

# SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS FOR VISITOR ACCESS AT YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK: EXPLORING TRANSIT OPTIONS FOR THE PARK'S MOST POPULAR DESTINATIONS

## **Roberts, Mandi**

MLA Candidate, University of Idaho, [robe1151@vandals.uidaho.edu](mailto:robe1151@vandals.uidaho.edu)

## **Scott, Elizabeth**

University of Idaho, Department of Landscape Architecture, Urban Design Center, [bscott@uidaho.edu](mailto:bscott@uidaho.edu)

### **1 ABSTRACT**

*Yellowstone National Park is experiencing unprecedented congestion levels, particularly in the heavily-visited Geyser Basin from West Yellowstone to Old Faithful. Congestion threatens unique geothermal features, rivers, natural vegetation, and habitat due to off-trail foot traffic and parking outside designated areas. Park visitor surveys indicate congestion levels are detrimentally effecting the quality of the visitor experience. Because vehicle volumes are frequently above the capacity of parking areas in the Geyser Basin in summer, this study investigates the potential to introduce a shuttle system to this area. Research methods include case studies of shuttle systems at other national parks, secondary analysis of visitor surveys and studies of visitor impacts in the Geyser Basin, and interviews with National Park Service (NPS) experts who plan and manage shuttle systems at other parks. The case studies examine visitation levels, system capacity, scheduling, parking, and operations. Research findings suggest that capping private vehicle use to existing parking lot capacities and delivering additional visitors via shuttle could be a more sustainable means for access to the park. Key findings include: shuttle systems should connect heavily visited areas, rather than serving the entire park; convenient, attractive park-and-rides are critical for encouraging ridership; and opportunities to promote bicycling and sight-seeing with the shuttle program can enhance visitor experience. A conceptual transit system plan proposes three services between West Yellowstone and Old Faithful (Express, Explorer, and Trekker) with synchronized timetables. This plan could remove up to approximately 45 percent of private vehicles from the congested corridor during summer peak months.*

### **1.1 Keywords**

- National parks shuttle
- Parks overcrowding
- Visitor use management
- Alternative transportation systems
- Sustainable visitor access

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