



## Parking and Traffic Circulation



Anyone who has visited Yosemite National Park on busy summer day knows the problem: during the late morning and early afternoon, as more and more vehicles accumulate in Yosemite Valley, traffic congestion builds and vehicle-pedestrian conflicts become more pronounced. Eventually, more vehicles have entered on Southside Drive than can exit without delay on Northside Drive cause the entire traffic circulation system in East Yosemite Valley to fail. When this occurs, Park staff are forced to divert traffic at the El Capitan crossover to prevent further gridlock from occurring in East Yosemite Valley.

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### What are the issues and opportunities related to traffic congestion and parking?

During public scoping, the National Park Service received many comments related to transportation and the issue of traffic and parking congestion remained a common theme in subsequent public workshops and meetings. Public comments included myriad suggestions, including reducing the number of vehicles in Yosemite Valley, increasing the number of shuttles and buses, decreasing number of buses, not allowing any increase in pavement, improving pedestrian crossings, and improving communication about traffic/parking conditions.

*Traffic Congestion:* During peak use days in the summer of 2011, there were approximately 68 days where the number of inbound vehicles to the East Valley exceeded the practical capacity of the transportation system. This occurs periodically, and causes traffic to back up along road segments, creating gridlock conditions. These congested traffic conditions are primarily associated with the performance of three key intersections: Northside Drive and Village Drive (Yosemite Village Day-use Parking Area/Camp 6) and Northside Drive and Sentinel Drive (Bank 3-way), and Northside Drive at the Yosemite Falls crosswalk. Pedestrian crossings conflicting with outbound vehicles often cause significant delays in traffic in East Yosemite Valley.

*Parking Capacity:* On peak visitation days in recent years the demand for visitor parking spaces in Yosemite Valley has frequently exceeded the available supply. Increases in visitation, particularly day-use, have led to increased demand for parking. Lack of parking negatively impacts visitors' experience and contributes to traffic congestion and crowding. As use levels rise and parking areas overflow, informal roadside parking has increased throughout Yosemite Valley, often negatively affecting meadows, wetlands, riparian areas, and other sensitive resources.

In Yosemite Valley there are presently 5,400 established parking spaces. Day-use parking spaces total 2,100 and overnight visitor parking spaces total ~2,200, administrative and residential parking spaces total 1,100. The Merced River Plan aims to provide appropriate parking that will enhance the visitor experience as well as protect resources.

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“I am deeply concerned by the traffic issue in Yosemite Valley.”

-2009 Scoping Comment

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## What does the plan do to address traffic congestion and parking issues?

Park planners have worked with nationally-recognized transportation and user capacity experts to conduct traffic studies and develop strategies to address circulation and congestion. Alternatives 2–4, through a reduction in maximum daily park visitation, remove the need for traffic circulation infrastructure improvements and sizeable increases in formalized parking. Alternatives 5 and 6 propose circulation infrastructure improvements and new parking areas to accommodate similar or higher visitation than present levels while reducing traffic congestion in Yosemite Valley.

The plan provides a range of alternatives that either expand parking supply to meet current demand or lower capacities and limit vehicle access to the East Valley to manage use levels. The established capacities for the roadway and parking areas in each alternative are protective of river values.

*Parking Permit System:* Under Alternatives 2-6, an East Yosemite Valley day-use parking permit system could be instituted when conditions reach the point where day-use demand frequently exceeds available day-use parking. Under Alternatives 2–4, day-use parking availability would be lower than current peak use conditions, so a day-use reservation system would need to be implemented immediately under these alternatives. Under Alternative 5 or 6, an East Yosemite Valley day-use parking permit system would be implemented when vehicles to the East Yosemite Valley exceeds the parking availability and requires formal traffic diversion at El Capitan Crossover for 14 or more days for two consecutive years (see Chapter 6). If implemented, the day-use parking permit system would require follow-on planning and environmental compliance, taking into account seasonality, fair and equitable allocation, distribution systems, permit compliance mechanisms, costs and fees, thru traffic options and other considerations (See Chapters 6 & 8 for additional information.)

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## Find Out More

If you're interested in learning more about the Merced Wild and Scenic River Draft Comprehensive Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement, you can download the entire document at [www.nps.gov/yose/parkmgmt/mrp-deis.htm](http://www.nps.gov/yose/parkmgmt/mrp-deis.htm). For those that have the time, reading the entire document will convey the fullest understanding of the plan. For those interested in an overview of the Merced River Plan, park staff suggest you begin with:

- Summary Guide for the Merced Wild and Scenic River Draft Comprehensive Management Plan/ DEIS
- Chapter 5 – River Values and their Management: Recreation ORV 20
- Chapter 6 – Visitor Use and User Capacity
- These sections of Chapter 8: Alternatives:
  - o Actions Common to Alternatives 2-6
  - o Overview section of Alternatives 2-6 (includes map series for each alternative)
  - o Full narrative for Alternative 5 (Preferred Alternative)

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## Tell Us What You Think

Comment on this draft environmental impact statement by visiting the Merced River Plan Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website at [http://parkplanning.nps.gov/mrp\\_deis](http://parkplanning.nps.gov/mrp_deis). Electronic comment submittal through PEPC saves resources and allows for direct entry to the NPS comment analysis system. Comments can also be submitted by email to [yose\\_planning@nps.gov](mailto:yose_planning@nps.gov) or by U.S. mail at the following address:

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