

Mojave National Preserve

Roadway Safety Improvements Project

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Project Scoping Newsletter Winter 2014



Dear Friends of Mojave National Preserve,

The National Park Service (NPS) is seeking your input on a road improvement project within Mojave National Preserve. The proposed project would reduce the number of accidents by improving roadway curves, grades, and sight lines and realigning two intersections. We are currently conducting planning and design work and preparing an Environmental Assessment (EA) to analyze impacts of the proposed actions.

Public scoping is underway and we welcome your input on project. Please join us for a public meeting on the project on Saturday, February 1, 2014. You may also comment online at <http://parkplanning/nps.gov/moja-road-safety> or by mail, before the end of the scoping period on February 15, 2014. Page 8 of this newsletter contains additional information on the meeting and how to comment.

If you have questions about the project, please contact Mr. David Moore, Chief of Maintenance, at david_b_moore@nps.gov or (760) 252-6142.

Thank you for your help!

Stephanie Dubois
Superintendent

Why is the Project Needed?

Numerous serious vehicle accidents occur every year on Preserve roads, often involving vehicle rollovers, injuries and fatalities. Some sections of the paved and maintained dirt roads have tight and sharp curves, improper super-elevation (banking or tilting of the roadway surface), inadequate sight distance and signage, and poorly designed intersections. Other sections of two dirt roads also wash out during large flood events, creating hazardous driving conditions and stranding residents and visitors. These dangerous road conditions have contributed to a high incidence of single vehicle accidents and increased accident severity, particularly when combined with drivers who are distracted and/or exceeding the speed limit.

What is the Purpose of the Project?

The purpose of the proposed project is to enhance public safety, reduce vehicular accidents, and improve the visitor experience by correcting existing road design deficiencies and conditions that endanger those driving through the Preserve. The project objectives are to:

- Reduce motor vehicle accidents in the Preserve;
- Improve road safety while protecting adjacent wilderness areas and the federally threatened desert tortoise;
- Reduce maintenance costs associated with roads that receive frequent localized flooding; and
- Improve the visitor experience for both motorists and pedestrians by reducing dangerous road conditions and confusion at intersections.

Issues

NPS staff identified the following preliminary issues to be analyzed in the EA. Are there any other issues we should consider?

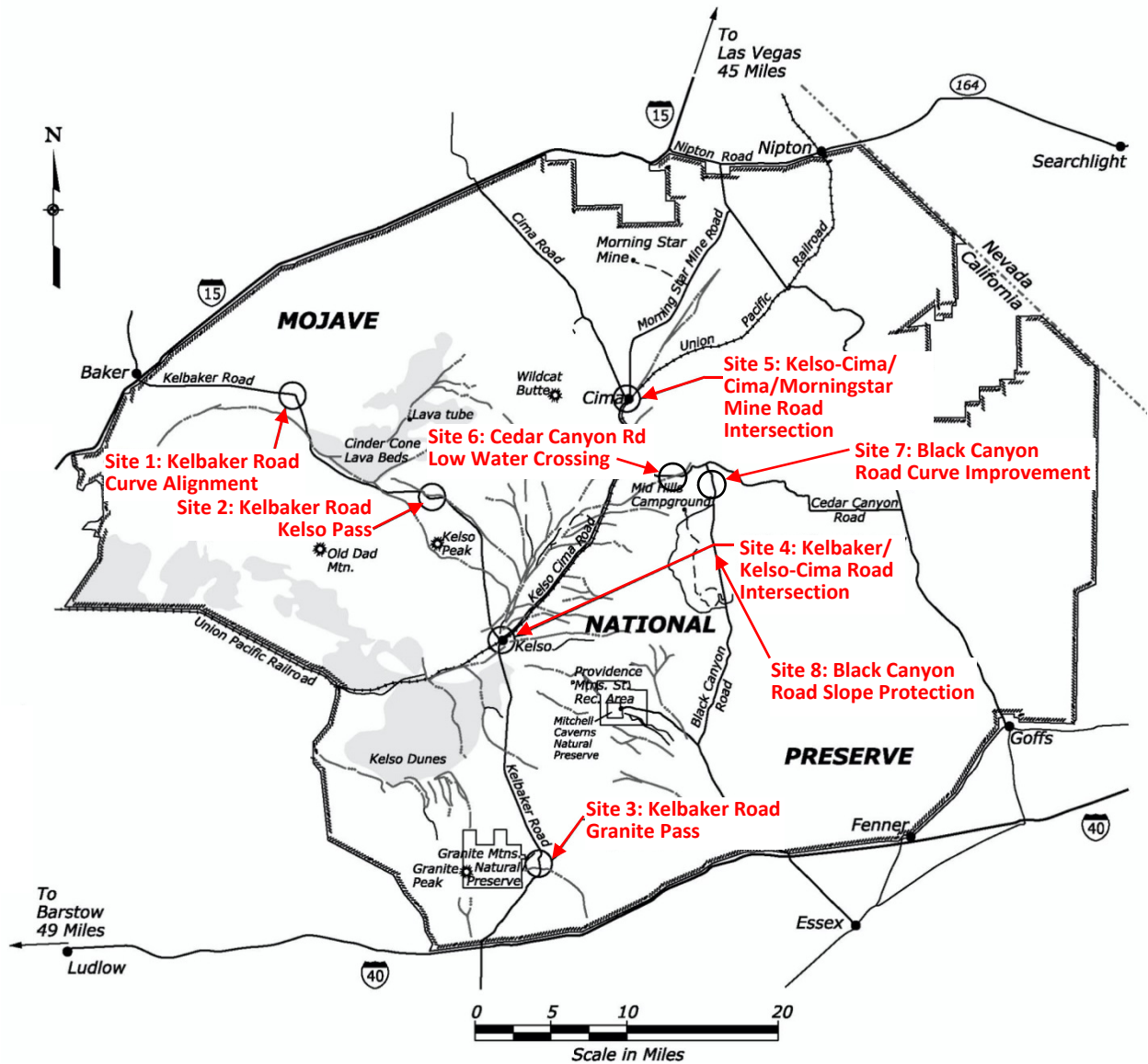
- Critical habitat for the threatened desert tortoise could be affected and there is a potential for tortoises to be within construction zones. In addition, other wildlife such as reptiles and small mammals may be affected during construction.
- Construction would disturb soils and landforms, remove vegetation and possibly spread or introduce invasive plants.
- The Kelbaker Road/Kelso Pass project area is near an archeological site.
- Temporary road detours and/or delays and other construction related activities may negatively impact park operations, traffic, residents, and visitors.
- Armoring channel banks with riprap to reduce flood-related road damage could affect stream flow.



Threatened desert tortoise crossing a Mojave road

Project Locations and Description

Approximately 3.75 miles of road realignment and repairs are proposed at eight locations throughout the Preserve. Details of specific improvements at each site are discussed on the following pages.



Map of Mojave National Preserve showing the location of project sites

Site 1: Kelbaker Road Curve Alignment

A long straight stretch of Kelbaker Road is interrupted by a sharp curve. A more gradually curved new alignment with a larger radius would allow vehicles to negotiate the curve easier and reduce the number of single-vehicle accidents at the site.



Photo of Site 1, Kelbaker Road



Aerial photo of sharp curve at Site 1

Site 2: Kelbaker Road, Kelso Pass

At Kelso Pass, another long straight road section is interrupted by several sharp curves and abrupt grade changes which limit sight lines and make it difficult for drivers to see oncoming vehicles. Approximately 3600 feet of road would be reconstructed and realigned to remove abrupt vertical and horizontal shifts. The vertical grade would be filled or lowered to remove dips and minor horizontal alignment changes would smooth the transition into and out of the curves in the road. Several Joshua trees along the revised alignment may need to be relocated.



Joshua trees and cacti at Kelso Pass



Site 2, note limited sight distance



Aerial Photo of Kelbaker Road at Kelso Pass

Site 3: Kelbaker Road, Granite Pass

At this location, a long straight stretch of road is followed by a series of sharp curves and dips that have also been the site of numerous single-vehicle accidents. The project would realign the road into one large curve with a smooth vertical grade instead of several small curves with sharp grade changes. In addition, the existing pullout would be converted to a gravel parking area. Other improvements may include replacement of an existing culvert, signage, flashing beacons, and rumble strips. Several species of cacti located in the new alignment would be saved and later transplanted.



Photo showing sharp curve and abrupt grade change at Site 3



Aerial Photo of Kelbaker Road

Site 4: Kelbaker Road/Kelso-Cima Road Intersection

This intersection is located at the historic town of Kelso. Both roads are two-lane asphalt roads which form a T intersection. The Union Pacific Railroad crosses Kelbaker Road approximately 100' south of the intersection. The Kelso-Cima leg would be moved to the northwest, allowing for more space between the railroad crossing and the intersection, and therefore improving the sight distance. The large expanse of asphalt in the existing intersection would be reduced (*Continued on next page...*)



Kelbaker Road/Kelso-Cima Road Intersection



Photo showing limited sight distance at railroad crossing

(Site 4, continued) to help clarify traffic flow through the intersection. From the gravel parking area, a pedestrian path would connect to a speed table/crosswalk that directs pedestrians to an existing path in the picnic area. This would promote slower speeds and provide a visual and physical separation for pedestrians. Additional controls to promote slower speeds and improve pedestrian safety would also be employed.

Site 5: Morningstar Mine Road/Cima Road/ Kelso-Cima Road Intersection

Kelso-Cima Road, Cima Road, and Morning Star Mine Road form a Y intersection that is confusing to drivers. A railroad spur line is located on Kelso-Cima Road approximately 70 feet south of the intersection and rises about five to seven feet above the road grade. This short distance between the railroad tracks and the intersection and the poor sight lines have led to rear-end collisions with vehicles stopped at the intersection. The proposed improvements include raising the grade of the roadway between the railroad spur crossings, improved signage and striping, and possible realignment of the intersection to improve sight distance and create a “T” intersection.



Photos of the Intersection of Morningstar Mine, Cima and Kelso-Cima Roads

Site 6: Cedar Canyon Road, Low Water Crossings



Photo Showing Low Water Crossing on Cedar Canyon Road

Cedar Canyon Road is an unpaved road where washouts during storm flooding events have required frequent and substantial regrading and road maintenance. To minimize damage during floods, two proposed low water crossings would be paved with asphalt and barriers installed on the road edges. The asphalt section would be 160 feet in one location, and 300 feet at the other. The proposed improvements are designed to work well in desert floodplain conditions.

Site 7: Black Canyon Road, Curve Improvement Site

Black Canyon Road is an unpaved two-lane road that provides access to the Mid Hills and Hole-In-the-Wall trails and campgrounds. A small curve would be re-graded to add the appropriate super-elevation and prevent vehicles from sliding off the roadway as they go through the curve. In addition to the road improvements, signage would be installed in several locations to identify curves and reduce speed.

Site 8: Black Canyon Road, Slope Protection Project

Black Canyon Road also runs parallel to a large desert wash. Flood waters often cross and damage the road during storm events, limiting access to/from private residences and the campgrounds. Large rock (riprap) would be placed in the road embankment adjacent to the wash to provide reinforcement against future damage. This work would occur on a 1.8 mile section of the road that most frequently washes out during flood events, preserving as much of the stable vegetated bank as possible. The below right photo shows a section of flood-damaged wash which is representative of the sections that would be armored.



Black Canyon Road Curve Improvement Site



Black Canyon Road Slope Protection

Next Steps

An approximate project timeline is as follows:

- January-February 2014: Public Scoping
- Winter - Spring 2014: Alternatives development based on the purpose and need, issues, and objectives, with input from the public
- Spring - Summer 2014: EA preparation, including the analysis of impacts to resources
- Summer 2014: Release of EA to the public for review and comment
- Summer - Fall 2014: Analysis of public comments, preparation of a decision document and completion of construction documents
- 2015: Construction begins

How to Comment

Do you see problems, concerns or opportunities related to the proposed project that we should know about? Please tell us what you would like the project team to consider. The NPS website, listed below, has been set up to receive your input. The site will also provide updates about the project's progress and other related documents. Please provide comments by **February 15, 2014**. You may provide comments in the following ways:

1. Attend the Public Scoping meeting on February 1, 2014, from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. The meeting will be held at the Interagency Fire Center at Hole in the Wall, 1 Black Canyon Road, Essex, CA, 92332.
2. Submit comments electronically on the NPS planning website: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/moja-road-safety>
3. Send a letter or write comments on the enclosed form. Comments may be sent to:
National Park Service
Mojave Roadway Safety Improvements Project, Attn: K. Cantwell
333 Bush Street, Suite 500
San Francisco, CA 94104-2828

Please note: Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment — including your personal information — may be made publicly available at any time. Although you can request that we withhold your personal identifying information from public view, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.



National Park Service
Mojave National Preserve
2701 Barstow Road
Barstow, California 92311

OFFICIAL BUSINESS
PENALTY FOR PRIVATE USE \$300

