

SAN JOAQUIN JOINT POWERS AUTHORITY

Meeting of May 15, 2026

STAFF REPORT

Item 9

INFORMATION

Thruway Bus Study Update

Background:

The San Joaquin Joint Powers Authority (Authority) is responsible for managing, improving, and planning for the future of the Gold Runner Intercity Passenger Rail Service (operated by Amtrak), which runs between Bakersfield in the south and Oakland and Sacramento in the north. A large network of 12 Thruway Bus routes connects Gold Runner passengers to destinations throughout California and into Nevada. This Thruway Bus network is integral to the success of the Gold Runner service, with a significant portion of the Gold Runner service's ridership supported by Thruway Bus connections to Los Angeles and other major population centers as an extension of the rail network.

Given the size and importance of the Gold Runner Thruway Bus network, there is a need to investigate the existing routes, performance, and governance of the Thruway Bus system to ensure that the service provided achieves the following:

1. A preferred and convenient option for intercity travelers that connects to Gold Runner rail services and increases Gold Runner ridership while driving mode shift away from the highway network.
2. A cost-effective service, responsive to structural shifts in demand, highly constrained Public Transportation Account funding, and increasing costs of providing service (including maximized utilization of available funding from partner agencies for Thruway service benefits).
3. Effective business models/governance structure to oversee and administer the Thruway Bus service.
4. Providing safe, reliable, and competitive connectivity to key travel markets throughout California – particularly for transit-dependent residents (focusing on near-term improvements/changes)

The Thruway Bus Study is intended to be tactical in nature and focused on delivering specific, feasible, and short-term recommendations for improving the Thruway Bus routes/network. The Thruway Bus Study will be supported by DB E.C.O North America (DB), the Authority's On-Call Planning Consultant. DB and its staff have supported strategic and technical planning for the Authority for several years. DB will work with Authority staff to make sure they fully understand the Authority's markets, operations, challenges, as well as performance and strategic goals. DB has assembled a project team to lead this task with specific experience in intercity passenger service in California, as well as with bus operations. DB's work will be supplemented by Authority staff expertise, historical knowledge, and hands-on experience. Public/stakeholder outreach will also be conducted by Authority staff to support this Thruway Bus Study. The Thruway Bus Study effort will be developed by a Technical Working Group that includes Authority staff from Operations, Passenger Experience, Planning, and Fiscal departments, as well as representatives from Caltrans.

San Joaquin Joint Powers Authority

Item 9

Thruway Bus Study Update

Presented By: Dan Leavitt (Manager of Regional Initiatives)

Background

- A large network of 13 Thruway Bus routes connects Gold Runner passengers to destinations throughout California and into Nevada.
- The Thruway Bus network is integral to the success of the Gold Runner service, with a significant portion of the Gold Runner service's ridership supported by Thruway Bus connections to Los Angeles and other major population centers as an extension of the rail network.
- Given the size and importance of the Gold Runner Thruway Bus network, there is a need to investigate the existing routes performance, and governance of the Thruway Bus services and to recommend potential changes to the routes.

Goals for Thruway Bus Services:

1. A preferred and convenient option for intercity travelers that connects to Gold Runner rail services and increases Gold Runner ridership.
2. Cost-effective services, responsive to structural shifts in demand, highly constrained Public Transportation Account funding, and increasing costs of providing service.
3. Effective business models/governance structure to oversee and administer the Thruway Bus service.
4. Providing safe, reliable, and competitive connectivity to key travel markets throughout California – particularly for transit-dependent residents.



Thruway Bus Study

- The Thruway Bus Study will be focused on delivering specific, feasible, and short-term recommendations for improving the Thruway Bus routes/network.
- The Thruway Bus Study is supported by DB, the Authority's On-Call Planning Consultant. DB's work will be supplemented by Authority staff expertise, historical knowledge, and hands-on experience.
- Public/stakeholder outreach will also be conducted by Authority staff/consultants to support this Thruway Bus Study.
- The Thruway Bus Study effort will be developed by a Technical Working Group that includes Authority staff from Operations, Passenger Experience, Planning, and Fiscal departments, as well as representatives from Caltrans.



Timeline for Thruway Bus Study

- The Thruway Bus Study Report is expected to be largely completed over a 4-month period and then followed by a couple of months for developing implementation strategies.
 - Key outreach is planned for early June 2026 and in late July 2026.
- Staff expects to present to the Authority at their July 17, 2026, Board Meeting regarding existing service characteristics and proposed goals for the service as well as input from initial outreach.
- Staff expects to present again at the September 15, 2026, Board Meeting on the Thruway Bus Study Report and discuss implementation strategies.



Fiscal Impact and Recommendation

Fiscal Impact:

- This is an information item only.

Recommendation:

- There is no action required.