

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 (TAC)?

The Paul S. Sarbanes Transit in Parks Technical Assistance Center (TAC) 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

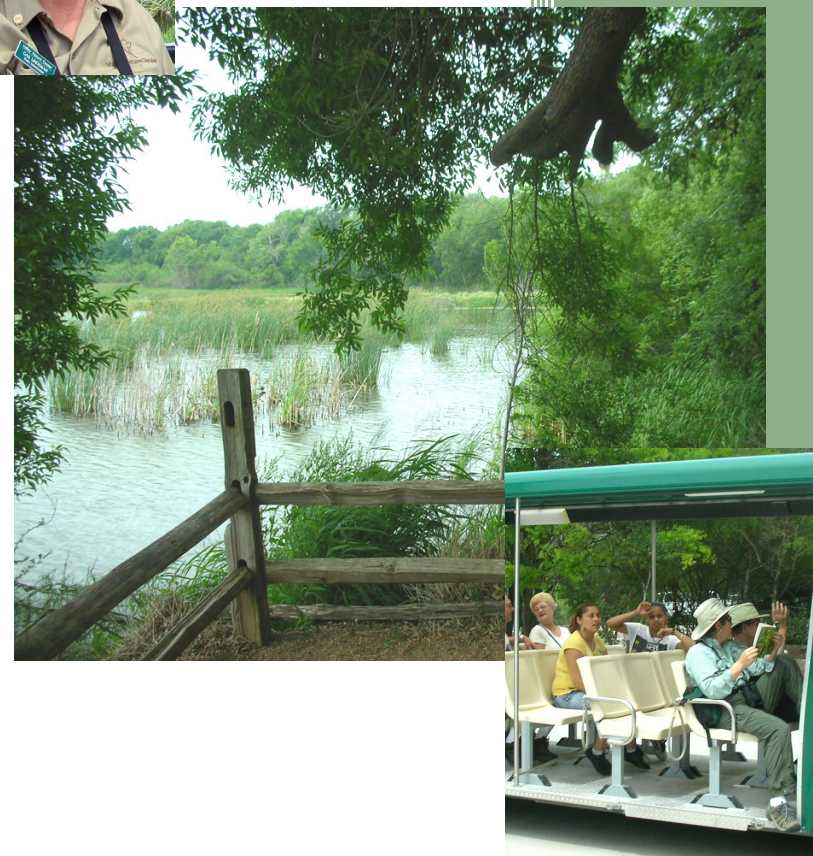
www.triptac.org/ResourceLibrary/TACPublications/Default.html

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Partnership Case Study

Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge Alternative Transportation Project

December 2010



*Paul S. Sarbanes
Transit In Parks*

Technical Assistance Center

UNDERSTANDING

RESOURCES

SOLUTIONS

*This document was prepared for the Federal Transit Administration
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge is located in southeastern Texas just north of the Rio Grande and the U.S.-Mexican border, seven miles south of the town of Alamo in Hidalgo County. The Refuge protects hundreds of plant and animal species that attract visitors from around the world. Therefore, much of its recreational activity is focused on viewing birds and wildlife while walking trails and touring Wildlife Drive, which circles the Refuge perimeter and provides primary access to it.

The Refuge tram service is a partnership between the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the Valley Nature Center (VNC), a local, non-profit organization, and, to a lesser extent, the Friends of Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). The Refuge's tram system is successful in large part due to their partnerships with these local non-profit organizations. Operating since 1982, the tram takes visitors on an interpretive tour through the Refuge along the Wildlife Drive loop, which is the Refuge's only road and is closed to private vehicles except bicycles during the peak visitor season to protect resources.

The current tram travels Wildlife Drive from November 15 through April 30, seven days per week (excluding major holidays), three times per day. The 90-minute tours stop at various points of interest along the way. The tram can hold up to 92 passengers, but typically only reaches capacity during spring months.

The operation of the tram service is defined through a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the Refuge and the VNC. Both partners handle certain components of the tram program. The Refuge provides the tram vehicles, as well as gasoline, oil, and tires. The Refuge also provides all parts and labor, or funding of such, for maintenance. Both partners assist with training the volunteers as defined in the MOU.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Provide financial sustainability through partnerships.
- Identify partners with similar missions.
- Communicate with partners.
- Compromise.
- Volunteers provide important financial assistance.
- Communicate with off-site USFWS staff.
- Conduct pre-purchase tram evaluations.
- Invest time in researching the type of vehicle and energy used.
- Communicate the need for change to visitors.
- Be honest when visitors ask about the reasons for a change.
- Conduct performance reviews of tram operations and interpretation.
- Expand scope of reviews.
- Increase annual meetings between partners.
- Partner on marketing efforts.
- Celebrate tram program successes.
- Identify tram purchase assistant.

SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES TO APPLY

- Select compatible partners.
- Use volunteer outreach tools.
- It is very important to identify short-, mid- and long-term plans that consider potential future growth.
- Long-term plans also need to identify each partner's responsibilities.
- Remember the agency message.

WHAT'S NEXT

Overall, all partners are very satisfied with the arrangement and plan to continue working cooperatively together in the future.