



Visitor Survey Update: May 2008

In conjunction with the Denali National Park Road Capacity Study, researchers from the University of Vermont created and administered social surveys to identify and assess key elements of visitor experience on the Denali Park road. These visitor surveys are critical elements in the multi-faceted road capacity study. The Road Capacity Study seeks to input social experiential values, gathered from the visitor

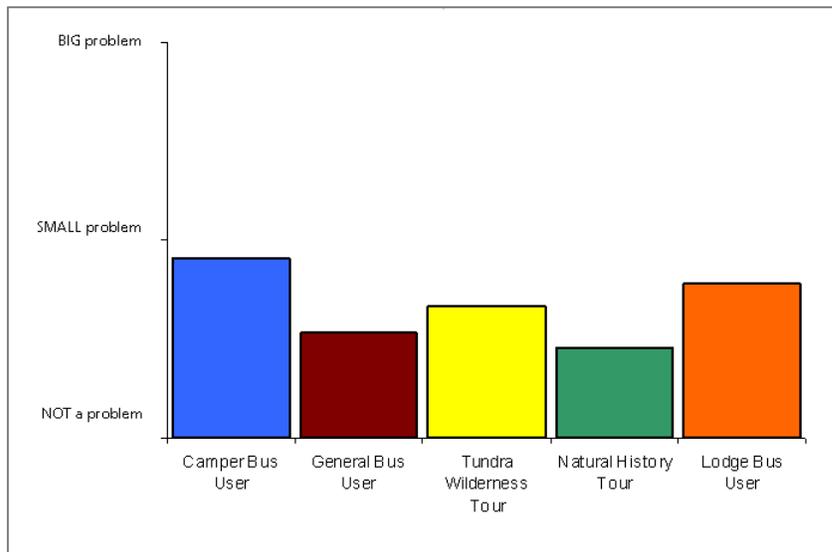


Figure 1. Mean responses of visitors to the question, "to what extent is the number of buses a problem on the park road?"

surveys, as well as resource protection values and traffic behavior patterns into an integrated traffic model for the park road. The traffic model will assist in determining the best method for managing traffic in the park.

The first phase of the visitor survey, administered in 2006, employed an informal interview format and asked visitors open-ended questions, such as "what are the three things you enjoyed most about your time on the Denali Park road today?" Responses from these questions helped identify important elements of the visitor experience along the park road, such as wildlife sightings and scenic values. In 2007, researchers administered a second survey designed to quantify the importance of key indicators determined in the first phase of the study.

Throughout July and August 2007, researchers distributed written questionnaires to visitors after they travelled on the park road. A total of 710 completed questionnaires were collected sampling riders from 1) Camper buses, 2) general Visitor Transportation Service buses 3) Tundra Wilderness Tours, 4) Denali Natural History Tours and 5) Kantishna Lodge buses.

The questionnaire asked visitors to what extent issues such as the number of buses on the road or not seeing enough wildlife were a problem during their experience on the park road on a scale from 1 (not a problem) to 3 (a big problem). Only a few issues approached the "small problem" range for visitors, including too many buses

on the park road, not seeing enough wildlife, not seeing enough wildlife close to the road, and dust along the road (Figure 1).

The survey also asked visitors to look at photo panels displaying a series of simulated traffic scenarios (Figure 2). Varying numbers of vehicles at wildlife stops, rest stops, and along a stretch of the park road were depicted in the photo panels.



Figure 2. Simulated photo showing eight buses in the Stony overlook viewscape.

Visitors evaluated the acceptability of the simulated scenarios and were asked to choose the photos that represented their preferred level of use, a level of use which would require management action to mitigate, a level would result in the visitor not returning to the park, and the level they actually saw.

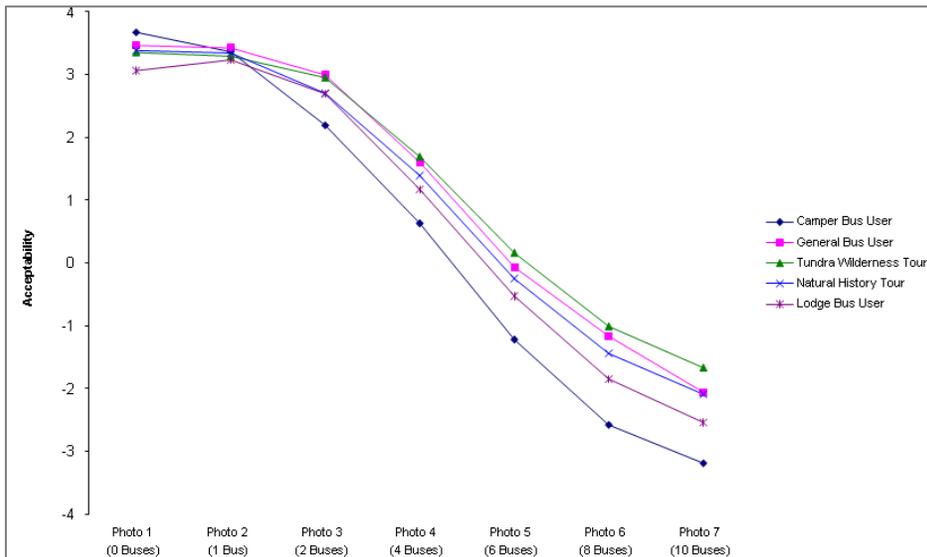


Figure 3. Visitor survey results for level of acceptability of varying numbers of vehicles within a viewscape on the Denali Park road. Higher values represent greater acceptability of use levels to visitors.

Visitor's evaluation of acceptability of crowding can be displayed as a social norm curve. The social norm curve identifies standards of acceptability for crowding indicators and gives park managers quantifiable levels of use to work with

in creating future management plans. In general, visitors from all user groups expressed similar opinions about which use levels were more acceptable on the Denali Park road (Figure 3).