



FACTSHEET

GROW AMERICA Act Fails the National Parks

The Obama Administration recently reissued its proposal to reauthorize federal surface transportation programs (GROW AMERICA Act). Unfortunately, it takes away guaranteed funding that has been provided historically to fix the deteriorating roads, bridges and other transportation systems within our national parks. With America preparing to celebrate the national parks centennial in 2016, it had been expected that the Administration would put forth bold initiatives to ensure that park transportation systems would be ready for this momentous occasion. GROW AMERICA not only fails to significantly increase such funding but, worse, it eliminates traditional guaranteed funding and thus totally fails the national parks.

There is no question that renewed focus and investment in our national parks should be a part of the Centennial celebration. Currently the NPS infrastructure maintenance backlog totals \$11.4 billion and growing. The transportation infrastructure portion of the backlog alone accounts for nearly \$6 billion, or over half of the total.

The National Park Service in its *Transportation Reauthorization Resource Paper*¹ released in May 2013, estimated that it would need \$970 million per year to complete, restore and maintain core transportation infrastructure. Nearly 40% of national park roads are in poor to fair condition according to the FHWA Pavement Condition Rating System and 42 of its bridges, including the Memorial Bridge over the Potomac River, are structurally deficient.

Transportation facilities located or operating in national parks are federal facilities. Congress has traditionally supported the building, operation, maintenance, and improvement of these facilities with funds from the Highway Trust Fund. Park transportation systems are wholly the responsibility of the federal government and *should be first in line for federal gas tax dollars*.

GROW AMERICA proposes to fund the Federal Lands Transportation Program (FLTP) at \$370 million (with 2% annual increases) with funding guaranteed for Forest Service (15%) and Corps of Engineers (5%), while eliminating guaranteed funding for the National Park Service. The NPS instead is to compete for the remaining \$296 million with the other DOI land managing agencies (Fish and Wildlife, Bureau of Land Management and Bureau of Reclamation), some of which have not traditionally been recipients of federal gas tax funds. The NPS currently receives \$240 million or 80% of the FLTP. By allocating remaining funds to a pot that combines NPS with all eligible Interior agencies, *the proposal actually puts NPS at risk of receiving less money*.

The NPS has benefitted from guaranteed funding since the inception of the Federal Lands Highway Program in 1982. Guaranteed funding means the NPS can efficiently plan and use its scarce transportation dollars. The only thing that this drastic and unwarranted elimination of guaranteed

¹ National Park Service Transportation Reauthorization Resource Paper, Federal Lands Transportation Program, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 30 May 2013.

http://www.nps.gov/transportation/pdfs/NPS_Reauthorization_Resource_Paper.pdf

funding for the NPS transportation program guarantees is that the backlog of transportation needs in national parks will continue to grow at a significant pace.

The Administration may contend that additional funding is provided in the proposed **National Significant Federal Lands and Tribal Projects Program** (also known as Mega Projects Program), to be funded at \$150 million per year from 2016 through 2021. But the \$25 million threshold for project eligibility is so low and the total funding for the program is so insufficient that the likely outcome is for the Secretary of Transportation to spread the money among as many relatively low-cost projects as possible. Iconic or high-cost NPS projects such as Memorial Bridge rehabilitation, restoration of the loop road in Yellowstone, and Foothills Parkway completion will not receive the funding levels needed to truly make a difference.

Another disappointment with the GROW AMERICA act is that it fails to reinstate the Transit in the Parks Program that was deauthorized in MAP-21. The program provided critical funding for important alternative transportation projects in national parks that do not compete well for funding under traditional transportation programs. Currently more than 100 parks offer some type of alternative transportation service. The future of these programs as well as the addition of new programs where needed are in jeopardy without a dedicated funding source.

In conclusion, it is improbable that the NPS will receive any more money under the modified Federal Lands Transportation Program and the Mega Project Program as proposed in GROW AMERICA than it is receiving with guaranteed funding under MAP-21. Consequently, the NPS backlog will continue to grow, park transportation infrastructure will continue to deteriorate, and visitors and local communities will pay the price. With the centennial of the national parks drawing near it is incumbent upon both the Administration and Congress to ensure that America's national parks will continue to preserve and make available for enjoyment this country's national and cultural heritage. Reliable and safe transportation systems will be vital to those efforts.