

# Grand Canyon South Rim Visitor Transportation Plan/EA

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



Newsletter, August, 2006

To the many people interested in Grand Canyon: The National Park Service (NPS), in cooperation with the US Forest Service (USFS), is pleased to provide you with a status report on the progress made on the South Rim Visitor Transportation Plan. Under the provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), the NPS is preparing an Environmental Assessment (EA) as an essential part of this plan. The EA will address impacts to park resources that may result from proposed actions developed to address the park's most pressing traffic and visitor access issues within the South Rim area.

As part of the NEPA process, NPS conducted public scoping from March through April, 2006, and included four public open house meetings in Las Vegas, Nevada, and in Phoenix, Flagstaff, and Tusayan, Arizona. The NPS received nearly 300 comments from the public, agencies, and other interested parties, who provided suggestions and input into the planning process.

The NPS has now developed a preliminary range of alternatives for your review and comment. These preliminary alternatives were developed based on this input from the public and continued communication with NPS and USFS staff. This newsletter describes the preliminary alternatives, how you can comment, and the next steps in the planning process. Your input is important to us and we encourage you to comment!

If you have questions regarding the South Rim Visitor Transportation Plan, please contact Vicky Stinson at (928) 774-3026.

Sincerely,

Joseph F. Alston  
Superintendent  
Grand Canyon National Park

## Planning for the Future

The South Rim is the primary destination for most Grand Canyon visitors. Unfortunately, many South Rim visitors arriving in their private vehicles experience frustration associated with long delays at the South Entrance Station, confusion about where to go to access canyon views and park services, and inadequate parking at Mather Point and within the Grand Canyon Village. People walking between Mather Point and Canyon View Information Plaza (CVIP) must cross heavy traffic using the South Entrance Road. Roadside parking in the area conflicts with moving traffic and visitors walking along the roadside are exposed to safety risks. While these are prominent issues today, should visitation increase at any level over time, their effect on South Rim visitors would be intensified if steps are not taken to plan for the future.

In March, 2006 the NPS released a public scoping letter that described the purpose and need for action

relating to a Transportation Plan for the South Rim and announced the start of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. The Purpose and Need for the project is described below.

### Purpose and Need

The purpose of the South Rim Visitor Transportation Plan is to provide a transportation system that addresses the park's most pressing transportation issues through the year 2020. The plan would accommodate current and anticipated future levels of visitation, help alleviate traffic congestion and safety risks, facilitate enhanced visitor experiences and protect park resources. The system would be affordable within park recreation fee revenues, and would be adaptively managed to respond to changes in visitation through the life of the plan. This project will not preclude other future transportation systems from being implemented, including those that may be required for substantial increases in visitation.

**Plan Objectives**

The purpose of the South Rim Visitor Transportation Plan will be achieved by meeting the following key plan objectives, which are based on the most pressing transportation issues:

- Improve/increase private vehicle parking as needed to meet current and future demand.
- Improve the entrance experience by reducing long waits at the South Entrance Station for visitors and employees/residents and commercial traffic.
- Reduce overall vehicle traffic in the Grand Canyon Village by 15-25 percent during peak periods.
- Provide a variety of means to access the Visitor Center at Canyon View Information Plaza (CVIP) to afford all visitors the opportunity to receive park orientation soon after their arrival.
- Improve/increase tour bus parking to better accommodate current and future demand.
- Restore areas damaged by improper vehicle parking and social trailing in non-designated areas such as at Mather Point.
- Reduce safety risks due to conflicts among pedestrians, parked vehicles and moving traffic near Mather Point

The preliminary plan alternatives have been developed to meet these key objectives and to respond to comments from the public during the scoping process. The alternatives achieve these objectives in a variety of ways. While meeting the key objectives, the plan alternatives contribute to visitor enjoyment, safety and resource protection in additional ways that will be evaluated during the NEPA process.



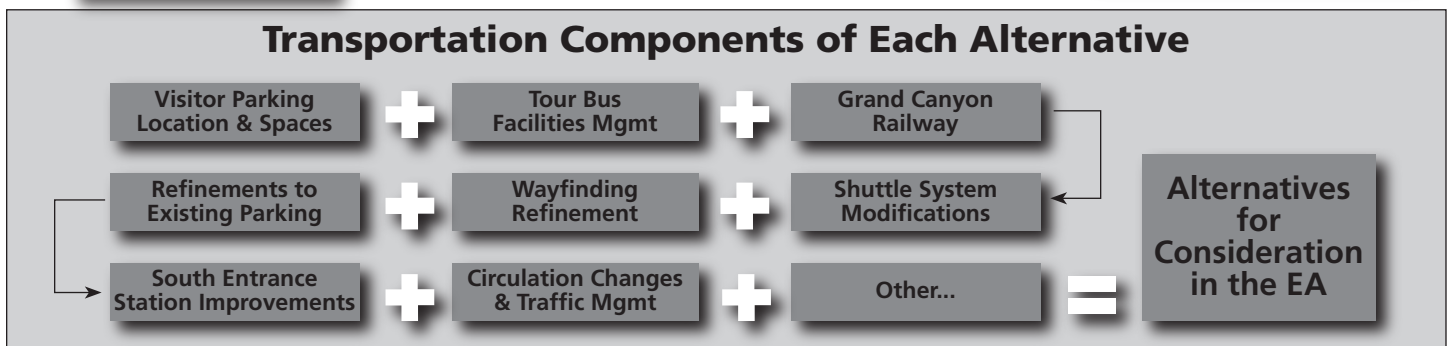
**Public Scoping Activities**

NPS provided descriptions of existing conditions and presented the purpose and need for the transportation plan at public open house meetings. Comments on this information and potential alternatives were solicited. A summary of public comments and NPS responses are posted on the National Park Service Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) website at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/grca>. A predominant theme of the comments related to the need to make transportation improvements within the South Rim area while protecting resources. Other comments related to types of transit service that should be provided, the need for improvements to the South Entrance Station and preferences for balancing personal vehicle, tour bus, shuttle bus and train transportation needs within the South Rim area.

**Alternatives Development**

A range of possible alternatives has been identified based on the purpose and need for the action, objectives, planning framework, input from the public scoping effort and data on visitor use. As illustrated in the diagram below, each project alternative addresses multiple transportation components including options for providing expanded visitor parking, improved tour bus parking and passenger loading, reduced waiting times and shorter traffic back-ups at the South Entrance Station, improved management of passengers and tour bus traffic associated with the Grand Canyon Railway, and enhanced shuttle bus service. The three identified “action” alternatives meet the overall project purpose and need and address the objectives of the project in different ways. The basic elements of the alternatives are illustrated and described on the following pages. We are soliciting your comments regarding these preliminary alternatives at this stage, in order to ensure they meet project objectives and represent a reasonable range of alternatives for detailed analysis in the EA. Additional detail and refinements will be determined in the EA process. These alternatives and a “no action” alternative represent the preliminary range of alternatives to be evaluated in the EA.

**Transportation Components of Each Alternative**



# South Rim Visitor Transportation Plan/EA

## South Rim Shuttle Routes

- Create new Rim Route by extending Hermits Rest route to CVIP via Yavapai Observation Station and Mather Point and increase frequency of service
- Modify Village Route by eliminating Yavapai Observation Station stop and reducing frequency of service

## Tusayan-Centered Alternative

This alternative would concentrate most new facilities outside the park. A new large visitor parking area and shuttle bus boarding facilities would be provided on USFS land just north of Tusayan. Visitors would have the option of riding frequent shuttle service from this location to CVIP, by-passing the entrance station traffic. Shuttle bus service would take visitors from CVIP to all major canyon overlooks west to Hermits Rest without the need to transfer. Short-term visitor parking would be provided near CVIP for visitors choosing to drive into the park. These visitors would then be able to drive to the village and use existing parking lots. This alternative would provide the greatest reduction in vehicular traffic in the park and would minimize development within the park.

### Village Tour Bus

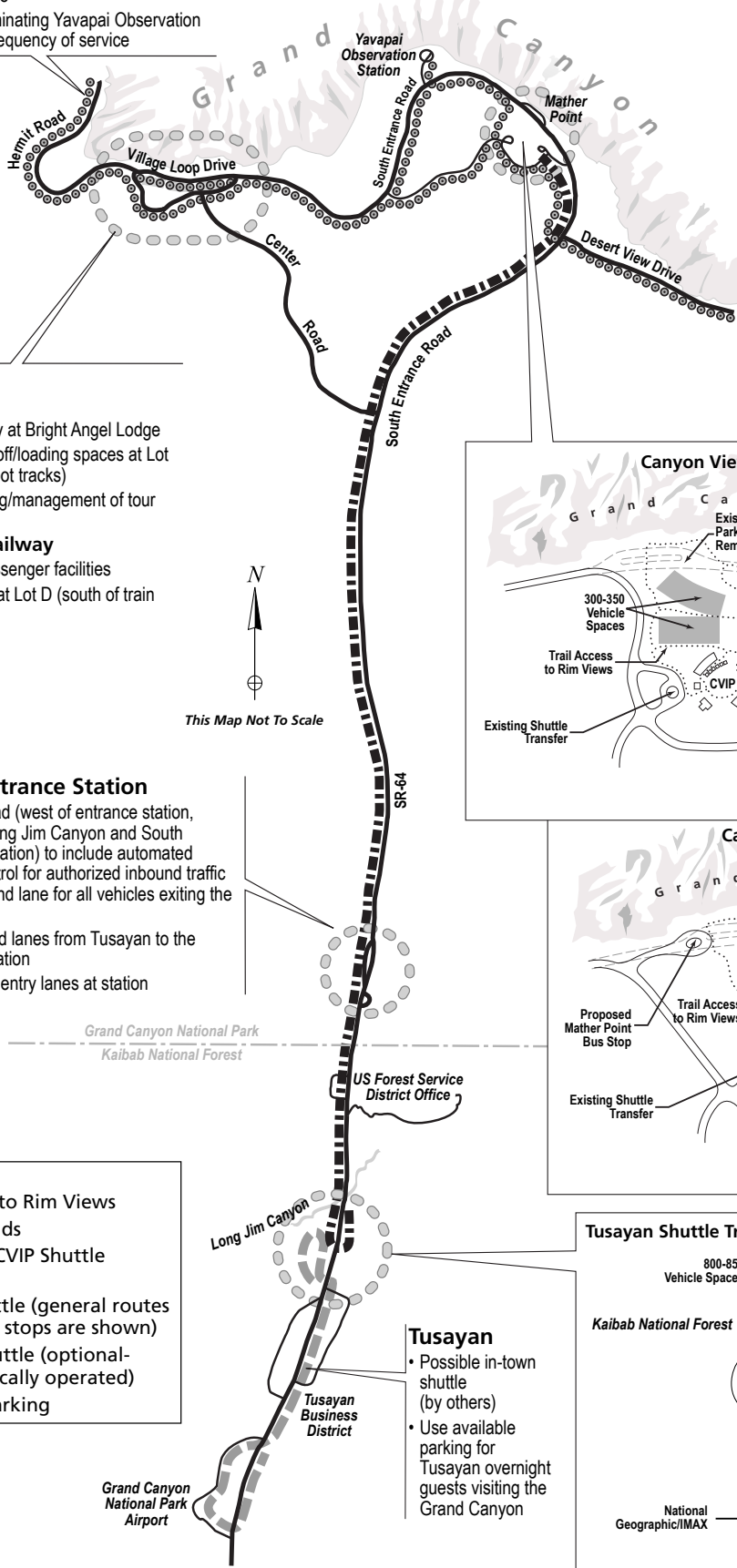
- Drop-off/loading only at Bright Angel Lodge
- 40-50 parking/drop-off/loading spaces at Lot D (south of train depot tracks)
- Enhanced wayfinding/management of tour buses

### Grand Canyon Railway

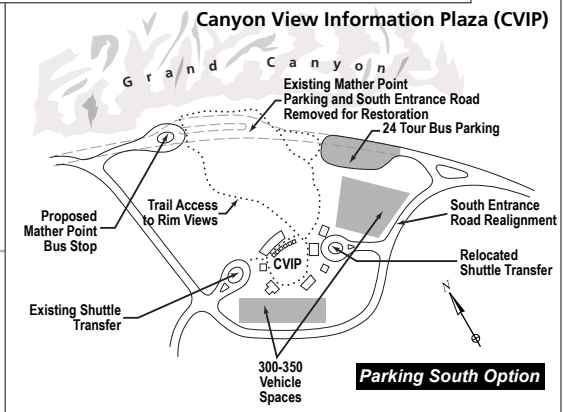
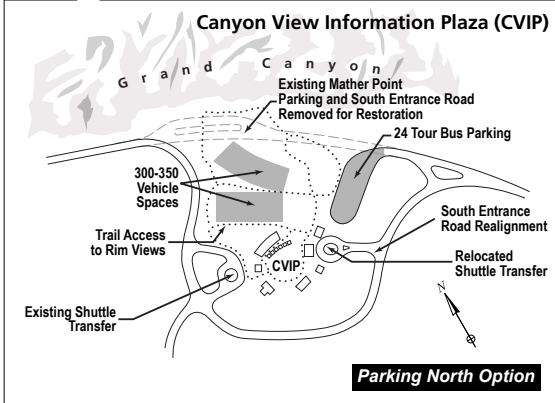
- Maintain current passenger facilities
- Xanterra tours load at Lot D (south of train depot tracks)

### South Entrance Station

- By-pass road (west of entrance station, between Long Jim Canyon and South Entrance Station) to include automated access control for authorized inbound traffic and outbound lane for all vehicles exiting the park
- Two inbound lanes from Tusayan to the entrance station
- Four to five entry lanes at station



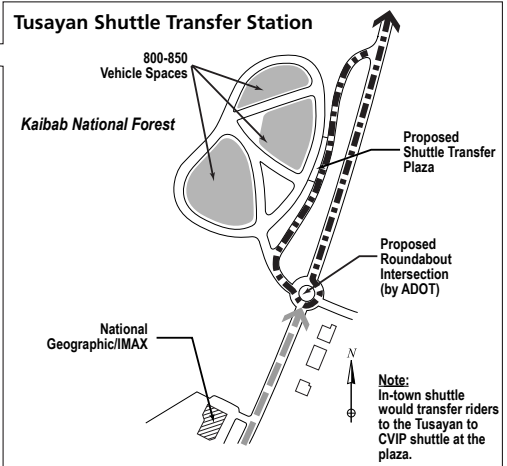
This Map Not To Scale



**Legend**

- ..... Trail Access to Rim Views
- Existing Roads
- ▬▬▬ Tusayan to CVIP Shuttle (voluntary)
- In-Park Shuttle (general routes only; not all stops are shown)
- ▬ In-Town Shuttle (optional-would be locally operated)
- Proposed Parking

- Tusayan**
- Possible in-town shuttle (by others)
  - Use available parking for Tusayan overnight guests visiting the Grand Canyon

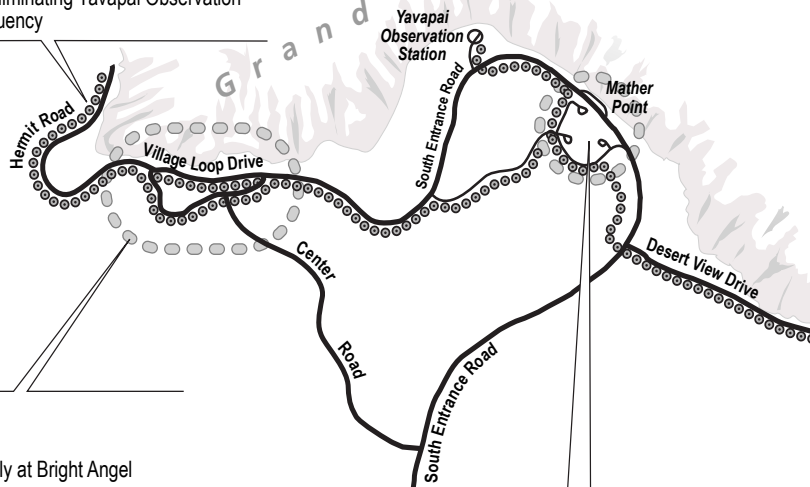


**South Rim Shuttle Routes**

- Modify Kaibab Trail Route to serve Mather Point and Yavapai Observation Station
- Extend Hermits Rest route to CVIP and increase frequency
- Modify Village Route by eliminating Yavapai Observation Station and reducing frequency

**Park-Centered Alternative**

This alternative would concentrate new transportation facilities within the park at CVIP. A new large parking area accommodating short-term use of the Visitor Center and long-term use by people riding shuttles would be provided. This alternative would simplify wayfinding and maximize the use of the Visitor Center by focusing visitor access at a single site at CVIP affording easy access to trip planning and other information. Shuttle bus service would be provided from CVIP directly to Yaki, Mather and Yavapai points, making it easy to enjoy canyon overlooks. Visitors would have the option of driving to the village and using existing parking lots.

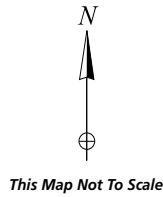


**Village Tour Bus**

- Drop-off/loading only at Bright Angel Lodge
- +/- 20 parking spaces in Lot E (near backcountry office)
- Enhanced wayfinding/management of tour buses

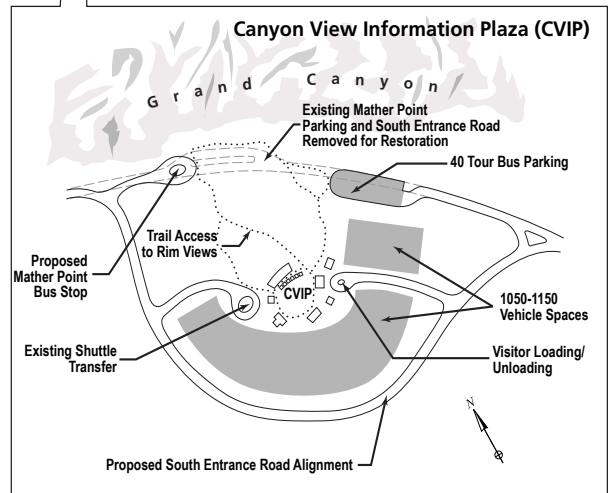
**Grand Canyon Railway**

- Maintain current passenger facilities



**South Entrance Station**

- New inbound lane (east of entrance station beginning north of USFS access road) with automated access control for authorized traffic
- Two inbound lanes from Tusayan to the entrance station
- Four to five entry lanes at station



Grand Canyon National Park  
Kaibab National Forest

US Forest Service District Office

Long Jim Canyon

Tusayan Business District

Grand Canyon National Park Airport

**Legend**

- ..... Trail Access to Rim Views
- Existing Roads
- In-Park Shuttle (general routes only; not all stops are shown)
- Proposed Parking (to include landscaping)

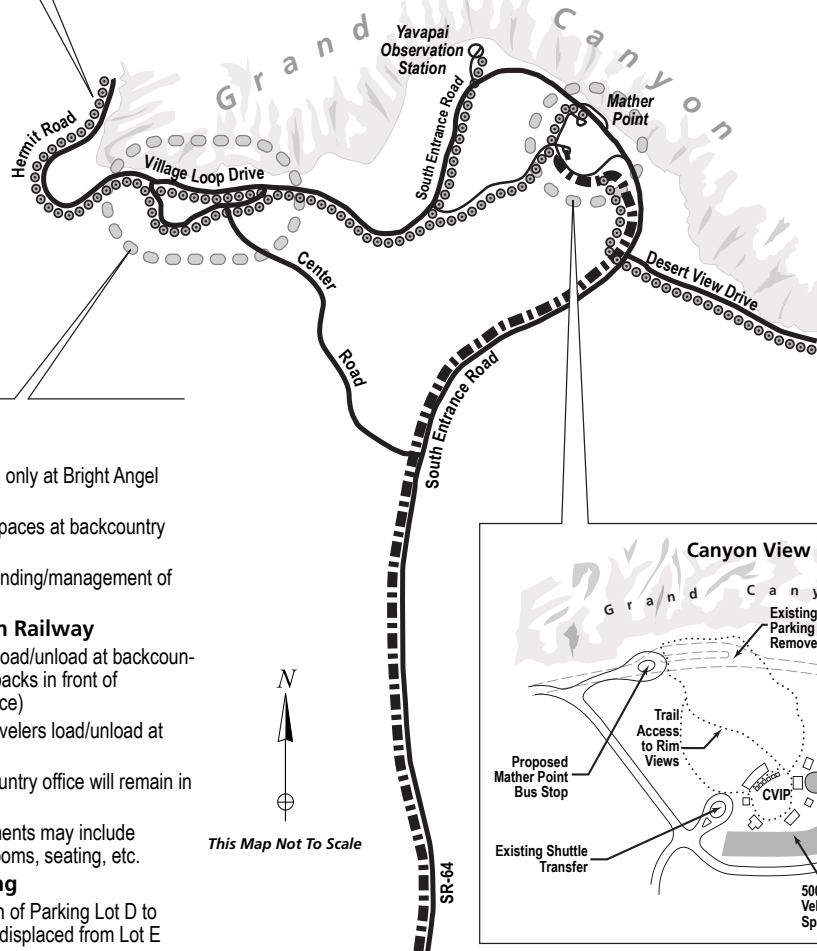


**South Rim Shuttle Routes**

- Maintain existing routes (with minor modifications)
- Increase frequency on Hermits Rest and Village routes

**Mixed Alternative**

This alternative is based on Option A from the Report to Congress. New parking for visitors choosing to ride shuttle buses would be located near the National Geographic facility in Tusayan and at CVIP. This alternative would reduce the amount of new development in the park, while providing sufficient visitor parking in the park to meet visitor needs except during the peak season, when the parking near Tusayan would be used. Frequent shuttle service would be provided from the parking near Tusayan to CVIP. Parking at CVIP would accommodate short-term use of the Visitor Center as well as shuttle riders. The existing shuttle bus routes in the park would be retained, with added service to reduce overcrowding.



**Village Tour Buses**

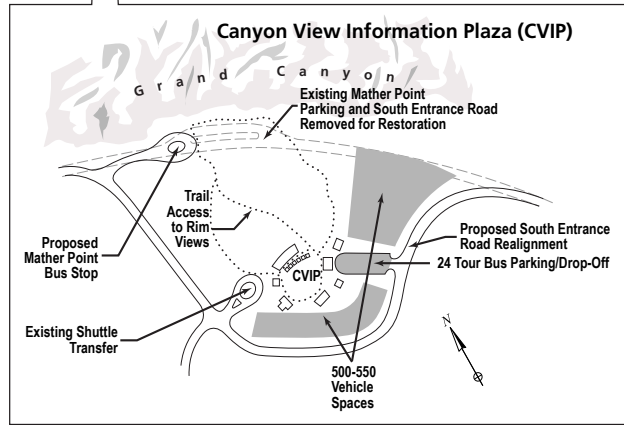
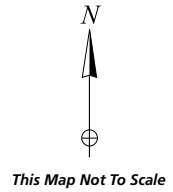
- Drop-off/loading only at Bright Angel Lodge
- +/- 20 parking spaces at backcountry office
- Enhanced wayfinding/management of tour buses

**Grand Canyon Railway**

- Tour bus users load/unload at backcountry office (train backs in front of backcountry office)
- Independent travelers load/unload at existing depot
- Existing backcountry office will remain in place
- Minor improvements may include additional restrooms, seating, etc.

**Vehicle Parking**

- Minor expansion of Parking Lot D to replace spaces displaced from Lot E



**South Entrance Station**

- Either the Tusayan-Centered or the Park-Centered option could apply

Grand Canyon National Park  
Kaibab National Forest

US Forest Service District Office

Long Jim Canyon

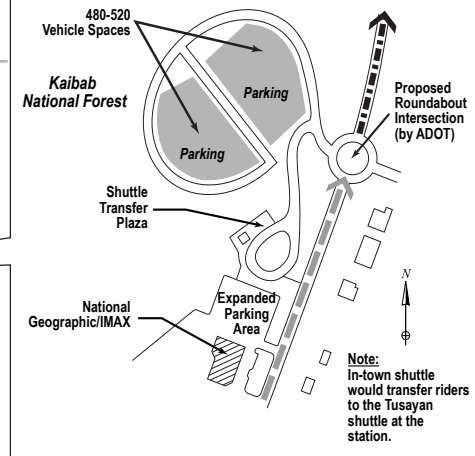
Tusayan Business District

Grand Canyon National Park Airport

**Legend**

- ..... Trail Access to Rim Views
- Existing Roads
- ▬▬▬ Tusayan to CVIP Shuttle (voluntary)
- In-Park Shuttle (general routes only; not all stops are shown)
- ▬▬ In-Town Shuttle (optional)
- Proposed Parking (to include landscaping)

**Tusayan Shuttle Transfer Station**



**Tusayan (optional)**

- Tusayan shuttle with multiple stops
- Use available existing parking for Tusayan overnight guests visiting the Grand Canyon
- Evaluate shared parking opportunities for day use visitors within existing parking lots
- Improved streetscape coordinated with ADOT project

## Alternatives Description

To meet the key plan objectives, the preliminary alternatives include a range of options for providing expanded visitor parking, improved tour bus parking and passenger loading, reduced waiting times and shorter traffic back-ups at the South Entrance Station, improved management of activity associated with the Grand Canyon Railway, and enhanced shuttle bus service. The alternatives include a **Tusayan-Centered Alternative** that would concentrate visitor facilities near the gateway community of Tusayan to minimize development in the park, maximize the reduction of vehicular traffic entering the park, and afford visitors the opportunity to by-pass any congestion at the entrance station by parking in Tusayan and riding a shuttle into the park. A **Park-Centered Alternative** would concentrate visitor facilities in the park near CVIP to provide simple visitor wayfinding and parking management. Under this alternative, most visitors would go to CVIP as the first step of their visit. A **Mixed Alternative**, based on Option A from the *Report to Congress*, would provide a balance of development in the park and adjacent to Tusayan. This alternative would provide sufficient parking in the park near CVIP to meet visitor needs except during the peak summer visitation season and on certain busy weekends, when parking in Tusayan would be used. Under this alternative, shuttle service to Tusayan would need to be provided only during the peak season and other busy days.

### Visitor Parking

The current demand for visitor parking in Grand Canyon Village is estimated to exceed the number of existing parking spaces by about 500 vehicles. At Mather Point, 120 spaces are available to meet an estimated demand of about 450 vehicles, which includes users of the Visitor Center at CVIP as well as visitors enjoying the overlooks. All alternatives provide convenient parking for short-term users of the Visitor Center as well as parking for visitors who would choose to leave their private vehicles behind and use shuttle buses to travel to other destinations at the South Rim. All alternatives also include removal of the existing parking and roadway at Mather Point and realignment of the South Entrance Road to the south to eliminate safety hazards and congestion caused by large numbers of pedestrians crossing traffic lanes. The parking areas would be designed to incorporate islands with native vegetation to limit visual intrusion of vehicles and to manage stormwater. The **Tusayan-Centered Alternative** would provide 800 - 850 vehicle parking spaces on USFS land southeast of Long Jim Canyon. Visitors using this parking would ride shuttle buses to CVIP where connections to other transit services are available. In addition, about 300 spaces are provided at CVIP for people driving to the Visitor Center. Two options have been identified for the parking at CVIP. The Parking North Option would provide convenient walking access to Mather Point, and the Parking South Option would reduce the amount of new land disturbance. A new shuttle bus stop at Mather Point would provide access for visitors preferring not to make the longer walk from the parking area to Mather Point. The **Park-Centered Alternative** provides 1,100 parking spaces near CVIP for both Visitor Center users and visitors parking there to ride shuttles to other destinations. More short-term parking is needed

under this alternative since nearly all visitors would drive to CVIP and park there for access to the Visitor Center. Most of the new parking at CVIP would be located to the west, south and east of the existing buildings. The **Mixed Alternative** would provide about 500 parking spaces on USFS land immediately adjacent to the National Geographic Visitor Center in Tusayan, where visitors would board shuttles to CVIP. This alternative also would provide about 500 parking spaces near CVIP, which would be used by a combination of Visitor Center users and people boarding shuttles to other South Rim destinations.

### Tour Bus Parking and Passenger Loading

Tour bus parking is presently provided in a paved area in the eastern portion of CVIP where 24 tour buses can be accommodated. Additionally, three bus parking spaces and three short-term passenger loading spaces are located at Bright Angel Lodge. Overflows of tour buses at Bright Angel Lodge frequently congest traffic along the Village Loop Road. The **Tusayan-Centered Alternative** would provide 24 paved tour bus parking spaces to the north of CVIP buildings, affording tour bus riders a shorter walk to the overlooks at Mather Point. Passenger loading and unloading would continue to occur at Bright Angel Lodge and 40 - 50 spaces for tour bus parking would be provided in Lot D, south of the railroad tracks. The **Park-Centered Alternative** would provide 40 tour bus parking spaces northeast of the CVIP buildings within a short walk to Mather Point. Tour bus operators would be encouraged to leave buses at the CVIP lot and allow visitors to travel on their own to other destinations. Passenger loading and unloading would remain at Bright Angel Lodge and 20 tour bus parking spaces would be provided in parking Lot E near the backcountry office. The **Mixed Alternative** would utilize the existing 24 bus parking spaces located east of the CVIP buildings. This alternative would retain bus passenger loading and unloading at Bright Angel Lodge and provide about 20 tour bus parking spaces in parking Lot E near the backcountry office.

### South Entrance Station

The South Entrance Station presently provides four entry lanes. Three of the lanes are configured for fee collection, while the fourth lane is used by visitors holding park passes or receipts and by employees, residents and commercial traffic. An exit lane is located to the west of the entrance lanes. Highway 64 provides one travel lane in each direction south of the entrance station. North of the station, the four entry lanes merge into a single northbound lane. Long lines of traffic back up from the entrance station along Highway 64 on busy days. Temporary improvements to reduce transaction time and the addition of a fifth entry lane are being implemented in 2006. The alternatives would build on these improvements to further reduce visitor waiting times and provide efficient access to the park for other traffic. All alternatives would widen Highway 64 to provide two northbound lanes from Tusayan to the entrance station to help shorten the backup of traffic. All alternatives would also include expanded efforts to collect entry fees and disseminate information to visitors prior to their arrival at the park.

The **Tusayan-Centered Alternative** could reduce vehicle traffic at the station by up to 45% during peak times because many visitors would be riding shuttle buses into the park. This alternative would provide a

new two-way roadway west of Highway 64 from Long Jim Canyon to north of the entrance station. The new roadway would accommodate all outbound traffic from the park, plus selected inbound traffic (using automated access controls) including shuttle buses from the visitor parking area in Tusayan, residents and employees working in the park and most commercial traffic. Four or five entry lanes would be provided at the station, with use of the lanes tailored to best accommodate pre-paid and paying visitors. The ***Park-Centered Alternative*** would result in no change in inbound traffic volumes approaching the station, but would include entrance station enhancements. A new inbound roadway would be constructed east of Highway 64 from north of the USFS access road to beyond the entrance station. This one-lane road would have automated access control to accommodate residents and employees working in the park and most commercial traffic. Four or five entry lanes would be provided at the entrance station, with use of the lanes tailored to best accommodate pre-paid and paying visitors. The ***Mixed Alternative*** would reduce traffic approaching the entrance station by a smaller amount than the ***Tusayan-Centered Alternative***. The improvements from either the ***Tusayan-Centered*** or the ***Park-Centered Alternative*** could be included in the ***Mixed Alternative***.

### Grand Canyon Railway

Grand Canyon Railway (GCR) operates one to two trains per day from Williams to Grand Canyon Village. Large numbers of arriving passengers stream from the train to the rim area, crossing Village Loop Drive. Some train passengers board tour buses near the road crossing, causing additional conflicts and congestion. Under the ***Tusayan-Centered Alternative***, train passengers using in the park would board buses south of the tracks using a tour bus parking area in Lot D, reducing conflicts with pedestrians. No change to GCR passenger facilities would occur under the ***Park-Centered Alternative***. GCR passenger loading and unloading would be split under the ***Mixed Alternative***. GCR riders using tour buses in the park would unload and load at the train platform west of the backcountry office in Lot E, reducing congestion at the

existing road crossing. Independent travelers would load and unload at the existing railroad station.

### Shuttle Bus Service

Three shuttle bus routes presently accommodate visitor travel in the South Rim. The Hermits Rest route operates along Hermit Road and is the only means of access for most visitors west of Grand Canyon Village during the peak season. This route is frequently overcrowded and visitors typically must wait for several buses to pass prior to boarding. The Village route operates between the Bright Angel Lodge area and CVIP, serving lodging facilities, camping sites and visitor services. This route is occasionally overcrowded and some visitors are required to take circuitous trips. The Kaibab Trail route operates between CVIP and Yaki Point, providing the only means of access to the Kaibab Trail for most visitors during the peak season. The alternatives include a range of options for reducing overloads and providing more direct travel routes. The ***Tusayan-Centered Alternative*** would include a new shuttle bus route between the visitor parking area on USFS land to CVIP. This alternative also would include a new route along the rim, to serve all the major overlooks from Mather Point to Hermits Rest, eliminating the current need to transfer buses. The ***Park-Centered Alternative*** would modify the Kaibab Trail route to serve Yaki, Mather and Yavapai Points. The Village route would be modified to skip Yavapai point, reducing the time required to travel from CVIP to the village. Selected trips on the Hermits Rest route would be extended to CVIP. The ***Mixed Alternative*** would retain the existing shuttle bus routes in the South Rim area, with added service to reduce overcrowding. A new route would be added from the visitor parking adjacent to the National Geographic Visitor Center in Tusayan to CVIP. Shuttle boarding areas near Tusayan (***Tusayan-Centered*** and ***Mixed Alternatives***) would include restrooms, shelters, benches and fee collection equipment. Shuttle service from Tusayan into the park (under the ***Park Centered Alternative***) or within Tusayan could be provided by others through a partnership or agreement with the NPS.

### What Details Still Need to be Determined?

The next steps in the EA process will be to collect and evaluate transportation and environmental data that will help to further refine alternatives. Transportation data include parking area inventories and occupancy, shuttle bus ridership and operations, and traffic flows/patterns. Analysis of this data will help to refine parking lot size, determine best shuttle bus routes and operations, and develop traffic management strategies for both inside and outside of the park. Other alternative elements to be determined include configuration of South Entrance Station improvements, wayfinding refinements, coordination with other GCNP efforts, such as Greenway (multi-use trail system) planning, and consultation with neighboring agencies.

### What if My Suggestion Hasn't Been Incorporated into the Range of Alternatives?

Many of you commented during the initial public scoping effort in April 2006. Many of the comments we received have been incorporated into the purpose/need and objectives and into alternative components. Some of them are more appropriate for inclusion at more detailed levels of analysis as we move through the planning process. Other comments may not have met the purpose and need for the project or were outside the project scope. If you are interested in how NPS has used your comments to date, please visit the PEPC website at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/grca> for a summary of public comments.

*This newsletter will be on public review for 30 days. Our practice is to make comments, including names, home addresses, home phone numbers, and email addresses of respondents, available for public review. Individual respondents may request that we withhold their names and/or home addresses, etc., but if you wish us to consider withholding this information you must state this prominently at the beginning of your comments. In addition, you must present a rationale for withholding this information. This rationale must demonstrate that disclosure would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of privacy. Unsupported assertions will not meet this burden. In the absence of exceptional, documentable circumstances, this information will be released. We will always make submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives of or officials of organizations or businesses, available for public inspection in their entirety.*



Superintendent  
Grand Canyon National Park  
Attn: Office of Planning and Compliance  
P.O. Box 129  
Grand Canyon, AZ 86023

## Grand Canyon South Rim Visitor Transportation Plan/EA

### We Invite Your Comments

The preliminary range of alternatives described in this newsletter are currently under consideration for analysis in the Environmental Assessment (EA). We encourage you to provide specific comments about these proposals, focusing on the range of alternatives, issues concerning the proposed alternatives, potential environmental impacts, and measures to avoid or lessen environmental impacts. The more specific your comments, the more useful they will be. The EA will include a detailed analysis of impacts to park resources from implementing each alternative and comparing this to taking no action at this time (no-action alternative). Once the analysis of all alternatives is complete, the NPS will select a preferred alternative for implementation, identify this in the EA, and distribute the EA for public review and comment, prior to making a decision.

**HOW TO COMMENT:** This newsletter is accessible for review at the National Park Service Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) website at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/grca>. Comments can be submitted at the PEPC website, or in writing to the address below, ***no later than Sept. 13, 2006:***

Superintendent  
Grand Canyon National Park  
Attn: Office of Planning and Compliance  
P.O. Box 129  
Grand Canyon, AZ 86023

### Next Chance to Comment

This newsletter will be on public review for 30 days. Following this time, the next opportunity for public comment will be during the public review period of the Environmental Assessment (expected to be released in Spring 2007).

**If you would like to receive a hard copy of the environmental assessment (EA)** for this project when it is complete, please contact Vicky Stinson at the address above, at (928) 774-3026, or send your request to the PEPC website: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/grca>, and one will be sent to you during the comment period. If you do not respond to this current request, a hard copy of the EA will not be sent to you. However, please be aware that this EA and other environmental documents are routinely available for your review on the PEPC website and the Grand Canyon National Park website at [www.nps.gov/grca/compliance/](http://www.nps.gov/grca/compliance/)