



# The Transportation Scholars Program

*As the population of the United States continues to increase, so do transportation issues in our national parks. In the past three decades National Park visitation has jumped more than 83 percent; almost all of these additional visitors have traveled to and through the Parks in privately owned vehicles. Roads and parking facilities that were once adequate are now often overwhelmed, especially during peak travel seasons.*

The resulting congestion both degrades visitor experiences and imperils the natural and cultural resources the National Park Service is committed to protecting. The result is further strain on an agency already stretched by small budgets and over-worked staff.

In 2001, in an attempt to help the National Park Service find innovative solutions to this problem, the National Park Foundation (NPF), the Ford Motor Company Fund, and Eno Transportation Foundation teamed up with the National Park Service to establish the National Park Transportation Scholars Program. Today the program continues under the guidance of the National Park Foundation, the National Park Service, the Federal Highway Administration, and the Eno Transportation Foundation.

## The Program's Beginnings

The Public Lands Transportation Scholars program began in 2012. It serves the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS), and U.S. Forest Ser-

vice (USFS), and is modeled after the very successful Transportation Scholars program managed by the National Park Foundation (NPF) that serves the National Park Service (NPS).

Jacqueline Lowey, Deputy Chief of Staff at the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) from 1996 to 1997, and Deputy Director of the National Park Service from 1997-2001, conceived the idea for the National Park Transportation Scholars Program. “I think that transportation is absolutely key to protecting park resources,” said Lowey. “Transportation is the nexus of how you preserve parks while enabling visitors to experience the parks’ incredible natural and historical treasures now and in the future.”

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The National Park Transportation Scholars Program provides parks with transportation professionals who assist in developing transportation systems to help parks reduce traffic, congestion, and pollution while improving park visitor experiences. The program matches emerging professionals with substantial knowledge and expertise in transportation planning with parks with corresponding transportation-related issues, such as pollution or congestion that can be major detractors of the overall park visitor experience.

Projects involve transportation planning and analysis, public outreach, intergovernmental coordination, environmental impact assessment, and other transportation-related tasks. Assignments generally begin in early summer and last either six or twelve months.

Each selected “scholar” builds partnerships, works across jurisdictional boundaries, gains an appreciation for the need of alternative transportation projects in the national parks, and acquires first-hand knowledge of

NPS efforts to preserve our national treasures, all while working to solve one or more current transportation issues within his or her assigned park.

## **Providing Needed Transportation Expertise**

The Transportation Scholars Program provides the Park Service with much-needed transportation expertise at a fraction of the cost of hiring consultants or bringing on full-time staff. The Parks derive significant advantages from having Transportation Scholars located on-site versus using off-site assistance, and Scholars benefit parks by serving as single points of contact on transportation matters for consultants, contractors, and local communities. Scholars also bring a fresh perspective to the Park Service, while taking away valuable personal and professional experiences.

As an example of a recent project, a 2011 Scholar, Todd Johnson, developed a pilot public shuttle system at Arches National Park. The system provides visitors with improved transportation options for visiting the park, better information on what to expect when visiting, increased contact with park personnel, and increased safety when traveling in the park. If successful, the pilot shuttle system in Arches and the gateway community of Moab will reduce greenhouse gases and reduce the negative impacts of parking congestion.



**Transportation Scholars for 2013 gathered in Colorado in May for orientation and training. Photo by Jason Newman.**

Parks with projects involving innovative approaches to addressing park transportation issues are given priority. Examples of such innovative approaches include projects

incorporating alternative transportation systems, community involvement, sustainable transportation, transportation master planning, multi-modal access, and non-motorized transportation.

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Scholar park assignments for 2013 include: Bandelier National Monument, Cuyahoga Valley National Park, The National Mall, Yellowstone National Park, and Lowell National Historical Park. A description of each project is available on the [ENO Foundation web site at: https://www.enotrans.org/course/national-park-foundation-transportation-scholars-program](https://www.enotrans.org/course/national-park-foundation-transportation-scholars-program)

## **The Selection Process**

The Scholar selection process is administered by the Eno Foundation, which assembles a selection panel with representatives from the NPS, NPF, the USDOT-Federal Lands Highway, and other organizations with a transportation focus.

To be eligible for consideration, parks must have a specific transportation-related project ready to begin or already underway. A committee made up of representatives from the NPS, the NPF, and the Eno Foundation reviews park applications that meet these basic requirements; the National Park Foundation's Board of Directors makes final park selections.

Transportation Scholars have come from a diverse range of educational and professional backgrounds; several have been working professionals in transportation-related fields. Others have been graduate students pursuing PhD or masters degrees in civil engineering, landscape architecture, urban planning, public policy, and business administration.

A panel reviews the project proposals of parks selected by the National Park Foundation, and matches the best-

qualified candidate with each project. Most Scholars are given assignments of between three months and one year, though some have worked for the same park for multiple years.

At the end of their term, the scholars are required to submit a report to the NPF detailing their accomplishments, providing guidance to NPS decision makers, and describing the significance of their findings for other National Park System units and the larger transportation community. Scholar reports and recommendations have been used by parks to further scholars' work after they have left.

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The Transportation Scholars Program helps parks to limit traffic congestion, battle climate change, and protect the park resources for the enjoyment of present and future generations. To learn more about the Transportation Scholars program and National Park Service transportation issues, [visit the National Park Service Transportation program web site.](#)