



Traffic Congestion Management Plan

Preliminary Alternatives Newsletter

October 2015

What are preliminary alternatives?

The preliminary alternatives propose different ways to meet the purpose and need and goals of the plan, while minimizing adverse effects to park resources. Some meet these goals better than others. Some of the preliminary alternative may eventually be found not to be reasonable and therefore may not be fully developed and analyzed.

Is this my only opportunity to comment on the project?

No, once the EA is developed, the document will be made available for public review for a 30-day period.

Share Your Thoughts

Through November 12, 2015 submit comments and find periodic project updates on the planning website:

<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/arch>

or

<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/cany>

Dear Friend of Arches and Canyonlands National Park:

The National Park Service (NPS) is charged with protecting the natural and cultural resources of parks while also providing opportunities for visitors to appreciate and enjoy those resources. With the strong growth in visitation it has been challenging to do both.

Consequently, the NPS is developing a Traffic Congestion Management Plan for Arches and Canyonlands national parks to consider ways to improve the visitor experience by reducing parking congestion and related crowding problems in the parks and to further conserve the park's resources that make these park units so extraordinary.

In July, we kicked off this planning with a public scoping newsletter that presented many proposed solutions suggested by the public, park staff and stakeholders, along with some of the pros and cons of implementing each solution. This second newsletter presents five preliminary alternatives for your review. These alternatives outline various responses that park management could take to address issues of congestion, parking shortages, and resource effects in both parks and to enable the NPS to prepare for increases or decreases in visitation and funding. The process to develop these alternatives included reviewing plan goals and objectives, reviewing public scoping comments, collaborating with the park planning team and collecting data.

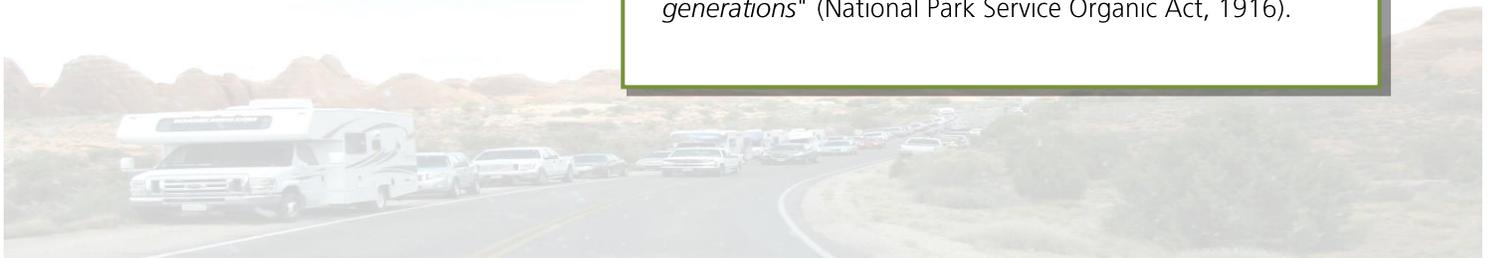
I invite you to review and comment on these preliminary alternatives by November 12, 2015. Your comments will be used to further inform the development, modification and analysis of these preliminary alternatives for the Environmental Assessment (EA). We have not yet selected a preferred alternative nor completed the environmental analysis. The analysis will be included the EA, which is anticipated to be available for review in the spring of 2016.

Sincerely,

Kate Cannon, Superintendent
Arches and Canyonlands National Park

The mission of the National Park Service is:

"... to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations" (National Park Service Organic Act, 1916).



Background on Transportation Planning

Arches National Park

Arches began transportation planning in the early 2000s and has implemented several actions identified in the 2006 *Transportation Implementation Management Plan*. For example the park has expanded parking areas, improved pull-outs and looked into new ways to move visitors around. The park has expanded its parking capacity by 93% since 1989 (Fig. 1). The parking lots at the Visitor Center (57% larger), Balanced Rock (20% larger), Sand Dune Arch (110% larger), Devils Garden (30% larger) and Wolfe Ranch/Delicate Arch (110% larger) all have been expanded. The park is currently working on reconfiguring parking spaces at the Windows section of the park.

The 2006 Transportation Plan did not evaluate a shuttle system operation. In 2011, the park initiated an *Alternative Transportation System and Congestion Management Study* to evaluate shuttle system alternatives and non-shuttle alternatives, such as a reservation system. Based on the results of the study and evaluating other parks with shuttle systems, Arches has determined that a shuttle system through a service contract is not a cost-effective means of

resolving the congestion issue; therefore, the park began to explore the idea of a timed-entry system as a means to manage vehicle congestion. In June 2015, a reservation system design study was completed and the park kicked off public scoping for a new traffic congestion management plan.

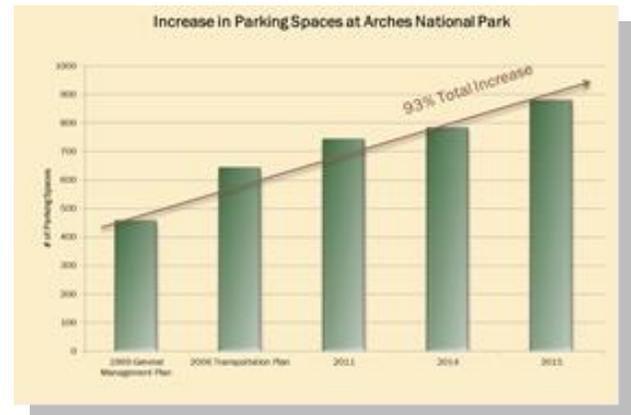


Fig 1: Arches parking increases over the years

Canyonlands National Park

Canyonlands has not undergone any additional transportation planning aside from initial efforts as part of its General Management planning. The parking areas have not been expanded or reconfigured since the park was

initially developed. However within the last several years Canyonlands has seen significant visitation growth and parking areas are now also at or over capacity.

Why is a new plan needed?

- Park visitation is increasing at both parks and trends indicate it is likely to continue to increase.
- In Arches, visitation hit 1 million in 2010 and has increased 26.7% in the last 5 years. In 2014 visitation jumped by 18.7%. This year, the park expects to hit 1.5 million visitors.
- For Canyonlands, visitation has increased 24.4% in the last 5 years and in 2014 visitation was up 14.8%. 2015 is on trend for the same increase.
- Visitation increases have already and will likely continue to add stress to existing facility infrastructure (parking, trails and restrooms) and increase congestion on the roads.
- In Canyonlands, parking areas have not been expanded or reconfigured since the park was initially developed and primary parking areas are also at or over capacity.
- Any action implemented at Arches will certainly affect visitation in Canyonlands.
- "Hot spots" have developed in the parks that need addressing (refer to pages 3-5).

Goal of Plan

To protect and enhance the current and future visitor experience in the parks while protecting park resources and values.

Objectives of Plan

- reduce crowding
- enable visitors to safely and easily experience the park
- minimize resource damage
- reduce crowding-related effects on park operations
- prevent crowding-related accidents

During peak times and peak season (May-Oct), certain areas in Arches become

HOT SPOTS

Devils Garden Trails

- Multiple user groups
- Increased use of trail and backcountry hiking
- Development of unofficial trails
- Increased search and rescue

Sand Dune Arch

- Increased use of trails
- Multiple user groups
- Development of unofficial trails
- Human waste issues

Wolfe Ranch/Delicate Arch Trail

- Increased use of trail
- Increased search and rescue
- No water available

Balanced Rock

- Congestion
- Pedestrian conflicts and crossing
- Only one toilet facility

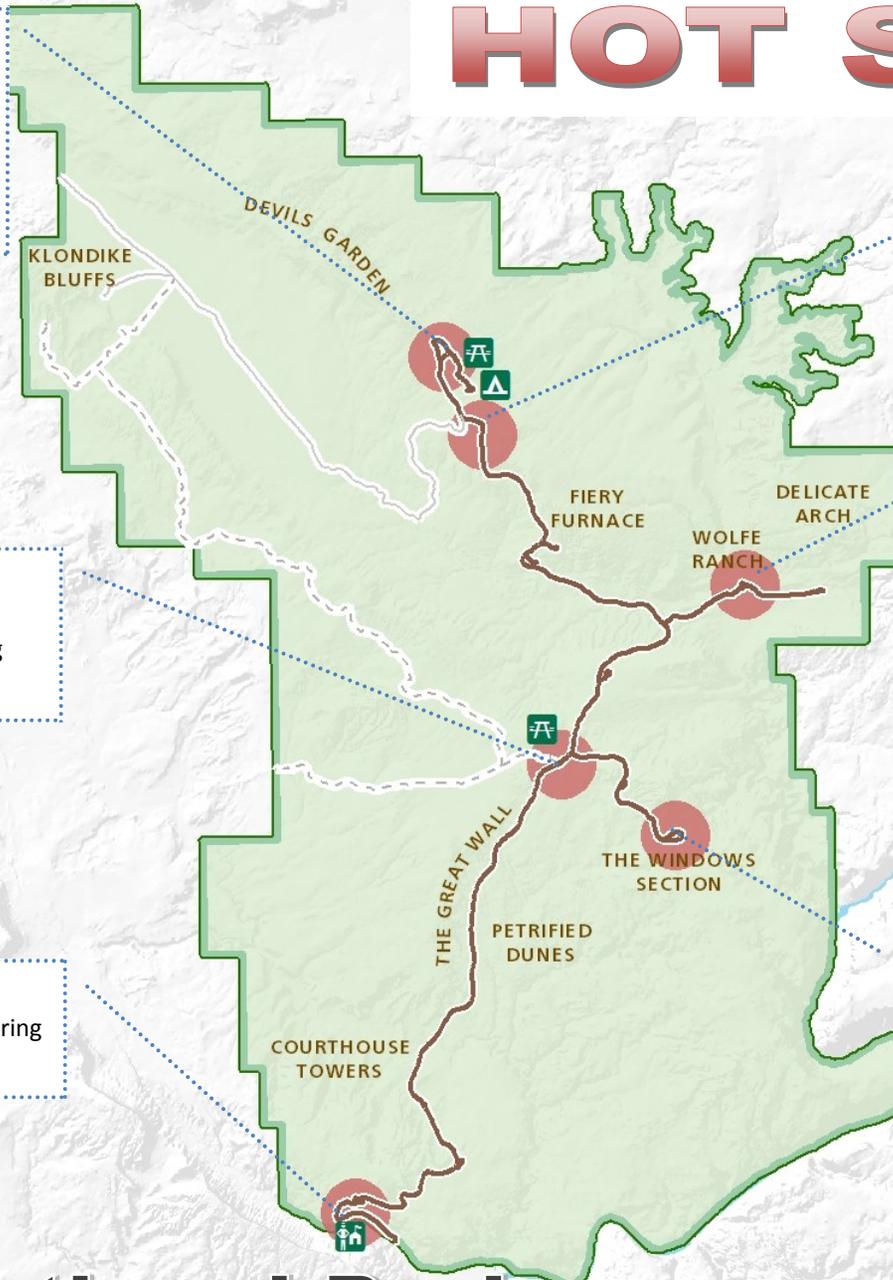
Upper and Lower Windows

- Congestion
- Inadequate oversized parking
- 60% of visitors go here

Entrance Station

- Long wait times for visitors entering park during peak times

Arches National Park



Island in the Sky District, Canyonlands

Upheaval Dome

- Congestion
- Multiple user groups
- Increased use of trails
- Visitors parking along road
- Development of unofficial trails
- Safety concerns
- Tight circulation
- Poor wayfinding and orientation for visitors

Secondary Parking Areas

- Multiple user groups
- Visitors parking along road
- Development of unofficial trails
- Poor wayfinding and orientation for visitors

Visitor Center

- Congestion
- Visitors parking along road
- Pedestrian conflicts and crossings
- Inadequate oversized parking
- Tight circulation

Neck Spring

- Safety concerns
- Multiple user groups

Green River Overlook

- Congestion at sunset
- Inadequate oversized parking
- Development of unofficial trails
- Pedestrian conflicts—campers walking along road to overlook

Mesa Arch

- Congestion
- Visitors parking along road
- Inadequate oversized parking
- Increased use of trail

Murphy Trail

- Multiple user groups
- Increased use of trail
- Visitors parking along road
- Poor wayfinding and orientation for visitors

Gooseberry Trail and Picnic Area

- Multiple user groups
- Inadequate parking
- Visitors parking along road

Grand View Point Overlook

- Congestion
- Visitors parking along road
- Inadequate oversized parking
- Increased use of area
- Development of unofficial trails

During peak times and peak season (May-Oct), certain areas in the Island in the Sky district become

HOT SPOTS



Needles District, Canyonlands NP

Big Spring Overlook

- Congestion
- Multiple user groups
- Visitors parking along road
- Development of unofficial trails
- Visitors park here and walk along road to the Slickrock Trail
- Poor wayfinding and orientation for visitors
- No restrooms nearby

Cave Springs

- Lack of delineated parking

Elephant Hill Parking Area

- Congestion
- Multiple user groups
- Development of unofficial trails
- Poor wayfinding and orientation for visitors

Squaw Flat Campground-both loops

- Inadequate parking for trail users
- Multiple user groups access this area
- Poor wayfinding and orientation for visitors
- No oversized parking

During peak times and peak season (May-Oct), certain areas in the Needles district become

HOT SPOTS



Development of Preliminary Alternatives

The National Park Service is required to examine a full range of reasonable alternatives when preparing an environmental assessment. The preliminary alternatives propose different ways to meet the purpose and need and goals of the plan, while minimizing impacts to park resources. Some meet these goals better than others. Some of the preliminary alternatives may eventually be determined to not be reasonable and therefore may not be fully developed and analyzed.

Reasonable alternatives must also be economically and technically feasible and show evidence of common sense.

These will be described as considered but dismissed. Reasonable alternatives must also be economically and technically feasible and show evidence of common sense.

These preliminary alternatives were developed by park staff and the project planning team. They were also informed by stakeholder and public comments, and work completed by contractors.

Preliminary Alternative 1- No Action- Continue with current management

This alternative is required by the National Environmental Policy Act. It describes the conditions that would exist in the parks if a plan was not prepared. It provides the baseline for evaluating the changes and environmental impacts that would or would not occur under the action alternatives. Response to increased visitation, changes in traveler demand, or park operations is reactionary and on project by project basis, rather than part of an integrated and long-term strategy.

Preliminary Alternative 2- Timed-entry to manage vehicle entrances

In this alternative, vehicles entering the parks would be managed through a timed-entry system throughout the day during peak season. A timed-entry scenario would be a mix of online time slots and drive-ups. The NPS would work with a third party vendor (such as Recreation.gov) to facilitate system set-up and implementation. The system would manage vehicle entrances, allow for changes and cancellations, and allow for drive-up access to the park. At this time, it is envisioned that the timed entry system would include real-time access through a call center and on the web, eliminating double bookings and providing up-to-date facility use information. This web-based approach would allow for a wide range of management approaches and would be flexible and scalable enough to meet the future needs of the park. Once timed-entry slots are no longer available online or at the entrance station, vehicles would not be allowed to enter the park. Once a vehicle enters the park, its length of stay would not be limited.

Preliminary Alternative 3- Build additional parking and infrastructure to accommodate visitation

This alternative would build more parking and infrastructure to accommodate current and future use at existing and new sites. Parking areas would be expanded as visitation grows. New trails with new parking areas would be developed to spread visitation out within the parks to alleviate some congestion from popular areas. Underdeveloped areas would be marketed and developed in new ways to shift visitation to these areas. Trails at popular sites would be widened, hardened and fenced to accommodate greater visitation while limiting further natural resource damage.

Preliminary Alternative 4- Timed-entry and Private Shuttle Services to manage vehicle entrances

In this alternative, visitors entering the parks would be managed through a timed-entry system and the use of private shuttle services during peak season. Vehicle entrances would be managed through timed-entries and private shuttles throughout the day. A timed-entry scenario would be as described in Alternative 2. Private shuttle service would be operated by private businesses and managed by the park through Commercial Use Authorizations (CUAs) and entry allocations. A limited number of CUAs for private shuttles would be issued each year. Under this alternative, visitors would have the opportunity to enter the park via their own vehicle or with a privately run shuttle service.

Preliminary Alternative 5- Combination of Development, Access and Vehicle Management

This alternative would be a combination of Alternatives 2, 3 and 4. This alternative would allow for flexibility to respond to changing future conditions. Changes to visitation, traveler demand, length of seasons, economics, land use, park funding and support could each or all have an effect on visitor experience, resource conditions and park operations. Triggers would be established and monitored to identify emerging changes and determine the appropriate management action response. Some preliminary triggers could include visitation levels, change in daily peak visitation times, shifts in peak visitation season, trail use levels, and resource conditions such as air quality, soil conditions, plant communities, natural soundscapes and viewsheds.

Actions Common to All Action Alternatives

- Protect natural processes and the park's natural ecosystem, including natural soundscapes and viewsheds.
- Construct an entrance by-pass lane.
- Implement vehicle restrictions (width or length limits) of large vehicles and trailers in the parks.
- Create more picnic areas in the parks.
- Create more visitor contact opportunities for NPS field staff.
- Provide more compelling messages to enhance visitor experience while recreating in the parks.
- Grow partnerships with local community and businesses to aid in developing new opportunities to spread visitation out seasonally and regionally.
- Provide targeted travel information in each park for variable message signs, trail signage, park radio station, mobile park apps, park webcams, social media, and printed brochures.

What happens next?

- Preliminary Alternatives comment period (closes November 12, 2015)
- Preparation of EA – Winter 2015/2016
- Public review of EA – Spring 2016
- Analysis of public comment and preparation of decision document – Summer 2016
- Announcement of decision – Fall 2016



How do I comment on this project?

The preferred method to submit your comments is online at the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website under either park:

http://parkplanning.nps.gov/arch_traffic_congestion_management

or

http://parkplanning.nps.gov/cany_traffic_congestion_management.

Click on and open the **Oct 2015 Preliminary Newsletter Traffic Congestion Management** document to comment.

Anyone unable to submit their comments to either of the above websites may mail their comments to the National Park Service, Attn: Planning and Compliance, 2282 SW. Resource Blvd, Moab, UT 84532. Written comments must be postmarked by November 12, 2015 deadline.