Public Scoping Newsletter

July 2015

What is scoping?
Scoping is the initial phase of project planning in which the agency seeks input from a variety of sources to identify issues, areas requiring additional study, and topics that will be analyzed in the EA process. Scoping is an opportunity for you to provide suggestions, comments and concerns about traffic congestion at Arches and Canyonlands National Parks.

Is scoping 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 August 19, 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 developing a Traffic Congestion Management Plan for Arches and Canyonlands National Parks to consider ways to reduce parking congestion and related crowding problems in the parks.

During peak season, all major parking areas in the parks are at or over capacity several hours a day. When this occurs, visitors park their cars along roadsides for long distances and walk in traffic to their destination. And at parking lots, stopped cars waiting for spaces to become available impede traffic flow. As a result, visitor safety is compromised, conflicts arise between visitors, roadside vegetation is damaged, and the positive visitor experience is diminished.

The purpose of the Traffic Congestion Management Plan is to explore ideas and identify solutions to solve these crowding problems. The overall goal of the Plan is to protect and enhance the current and future visitor experience in the parks while protecting park resources and values. More specifically the plan will aim to:

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

In January 2015, the NPS held an open house to seek feedback from the public on various congestion management strategies for Arches National Park, and comments received offered a variety of possible solutions to managing congestion in park. The NPS is now beginning the compliance process (NEPA/NHPA) to further examine those solutions as part of a Traffic Congestion Management Plan and Environmental Assessment (EA) for both Arches and Canyonlands National Parks.

We are seeking the public's input on the suggested solutions as part of the public scoping process and will examine a range of alternatives crafted from these solutions in the EA. The public comment period will open on July 20, 2015 for 30 days. Those wishing to comment should submit comments on the NPS *Planning, Environment, and Public Comment* (PEPC) website by August 19, 2015 at http://parkplanning.nps.gov/arch_traffic_congestion_management or http://parkplanning.nps.gov/cany_traffic_congestion_management. Written comments can also be submitted via email to seug_planning@nps.gov or mailed to the National Park Service, Attn: Planning and Compliance, 2282 SW. Resource Blvd, Moab, UT 84532.

As the superintendent of Arches and Canyonlands National Park, I invite you to participate in this public scoping phase of the planning process.

Sincerely,

Kate Cannon

Kate Cannon, Superintendent
Arches and Canyonlands National Park

Background

With increasing visitation over the past decade, the transportation infrastructures at Arches and Canyonlands are at or near full capacity during the peak visitation periods. In 2014, 464,138 vehicles came into Arches and the long-term trends suggest that number of vehicles will increase two to three percent annually; however, in recent years from 2010 to 2014 visitation has grown by more than 25%, with 2014 showing a 18.65% rise in visitation.

Visitation to Canyonlands National Park has also been steadily increasing over the years and is now also at or over capacity much of the peak season. In order to manage current and future traffic congestion, each park requires an updated and integrated plan that will guide park operations for the next 5-10 years.

Topics to Consider

The following topics will be considered during the planning process. These resources, as well as any additional resources brought up during this public scoping phase, will be analyzed in the EA.

Visitor Use and Experience – Changing current access, vehicle restrictions, and construction activities would affect visitors to the parks.
Gateway Communities – Changing current access, vehicle restrictions, and construction activities would change visitors use patterns and visitor numbers which would have an effect on the city of Moab and Grand and San Juan counties.
Park Operations – Proposed solutions would require changes in current park operations.
Air Quality – An increase or decrease in vehicle emissions would affect air quality.
Natural Soundscapes – An increase or decrease in visitation would affect the natural sounds.
Viewsheds – Construction activities, new developed areas, and changes to signage and infrastructure could affect the natural viewshed of the parks.
Soils and Vegetation – Proposed solutions would affect park soils, including geologic resources, and plant communities.
Socioeconomics – Construction activities and maintenance and spending associated with proposed solutions could provide a temporary stimulus to the local or regional economy. Changes in visitor access or costs to visit the parks could change visitors' patterns and spending habits.

Possible Solutions to Traffic Congestion

Proposed solutions suggested by the public through comments received, along with some of the pros and cons of implementing each solution, are listed on the next page. Please provide your thoughts and comments on the proposed solutions.

Possible Solution	Implementation Considerations
Continue with current management- *No changes to the way the parks currently operate with regard to management or visitation.*	
Pros	▪ Visitors continue to enter and explore the parks as they currently do. ▪ Visitors enter the park through an entrance booth that is variably staffed. ▪ No new infrastructure is needed beside what has already been submitted for funding.
Cons	▪ Parking areas would continue to be crowded. ▪ Parking and walking along roads would continue. ▪ Park staff would continue to be pulled away from primary duties to manage traffic congestion. ▪ Visitors continue to be frustrated when not able to enter the park quickly or find a parking spot. ▪ The park does not have the current infrastructure and staffing to accommodate increasing visitation.
Hire parking lot attendants-*Staff would be present in parking areas to efficiently and safely park visitors.*	
Pros	▪ Parking lot attendants can improve a visitors experience by providing direct information and assistance. ▪ Parking attendants can assist with parking cars efficiently which could create more opportunities for more cars to visit a site throughout the day.
Cons	▪ Using people to manage parking lots is time and cost intensive. ▪ Visitors could ignore the instructions of staff and still try and find a parking space in a lot that is noted as being full. ▪ Hiring parking attendants could not create enough of a change to affect crowding at popular parking areas.
Offer an off-peak rate- *A reduced entrance fee would be charged to enter the parks during times when the park is less crowded.*	
Pros	▪ A reduced rate could shift visitor use into the less crowded times of the day. ▪ Visitors have an opportunity to pay less to enter the park during times when the parks are less crowded.
Cons	▪ Variable rates would be necessary and could be difficult to manage. ▪ ~60% of visitors currently enter the parks without paying an entrance fee (they have some type of federal pass). A reduced rate would not be an incentive for these visitors to enter the park during less busy times. ▪ A reduced rate could not be a large enough incentive for visitors to change their travel patterns.
Time-limited parking- *Parking spaces at popular sites (Wolfe Ranch/Delicate Arch, Devils Garden or Windows in Arches and Mesa Arch, Upheaval Dome and Grandview Point in Canyonlands) could be marked a specific timed- limit depending on the average stay times at those sites.*	
Pros	▪ Time-limited parking could result in a higher turnover of parking spaces and allow more visitors to visit an area throughout the day. ▪ Time-limited parking could reduce the issue of "tailgating" in the parking lots where visitors stay and occupy a parking space to eat.
Cons	▪ Visitors could be forced to leave an area sooner than they planned. ▪ There would be additional costs associated with enforcement to manage the parking lot and ensure vehicles leave parking spaces within the timed-limit specified.
Charge a fee for parking- *In existing parking areas, a fee could be charged to park in some parking lots such as Wolfe Ranch/Delicate Arch, Devils Garden or Windows in Arches and Mesa Arch, Upheaval Dome and Grandview Point in Canyonlands via parking meters, pay kiosk or gated booth.*	
Pros	▪ Those visitors wishing to just drive through the park and not stop to park would not be affected. ▪ Charging a fee for a parking space could reduce traffic congestion by deterring some visitors to areas where a fee to park is not required.
Cons	▪ Additional infrastructure could be required (meters, kiosks, gated booths).

	▪ There would be visual impacts from parking meters/kiosks/gated booths. ▪ Charging a park entrance fee and a fee to park could cause affordability challenges, especially for lower income households. ▪ Additional park staff would be required to ensure parking fees are paid.
Build more parking lots- *Expand or create new parking areas throughout park.*	
Pros	▪ Additional parking could reduce visitors frustration related to searching for parking spaces. ▪ Additional parking could reduce circling/idling of vehicles waiting for parking. ▪ Expanding the parking supply could reduce parking lot congestion. ▪ The need for staffing to manage parking lots could be reduced.
Cons	▪ Additional parking would increase the number of people able to visit an attraction at any given time, which would increase crowding on the trails. ▪ Parking expansion could help in the short-term but if visitation continues to increase, additional parking lots would continually need to be built to accommodate visitation growth. ▪ Additional parking lots could adversely affect the scenery. ▪ Space for additional parking could not be sufficient in the areas it where it is needed.
Additional entrance booths- *Build more entrance booths at the main park entrance and/or create new formal entrances to the park at Willow Springs and Salt Valley Roads in Arches and Potash Road in Canyonlands.*	
Pros	▪ Adding entrance booths could allow for more vehicles to enter more quickly into the parks. ▪ Staffing of the additional booth(s) could only be necessary during times of crowding. ▪ Entrance booths at other park entrance roads would alleviate primary entrance road congestion.
Cons	▪ Additional entrance booths would increase the number of vehicles entering the park at one time which would increase crowding in the parks. ▪ There would be additional costs for construction and staffing.
A by-pass entrance lane - *Create a new entrance lane for those visitors who have a park pass or on a commercial bus tour, park staff and for emergency service vehicles to quickly enter the park.*	
Pros	▪ By removing pass holder vehicle traffic from the normal entrance flow, visitors would have decreased delays, shorter queues, and possibly an increased visitor experience. ▪ This would reduce the line of vehicles along the entrance road in Arches from queuing out to Highway 191.
Cons	▪ Additional capacity with a by-pass lane could allow for quicker entrance but crowding in the park would not be solved. ▪ There would be additional costs of staffing to operate a by-pass lane.
Shuttle service-*Shuttle buses would transport visitors from a park and ride lot to destinations in the park.*	
Pros	▪ Shuttles could potentially reduce the number of cars on the road and in parking areas which would allow more visitors to access park sites. ▪ Shuttles are a great option for those who do not have access to a car or who don't want to drive their vehicles through the parks. ▪ Shuttles are an idea that is frequently suggested by the public.
Cons	▪ Shuttles are expensive to operate and maintain on an annual basis. In addition, parks must demonstrate the service is financially sustainable in the long-term in order to be authorized. In 2012, Arches demonstrated in a feasibility study that a non-mandatory shuttle operation was not financially sustainable for the park; it would cost 3 million dollars each year beginning in 2015. Also, the park's preferred non-mandatory shuttle scenario would divert approximately 23-28% of cars off the road. With the recent increase of visitation (19% from 2013-2014) and 2015 on trend to increase 20%, the shuttle would not alleviate traffic congestion in the park in the long-term. In fact, traffic congestion would be just the same as it is now, even with a shuttle, in a couple of years. ▪ A shuttle could add additional people at a site that is already at capacity. This could affect the resources and the visitor experience at these locations by causing crowding when parking lots were the limiting factor. ▪ Shuttles cause a "pulsing effect" where 40+ visitors get dropped off at one site at the same time which could affect the resources and the visitor experience. ▪ Shuttles are typically filled to over capacity to avoid long wait times. Standing/sitting on a crowded bus could negatively affect a visitors' experience.

	▪ The long length of the park roads and distance between the major sites require numerous shuttles and higher operating costs. ▪ Shuttles require a large park and ride lot outside park boundaries in order to reduce cars within the park. ▪ Shuttles require additional maintenance staff and facility to store, fuel and maintain shuttles.
Timed-entry ticket- *Visitors would be required to get a ticket on-line for a certain time to enter the park.*	
Pros	▪ A timed-entry ticket could manage the maximum number of visitors allowed at the park at any given time, which would maximize the use of park capacity throughout the day and would reduce traffic congestion. ▪ A timed-entry ticket would give visitors certainty of access to all areas of the park. ▪ A timed-entry ticket could provide an opportunity to experience the park with significantly less crowding and parking issues. ▪ A timed-entry ticket could eliminate long entrance lines. ▪ A timed-entry ticket could spread out visitation to the park to days and months that are less busy which could in turn spread out visitation to the surrounding community. ▪ A timed-entry ticket could have a positive economic impact on the park and gateway communities.
Cons	▪ A timed-entry ticket could be controversial and visitors could be disappointed if not able to visit the park when they initially want to. ▪ Visitors could arrive at the park without realizing they needed a timed-entry ticket to enter the park. ▪ Visitors could find it frustrating to have to get a timed-entry ticket to be able to visit the park. ▪ A timed-entry ticket would require additional staff to manage. ▪ A timed-entry ticket could have a negative economic impact on the park and gateway communities. ▪ Additional infrastructure and costs could be needed: online ticket system, staffed gates, queue lane, a turnaround area and enforcement.
Site-specific permit- *Visitors would be required to get a site-specific permit for a specific area such as Delicate Arch, Devils Garden and the Windows.*	
Pros	▪ A site-specific permit could manage the number of visitors allowed at a site at any given time, which could reduce traffic congestion. ▪ A site-specific entry permit could provide an opportunity to experience the site with significantly less crowding and parking issues.
Cons	▪ A site-specific permit could potentially create more demand at sites that don't require a permit and that don't have the capacity or infrastructure of handling more visitors. Visitors without a site-specific permit for an area would be forced to visit other areas of the park. ▪ Visitors could find it frustrating to have to get a site-specific permit to visit the site. ▪ Additional infrastructure could be incurred: online permit system, staffed gates, queue lane, a turnaround area and enforcement.
Encourage visitation to less congested areas- *Expand access to new areas via new trails or developed areas in the parks such as La Sal Mountain Overlook, Courthouse Wash, Panorama Point, Salt Valley, Herdina and Eagle Parks.*	
Pros	▪ Visitors avoiding crowded areas could lessen traffic issues for others, as well as create a better visitor experience for themselves. ▪ Expanding access to new areas via new trails or developed areas in the parks could reduce traffic congestion. ▪ Expanding access to new areas via new trails or developed areas could attract and serve more visitors to the park.
Cons	▪ For this tool to produce benefits, visitors must want to go to these new areas based on the information provided (signs, website info, rangers at visitor centers, etc.). ▪ Heavily promoting a less crowded area could potentially create more demand at previously undisturbed areas, or areas that don't have the capacity or infrastructure of handling more visitors. ▪ There would be additional cost of staffing. ▪ Expanding access to new areas via new trails or developed areas may not alleviate crowding in popular sites and could increase crowding to new sites.

New picnic areas- *Create more picnic areas in the park for visitors.*	
Pros	▪ Picnic areas remove visitors from "tailgating" in parking lots where visitors stay and occupy a parking space to eat. ▪ Picnic areas provide other areas visitors could experience the park. ▪ Picnic areas could attract and serve more visitors to the park.
Restrict large RV's and trailers/Vehicle restrictions- *Implement vehicle restrictions (width or length limits) of large vehicles and trailers in the parks.*	
Pros	▪ Vehicle use restrictions could decrease traffic congestion by eliminating large vehicles from roadways and parking areas where they cannot be accommodated. ▪ Larger vehicle restrictions increase safety for pedestrians and cyclists sharing the roadways. ▪ Size restrictions would reduce "mirror to mirror" traffic accidents.
Cons	▪ The level of staff enforcement would have to increase for vehicle use restrictions to be effective. ▪ Vehicle use restrictions without an alternative way for visitors to get to their intended destination could cause visitors frustration and diminish their visitor experience. ▪ Only 10% of vehicles to the parks are RV's and trailers. Vehicle restrictions would not be enough to alleviate traffic congestion at most areas. ▪ Larger vehicle restrictions could eliminate commercial bus tour operators from visiting the park. This could have an economic impact on the park and gateway communities.
Expand or improve bicycle and pedestrian access-*Create new bicycle and/or pedestrian paths in the parks.*	
Pros	▪ Bicycle/pedestrian facilities would provide an alternative visitor experience to auto-touring. ▪ Bicycle/pedestrian facilities could shift auto traffic to biking or walking in the park. ▪ Bicycle/pedestrian facilities offer an opportunity to increase access to outdoor activities.
Cons	▪ Current road configurations for both parks are insufficient to provide continuous bicycle/pedestrian lanes due to terrain constraints and complexities. ▪ Additional separated bicycle/pedestrian lanes would widen the footprint of the transportation corridor and could negatively impact natural and cultural resources the park is required to protect. ▪ The percent of visitors who would prefer accessing the parks via bicycle/pedestrian lanes may not be enough to alleviate traffic congestion.
Traveler Information- *Targeted information from variable message signs, park radio station, mobile park apps, park webcams, social media, hotels, and gateway communities could help inform visitors of crowding issues in the parks.*	
Pros	▪ Traveler information could help visitors make more informed decisions about travel times, alternative parking locations, or locations to avoid traffic congestion and could help them in adjusting their travel plans. ▪ Ensuring that the signage, print materials, and staff provide a consistent message would help visitors feel the information is timely and accurate. ▪ Websites, radio, visitor centers, and hotels could help to promote less crowded times and locations. ▪ Providing visitors with targeted information could help inform their travel decisions and improve their experience in the parks.
Cons	▪ To produce benefits, visitors must take an action based on the information provided and change their travel plans. ▪ Visitor centers (and a park's marketing materials) tend to highlight their most popular destinations, which in turn could lead to crowding. ▪ By promoting locations that are not already crowded, tourists could choose to visit areas that do not have the infrastructure to handle higher levels of visitation.

Overview of Process

Project milestones include:

- Public scoping period (closes August 19, 2015)
- Preliminary Alternatives – Fall 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

Questions to consider when commenting on this project:

1. Which listed or new solution(s) to traffic congestion do you support? Which solution(s) do you least support?
2. Of your supported solutions, how do you think it would affect traffic congestion in the park(s)?
3. What kind of visitor experience do you want in a national park?
4. Do you have any other comments and suggestions for us to consider?

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 **July_2015_Public Scoping Newsletter_Traffic Congestion Management** document to comment.

Anyone unable to submit their comments to either of the above websites may submit comments via email to seug_planning@nps.gov or mail their comments to the National Park Service, Attn: Planning and Compliance, 2282 SW. Resource Blvd, Moab, UT 84532.

National Park Service
Department of the Interior
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Canyonlands National Park
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