



# Journeying Through Public Lands

## Why Transportation Planning Is Essential

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**N**ational parks and other public lands are treasured by Americans and international visitors alike. Planning for transportation to and within these public lands is distinct from planning at the local, state, and federal levels. In this theme issue are articles highlighting the unique considerations associated with transportation planning on public lands.

*Federal Lands Transportation Planning 101* describes the challenges specific to federal lands, including coordination, deferred maintenance, electrification, resiliency, and equitable access, as well as determining which entities may constitute a federal land management agency. This article provides a roadmap of the scope, structure, and direction for those new to federal lands planning.

*Enhancing the Visitor Experience: The National Park Service's Data Collection Innovations* details the challenges of applying mobile device data for small zone sizes and short time segments and

explains how mobile device data can augment—but not replace—traffic counts. Ultimately, the National Park Service expects that this data can provide better information about how visitors travel to and through parks and whether entering and exiting from the same entrance or pass-through drives are more common. The authors also highlight how rapid changes to technology may have affected a previously promising technology (e.g., Wi-Fi-based data), as well as the limitations of technologies in rural areas due to limited data and concerns about data reliability.

*Integrated Planning: Closing the Tribal Engagement Gap* explores ways to bridge the divide between federal and tribal planning programs that are exacerbated by how funds are allocated (i.e., where the federal and tribal land concentration is the greatest, the federal aid allocation is the smallest). The authors explain collaborative long-range transportation plans and why development of these plans was discontinued. The article also describes a

new piloted approach and the challenges uncovered as a result of that effort. This article features the need to engage tribes one on one, emphasizing the value of personal connections.

*A Trail for Everyone: Active Transport in State Parks* showcases several state parks dedicated to active transportation, such as biking and hiking. It looks at how federal funding programs, such as the Transportation Alternatives Program and Recreational Trails Program, proved vital to the successful implementation of these and other trails. The trails have improved the economic well-being of nearby communities with—for example, new restaurants and convenience shops—as well as the health of community members with such benefits as reduced health care costs because of a more active population. The article touches on the need to ensure access for all, regardless of socioeconomic status; the benefits that trails provide by reducing greenhouse gas emissions; and the role that state parks may play in improving Americans' mental health.

*Wild Open Spaces: Cultivating the Next Generation of Public Lands Stewards* describes the roles that transportation fellows fill in national parks and wildlife refuges, such as helping to improve the visitor experience, community outreach, and coalition building, as well as facilitating partnerships, developing new programs, and piloting next-generation technologies. The fellowship program can serve as a pipeline to federal service through providing federal noncompetitive eligibility upon completion. The article details the experiences of current fellows, highlighting their varied and often unexpected backgrounds (e.g., a history major) and how those skill sets have proven useful for the success of their tasks.

*Transportation Connections 2040: Preserving Transportation Within America's Great Outdoors* is a significant achievement that supports the valuation of the bureau's transportation system as critical to its mission. The authors discuss the



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Thickets of greenery line a stretch of Missouri's Katy Trail State Park, where bicyclists get fresh-air exercise while enjoying the scenery. Running 240 miles along the corridor of the old Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railroad, it is the longest continuous rail trail in the United States and is dedicated exclusively to active transportation.

plan's five goals and how they align with the U.S. Department of Transportation's national goals for the Federal-Aid Highway Program. Within the five goals, a performance-based framework was used to enable implementation and monitoring.

*Peaks and Valleys: Forecasting Recreational Travel Demand* provides a summary of a National Cooperative Highway Research Program project that builds a series of models and open-source tools to predict recreational travel to America's great outdoors. The demand models and tools highlighted in this article will allow state and regional transportation agencies and public land managers to predict visitor demand and vehicle travel to their recreational sites under a variety of scenarios.

Throughout several of these articles, FHWA's new funding source through the Innovation and Research Council is featured and can be expected to move the needle on research related to

federal lands for years to come. The articles discuss various funding programs, including—but not limited to—the Office of Federal Lands Highway's three capital funding programs: the Federal Land Transportation Program, the Federal Lands Access Program, and the Tribal Transportation Program.

*The TRB Standing Committee on Transportation Needs of National Parks and Public Lands contributed to the development of the articles in this TR News issue and welcomes those interested in continuing the discussion on these important topics to participate in future committee activities. For more information on how to get involved, become a Friend of the committee at <https://MyTRB.org>.*