

Economic Benefits of Alternative Transportation Systems on Federal Lands

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*Paul S. Sarbanes
Transit In Parks*

Technical Assistance Center

UNDERSTANDING

RESOURCES

SOLUTIONS

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INTRODUCTION

Alternative Transportation Systems (ATS) help federal land managers maintain the balance between protecting natural resources and providing visitor access. ATS can be described as services and facilities that provide visitors with a viable alternative to their automobile for traveling to or within a park or public land. While shuttle buses are the most common, ATS also include:



National Capital Region bike share program for NPS employees (Photo Source: Rebecca Gleason, WTI)

- taxi, water shuttles, and pontoon boats
- Rail, including light rail transit and self-propelled vehicles
- Trams, vehicles for short-distance recreational travel



Trolley at Lowell National Historical Park (Photo Source: National Park Service)

- Bicycle facilities, such as trails or bike lanes, bicycle parking, or shuttles with bike racks
- Pedestrian networks and services, including trails, shelters and interpretive services
- Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS), which are advanced technologies that support, enhance or facilitate travel
- Waterborne vessels, such as ferries, tour boats, water



Wickenburg community trails system (BLM) (Photo Source: Bureau of Land Management)

In addition to the environmental benefits inside the parks and federal lands, gateway communities are experiencing the ripple effects and the resulting economic benefits from ATS in the form of new businesses, employment opportunities, and increased revenues. The following examples illustrate the impact of ATS on local communities of neighboring national parks and federal lands.

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Local communities are experiencing growth as new businesses move in and existing businesses expand to meet growing demand for services related to ATS on public lands. For example as bike trails are added or improved, demand for rentals, sales, and services increase.

CAPE COD NATIONAL SEASHORE

A 1993 survey of 38 businesses along the Cape Cod Rail Trail indicated that 24% of business owners cited the Rail-Trail, which runs through or near Cape Cod National Seashore, as one reason why they opened or acquired their business (1).



Bicyclist on bike path in Teton County (Photo Source: Rebecca Gleason, WTI)



Biking on the Cape Cod Rail Trail (Photo Source: Department of Conservation and Recreation)

BRIDGER TETON NATIONAL FOREST

Bicycle rentals for two shops in Jackson Hole, Wyoming more than doubled, which coincided with the growth of the Teton County trail system (2).

ZION NATIONAL PARK

The Zion Canyon Scenic Drive is closed to private automobiles from April until November making the road more pleasant for bicyclists. The shuttle buses are equipped with bike racks and can transport bicyclists from nearby Springdale, Utah into the park. Springdale bike shops have benefitted from the bicyclists use of the shuttle and opportunities have expanded in Springdale for bicycle sales, rentals, and services (3), and short term storage units (4). Expert interviews revealed that a policy of no pets on buses has increased demand for pet boarding, creating a new growth area in Springdale (5).



Bike Shop in Springdale (Photo source: Zion Cycles)

INCREASED REVENUES

As ATS connect federal lands visitors to gateway communities, local economies experience an increase in patrons and revenues. Shuttle buses provide easy access to businesses and activities in local communities. Federal lands visitors who may not have taken the time to park their vehicles and explore an area may be more apt to visit local stores and gift shops if they are dropped directly off in front and have time while they wait for the next bus.

ACADIA NATIONAL PARK

With the implementation of the Island Explorer shuttle service, tourists can visit community businesses even when parking areas are full. As a result, the Island Explorer is essentially increasing the client base of businesses that were previously constrained by their parking capacity. (6)



Island Explorer at Acadia National Park (Photo Source: John Daigle)

BRIDGER TETON NATIONAL FOREST

An estimated \$18 million is flowing through the Teton County economy as a direct result of the Teton County trail system. (2)

COLONIAL NATIONAL HISTORIAL PARK

Visitors riding the Historic Triangle shuttle frequently stay at museums and gift shops longer while they are waiting for the next bus, resulting in additional sales. (7)



Shopping in Williamsburg near Colonial National Historical Park (Photo Source: Williamsburg Area Destination Marketing Committee)

DEVILS POSTPILE/INYO NATIONAL FOREST

Access into the Reds Meadow Valley and Devils Postpile National Monument is available only by mandatory shuttle bus. Because the operation of the shuttle begins in a shopping area, businesses in the town of Mammoth Lakes were very enthusiastic in their support of the system and the prospect of increased consumers. (7)

WHITE RIVER NATIONAL FOREST – MAROON BELLS – SNOWMASS

A local sporting goods store in Snowmass Village, Colorado near Aspen sells Maroon Bells transit tickets at no charge to the Roaring Fork Transportation Authority because visitors buying Maroon Bells tickets also frequently purchase equipment, clothing, and other merchandise at their store. (7)

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND EMPLOYEE SERVICES

Many gateway communities are small, offering limited employment opportunities for local residents. ATS has helped increase job options, even providing training in some situations. Some services provide transportation for federal lands employees adding value to employee benefits.

ACADIA NATIONAL PARK

The Island Explorer shuttle created over 51 job opportunities for drivers and shift supervisors. It provides free and convenient transportation enabling a larger segment of the population to obtain and retain employment on the island and in the gateway community.

CAPE COD NATIONAL SEASHORE

The Cape Cod National Seashore shuttle service provides transportation for employees working at park service jobs. (4)



Zion Shuttle at Temple of Sinawava (Photo Source: NPS)

ZION NATIONAL PARK

McDonald Transit, operator of the Zion National Park ATS, employs 57 people at Zion – 43 full-time, seasonal drivers, 4 seasonal mechanics, 1 dispatch/office manager, 4 detailers (bus washing & refueling), and 5 operations supervisors at higher wages than service jobs in Springdale, the gateway community with a population of less than 400. McDonald Transit provided commercial driver training when needed, thus adding a new skill set to Springdale; 98% of drivers trained and hired in 2000 returned in 2001. (8)

GRAND CANYON NATIONAL PARK

The Grand Canyon National Park shuttle service employs 40 drivers, 15 of which are full-time, year-round. (8)

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK

The Yosemite National Park Concession Service hires about 50 drivers every summer for the free shuttle buses and tour buses. (8)



The Yosemite Shuttle employs 50 drivers every summer. (Photo Source: NPS)

CONCLUSION

National parks and federal lands that support recreation have been proclaimed to be one of the greatest bargains in the federal budget. Federal land managers strive to preserve these natural, historical, and cultural resources through alternative transportation means. The benefits within the federal land include reducing congestion and pollution, improving visitor mobility and accessibility, and enhancing the visitor experience. But as we have seen, the ATS benefits extend beyond the public land boundaries into the gateway communities, creating business and employment opportunities to meet the new demands, and giving a boost to local economies with an increase in patrons.



(Photo source: Zion Cycles)

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