you can't stand against it."

🌟 The Weather 🌟
Janet,

The NPS is moving forward with a plan to require reservations for entry into the Park for day use. In my campaign, I gave a speech that I would support plans to allow residents of Mariposa County and guests that use the lodging facilities to have a priority status when entering Yosemite National Park. Many residents frequently patronize the Ahwahnee and the Mountain Broiler Room. These residents are not inclined to make reservations for lunch or dinner weeks or days in advance. The concessionaire should also be advised of these concerns. I feel the County has a Fiduciary responsibility to the Lodging industry. The County should do everything in our power to ensure that the Mariposa County continues to be a destination as part of the Yosemite experience. I believe the effect on our visitation will be impaired if the NPS implements day use reservations. Yosemite is in Mariposa County. Mariposa County is not in Yosemite National Park! Mariposa County should be considered when ever the NPS makes any plans especially when it involves our residents and guest. I believe that VIA buses can be expanded to support the transportation needs of the NPS during the recovery of the Valley.
February 25, 1997

Bob Pickard, District V
MARIPOSA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
P.O. Box 784
Mariposa, California  95338

Reference: Follow-Up To February 25th Meeting

Dear Mr. Pickard:

Thank you for the opportunity to present the communities' objectives to a day-use reservations service implemented by the National Park Service. There are three points I wish to make:

1. We need to stop “slow dancing” with Park officials, as if they were our partners. They are the competition, and have never had the best interest of the Gateway Communities in mind. Their business is conservation and controlled access to Yosemite and our communities' business is tourism and assemblage. This inherent conflict of interest is the basis of our entire relationship. The Park Service should be treated with respect and a high level of wariness, but they are not our friends! They speak of partnering with the Yosemite experience with the business communities, then implement a 400% year round increase in Park entrance fees to our customers with no public comment or hearings to discuss it. If private enterprise ran the Park, then the 140 corridor would already be reopened and the Valley floor rebuilt to allow public access. A business for profit company does not need three weeks of damage assessment before work begins. The length of this year's closure is a reflection on who's in charge of repairing the damage. Our entire economic base is being held hostage to a Government agency that will never care about creating access to benefit the Gateway Communities. Instead, they have seized the moment and opportunity to restrict access even further due to the damage to the Park. Discussions for a reservations service have been ongoing for years. However, the Park Service has decided that now is the time to implement this program, in the midst of the economic tragedy facing our communities.
2). A day-use reservations service on top of the natural disaster and Park closures of the past two years would continue to create the perception, both domestic and international, that it is even more difficult to visit and enjoy Yosemite. It would also create one more reason for tourists not to visit us, opting instead for Napa, San Francisco, the Coastline, and Disneyland. After the Government shut down in 1996, for 15 days in January, our resort and this community never recovered financially the entire year. Although California enjoyed significant tourism growth in occupancy and revenues in 1996, the Yosemite Gateway communities had their “softest” summer in six years. Our rooms revenue here at Tenaya was less in 1996 than 1995, therefore TOT contributions were less in 1996. This year’s Park closure will continue to impact these communities for years to come. We stand to lose 1.5 million dollars in forecasted revenues in 1996, even if the day use reservations system is not implemented. Last year our TOT contributions was approximately $850,000. This year Mariposa County will be lucky to receive $700,000 from us! This is devastating if all hotel rooms in our County suffer the same losses. Is the County willing to see the current TOT losses of $500,000 grow to over a $1,000,000 by year-end if a day use reservations system is in place? In 1996 over 4.2 million people visited the Park. How low will this number be in 1997 ... 3.7 million, 3.2 million, 3.0 million before the Park Service achieves it’s goal? Don’t allow the Park Service to continue alienating our customers by furthering their cause at the expense of ours.

3). The mobilization and sense of urgency required to establish a reservations service to handle this process is far beyond the scope of understanding the Park Service has on the difficulty of quality service. Who is going to potentially handle the 2 million phone calls a year when this service is operating. This is big business and too complicated for the Park Service to handle. If Yosemite Concessions contracts for this business then we are really in trouble. Have you ever tried their “voice mail obstacle course” to secure Park accommodations? It’s a nightmare! The Concessionaire can only accommodate 13% of total demand annually. That means that 87 out of 100 phone calls are turned away or lost. Entrusting the concessionaire with the efficiency required to maintain our economic livelihood here in Mariposa is once again, like trusting the competition not to take your business. Yosemite Concessions are also not our friends, but competition! Otherwise, why didn’t they open Badger Pass for downhill skiing this year for the Gateway hotels to use? If the ski resort wasn’t able to fill their hotel rooms due to damage, then everyone suffers with them in the process! Any ethical “good neighbor” with our community interest in mind would have taken a personal loss for the good of the business community. I know Tenaya would have! I couldn’t look my business neighbors in the eye if I had made that fiscal decision to purposely create additional hardship by not opening Badger.
The bottom line here is that a day use reservations system continues to send out an unhealthy marketing message worldwide. Most of us feel that aside from a handful of Saturday's each spring that we will not see the Park visitation numbers of 1994-1996 for many years to come. We have been economically devastated by natural disasters, bad decisions, and slow moving bureaucracies. Restricting public access through a "ticketron" reservation service will signal the end to tourism and a strong economic tax base. Send our competition a message that we oppose this plan.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Paul Ratchford
General Manager