



Transportation

Project Newsletter • October 2011

A Note from the Superintendent

More than 1 million visitors came to Arches National Park in 2010. That was a new record which will probably be broken this year and in each coming year. It is wonderful to see the ever growing popularity of Arches National Park and the enjoyment the park brings to more and more people.

In the park the visitor's experience is one of beautiful views sweeping from the high peaks of the La Sal mountains in the National Forest down to the Colorado River gorge and across varied and beautiful BLM public lands back to the park in the foreground. It is a stunning landscape.

However, with this growth in visitation the visitor experience in the park has become one of searching endlessly for a parking place. On most days, from mid-morning to mid-afternoon, parking lots in the park are filled to overflowing and parked cars line the roadsides. Visitors face long waits, disappointment, and frustration instead of the great experience they had expected.

Less obvious but equally important is the fact that as visitors drive throughout the park tailpipe emissions from their cars turn into haze and air pollution which can diminish views and harm plants and animals across the landscape – the very landscape we are charged with protecting.

Can we solve both of these problems? Can we cut air pollution and cut parking congestion at Arches National Park? We think so, and we've launched the Alternative Transportation System and Congestion Management Study to help find solutions. We hope you'll join us in the effort.

Kate Cannon

Superintendent, Arches National Park

The Alternative Transportation System and Congestion Management Study

In 2009 the National Park Service (NPS) submitted a grant request to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Paul S. Sarbanes "Transit in Parks Program (TRIP)" to fund development and implementation of strategies to enable the park to manage traffic congestion and improve the visitor experience at Arches National Park. In the summer of 2010 Arches National Park received funding from FTA for the 2011-12 Alternative Transportation System and Congestion Management Study.

Through the NPS Denver Service Center (DSC), the park service's planning, design, and construction management office, the NPS hired Louis Berger Group, Inc. (prime consultant under a General Services Administration Transportation Planning contract) and sub consultants from Nelson Nygaard (transportation planning) and Rhodeside & Harwell (landscape architects) to bring a full team of transportation planners, transit operations financial analysis, and site planning and design expertise to this project.

This Study will build upon the Arches National Park 2006 Transportation Plan & Environmental Assessment. The 2006 Transportation Plan served a 5 year planning horizon and focused on actions that could be achieved without necessitating a new General Management Plan for the park. It included a roadside pullout plan and associated National environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance as well as determined that a concession for a motorized interpretive tour in the park could be a profitable operation. That tour, if implemented, would offer an expanded opportunity for scenic viewing via trips with a professional driver but it would not take a sizable percentage of vehicular traffic off the park roadways or alleviate traffic congestion in the parking areas.

To succeed at solving traffic congestion inside the park, NPS needs to work collaboratively with the City of Moab, other agencies, and stakeholders outside the park. This project will go beyond the 2006 Transportation Plan by building upon partnerships with the City of Moab and other county, state, and federal agencies and will include project stakeholder involvement to help the park to better manage traffic congestion in parking areas and improve the visitor experience.



An example of frequent overflow parking along road shoulders which can create impacts to soils and vegetation off the road and can potentially block the main road.



Congestion and parking overflow at Wolfe Ranch

Project Scope of Service Requirements

Specifically, this project will develop a set of management options to enable the park to manage traffic congestion in

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the park and support the planning and implementation of a limited, voluntary 1-3 year pilot shuttle system originating within or near the gateway community of Moab providing service to prime destination trailheads in Arches.

Options for Moving Forward

After a productive Study kick-off meeting in August, the NPS along with the consultant team have continued to analyze the park's visitation patterns and congestion-related problems.

The team is currently using that information, along with ideas expressed in the November 2010 community workshops held in Moab, to develop a "transportation tool kit" or set of traffic and visitor management strategies, for Arches National Park. The options for moving forward can be broken down into two primary alternatives:

- A congestion management model aimed at managing continued visitor access using personal vehicles. Under this option, the NPS would incorporate congestion management strategies (such as variable traveler information services, parking management, or park reservation systems) to manage demand and help alleviate traffic and parking congestion within the park.



Consultant team and NPS staff meet with Moab Trails Coordinator Kim Schappert on the recently installed Bridge that links Lion's Park with Arches National Park and points beyond via the Moab Canyon Trail

- A shuttle service designed to increase travel options between and within Arches and Moab. Concepts could range from an integrated shuttle serving Moab and Arches National Park to more focused services centered on the park alone.

The team is currently evaluating these options. In town, the assessment focuses on identifying locations for potential park-and-ride lots, shuttle operations facilities and partnership opportunities. In the park, the analysis builds on information about visitor travel patterns and resource constraints. In addition to exploring how to bring visitors to the park, the team has been reviewing

shuttle options for moving visitors around within Arches and to match shuttle service levels to visitor demand and visitor use capacity which is not necessarily determined by the size of the parking lots. Each option will involve careful consideration of where to locate "temporary" shuttle facilities such as bus stops and shelters, taking into account scenic views, convenience, and financial and operational efficiency. The goal is to reduce traffic congestion at heavily used parking areas and develop a pilot shuttle service that is efficient, easy to use, and provides a high quality visitor experience. If the pilot strategies are successful and prove to be financially sustainable, the NPS may elect to move forward with long term implementation.



In August, the Project team met with city, county and local stakeholders to discuss ideas for congestion management and shuttle staging areas in the Moab vicinity

November 2010 Workshop Summary and Recent Activities

In discussions with our stakeholders and park employees during the 2010 November workshops, both groups came up with many solutions in an attempt to accomplish some short and long-term goals to help alleviate traffic congestion issues in Arches National Park. Several near-term strategies described ways to inform visitors when the busy times in the park are and what visitors can expect when they are visiting the park during these times. The park began tackling some near-term solutions earlier this year.

Since November, the NPS has updated the park website, www.nps.gov/arch, to include a *Traffic and Travel Tips* section under *Things to Know Before You Come*. There are two new sections called *Getting Around the Park* and *Bus Information* that describe alternative ways to see the park. We also dedicated

a page to the park's transportation planning efforts. This page describes past, present and future transportation planning and links to transportation planning documents.



In April, Arches National Park launched its new Facebook page and Twitter account. Both these social media outlets allow the park to keep visitors updated on park information, including transportation and traffic related issues.

The park newspaper was recently updated in July to discuss the park's

increasing visitation, what the "busy season" is all about, and ways each visitor can help reduce crowding. The paper also refers to the limited parking at all destinations and the best way to park in these areas.

As previously mentioned, we now have on board a consultant team of transportation planning experts to develop a shuttle system and analyze the feasibility of operating it.

All these recently completed efforts are an attempt to give visitors more information regarding the parks' traffic conditions so visitors can make better informed decisions when they are planning their trip to Arches from home or if they are already in the Moab area. The park will continue to focus on implementing additional near-term strategies prior to the completion of the feasibility study.

Meet Todd Johnson, Our Transportation Scholar

The National Park Transportation Scholars Program selected Arches National Park to receive a transportation scholar for one year. The Scholars Program places transportation professionals, as well as master's and doctoral candidates in the fields of transportation, engineering, and planning, in national parks across the country to assist NPS staff in developing transportation solutions that preserve valuable resources and enhance the visitor experience. Projects can involve transportation planning and analysis, coordination with local communities, environmental and traffic studies, and other transportation-related tasks.

Todd Johnson was the scholar selected to work with Arches National Park on the park's transportation related issues. Todd has a M.S. in Civil Engineering from Portland State University, a B.S. in Civil Engineering from U.C. Davis, and has previously worked as a Transportation Interpreter at Rocky Mountain National Park.

The Scholar Program, which began in 2001, is still going strong thanks to the assistance of the National Park Foundation, the National Park Service, the Eno Transportation Foundation, the Federal Highway Administration, the Paul S. Sarbanes Transit in Parks Technical Assistance Center, and other private funding.

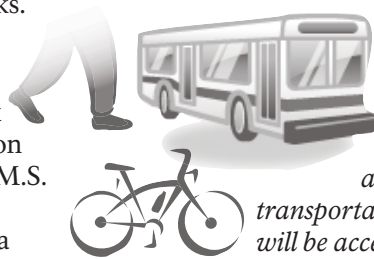
I am very excited to work with the National Park Service, the Moab community, and other key stakeholders in addressing and solving longstanding automobile parking and congestion issues at Arches National Park. Working within the boundaries of a national park, a place set aside in this case for the protection and enjoyment of extraordinary examples of eroded sandstone formations, creates a unique transportation challenge. Within the context of a national park, additional transportation capacity, in the form of roads, multiuse/ bicycle paths, transit facilities, or parking lots and the need to preserve park resources often clash.

So we're working on better ways to alleviate automobile congestion problems, finding solutions and beginning longer-range transportation planning efforts that will be acceptable and beneficial for all stakeholders. I, for one, am proud to be a part of Arches as we move forward in studying and implementing transportation solutions.

-Todd Johnson

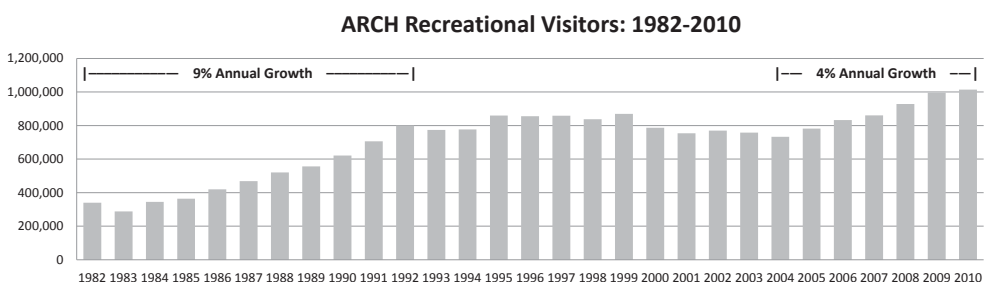
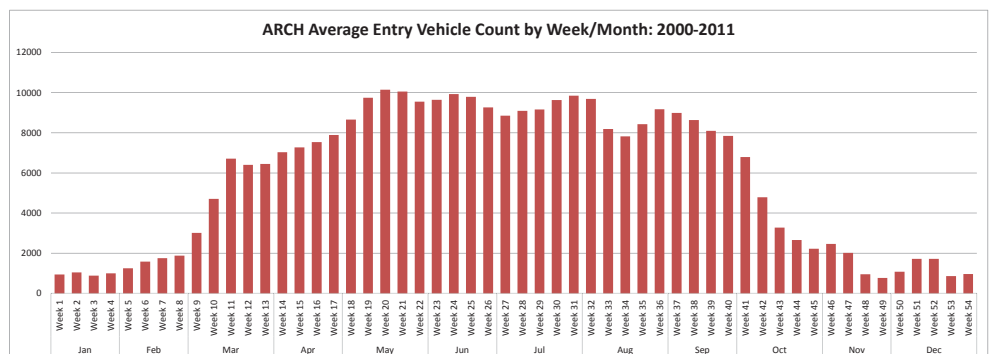
Todd will be focused on a few key objectives and tasks during his year at Arches:

1. Identify and implement additional near-term strategies to assist in alleviating traffic congestion and circulation issues with the park and inform the alternatives that go into the Study
 - update peak parking and traffic data from 2003
 - evaluate under-used/secondary parking lots.
 - develop transportation solutions to address traffic congestion (social media, ITS, HAR, restriping parking lots).
2. Collaborate with the park and key stakeholders to identify effective solutions that will support both the park and broader community needs.
 - establish, coordinate and manage a community transportation alliance advisory group to inform the Study.
 - identify areas in the Moab area that may be able to handle shuttle pick-up/ drop-off and parking of visitors cars.
3. Examine and develop implementation ideas to support multi-use trails for pedestrians and bicycles in the near term.
 - assess development of possibilities for walking/biking paths linking sites and future shuttle stops.
 - consider bicycling opportunities/events



Visitation Growth

In 2010, Arches National Park reached a milestone and was the destination for over 1 million visitors. This year, Arches is already forecasting that visitation will be above last year's count. Since 2004, when visitation trends were last evaluated for the Arches NP Transportation Plan, park visitation has increased from 733,131 in 2004 to 1,014,405 last year, and has averaged a 5% growth increase each year. From 2004-2010 there has been an increase of 14,220 cars annually, 21% more cars than documented in the 2006 Transportation Study. Arches also receives around 1,300 commercial bus tours a year with the busiest seasons from May through October. With the increase of visitation, the park has seen an increase of parking issues that are no longer associated with only holidays or weekends or other special occasions. Parking congestion is now the norm from mid March through early November.





Arches National Park
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Moab, UT 84532-0907

Project Schedule

November 2011 – Internal NPS Workshop to examine potential transportation strategies

December 2011 – Public newsletter project update with workshop results

February 2012 – Public meeting to present alternative strategies for feedback and public comment

March 2012 – Public newsletter project update with feedback on comments received on alternative strategies

Spring 2013 – 1 to 3 year Pilot Shuttle Program potentially begins

Planning, Environment & Public Comment (PEPC)

The National Park Service's (NPS) Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) system, <http://parkplanning.nps.gov> is the electronic way to submit public comments for NPS projects and planning efforts. PEPC is a web-based system that facilitates public involvement in NPS projects and planning efforts nationwide. The public can comment on project documents open for review, as well as access schedules for projects along with specific information about public meetings. Anyone with an internet connection can access the site to find out what projects are available for public review, submit comments, or find information on public meetings. A map will display documents currently open for review.

There is a shortcut to finding Arches National Park projects in PEPC: just type in the browser <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/arch> and it will take you directly to a list of all current Arches projects. From here you can

select the 'Open for Comment' link in the left navigation to find those documents currently open for commenting. You can select the Archived Projects link to find projects which have been officially 'closed' for more than a year. To view Arches' main park website click on "Park Information" for more planning information.

When the Alternative Transportation System and Congestion Management Study becomes available for public review and comment it will be posted on PEPC for a 30 day review period. Comments can be submitted in PEPC (the preferred method) or mailed to:

National Park Service
Attn: Planning and Compliance
2282 S. West Resource Blvd
Moab, UT 84532

