



The National Park Service Fact Sheet

Alternative Transportation Program
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Bicycle and Pedestrian Trails in Parks

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Bicycle and pedestrian trails are integral parts of park alternative transportation systems (ATS). ATS integrate all modes of travel within a park, including transit, automobile, and bicycle and pedestrian trails. The National Park Service (NPS) has developed over 100 alternative transportation systems in more than 90 parks, improving visitor mobility and access to recreational opportunities within and around parks.

NPS manages over 12,000 miles of in-park trails, including 2,755 miles of "front country" trails, which visitors bike, hike, and walk to view park wildlife and natural vistas. NPS also works with state agencies and private and non-profit organizations to manage over 30,000 miles of trails listed under the National Scenic Trails Act of 1968, including the famous Appalachian Trail.

The NPS Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program (RTCA) works with communities to develop new trails and greenways, conserve rivers, and preserve open space. Examples of projects on which RTCA has assisted include urban promenades, trails along abandoned railroad rights-of-way, regional water trails, and wildlife corridors. Visit www.nps.gov/rtca for more information.

FOR MORE INFORMATION...

NPS Alternative Transportation Program:
<http://www.nps.gov/transportation/alt/index.htm>

GOOD FOR YOU AND FOR THE PARK

We all know that biking, hiking, and other forms of outdoor recreation are good for our health. A National Park Service (NPS) study found that people who exercise regularly spend 30 percent fewer days in the hospital than people who do not. But did you know that biking and hiking are also good for the health of our national parks?

Nearly 300 million people each year from the U.S. and around the world visit our national parks. Many come for the outdoor recreational opportunities our parks provide, including biking, hiking, fishing, swimming, canoeing, kayaking, and wildlife watching. Park visitation is expected to continue to increase, reaching 367 million visitors by the year 2020.

However, the natural quiet, pristine air quality, undisturbed lands, and unique wildlife that these recreational opportunities depend upon and that visitors come to enjoy are under threat.



Hikers enjoy the scenery at Yosemite National Park in California.

ENVIRONMENTAL THREATS



Over Memorial Day weekend in 2002, the line of cars waiting to enter the South Entrance at Grand Canyon National Park in Arizona stretched for miles.

As the number of motor vehicles in our parks continues to increase, many parks are impacted by traffic congestion and over-crowding. Parking areas and trailheads are often overrun, forcing motor vehicles and buses to park off the existing parking area pavement and on roadside shoulders, endangering the safety of pedestrians.

On a typical summer day at Grand Canyon National Park, nearly 6,000 vehicles compete for 2,400 parking spaces. Some parks have been forced to restrict park access during high visitation periods because their roads and parking areas are at, or beyond, capacity. What's more, this overcrowding often causes poor air quality, impaired scenic views due to haze, increased noise pollution, adverse impacts to park wildlife, monuments, and other sensitive resources, and visitor frustration.

A SOLUTION: TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES

Bicycling, hiking, and walking are effective and pleasurable alternatives to motor vehicle travel. NPS is exploring the use of these and other transportation alternatives to accommodate more park visitors while alleviating congestion, protecting park resources, and improving the visitor experience. Alternative transportation systems (ATS) help reduce the number of motor vehicles in our parks by allowing visitors to park their cars at designated parking areas and then walk, bike, or ride a shuttle bus, tram, trolley, water taxi, or other form of alternative transportation to park sites and local attractions, such as restaurants, shops, and campgrounds. ATS also expand access to trail heads and allow visitors to enjoy more fully recreational opportunities, since they no longer have to worry about finding a place to park.



Biking in parks, like this family is doing in Yellowstone National Park, is a fun and environmentally friendly way to see park attractions.

BIKING AND HIKING IN OUR NATIONAL PARKS

PARK CASE STUDIES AND SUCCESS STORIES



Hikers take a rest and enjoy the view in Shenandoah National Park.

Blue Ridge Parkway and Shenandoah National Park in Virginia

The 469 miles of the Blue Ridge Parkway, stretching from Great Smoky Mountains National Park in North Carolina to Shenandoah National Park in Virginia, and the more than 500 trails in Shenandoah National Park, provide visitors with a variety of biking and hiking opportunities. Along the Parkway itself are over a hundred hiking trails. NPS is working with the nearby community of Roanoke, Virginia, to develop a network of trails linking Roanoke with the Blue Ridge Parkway. Visitors will be able to park their cars in and around Roanoke and then hike or bike to the Parkway.

Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore in Indiana

Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore maintains over 45 miles of trails for visitor use, including the newly renovated Calumet Bicycle Trail. The 9.1-mile trail, part of a larger bikeway linking the Chicago area to southeastern Michigan, allows visitors to view close up the diverse and rare plant species of Indiana Dunes and to travel regionally without a personal vehicle. Visitors can use other designated trails at Indiana Dunes for hiking, cross-country skiing, and horseback riding.

Minute Man National Historical Park and the Minuteman Bikeway in Massachusetts

Opened in 1992, the 11-mile Minuteman Bikeway links Cambridge, Arlington, Lexington, and Bedford, Massachusetts, and was named the 500th rail-trail in the country by the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. The bikeway, which follows the famous route taken by Paul Revere, also passes near Minute Man National Historical Park and the historic area where the American Revolution began in April 1775. The bikeway is also close to local attractions, such as shops and restaurants. Thousands of people use the converted rail corridor each day for bicycling, walking, jogging, and in-line skating. In addition, hundreds of local residents use the bikeway to bike during the workweek to a subway station in Cambridge, helping to relieve commuter congestion on busy streets and highways.



An estimated 6,000 to 9,000 cyclists use the Minuteman Bikeway on weekend days during the summer. (Photo from the Friends of Bedford Depot Park)



The Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail is popular with both park visitors and local residents.

Cuyahoga Valley National Park in Ohio

Cuyahoga Valley National Park is now developing a safe, bicycle- and pedestrian-only trail that will link the park's most visited attractions. The proposed trail will help to reduce congestion at trailhead parking facilities and to improve visitor safety and mobility. Once complete, the trail will link the Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail and the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad to communities east of the park and to the locally popular Bike & Hike Trail. The Bike & Hike Trail is also connected to the Cleveland Metroparks System and to communities south and east of Cuyahoga Valley.

BIKE AND HIKE – THEY'RE GOOD FOR YOU AND FOR PARKS!

Bicycle and pedestrian trails are integral parts of larger park, community, and regional alternative transportation systems. More than just recreational opportunities, these trails can help to reduce traffic congestion, protect sensitive park resources, improve access and mobility within parks and communities, and enhance the visitor experience.