



Park Facility Management Division

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Deferred Maintenance Backlog

Background

The National Park Service (NPS) defines “deferred maintenance” (DM) as work activities that were not performed when scheduled on fixed assets (such as a bridge) and subsequently delayed until the future (most often due to funding constraints).¹ The NPS inventory is not only historic in nature, but is second only to the Department of Defense in size, totaling some 70,000 facility assets (i.e., visitor centers, lodges, utilities, roads and trails). These assets are necessary to provide the public an enjoyable experience in harmony with resource protection which is the economic engine for local communities across the nation.

In 2013, NPS visitors spent \$14.6 billion in local gateway communities translating to some 197 thousand jobs¹. Logically, a large portion of these assets allow the public to access and provide mobility in and around parks through an extensive system of roads, bridges, trails and transit systems². Many assets such as the White Bridge across Crum Elbow Creek, built in 1896 at Vanderbilt Mansion NHS or Clover Creek Bridge, built 1930, Sequoia NP have great historic value. It is the NPS mission to protect these historic assets for perpetually for the enjoyment of future generations.

Over time, the deferral of maintenance results in facility deficiencies that must be corrected. Many times at 3 to 5 times the cost versus practicing sound asset management because they will have to be rebuilt. DM includes also modernization of any facility deficiencies to meet current compliance to local and Federal codes (e.g., life safety, accessibility, environmental, etc.) and other regulatory or Executive Order compliance requirements and facility condition and operational objectives.

The DM of the nation’s most treasured NPS assets has steadily grown over the years as a result of the deterioration of dynamic systems (use, weather, aging, functional changes, end of life cycle replacement needs and funding constraints). In addition, new legislation and executive orders have transferred to the NPS additional assets in poor condition compounding the NPS already limited capacity to provide stewardship to existing assets. For example, since 2005, fifteen additional parks with transportation assets added 180 miles and four bridges to the inventory. Delay of maintenance and repairs can diminish safety, limit functionality and the quality of services leading to shortened facility life, decreased asset value and a spiraling burden. And in some instances the increase risk in loss of a historical asset. The growth in DM is attributed to shortfalls in annual appropriations for maintenance and repairs.

¹ NPS Report, 2013 National Park Visitor Spending Effects, Economic Contributions to Local Communities, states, and the Nation, see Executive Summary.

² The NPS is responsible for a transportation system consisting of 9,600 miles of roads, 1,442 bridges, 63 tunnels 17,872 miles of trails and 147 alternative transportation systems (i.e., ferries, buses, etc.). A system the similar size of several small states, but spread across the United States and Territories.

The NPS DM Backlog

The total NPS DM backlog is estimated to be greater than \$11.26 billion. Approximately half of the total DM is attributable to transportation facility needs across the nation. The DM is constantly changing as facilities deteriorate and additional assets are added. Meeting the required maintenance and repair is not being met through current annual congressional appropriations from both the U.S. Department of the Interior and the U.S. Department of Transportation. Understanding this great shortfall in transportation funding, NPS continues to explore innovative finance mechanisms as discussed in a study completed by the John A. Volpe National Transportation System Center, US Department of Transportation (http://www.nps.gov/transportation/pdfs/NPS_Innovative_Finance.pdf). The primary finding of this analysis is that the NPS has already implemented innovative finance techniques, including most of the mechanisms that are legally authorized and relevant to its mission. The deployment of additional innovative financing techniques would require congressional support and legislation (i.e., tolling), and in some cases would require state and local government support as well. The paper notes that most innovative finance techniques afforded to state and local governments are not applicable to federal agencies.

Based on historical levels of congressional appropriations, NPS anticipates the backlog to continue to grow as a result of addition of new parks and the unavoidable impact of inflation and deterioration. DM is calculated on an annual basis and published in a report available to the public.ⁱⁱ For NPS transportation assets DM is generated based on engineering field surveys completed using the “industry standard” approach by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). The Federal Accounting Standards Advisory Board or FASAB report generated and reported annually are greatly influenced by these field surveys for those projects that have not been scoped and developed into full projects for identification in the multiple year project plan. Accordingly, the \$5.4 billion backlog is developed as the preliminary figure to reflect the magnitude of the NPS paved roads, bridges, parking lots and tunnels deferred maintenance backlog of need across the Service. Understanding the NPS only receives a constraint amount of funds, it is not practical and uneconomical to scope and develop a project list to address the total \$5.4 billion backlog of need.

NPS Optimizes Investments Based on funding Constraints

The NPS has a tremendous challenge of reducing the deferred maintenance backlog. Subject to congressional appropriation constraints, the NPS has responded by deploying sound asset management strategies including the development of a “Capital Investment Strategy that focuses constrained funding on the Service’s highest priority assets.”ⁱⁱⁱ By doing so the NPS will correct the health and safety, accessibility, environmental, and deferred maintenance deficiencies of the facilities that are most important to park visitor experience and resource protection. In terms of transportation, these investments are focused on the highest priority facilities mandated by the parks enabling legislation and high use assets such as main entrances to the national parks.

The Obama Administration’s Proposal.

The Obama Administration has proposed new transportation legislation called, Generating Renewal, Opportunity, and Work with Accelerated Mobility, Efficiency, and Rebuilding of Infrastructure and Communities Throughout American, or “GROW AMERICA Act.” Many of the suggested changes in transportation legislation would support addressing the NPS deferred maintenance backlog including the creation of a Nationally Significant Federal Lands and Tribal Project Program to support funding large and complex projects such as the Arlington Memorial

Bridge in Washington DC estimated at \$128 million. Additional information can be found at NPS website: <http://www.nps.gov/transportation/index.html>, and at http://www.nps.gov/transportation/pdfs/DOI_GROWAMERICA_Act_Fact_Sheet.pdf.

ⁱ This definition comes from the *U.S. Department of the Interior Facilities Maintenance Assessment and Recommendations, February 1998*.

ⁱⁱ See the Statement of Federal Financial Accounting Standards (known as “FASAB” Standard Number 6); “Accounting for Property, Plant, and Equipment” requires annual disclosure of the estimated cost to remedy accumulated deferred maintenance on Department of the Interior property. This is an estimate only based on preliminary field surveys and includes a high and low calculation of between plus twenty and minus fifteen percent due to the practicality and cost that it would take to scope and develop a comprehensive project list for the total backlog (i.e., \$5.4 billion for transportation).

ⁱⁱⁱ The Capital Investment Strategy targets investments on the highest priority constructed assets, consistent with the criteria of the NPS Capital Investment Strategy and Park Asset Management Plans by ensuring that minimum annual maintenance requirements are met on high priority assets; halting the cycle of accruing deferred maintenance; implementing “Freeze the Footprint”; disposing of excess, obsolete, and low-priority assets; achieving energy and water cost savings and environmental benefits; making facilities fully accessible and compliant with current building codes; and, strengthening performance reporting standards and practices.