

Kings County Association of Governments
 Virtual Stakeholder Advisory Committee Meeting

Introduction & Background

The Kings County Association of Governments (KCAG) is overseeing the Kings County 2020 Transit Development Plan (TDP), which is a five-year plan for transit services in the Kings County region, including the cities of Corcoran, Hanford, Avenal, Lemoore, and the unincorporated areas of Kings County. Ultimately, the plan’s goal is to create a transit “business plan” for the region’s public transit providers and to propose transit improvements to better serve both urban and rural communities’ needs.

The Transit Development Plan is required in order to receive federal grant funding for transit projects and improvements, and it also provides an opportunity to review, update, and improve transit services. The TDP provides opportunities for public input through stakeholder meetings, passenger surveys, as well as virtual open houses and surveys.

Format, Goals, and Objectives of the Stakeholder Advisory Committee Meeting

KCAG established a Stakeholders Advisory Committee (SAC) consisting of public transit providers, social service providers, disadvantaged community transportation advocates, and representatives from the cities of Avenal, Lemoore, Hanford, and Corcoran, including the County of Kings, to offer insight into the transit issues as perceived from a variety of perspectives. Members of the Advisory Committee will participate in presentations and workshops throughout the planning process. This committee will also ensure that the TDP is on track with local priorities and reflects the local vision.

Due to the current COVID-19 climate, KCAG and the project team held a virtual SAC meeting using the Zoom application. There were 20 participants in the Stakeholder Advisory Committee meeting, including the project team and representatives from the following:

- Kings County Behavioral Health
- Valley LEAP
- Caltrans
- Kings County Area Public Transit Agency (KCAPTA) for Kings Area Rural Transit (KART)
- Corcoran Area Transit (CAT)
- The City of Avenal
- The City of Corcoran
- The City of Lemoore
- The County of Kings



The goal of this meeting was to introduce the KCAG Transit Development Plan and the background of its necessity to the Advisory Committee. Trends of those who are transit dependent or who use transit as their primary mode of transportation were presented, as well as a brief overview of current KART and CAT services, ridership, and service performance. Lastly, the project team obtained stakeholder input regarding transit needs, desired improvements, and other possible opportunities for outreach.

The meeting was one-and-a-half (1.5) hours long, facilitated by Gladys Cornell, Principal of AIM Consulting. The meeting began with participant and project team introductions. Following, project team member and KCAG Regional Planner, Teresa Nickell, presented a brief introduction and overview of the Kings County Association of Governments, which is the organization overseeing this transit development plan.

The Kings County Association of Governments was formed in 1967 and is a metropolitan planning organization (MPO) for the Kings County region. The member agencies include the County of Kings and the cities of Avenal, Corcoran, Hanford, and Lemoore. As an MPO, KCAG serves as a pass-through agency for funding for local transportation projects. KCAG receives direction from the Transportation Policy Committee (TPC) and the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). Representatives from each of the member agencies serve on these committees, as well as Caltrans District 6 staff.

Following Teresa, Selena McKinney, Project Manager of LSC Transportation, Inc., led a presentation of findings from their research of population trends and what it means to current and future transit needs, and the initial research gathered on the performance of the KART and the CAT systems. Below is an outline of the presentation.

- **Background:** The Kings County Association of Governments (KCAG) is overseeing the Kings County 2020 Transit Development Plan (TDP), which is a five-year plan for the operation of transit services in Kings County. The main goal of the TDP is to optimize use of transit resources to best meet transit needs.
- Why Create a Transit Development Plan?
 - A TDP is required to receive federal grant funding
 - The TDP provides an opportunity to review and improve transportation services
 - The TDP provides opportunities for public input from stakeholders, current riders through passenger surveys, community-wide input, including disadvantaged communities' input, through virtual open houses and surveys, and provides an opportunity to gather input from transit staff and government officials.
- What is a Transit Development Plan?
 - The TDP evaluates existing transit conditions and services. This includes identifying transit issues, understanding population needs, including needs of the seniors, disabled, limited income, and minority groups, and evaluating overall transit performance
 - The TDP develops a five-year business plan for transit that includes a 5-year financial plan and provides guidance for transit operations managers.

- The project team has researched population trends and what this means to current and future transit needs, and the performance of KART and CAT.
 - Kings County population trends
 - Trends of those populations who may be transit dependent
 - Low Income
 - Elderly population
 - Disabled persons
 - No vehicle households
 - Employment
 - KART Service Overview
 - KART route maps
 - KART Ridership by Service by Year
 - CAT Services
 - Ridership by year
 - Ridership by month
 - CAT performance by ridership type
 - Overall transit strengths and challenges

[View the PowerPoint presentation here.](#)

Presentation Q&A's

Below is a compilation of questions and answers provided during the presentation.

- *Question:* Why have the Avenal and Corcoran communities had a decrease in population?
 - *Answer:* Avenal and Corcoran population are influenced by the State prisons.
- *Question:* Is the homeless population counted for in the population trends?
 - *Answer:* The most accurate population data used for the TDP existing conditions analysis was based on the US Census. For this reason, the current homeless population is not included since it is not included in the Census.
- *Question:* Are unincorporated communities, like Kettleman City, included in the KART ridership study results? They are on the SB535 as a recognized disadvantaged community.
 - *Answer:* Kettleman City is included in the study. This presentation highlights population trends in a select few locations (Avenal, Corcoran, Hanford, and Lemoore), as those communities had the most significant change since the prior TDP.
- *Question:* Can we compare the Kings County decrease in ridership to the National decrease in ridership?
 - *Answer:* Over the last number of years, most transit systems all over the country are seeing a decrease in ridership. Part of this decrease is due to low costs of gas and increased access to alternative mobility options.

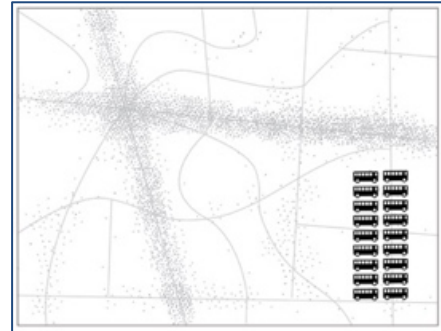
- *Question:* Do we know how many passengers are on each bus during peak/non-peak hours?
 - *Answer:* Peak hour data is not typically analyzed in the existing conditions report. That is usually studied in detail and expanded upon in the forthcoming memos to ultimately inform the recommended alternatives for the TDP and why.
- *Question:* Because of COVID-19, is the idea of shifting to smaller buses/minibuses out of the equation due to social distancing?
 - *Answer:* It is not out of the question. This shift to smaller vehicles will start to be planned for and implemented with grant money around 2021. We envision, that like a trolley system, a smaller bus in a smaller corridor is easy to drive, easy to maneuver, and has the possibility to be 100% electric. However, this does not necessarily mean that the cost will be lower since a significant amount of the cost of transit is in labor, not in the vehicles themselves.
- *Comment on overall KART ridership:*
 - Saturday ridership has declined 35%, so we are now trying to focus on how we will rebuild ridership in an environment where people do not want to be close to each other, i.e. COVID. We are focusing on our core ridership hours. We are also updating all of our real-time transit information. We will be bringing all Hanford routes into half-hour service. Our busiest route R6 will be every 15 minutes.

Small Group Format and Discussion Questions

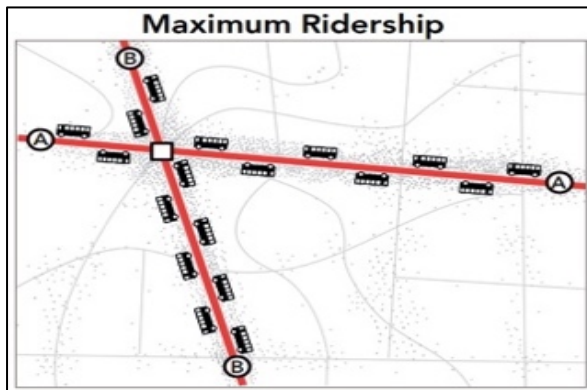
Following the presentation, participants split into three ‘virtual meeting rooms’ for small group discussions, each led by a facilitator from the project team. After the groups re-convened, a spokesperson presented their group’s overall comments on the following discussion questions:

- *What are the benefits of transit?*
- *Who should transit serve?*
- *Referencing the below findings, moving forward, should the transit priority be for better service within Kings County or to create better opportunities to travel in/out of the county, such as from Hanford to Fresno or Visalia?*
 - *KART Ridership Service by Year, from 2011-2019*
 - *Hanford routes have the most ridership, followed by Lemoore*
 - *Overall ridership has decreased by about 14 percent over the past 8 years*
 - *Lemoore route ridership has stayed fairly consistent year over year*

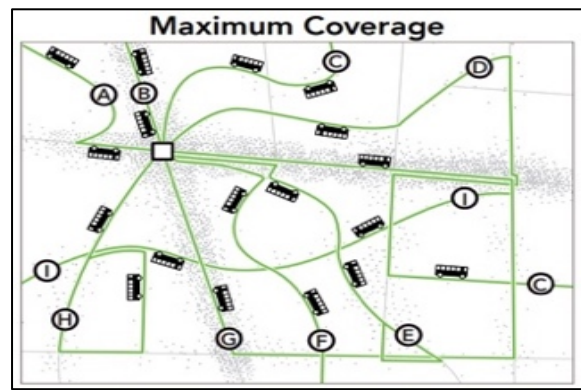
- Imagine you have a set number of buses for transit. You have busy rider corridors, and dispersed areas of more scattered riders.



Of the following examples, what is the best approach for Kings County?



Maximum Ridership: Serving a concentrated area twice as often



Maximum Coverage: Serving twice the area half as often

[View the small group presentation here.](#)

Small Group Discussion Notes

Below is a summary of the small group discussions, organized by the discussion questions.

What are the benefits of transit?

- Transit provides people more freedom of movement through mobility.
- Transit moves people and connects lives.
 - Gets people to their jobs, or future jobs.
 - Provides interconnectivity to other regions/counties for medical, educational, retail, or entertainment purposes.
 - Transit is a way to connect those who cannot afford a personal vehicle.
 - Without transit, our transit-dependent riders would not be able to go anywhere (the store, medical appointments, etc.)
- Greenhouse Gas emissions reduction.

- Transit options can reduce the wear and tear on infrastructure in some cases by taking single occupancy vehicles off the road.
- Public transit serves individuals with mental health issues and gets them to the services they need. With increasing in-person appointments as conditions related to COVID improves, constituents will need transit in and around Kings County to receive care.
- Corcoran Dial-A-Ride system is available immediately, providing service within 30 minutes to someone's home. Out-of-town service is available by Amtrak in Corcoran, but that may disappear with High Speed Rail. If Amtrak service is removed, there would be an increased need to get to medical appointments and shopping in Hanford or Visalia.
- The more transit options provided, the more opportunities to reduce GHG emissions.

Who should transit serve?

- All populations.
- Elderly populations.
- Student populations, both college-aged and K-12 students.
 - Corcoran Transit serves 4th and 5th graders at a school outside of a 2-mile radius. Ridership dropped with a pilot fixed route from 22 students to 1 student because students did not want to walk to a bus stop. There was also an after-school program every other week to transport students from the school site to the Recreation Center (RAC). Now that all schools are closed, the transit hours have changed.
 - Dial-a-ride service is very important to get kids to after-school programs.
 - For college-age students, we should make more of an effort to work with the colleges and education centers to educate students about another option to get to school and inform them of the different transit stops so we can reduce the amount of time they spend in their cars.
- Medical patients
 - Partnerships with transit agencies is crucial for major centers/medical offices for mental health services. There are residential programs in Hanford and Lemoore for behavioral health programs, there are also clinics in Avenal and Corcoran. These are areas with transit needs to help patients get to appointments. Patients often need to get from Avenal to Hanford for treatment, but due to the COVID climate, Kings County Behavioral Health is trying to move toward more tele-health services.
- Residents who need to travel around Kings County for appointments, shopping, recreation, etc.
 - Avenal residents need to get to Hanford and Corcoran.
 - There is a great need for transit service into Avenal, Kettleman, and Hanford; people who are coming into those cities have to make a quick trip up and back or else they are stuck there all day.
 - Trips to Fresno take way too long, so there should be some improvements
- Prioritizing transit-dependent riders is important.

- While rural areas may have the most need for transit, it appears that transit service is quite limited in those areas.
- Services should focus on families in low-income areas and rural areas.
- Transit should serve everyone – if we just focus on the transit-dependent population, we miss a large group of people who might ride transit.
 - By serving everyone, we can reduce GHG emissions significantly.

Referencing the below findings, moving forward, should the transit priority be for better service within Kings County or to create better opportunities to travel in/out of the county, such as from Fresno to Visalia?

- *KART Ridership Service by Year, from 2011-2019*
- *Hanford routes have the most ridership, followed by Lemoore*
- *Overall ridership has decreased by about 14 percent over the past 8 years*
- *Lemoore route ridership has stayed fairly consistent year over year*
- Kings County services should be perfected before trying to extend into other counties.
- Consider ridership before a decision is made to expand.
- Out of community transport to Visalia or Fresno is needed for individuals who need VA health services, particularly in Fresno.
 - The VA hospital clients transport system with KART from Hanford needs more attention.
- There are not as many shelters for the homeless population in Kings County, so transport to Visalia where there are a higher amount of shelters and services, is needed.
- More transit services to rural areas such as Avenal, Kettleman City and Stratford are needed.
- More options for travel times are needed.
- There needs to be more exploration for more transportation options to eliminate a long travel day from Avenal to Fresno. Maybe a volunteer driver program or car share program could be considered.
- *Question:* Has the idea of fixed seasonal routes been considered?
 - *Answer:* Yes, we are looking at solutions for people to use the vanpool option; the only seasonal ridership currently is to and from the colleges.
 - People like consistency in routes, even if the ridership is significantly lower.

Imagine you have a set number of buses for transit. You have busy rider corridors, and dispersed areas of more scattered riders. Considering Maximum Ridership or Maximum Coverage, what is the best approach for Kings County?

- Just looking at the rural areas, will transit be reliable? Do you want to put a lot of funding into bringing transit out there if overall ridership is going to decrease?
- A happy medium of both maximum ridership and maximum coverage would be ideal.

- When you get into the rural area, the question is ‘do I provide more service to less riders?’ and ‘how does this get paid for?’
 - You have to look at resources and costs; rural areas may have the most need for transit, it appears that transit service is quite limited in those areas.
 - Just looking at ridership solutions without considering the costs and resources is not going to work.
- Consider some express routes to the rural communities like Avenal and include good connections.
- Consider timing of services:
 - Less hours in the late evening and more frequency during core hours.
 - There is a decline in ridership in the evening after 7 pm.
- Consider the new developments within Kings County when deciding between maximum coverage and maximum ridership:
 - Lemoore has new housing projects in motion. A new 362-home subdivision just approved. Consider taking transit out there.
 - 18th and Lacey in Hanford will see about 500 new homes in the near future.
- Consider maximum coverage
 - There are some neighborhoods in Hanford that are underserved, like the elderly and youth/schools.
 - There are rural areas that are limited in service.
 - Are there opportunities for more commuter service?
 - There are a few new housing developments that should be considered.
 - Strive for maximum coverage because we have rural areas that are spread out, we have so many small cities
 - We should keep the buses that go out and serve many cities.
 - It’s important to have the loops within and around these cities so that service is spread since we are served by major freeways already.
 - We need to plan for transit that fits all people’s needs
 - There is a concern that those reliant on transit may not get service if maximum ridership is the focus.
 - We have to consider each system. Looking at Kings County, how do we solve our challenges for rural areas?
 - Put yourself in someone’s shoes for example: If you live in a rural area, and you have the flu and your doctor says that you need a medication at the doctor’s office, you have to travel while feeling sick. Now consider that you have to wait an hour for a bus, weave around town, pick up your medication, and wait another hour to be picked up, all while feeling ill. As transit planners, we have to consider these people in rural areas.

- We should consider maximum coverage to serve pockets throughout the Hanford and Lemoore areas, senior housing, schools, shopping, and medical needs. Freeways are easy to reach with the smaller cities.
- Consider more maximum coverage for fixed route study alternatives in Corcoran.
- Consider maximum ridership
 - Planning for maximum ridership looks good. Planning for more coverage looks to me like there will be more GHG emissions.
 - We use clean energy for all [KART] buses. You must compare GHG emissions to the idea of how many people left their cars at home and took transit instead.
 - On-demand transit acts as a feeder to urbanized areas, this works for those areas.