

Voluntary Amenity Fee - Fast Pass Automated Gate Transponder

Civic Engagement Summary

Overview

On July 1, 2022, Rocky Mountain National Park (ROMO) issued a press release announcing a comment period on a proposed \$15 annual amenity fee to provide voluntary fast pass automated gate transponders to interested visitors with valid annual or lifetime passes. The public could submit their comments through the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website from July 1 to July 31, 2022. Comments were also accepted via mail. In addition to the press release, the park website was updated to inform the public on the proposed annual amenity fee and open comment period.

One topic question was presented to the public on PEPC: “Would you be supportive of an estimated \$15 annual amenity fee in order to be able to use the optional fast pass lane?” The public were able to include additional feedback in a “Comments” section.

A total of 296 correspondences (all collected in PEPC) were received in response to the proposed annual amenity fee. Correspondences were coded by two codes indicating if the commenter was in support or in opposition of the fee, and one code indicating if the correspondence was a duplicate. An additional 10 qualitative sub-codes were used to record statements of reasoning behind a response, statements about the technology and use of transponders, and statements unrelated to the proposed amenity fee. This review process found 193 correspondences in support of and 92 in opposition to the proposed annual amenity fee to provide voluntary fast pass automated gate transponders.

General Feedback

Most commenters expressed support for the proposed amenity fee, highlighting the benefits to visitor use and experience of the fast pass automated gates to reduce congestion and wait times at entrance stations, and that the annual cost for the transponder is worth the use benefits.

However, many in support of the amenity fee also expressed concerns about the proposal, including that the transponder could not be used during peak times of ROMO’s current visitor use management strategy, lane congestion may still occur prior to the fast pass automated gate at the Beaver Meadows Entrance, Lifetime Pass holders and in-holders must pay annual fees for the amenity, that transponders would be affixed to a single window shield, and that transponders are programmed to a single annual pass requiring some households to obtain more than one pass to use the automated gate with different vehicles.

Commenters in opposition to the proposed amenity fee expressed the concerns listed above often adding that, for these reasons, the cost of the transponder was not worth the amenity. Others in opposition stated that passholders should not be charged a fee for a previous amenity and that the amenity favors frequent visitors.

In addition to these reasonings, commenters asked about the use of transponders with a rental vehicle, motorcycle, scooter, and bicycle; and about the incompatibility of annual and lifetime passes with automated gate, capabilities of future technology, and capabilities for timed-entry permits to correspond with transponders. Some commenters asked about the renewal process, including if the transponder would be replaced annually and if visitors could renew transponders online. Others suggested that if implemented, the automated gate would need clear signage or expressed a need to widen the road to the automated gate at the Beaver Meadows Entrance.