

WHAT IS THE PAUL S. SARBANES "TRANSIT IN PARKS" PROGRAM?

The Paul S. Sarbanes Transit in Parks (Transit in Parks) Program is a federal financial assistance program that annually awards grants to carry out projects that provide alternative transportation (bus, rail, or other conveyance including facilities for pedestrians, bicycles, and watercraft) in national parks and public lands.

WHAT IS THE PAUL S. SARBANES "TRANSIT IN PARKS" TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER (TRIPTAC)?

The Paul S. Sarbanes Transit in Parks Technical Assistance Center (TRIPTAC) provides information, training, and technical support on alternative transportation systems (ATS) for federal land managers. Specific services include person-to-person technical liaisons, a Help Desk (helpdesk@triptac.org or 877-704-5292) and website (www.triptac.org), training workshops, a peer mentoring program, and an online system to help public land managers find documents, technical manuals and other resources.

WHAT IS A CASE STUDY?

To expand knowledge about outstanding ATS projects in parks and public lands, the TAC is assembling a set of case studies. Each case study highlights successes experienced and examines lessons learned by land management units. Studies describe the transportation challenge, ATS solution and the steps taken to reach a successful outcome. They pay special attention to the characteristics of successful partnerships, such as those between a public land unit, local friends groups, and non-profit organizations.

THIS DOCUMENT WAS AUTHORED BY

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THE FULL CASE STUDY CAN BE FOUND AT

www.triptac.org/ResourceLibrary/TACPublications/Default.html

www.triptac.org
helpdesk@triptac.org (877) 704-5292



Paul S. Sarbanes
Transit In Parks

Technical Assistance Center

UNDERSTANDING

RESOURCES

SOLUTIONS

Partnership Case Study

Grand Island National Recreation Area Alternative Transportation Project

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Grand Island National Recreation Area (GINRA) is a 13,500-acre island in Lake Superior, located one-half mile from Munising in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. GINRA is managed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service (USFS) as part of the Munising Ranger District of the Hiawatha National Forest, and hosts approximately 7,000 visitors annually. These visitors travel to the island to enjoy numerous recreational activities including hiking, biking, camping, fishing, ice climbing and cross country skiing. Managing transportation for an island is challenging and GINRA is no exception.

When the USFS purchased the island from the Cleveland Cliffs Iron Co. in 1990, a public involvement process was initiated to ensure that citizens' concerns were taken into consideration in the general management plan. Private automobile access had historically only been available to those who worked or owned homes on the island. A recurring theme throughout the public involvement process was the issue of transportation. It was determined that an alternative transportation system (ATS) comprised of ferry service and multi-use trails was the best way to resolve the issue and protect the island's resources while continuing to make it available to the public. A bus service would later be added, to offer a more comprehensive transportation system. A local concessionaire began providing ferry service to the island, and use of private passenger vehicles on the island was prohibited, limiting visitors to alternative modes such as hiking, biking, cross-country skiing and snowmobiling.

In 2001 GINRA formed a partnership with Alger County Public Transit (ALTRAN), and the transit provider began offering bus service on the island during the summer season. Today the only motorized vehicles allowed on the island are ALTRAN tour buses, private vehicles belonging to Grand Island homeowners and USFS administrative vehicles. These vehicles are transported between the island and mainland on Mondays and Fridays by the USFS tug and barge. The elimination of most passenger vehicles has helped to enhance the visitor experience and promote resource protection.

Since its inception in 1990, the ATS has grown to encompass an integrated motorized and non-motorized system, consisting of a 32-person passenger ferry, a system of non-motorized hiking and biking trails approximately 25 miles in length, and an on-island gasoline/electric hybrid bus service which offers daily interpretive tours. The ferry service operates between Memorial Day weekend and early October. Bus tours are offered twice daily from June 15th through Labor Day. The interpretive tours last approximately three hours and stop at 12 points, giving visitors the opportunity to explore the island's key features while learning about its rich cultural and natural history. The growth of this system can be attributed to a foundation of strong partnerships between the USFS and its partners, including local businesses such as ALTRAN, Grand Island Ferry Service (GIFS), and the Hiawatha Interpretive Association (HIA), as well as federal agencies such as the National Park Service (NPS) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA).

GINRA received \$790,000 from the Paul S. Sarbanes Transit in Parks (Transit in Parks) program (formerly the Alternative Transportation in Parks and Public Lands (ATPPL) program) between fiscal years 2007 and 2008. The Transit in Parks program is administered by the FTA in partnership with the Department of Interior and the USFS, and funds capital and planning expenses for alternative transportation. These grants funded a large portion of the ATS enhancements at GINRA. The capital investment from the Transit in Parks grants, in conjunction with the resources provided through partnerships, is helping USFS managers reach the ATS goal for GINRA, which is to offer complete access to the island by creating a transportation system that is safe, sustainable, and provides a positive visitor experience. The ATS project was designed to enhance the existing system in order to increase and diversify visitation, improve customer service, heighten resource protection, and encourage area visitors to "Cross Over to Adventure."

While land managers face unique challenges at every site, it is hoped that by examining the lessons learned through the GINRA partnerships, new ideas will arise that will help land managers as they consider and develop their own ATS.

LESSONS LEARNED — WHAT WORKED?

- Engage in pre-planning prior to applying for grants.
- Think broadly to develop a system that addresses regional goals and issues.
- Cast a wide partnership net and get all parties involved early.
- Use public involvement mechanisms to secure community support and buy-in.
- Think clearly about ATS challenges and proposed solutions, including a Plan B.
- Utilize partners or private consultants for technical expertise.
- Look for funds in creative places. Utilize all resources.
- Identify a project champion.
- Work hard as administrators to maintain healthy partnerships.

LESSONS LEARNED — WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED?

- Be as detailed as possible when estimating a project budget.
- Make potential partners aware of both the rewards and challenges of developing ATS.
- Ask the individuals who deal with ATS components every day for their ideas.
- Keep partners involved from conception to implementation.
- Be patient, as ATS projects take considerable time to develop.
- Make sure the benefits of green technology outweigh the costs.

FUTURE PARTNERSHIP ACTIVITIES

Overall, the partners involved in the GINRA ATS project have found the partnership rewarding and useful, and anticipate many future developments. Challenges were encountered and the system continues to grow, but by working hard to maintain healthy and communicative partnerships, the potential of GINRA as a premier recreation destination is being realized. The partners are eager to see the final product and witness the accomplishment of the ATS goals for the island.