



Denali National Park Road Reconstruction



Above: The 92-mile-long Denali Park Road is the only road in the 6-million-acre park. The first 15 miles of the road are paved, and are in dire need of reconstruction. (Photo by Tim Vo, www.PatternsOfNature.com)

Project Description. Denali National Park and Preserve is comprised of 6 million acres of wild land, bisected by one ribbon of road, called simply The Denali Park Road. Extending 92 miles from the park entrance to its terminus in the old mining community of Kantishna, the mostly-gravel road traverses boreal forests and sub-arctic tundra.

Crossing rolling mountainsides and sheer cliffs, the Denali Park Road meanders through scenic vistas and prime wildlife viewing areas. Thus, the Denali Park Road, the only road that winds into this wilderness landscape, is an important portal through which thousands of people travel each year to discover the wonders of this wild place.

Prior to the 1972 completion of the George Parks Highway—the main travel artery which opened up interior Alaska—visitation to Denali National Park and Preserve was fairly low. Anticipation of major increases in traffic resulting from the new direct route to the park prompted park officials to implement the mass transit system beyond milepost 15 at Savage River.

Traffic on the majority of the Denali Park Road is now guided by a new management plan. In 1986, Denali National Park and

Preserve established a limit of 10,512 vehicle trips on the park road during the core summer season. Vehicle use and the capacity of this vehicle allotment program to accommodate more visitors is limited based on wildlife resource needs.

Pavement failing in the first 15 miles.

Only the initial 15 miles of the Denali Park Road are paved. That paved portion, leading from the park entrance to the Savage River trailhead (see map side 2), is open during the summer for public, non-commercial vehicles to travel. Summer travel beyond milepost 15 is by shuttle or tour bus, or under human power.

The paved portion of the Denali Park Road was last re-surfaced in 1989; many sections are now failing, due to year round use and Alaska's extreme freeze-thaw activity. Every spring maintenance crews struggle to keep the failing road glued together with crack seal.

Rutting and cracking causes vehicles to swerve sometimes into the opposite lane creating very unsafe driving conditions. Frost heaves have become extreme enough in some areas of the road to force larger vehicles such as motor homes and tour buses to lurch and rebound in such a manner as to cause injury to occupants; injuries have been documented.

Mega-Project* Profile: The Denali Park Road Reconstruction

Estimated cost: \$15 million
(preliminary)

Percentage of Alaska Region
FLTP Annual Allotment:
275%

Percentage of NPS FLTP
Annual Allotment: 7.5%



Because of the failed pavement at the milepost 2.5 pull-out, traffic stops in the middle of the road to view and photograph scenery, forcing following traffic to brake hard on a steeply curving section of the road.

More than 140 tour buses each day descend on this incline, and are often forced to come to a complete stop while fully loaded with passengers. Private vehicles stopped in the road for the vista viewing and photography are the primary reason for hard braking, and are the cause of many near collisions.

The Resurfacing Project.

The resurfacing project will replace all currently failing asphalt pavement on the Denali Park Road from the intersection at State Hwy. 3 (milepost 0) to Savage River (milepost 15).

The project will be completed in five sections, with the re-surfacing of the worst sections completed first. The old asphalt surface will be roto-milled and recycled back into the sub grade; a 3" to 4" layer of new asphalt will then be applied.

Soft spots will be dug out, refilled and compacted with suitable gravels prior to application of the new surfacing. Centerline striping of the full 15-mile length of road will be reapplied as a final step.

The project will incorporate the re-paving of all pullouts, turn lanes, and intersections, including the total reconstruction of the scenic pullout at milepost 2.5. Subsurface failures in the roadway will be stabilized and the pullout will be widened to increase visitor parking to 20 vehicles. Construction will consist of a 500' long vehicle parking pullout with a viewing platform.

Resurfacing the Denali Park Road will reduce unsafe driving conditions for all park road users, alleviate unsafe stopping concerns, reduce the backlog of deferred maintenance projects, enhance visitor experiences, and reduce the annual costs of emergency maintenance measures to keep the road passable. The project will provide for safe year-round vehicle access by addressing the failing roadway, enhancing distance vista viewing opportunities, decreasing congestion, and eliminating traffic and pedestrian conflicts.



Top: Traffic shares the Denali Park Road with wildlife. (Photo by John Hourdos, NPS)

Middle: Much of the paved road surface on the Denali Park Road is failing. (NPS photo)

Bottom: Cars often park in the roadway for viewing wildlife and scenery. (Photo by J. Stephen Conn)

* Mega Projects: The NPS transportation system is supported, in part, by funds from the Federal Lands Transportation Program (FLTP). Currently, the NPS is authorized an annual budget of \$268 million from the FLTP. These funds are apportioned by formula among the seven NPS Regions. Most of these funds are used for "transportation asset management" – that is, to pay for the work required to keep existing assets in good condition. There are some projects, such as a major bridge repair or ship replacement, that require a much larger amount of funding than is available on an annual basis to a Region. These we call "Mega Projects." The NPS is pursuing strategies to fund these projects.

