Visitor Access Plan, Summer 2023 Newsletter

Concerned about park access? We want to hear from you!

This past winter we invited you to join us in envisioning the future of accessing Yosemite National Park. Your feedback was instrumental in helping the planning team develop the preliminary strategies presented below. These strategies aim to provide safe and efficient park access and high-quality experiences to visitors while ensuring protection of park resources and values.

We want to hear your ideas and questions about these preliminary strategies. Continue reading to learn about the many ways to stay involved and access information, including upcoming public meetings.

Thank you for your continued interest and support in this process!

- Yosemite National Park Planning Team

Purpose of this Comment Period

We are interested in hearing your questions on the preliminary strategies. We are accepting feedback from July 6 to September 6, 2023.

Please submit comments electronically by visiting the National Park Service (NPS) Planning, Environment and Public Comment website at https://parkplanning.nps.gov/yosemitevisitoraccess. Once on the website, select "Open for Comment" to provide your thoughts on the preliminary strategies.

Stay Involved!

Want to learn more?

Visit the project website at https://parkplanning.nps.gov/yosemitevisitoraccess and the StoryMap at https://arcg.is/18Sv4C. During public meetings, the NPS planning team will share information about the ideas described in this newsletter and be available to respond to questions. Check the project website for a complete list of public meetings and instructions on how to connect to the meeting. If you would like to receive updates on this project, subscribe to an email list at https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDOINPS/subscriber/new.

Purpose of the Plan

Ensuring a welcoming environment for all visitors, preserving thousands of years of human history and connection, and protecting nationally significant resources are Yosemite National Park's primary and daily focus areas. Managing use at the park is increasingly complex due to growth in day-use visitation and changing use patterns. The purpose of the plan is to protect Yosemite National Park's exemplary natural and cultural resources while providing equitable visitor access to world-class experiences and ensuring operational sustainability.

Plan Components

This plan will apply the visitor use management framework to ensure that decisions about visitor access to the park and related management are consistent with protecting and maintaining desired conditions for resources and experiences. For additional information on the framework, please see https://visitorusemanagement.nps.gov.

Key Issues

This plan is needed to address a wide range of issues associated with persistently high visitation. These issues include but are not limited to:

- road and parking congestion that delays emergency response and causes unsafe conditions for visitors and staff

- long waits at entrances that detract from positive visitor experiences

- Insufficient numbers of staff responding to intense use and maintenance of facilities

- vegetation impacts from non-designated parking

- human waste along roads and turnouts and in parking lots

Potential Strategies

The visitor access management planning team has been developing potential strategies for management based on public and stakeholder input and feedback from all levels of the National Park Service. These strategies are designed to help protect Yosemite's fundamental resources and values and improve visitor access and opportunities.

For each of these strategies, we are currently evaluating:

- **Viability.** How this strategy will help us resolve key issues in the congested areas; how this strategy will help us meet project goals.

- **Feasibility.** How much this strategy will cost and the potential source of funding, including whether user fees would be required; what resources will be needed to implement this strategy (for example, staffing, facilities, and funding).

- **Desirability.** When and where this strategy would be most useful; how much this strategy would improve visitor experience and resource conditions and whether there will be any tradeoffs such as additional fees or wait-times to access the park.

No single solution will meet all project goals and resolve all issues. We are evaluating strategies individually and in combination to identify the best ways to meet overarching goals. We are seeking your feedback on the management options described below as a part of our evaluation.
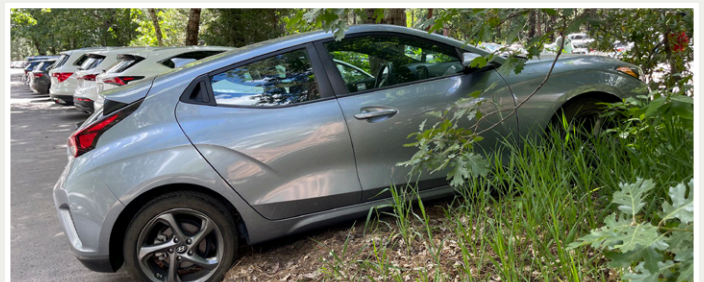
Implement Reservation Systems

Issue/Opportunity: There is an opportunity to improve the safety and flow of traffic at entrance stations, along roadways, and in parking areas. Some individuals and stakeholders have encouraged the National Park Service to consider reservations and other timed-entry systems to better manage vehicle distribution and flow. Well-designed reservation systems have improved the quality of visitor experiences, distributed use across time and space, and served as a useful trip-planning tool for visitors on public lands and recreational resources where this strategy has been implemented.

Potential Strategies:

- Daily reservations at entrances during peak hours (such as the summer 2022 peak hours pilot system).
- Parking lot reservations for specific areas (such as the Tuolumne Meadows area) or specific lots (such as the Yosemite Falls parking lot).
- Daily reservations at entrances for events (such as Horsetail Falls).
- Timed entry at entrances (visitors must enter the park within the time window specified under the permit, such as 8 am to noon or noon to 4 pm).
- Your ideas?

Enhance Trip Planning

Issue/Opportunity: Trip planning and travel forecasting tools help improve visitor experiences by giving visitors information when and where they need it to make informed choices about visiting the park.

Potential Strategies:

- Improve availability of visitor orientation and information such as traffic forecasts, parking space availability, best times to visit, and current conditions prior to visiting the park.
- Increase trip planning information to inform visitor expectations. Examples of trip-planning tools include the park website and app, social media, virtual ranger programs, and park partnerships to disseminate information.
- Improve technology (including internal and external internet connectivity) and information collection throughout the park to inform forecasting and the potential availability of real-time traffic/parking information for visitors.
- Your ideas?

Upgrade and Modernize Entrance Stations

Issue/Opportunity: Congestion at entrance stations impact park visitors, staff, and residents in surrounding areas including El Portal, Wawona, Yosemite West, and Foresta. Congestion (wait times and lines) at entrance stations results in visitor frustration, stress on park staff, and incidences of human waste at pull-offs.

Potential Strategies:

- Relocate Arch Rock entrance to an area that is wider and able to accommodate more vehicles.
- Relocate or reconfigure Tioga Pass entrance to improve flows through this entrance station.
- Evaluate opportunities for streamlined access to the park (such as contactless entry).
- Your ideas?

Expand Bicycle and Pedestrian Options

Issue/Opportunity: Current options for travel that does not depend on private vehicles in the park are limited and could be improved to increase safety. There is an opportunity to expand access to travel that does not depend on private vehicle access in the park in order to promote carbon-free transportation, encourage active transportation (such as bicycling and walking), and reduce vehicular congestion.

Potential Strategies:

- Expand bicycle and pedestrian routes in developed frontcountry areas.
- Delineate areas specifically for bicycle use to reduce conflicts between vehicles and pedestrians.
- Build pedestrian overpasses to reduce conflicts with vehicles.
- Your ideas?

Improve Transit and Shuttle Opportunities

Issue/Opportunity: While the current shuttle system helps transport visitors to their desired destinations in the valley, it does not adequately meet visitation demand when the park operates without a reservation system. When shuttles are full, visitors drive their own vehicles around the park to avoid long waits, which further contributes to congestion on roadways and in parking lots. Any potential changes to shuttle systems in the park would involve a robust feasibility assessment due to significant operating costs.

Potential Strategies:

- Expand regional connectivity by partnering with local businesses (such as hotel shuttles or other commercial shuttles).
- Optimize Yosemite Area Regional Transportation System (YARTS) connectivity.
- Expand park-and-ride options.
- Explore options for rideshare opportunities.
- Your ideas?

Update Infrastructure

Issue/Opportunity: High visitation strains existing infrastructure and facilities. There is opportunity to update and modernize existing infrastructure and evaluate the need for new infrastructure to better meet the changing needs of the park.

Potential Strategies:

- Provide opportunities for enhanced visitor experiences in underutilized areas such as Crane Flat and Badger Pass.
- Analyze current parking use and allocate overnight and day-use parking to better meet visitor needs.
- Analyze the amount of housing, staff, and facilities needed to support a positive visitor experience.
- Your ideas?

Visit the project website at https://parkplanning. nps.gov/yosemitevisitoraccess to share your ideas and questions. Your input will help refine these preliminary options for further analysis. We are seeking your responses to the following questions:

1. Based on your desired conditions for resources and experiences (how you arrive and visit the park), which of the listed strategies (or combination of strategies) do you think best achieve the purpose of the plan?

2. Are there other strategies or changes to listed strategies that should be considered and analyzed that are not already presented?

WINTER 2022-2023

Project kick-off! Request public and stakeholder feedback on key issues, opportunities, and values associated with providing quality and sustainable access to the park.

SPRING 2023

Refine purpose and need for the project. Explore potential solutions.

SUMMER 2023

Request feedback from the public and stakeholders on potential strategies and actions to address identified issues.

FALL 2023-SPRING 2024

Incorporate public and stakeholder feedback and develop the alternatives, draft plan, and associated compliance.

SUMMER 2024

Request public and stakeholder review of the draft plan and begin associated compliance.