



**U.S. Department of Transportation  
Federal Transit Administration**

**Alternative Transportation in the Parks and Public Lands Program  
Project Proposal for Fiscal Year 2008 Funds – Planning Project**

BASIC PROJECT INFORMATION			
Project Name (Please provide a 1-2 sentence description of the project): Comprehensive transportation study and development of a multi-agency Master Transportation Plan for the Eastern Sierra			
Proposed Funding Recipient: U.S. Forest Service - Inyo National Forest			
Public land unit(s) involved: Inyo National Forest Devils Postpile National Monument Yosemite National Park		<u>Location of Project</u> City: Multiple (Lee Vining, Mammoth Lakes, Bishop, Independence, Lone Pine, Ridgecrest) County: Inyo and Mono Counties State: California Congressional District: 25th	
Federal Land Management Agency managing the above unit(s): <input type="checkbox"/> Bureau of Land Management <input type="checkbox"/> Bureau of Reclamation <input type="checkbox"/> Fish and Wildlife Service <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Forest Service <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> National Park Service		Type of Planning Project: (Implementation projects, please use the alternate form) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Planning	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Proposal is to plan for a possible new alternative transportation system where none currently exists. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Proposal is to plan for a possible expansion or enhancement of an existing alternative transportation system.			
ATPPL Funding Requested during FY 2008 \$350,000		<b>Total</b> Cost of Planning Project at Completion (All sources) \$350,000	
Were you awarded FY 2006 or FY 2007 ATPPL funds? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No If answer "Yes," please provide amount awarded: \$267,000			
Do you plan to request additional ATPPL funds in future years? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <b>(Note: If you wish to compete for future ATPPL fiscal year funds you must reapply).</b>			
If answer "Yes," please specify ATPPL proposed funding levels for out years below:			
FY 2009	\$200,000	FY 2010	\$200,000
<b>FY 2008</b> Funding Amounts from sources other than ATPPL funds? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No If answer "Yes," please specify funding levels per source below:			
State \$	Local \$	Federal (other than ATPPL) \$	Private sources \$

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**OTHER PROJECT SPONSORS (in addition to funding recipient)**

Eastern Sierra Transit Authority, Bureau of Land Management, Town of Mammoth Lakes, CalTrans, Mono County, Inyo County. Additional Letters of Support available upon request.

**REQUIREMENTS**

- If a State, Tribal, or local government entity is proposing the project, the applicant has contacted the manager of the federal land unit(s) and has the consent of the Federal land management agency or agencies affected.
- The project is consistent with the metropolitan and statewide planning process.
- The project is consistent with agency plans.
- The planning project will analyze all reasonable alternatives, including a non-construction option.

**BASIC PROJECT DATA**

Number of Visitors (Annual): 4 million

Daily Number of Visitors (Peak season): 50,000

Average Number of Vehicles per Day at Peak Visitation: 20,000

Current Road Level of Service at Peak Visitation: B to E (depending on roadway; study will address multiple roads within the service area, many of which rate "D" or "E" for LOS). (Please consult guidance where available on determining this variable. You may use observational accounts or pictures to provide an assessment of this datum for FY 2008 proposals).

What time of the year does your land unit experience Peak Visitation?

 Spring       Summer       Fall       Winter

Current Carrying Capacity of Existing Roads: Requires further study, but some roadways within the service area are at 100% capacity (vehicles/day)

What percent of that capacity is the site operating at during peak periods? 100 %

Current parking shortages during peak visitation: 1,000s (exact figures currently not available; transportation study would help quantify this but most Forest sites reach full capacity during peak season)

Current Number of Persons who use the alternative transportation system (if one already exists) at peak visitation: 4,000 (Based on use of a USFS ATS at Reds Meadow Valley as well as interregional public transit; transportation study would help quantify this.) (average number of visitors/daily at peak)

Estimated Annual Number of Persons who will use the alternative transportation system at project completion: 500,000 (anticipated number of riders or users/annually)

Average number of auto collisions with wildlife in the area? 1,000 collisions/year

## Executive Summary

In 2004, the Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Authority completed the “Field Report – Eastern Sierra Expanded Transit System,” (ESETS) which analyzed existing and potential alternative transportation systems in the Eastern Sierra. Since that time, the Inyo National Forest, Yosemite National Park, Devils Postpile National Monument, and the Town of Mammoth Lakes have developed or expanded a number of alternative transportation systems aimed at supporting specific local resident and visitor based programs. Collectively, these units have been able to establish systems that serve individual needs and discrete destinations, but connections between these systems continue to be incomplete. This was recognized as part of the 2007 TAG Report which identified the #1 priority for the area was the development of a Regional Transportation Plan.

Utilizing this broad analysis, this planning proposal is aimed at completing a detailed inventory of factors for each of the transit nodes and linkages identified within the ESETS Field Report. This effort will focus on gathering detailed information to sufficiently determine the timing and priority of future transit linkage developments and expansion of existing services. Specifically, the scope of work will focus on the service area from State Route 120 at Yosemite National Park to Whitney Portal Road (terminates at Mount Whitney), and will analyze existing ATS systems, gather data to sufficiently inform future transit decisions, identify potential funding strategies, and make recommendations about the needs associated with connecting these systems with existing and planned interregional transit systems. In addition to regional service areas, there are a number of very specific linkages located on the Inyo National Forest that will be analyzed as part of this effort:

- State Route 120 (Tioga Pass) from Yosemite National Park to Lee Vining
- Service extensions from Mammoth Lakes to Hot Creek / Convict Lake / Rock Creek
- Service extensions from Yosemite NP and Lee Vining to Mammoth Lakes
- Service extensions or expansions to the June Lake Loop / Lakes Basin / Reds Meadow
- Service extensions to Big Pine, Lone Pine, and Mount Whitney Portal

This final large scale planning effort is necessary to determine which areas and corridors are ready for additional transportation system improvements. It will assemble (through the use of transportation planners, various consultants, and other specialists) detailed information to support the development of the additional linkages within the system to complete the network of alternative transportation within the Eastern Sierra. The key elements of this effort include:

- Cooperation with other local or regional systems for innovative financing or joint development strategies. The analysis will look at opportunities to link to city, county, regional and interregional transportation systems such as YARTS (Yosemite Area Regional Transportation System), and determine which of the entities should be the lead agency in future implementation projects.
- Timing and priority schedules for phasing implementation of transportation system expansions. This will include identifying the responsible entity to lead the effort, define the role of the other supporting agencies, and determine how the individual extensions of transportation service fit within a broad vision for transportation in the Eastern Sierra.
- Financial planning. This will include a determination of broad scale needs for capital, operations, maintenance, infrastructure, and administrative expenses associated with each additional link. In addition, potential user fee, public-private partnerships, and other supporting financial aspects would be identified. The information gained here would directly inform future feasibility studies.
- Operational efficiency and environmental sensitivity. This will include gathering detailed information about possible ridership, current transportation limitations and impacts, as well as a study of traffic patterns and visitor use trends at key areas.

## Project Description

This grant will fund a transportation study in which the Inyo National Forest (INF) will lead the effort to collect data in support of future transportation improvements and guide the collaboration of this project with the National Park Service, Eastern Sierra Transit Authority, the Town of Mammoth Lakes, and other stakeholders interested in the development of transit systems in the Eastern Sierra. While the effort focuses mainly on the area from Lee Vining to Lone Pine, the goal of this project is to produce detailed information to support a plan that describes the integration of all of the existing systems into a regional transit program that spans the entire Eastern Sierra (an area along U.S. 395 from Reno, NV in the north to Ridgecrest, CA in the south).

The first phase of this effort will begin with the collection and synthesis of existing information, determining information gaps and developing for each potential transit node a methodology for gathering data. While current planning information available includes such things as transportation analysis documents, transit plans, land and resource management plans, general plans, annual and strategic reports, Federal Highways Administration field reports, and visitor surveys and statistics, a shortfall persists in the availability of more technical information such as visitor surveys, primary data collection, schedules, headway, potential routes, frequency, vehicle types, and the myriad of environmental impacts related to traffic congestion for specific sites within the proposed service area.

A key element of this effort is an analysis of each of the potential transportation routes, and how they fit within the regional transit plan. Each of the individual transit linkages will be ranked and prioritized based upon a number of factors. This ranking will lead directly to the development of a schedule of projects that will describe when each of the routes will be implemented and what steps are necessary before completing the implementation. It will also serve as a master development plan and basis of a schedule for additional ATPPL planning and implementation grants in future years, guiding the future actions of the various partners in the improvement of alternate transportation in the Eastern Sierra.

An important component of this grant will also include the coordination and collaboration between the various transit entities. The Inyo National Forest will lead this effort with assistance from the newly formed Eastern Sierra Transit Authority, and will include contacting partners and interested stakeholders, convening meetings, hosting brainstorming sessions, assembling information, producing planning materials such as maps and diagrams, as well as maintaining interest until this planning effort is complete. Acknowledging, however, that a background in transportation planning remains essential to the future success of an expanded ATS in the Eastern Sierra, the Inyo National Forest will apply planning funds received from this ATPPL proposal to retain the services of a professional transportation consulting firm such as Cambridge Systematics or Volpe National Transportation Systems Center. Based on prior transit studies and field reports, engaging independent transportation consultants like these in the overall planning process lends technical expertise and proficiency critical to the success and sustainability of an ATS.

Lastly, this planning effort will produce a commensurate financial plan for each of the proposed implementation phases. Recognizing that long-term funding is essential for the continued success and longevity of any ATS, the Inyo National Forest will work with its partners and stakeholders to identify funding strategies for the various linkages and routes. Additional funding sources—both federal and non-federal—will also be identified and researched by this scope of work. Emphasis will be focused on identifying an ATS alternative that meets visitor mobility, natural resource management, and regional transportation planning needs for the least expense. Ultimately, the end product of this endeavor will serve as a basis upon which the Forest and its partners will rely for technical, logistical, temporal, and fiscal guidance in the implementation of an expanded ATS in the Eastern Sierra.

## **1. Demonstration of Need**

### **a. Visitor mobility and experience:**

“The Eastern Sierra Expanded Transit System service area serves international, U.S., as well as regional and local Nevada and California visitors to the various attractions in and adjacent to the Inyo National Forest” (Field Report: Eastern Sierra Expanded Transit System, Federal Transit Administration, 2004). The Inyo National Forest is the most visited National Forest in California, and the third most visited in the United States. Market projections for the growth in visitation for the National Forest alone show that an additional 98,000 visits per/year can be expected each year for the next 20 years (U.S. Forest Service Recreation Facility Analysis, 2007). This will increase the number of recreation visits on the Inyo National Forest from nearly 4 million visits to over 6 million recreation visits each year.

Many areas within the region are already at or exceeding their transportation capacity. A number of small scale transportation systems have been implemented to alleviate capacity problems, and include systems like those operated by the Town of Mammoth Lakes in the Lakes Basin, Inyo-Mono Transit in Inyo and Mono Counties, as well as the Mandatory Shuttle for Reds Meadow Valley/Devils Postpile National Monument. Annual combined ridership for these systems is estimated at 350,000 based on 2007 ridership counts from ESTA. Still, many areas of the region continue to experience daily parking problems, traffic congestion, and resource impacts associated with overcrowding. Conversely, some recreation sites require access by personal vehicle, which precludes segments of the public such as the disabled, elderly, and low-income from visiting.

Rock Creek Recreation Area serves as a prime example. Located off of U.S. 395, approximately half way between the towns of Bishop and Mammoth Lakes, this recreation area includes several public campgrounds and day use sites, three resorts (one of which is an all season resort), and the most popular wilderness trailhead accessing the John Muir Wilderness. For the trailhead, on any given day during the summer peak season, the “Mosquito Flat” parking lot is completely full by 10am, resulting in vehicles parked off the roadway as far as two miles down the road from its terminus. Some of the popular day use sites in this area suffer similar congestion problems. Anglers, picnickers, boaters, hikers, campers, and sightseers contend with one another for the 400 parking spaces available. With an estimated 4,200<sup>1</sup> visitors descending on this recreation area during a busy day and only a fraction of that amount in parking spaces available, traffic congestion remains an unavoidable consequence of the current lack of an ATS.

Many other sites on the Inyo National Forest witness similar traffic and capacity impacts during the peak use seasons. These include places such as Hot Creek, Convict Lake, June Lake, and Mount Whitney. Transit to these popular destinations is limited to automobile travel, emphasizing the use of parking lots in close proximity to resources as a means of access. As destinations on the “east side” of the Sierra become more popular along the U.S. 395 corridor, increasing strain is placed on the already overcrowded parking infrastructure. The majority of these access points exist as closed systems adjacent to U.S. 395: one road leads in and out of the trailhead, campground, or day use area. Evocative of miniature Yosemite Valleys, many of these congested sites are situated on the eastern escarpment of the Sierra Nevada range, tucked tightly into narrow canyons. Travel time can be as much as 30 minutes to reach parking areas and visitors often arrive on scene with the prospect of no parking. Frustrated, many are forced to drive down canyon, retracing their route until a suitable roadside parking space can be found.

The 2004 ESETS Field Report identified many of these recreation sites as potential candidates for alternative transportation systems (ATS). With limited or no public transit service to the majority of these locations, and predicted increases in visitation on the horizon, the ESETS study determined that the current transportation infrastructure (including roads and parking lots) will not meet future needs. A few recommendations identified in the study have been implemented in the last two years,

<sup>1</sup> Figures supplied by the U.S. Forest Service Recreation Information Management System, 1989.

including the expansion of Inyo-Mono Transit's CREST service and the Town of Mammoth Lakes' summer shuttle service in the Lakes Basin. While these developments demonstrate a regional commitment to expand existing services, the greater need to develop new systems and synthesize transit services region-wide remains unaddressed.

A high quality visitor experience remains integral to sustaining the recreation and tourism industry in the Eastern Sierra. As this industry serves as a main component of both Mono and Inyo Counties' tax base, adequately planning the visitor experience, including transportation to and from these popular sites, will ensure resource impacts are minimized and experiences are not diminished by poorly designed transportation systems. Based on observations made in both the 2004 ESETS Field Report and the 2007 Transportation Assistance Group Report, several opportunities exist on the Forest to develop and integrate alternative transportation systems. Sites such as Rock Creek and the ever popular Tioga Pass entrance to Yosemite National Park (which hosts over 600,000 visitors each summer from the Eastern Sierra via State Route 120) would benefit from a comprehensive transportation plan. Through the support of ATPPL funding, a master transit plan would be developed for the U.S. 395 corridor and adjacent INF recreation sites. Visitor surveys, primary data collection, data analysis, potential alternatives, transit schedules, possible routes, phased implementation, contracting methods, additional infrastructure needs, and funding strategies would be identified in the transit plan. While temptation might encourage the direct transition from field reports to implementation, the development of a comprehensive transit plan would allow for savings, efficiency, and coordination. The proposed transportation plan would prioritize capital investments, determine a phased implementation schedule, and foster synchronization of efforts between a variety of stakeholders.

**b. Environmental condition as a result of the existing transportation system:**

The capacity of the sites identified in the ESETS report, including Whitney Portal—the subject of a separate ATPPL planning proposal—to offer a quality visitor experience has been compromised in recent years. California continues to experience staggering rates of growth, with population levels predicted to increase by 500,000 annually<sup>2</sup>. The INF mirrors that trend, with estimates of visitation growth projected at 98,000<sup>3</sup> additional visitors each year for the next twenty years. An increase in visitation correlates directly with an increase in vehicle congestion. Parking shortages encourage visitors to park where they otherwise would not, resulting in damage to native vegetation as well as soil compaction and corresponding increases in water run-off.

As visitors hunt for parking spaces in idling cars, emissions and noise pollution generated by vehicles inundate the region. While a single, isolated trailhead or day-use area may contribute marginally to air quality and natural soundscape problems, the traffic congestion at a multitude of recreation sites on a 2.1 million acre National Forest collectively represents a substantial impact to these resources. In a single year, an estimated 1.5 million<sup>4</sup> vehicles access INF recreation sites. If visitation continues to grow as projected, this number could increase to over 2 million vehicles annually. Although specific data is not available for emissions factors on the INF, a transportation plan could analyze current air quality baselines with assistance from the Great Basin Unified Air Pollution Control District and establish targets for emissions reductions forest-wide.

U.S. 395 not only serves as the primary arterial route for motorists in the Eastern Sierra, but it simultaneously represents an imposing hurdle to wildlife. During the spring and autumn months, thousands of Rocky Mountain mule deer make their annual pilgrimage to summer and winter pastures. The Round Valley herd alone is comprised of more than 3,000 individuals. Unfortunately, many animals never make it to their seasonal destinations. The peak migration months of May, June, September, and October transform U.S. 395 into a road-kill wasteland. It is not uncommon over the course of a 30-mile commute to encounter more than five carcasses along the roadside—victims of

<sup>2</sup> Fulton, William and Shigley, Paul. *Guide to California Planning*, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> National Visitor Use Monitoring, U.S. Forest Service, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Figure determined using the vehicle multiplier of 2.6 passengers per car used by the 2007 Reds Meadow/Devils Postpile Feasibility Study to be published in March 2008.

automobile collisions. Unlike hitting smaller mammals or birds, motorists who collide with a 140lb. mule deer count themselves fortunate if their vehicle was the only thing to suffer damage. As traffic congestion is set to increase alongside predicted visitation growth, the frequency of these collisions will only increase.

## **2. Methodology for Assessing - Visitor Mobility & Experience Benefits of Project**

### **a. Reduced traffic congestion:**

A primary objective in this planning effort is the reduction in overcrowding, gridlock, and traffic delays associated with traffic congestion at INF recreation sites. By orchestrating a comprehensive, integrated approach to examining transit solutions for INF destinations, the transportation planning study will develop solutions appropriate for specific sites within a wider, regional context. The collection and analysis of primary data such as traffic counts, vehicle trips, passengers per vehicle, duration of stay, and traffic patterns will inform land managers and transit planners of the magnitude of traffic congestion experienced at each site. This information will then inform the development of suitable alternatives to address the varying degrees of traffic congestion at these sites.

In addition to primary data collection, visitor surveys conducted at Tioga Pass, Lee Vining, June Lake, Mammoth Lakes, Rock Creek, and other potential transit nodes will provide a composite image of visitor use patterns and corresponding transportation needs. Although each site must be analyzed for its individual trends and management concerns, the transportation study will define the nexus between each of these sites and how a transit solution at one can directly affect the other. By successfully integrating alternative transportation systems within the INF and the greater regional transit system, traffic congestion can be addressed throughout the entire service area as opposed to at just one isolated site.

Initial data collected by the planning study will provide a baseline against which future monitoring of circulation patterns and traffic congestion at these recreation sites can compare. Alternatives developed will include the removal of some parking at trailheads, the expansion of staging areas in relatively urbanized settings (e.g., visitor centers, metropolitan margins, highway corridors, etc.) to accommodate park-and-ride use, and consideration of permit or reservation systems to discourage vehicle use. Emphasis will be placed on restoring the natural, pristine character of the environmental setting by reducing vehicle trips to the greatest extent possible.

### **b. Enhanced visitor mobility, accessibility, and safety:**

The INF's Forest Plan indicates "[providing] public access to public land and developed recreation sites, consistent with Forest goals and objectives" as a key target. Current statistics illustrating the number of disabled or elderly individuals who recreate on the Inyo National Forest are not available. The US Census Bureau statistics, however, reveal that the elderly and disabled account for 12% of the state's overall population. Mono County, located at the north end of the expanded transportation system service area, boasts the highest per capita number of service workers in the State, many of whom are non-native English speakers. Together, these demographics indicate the existence of a large segment of the population who are currently underserved due to lack of accessibility and mobility.

In order to meet the needs of these user groups, the INF and its partners must develop a long-range master transportation plan that addresses several issues:

- Incorporation of a fleet equipped with the latest ADA accessibility features (low floors, hydraulic lifts, etc.)
- Frequent service (short headways) to alleviate passenger fears of becoming stranded or enduring long waits
- Interconnectivity with existing transit service
- Convenient access (location and frequency of bus stops)

- User-friendly signage (strategically placed; bilingual)

The implementation of an ATS serving the aforementioned recreation sites will empower a large contingent of visitors to access remote sites like Whitney Portal, South Tufa (Mono Lake), and Mosquito Flat (Rock Creek). In addition to the elderly and disabled, lower income residents and visitors who are either without vehicles of their own or who do not possess driver's licenses will be able to access a wide range of recreation sites along the U.S. 395 corridor. By enabling ease of access for these user groups, an ATS would foster meaningful connections between previously underserved visitors and the natural environment.

In addition to facilitating accessibility and mobility, the development of a master transportation plan would also address critical safety concerns on the INF. When trailhead parking lots reach capacity and visitors must leave their vehicles farther from the trailhead, a potentially hazardous combination ensues. Hikers and backpackers find themselves sharing narrow, single-lane roadways with a high volume of motorized traffic as they walk from their parked cars to the trailhead. Proposed shuttle services described in prior transit studies would alleviate this problem by delivering hikers and backpackers directly from the safety of a bus stop or parking area to their destination.

### **c. Improved visitor education, recreation, and health benefits:**

Many of the sites within the planning are immediately adjacent to popular recreation areas or trails. Most of these currently have interpretation in the form of signs and/or brochures. Over the last decade, the INF has demonstrated regional and national leadership in the area of interpretation and education. The forest has dozens of sites, including four major visitor centers, which illustrate the forest's commitment to the improvement of visitor information and education. In addition, the INF is working with partners such as the Town of Mammoth Lakes and the Mammoth Lakes Trails and Public Access to develop signage and way finding plans. It could be reasonably assumed that as priority ATS routes are identified, analysis of sign plans and the development of interpretive themes would be completed. As future ATPPL funding requests are made for either feasibility or implementation, the information assembled as part of this will facilitate a focus on the development of messages, the implementation of interpretive signing, or both.

In addition to formal interpretive opportunities, informal experiences will also be facilitated with the development of a region-wide ATS. As demonstrated by existing systems at Red's Meadow Valley and within Yosemite National Park, ATS operators provide a substantial amount of educational and safety information to visitors as they utilize transit services. Over the course of one summer, shuttle operators in these two land units supply a myriad of natural and cultural resource information to their ridership. Visitors enjoy the opportunity to ask questions about their surroundings, often inquiring about the history behind the unique geological and historical resources in the area. With proposed services to locations like Mono Lake, the Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest, and Mount Whitney, operators of an expanded ATS would have ample interpretive material for engaging their ridership.

An ATS would also supply essential health and safety benefits to those who elect to use it. Establishing connections to recreation sites and trails represents another key focus of the ESETS report, which has directly influenced the identification of the routes to be considered under this effort. With the proximity of these routes to popular recreation sites, it is likely that many riders of the ATS will gain access to recreation related activities which will directly lead to more healthy lifestyles. Moreover, as the ATS promotes healthy lifestyles through convenient transportation to recreational opportunities, it will also encourage safe behaviors. Hypothermia, dehydration, high altitude sickness, lightning strikes, and other hazards exist in the High Sierra environment that characterizes the region. ATS operators could warn and advise ridership to take simple precautions to ensure their safety while engaging in recreational activities on the Forest.

### **3. Methodology for Assessing - Environmental Benefits of Project**

#### **a. Protection of sensitive natural, cultural, and historical resources:**

Transportation related impacts are growing in the Eastern Sierra. With an overwhelming 95% of the visitors arriving in the area via private motor vehicle (TAG Report, 2007), any projected increase will directly translate to more motor vehicles. The market projections for growth of visitation on the Inyo National Forest show that an estimated 98,000 additional visits/year is expected each year over the next two decades. This will directly translate to more private motor vehicles. The current existing transportation system is not expected to be able to accommodate the visitation demands and will likely result in significant impacts on the area's sensitive natural, cultural, and historic resources.

This study will finally gather data necessary to develop a baseline assessment of vehicle use and traffic, encompassing the entire planning area. This will serve as the basis for necessary capacity analysis, to compare alternatives with and without alternative transportation options, and to consider the effects of this growing use. One of the main objectives of this planning effort is to identify methods and design a transportation system that would reduce the potential impacts to these resources, thereby enhancing the quality of the recreation experience in the Eastern Sierra. With the protection of these resources being one of the main issues driving the need for enhanced visitor management, this broad scale planning effort would analyze the existing condition and outline a desired condition for these various environmental resources.

An analysis of conditions with and without transit focusing on resource impacts will illustrate potential environmental benefits of various transportation system alternatives. As an example, alternatives would involve discussions and analysis around strategically managing or "controlling" visitor use by identifying key areas that provide a valuable recreation opportunity and could accommodate visitation while protecting and/or enhancing environmental resources.

#### **b. Reduced pollution:**

As has been shown in many different transit operations, the development of ATS has a profound effect on air quality. As an example on the INF, the Reds Meadow Shuttle is estimated to reduce the use of approximately 25,730 gallons of fuel and 460,000 lbs of CO<sub>2</sub>. There is no way to estimate either the current or future motor vehicle related pollution across the entire planning region at this time, however this grant will support the development of this information. While specific areas such as Reds Meadow have accurate reports depicting the pollution reductions associated with the ATS, this data is incomplete and not representative of the Eastern Sierra region as a whole.

This grant will fund the gathering of the data sufficient to forecast environmental and pollution related benefits associated with increasing alternative transportation. This effort will rely upon the expertise of many professionals as well as consulting firms to assemble existing information, determining where data does not exist to support this type of analysis, and establish methods for gathering the necessary information. The scale of future data collection will largely depend on the lack of availability of certain information.

### **4. Methodology for Assessing - Operational Efficiency and Financial Sustainability**

#### **a. Operational efficiency:**

Currently, there is no region wide planning document which guides the development of alternative transportation in the Eastern Sierra. Even worse, there are several different entities responsible for a portion of the overall transportation system. The 2007 TAG Report identified the development of a Regional Transportation Plan as the number one priority. This planning grant is aimed at fulfilling this need, with a main objective to collaborate between all entities in the development of a region wide transit strategy. And while there has been some coordination ongoing, without a single regional

planning strategy for alternative transportation, having “regional, seamless, and sustainable transit” (TAG Report, 2007) will be impossible.

Before implementing any of the projects, this collaboration alone is likely to increase the operational efficiency of the various agencies/entities. The simple sharing of resources and discussions related to the development of future transit options will ensure that entities are being strategic in their use of financial resources. Perhaps more importantly, the addition of transit service to any area will be prioritized, and will have been shown to be a valuable addition to the overall transit program fit within the regional strategy. It is the expectation that this prioritization of future ATS will directly lead to increased operational efficiency.

Lastly, but equally important, is the consideration of the efficiency lost over the entire region if a system is not implemented. Determining values associated with loss in air quality, degradation of visitor experience resulting from congestion or other traffic related situations, or the loss in quality of the setting would be difficult to undertake. Even so, it can be reasonable to assume, based upon the current use and growth projections, the environment and recreation programs in the Eastern Sierra will become more negatively impacted and incur untold costs if alternative transit options are not explored and implemented.

**b. Financial feasibility:**

The development of an appropriate fare structure for each proposed alternative will be considered part of this effort and will be indicative of operating costs and reflective of anticipated additional funding support. The INF has already identified possible sources of agency revenue to help subsidize an ATS, however, further study is needed to determine if these fund sources are eligible and adequate. Current strategies to help maintain sustainability of an ATS consider the use of Recreation Enhancement Act funds. This effort will identify additional federal and non-federal funding sources. The possibility of long-term reliance on certain fund sources will be addressed as well as the constraints associated with specific types of funding. Furthermore, the study will identify financing shortfalls that may emerge as operations continue into out-years and possible solutions to tackle these shortages, including public-private partnerships. Funding strategies for all alternatives proposed will include identification of initial and long-term costs so as to give land managers better insight as to which alternative would prove the most effective way of leveraging federal funds.

**c. Cost effectiveness:**

For each proposed alternative, a review of fiscal operations will be included with descriptions of all anticipated revenues and expenditures, capital costs, operations and maintenance costs, and administrative oversight costs. Financial analysis for ATS alternatives will be analyzed on the premise that the Eastern Sierra Transit Authority will own and operate the actual ATS fleet and that costs to ridership should be minimized as much as possible. Alternatives proposed in this effort will be reviewed on the basis of which options would enable the Forest to mitigate current environmental impacts, address visitor mobility needs, and compliment regional transportation efforts most effectively for the least expense.

Any future funding acquired by the INF for the purpose of purchasing or leasing fleet vehicles in support of an ATS alternative will be transferred directly to the Transit Authority by virtue of its Joint Powers Authority and interagency agreement with the Federal Transit Administration. Although one alternative may prove more expensive in the short term, comparisons of its long-term (5 + years) financial viability to other alternatives based on ridership growth, additional revenue sources, and in-place infrastructure will be made. Initial capital investments may be overshadowed by long-term reductions in, or sustainability of, operating costs.

**d. Partnerships and funding from other sources:**

Emphasis will be placed on fostering the INF's partnership with the Eastern Sierra Transit Authority, the Town of Mammoth Lakes, Mammoth Mountain Ski Area, and other stakeholders. ESTA is already engaged in planning efforts throughout the region and welcomes the opportunity to collaborate on future transit projects with the INF. As this effort will attempt to analyze the financial sustainability for each potential route, the INF and ESTA will cooperatively develop a schedule of financial commitments for which each entity will be responsible. By determining anticipated contributions to an ATS from each partner, the study will facilitate long-term transportation planning objectives. Additional stakeholders who have demonstrated interest in the implementation of an ATS include CalTrans, Bureau of Land Management, Inyo County, and the Lone Pine Chamber of Commerce. Several of these partners are eligible for funding sources that the INF, as a federal agency, is not. Moreover, the INF expects a transit feasibility study to identify additional funding sources from public-private partnerships.

ATPPL Planning Proposal  
 Forest-wide Transportation Planning  
 Inyo National Forest





## Eastern Sierra Transit Authority

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February 27, 2008

Office of Program Manager - ATPPL  
Federal Transit Administration  
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Washington, DC 20590

To Whom It May Concern:

The Eastern Sierra Transit Authority (ESTA) would like to express our support for the Inyo National Forest proposal to further study the many recreational sites in the Inyo National Forest, with hopes of implementing these projects in the near future. One of the sites of particular interest to ESTA would be the Whitney Portal.

This project is in alignment with ESTA's Vision Statement, which is to provide excellent public transportation services in an entrepreneurial style within the Eastern Sierra Region. The Authority, through its leadership provides responsive and reliable services and is a regional platform for service planning and funding decisions. In addition this project conforms with Inyo County's vision for 20/20, which is to maintain Inyo County's natural environment and rural quality of life, support and expand tourism, improve health care, social services and education, and promote economic development.

ESTA currently operates local, inter and intra regional bus routes throughout Inyo and Mono Counties. The CREST Route provides transportation between Reno, NV and Ridgecrest, CA, with a main stop in Lone Pine. Additionally there are three daily round trip services between Lone Pine and Bishop, and local Dial-A-Ride service in Lone Pine. Adding shuttle service from Lone Pine to the Whitney Portal would be an enhancement to the services that are already being provided in the area for residents and tourists. Implementation of a Shuttle to Whitney Portal would benefit the gateway community of Lone Pine, increase overnight stays and thereby increase revenues for this rural community. It would serve local underserved residents by providing access to the recreation areas in their own backyard that would otherwise be inaccessible.

In summary, ESTA extends our support to the Inyo National Forest to study and implement shuttle service to the Whitney Portal, and the other many recreational sites in the Eastern Sierra. This project is in alignment with ESTA's and Inyo County's vision statements will be good for our community by promoting and expanding tourism and enhance local transportation services. ESTA is interested in being an integral part of transit in the Inyo National Forest.

Sincerely,



Jill Batchelder  
Transit Analyst  
Eastern Sierra Transit



**United States Department of the Interior**

**BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT**

Bishop Field Office  
351 Paco Lane, Suite 100  
Bishop, CA 93514  
Phone: 760 872-5000 Fax: 760 872-5050  
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February 28, 2008

1741  
8372PN

Office of Program Management  
Federal Transit Administration  
1200 New Jersey Ave. SE  
E-4-417  
Washington DC 20590

To: Warren H. May Concern:

The Bureau of Land Management, Bishop Field Office would like to convey our support for the grant application of the Inyo National Forest for ATPPL Funds.

BLM manages the land to the east of Whitney Portal, known as the Alabama Hills Special Recreation Management Area. This past summer, our office participated on a field trip and discussions of alternative transportation for the portal. A shuttle system would also benefit users of the Alabama Hills, as it could be one of the stops between Lone Pine and Whitney Portal.

Our Office has been working with the community of Lone Pine on a stewardship strategy for the Alabama Hills this past year. Development of a shuttle service would help to implement some of the goals the community has established in their Vision Statement for the area.

In closing, we support these efforts, and would be happy to provide any further information requested.

Sincerely,

Bill Dankelberger  
Field Manager

CARING FOR THE LAST VESTIGE OF WILD CALIFORNIA  
CONSERVATION, EDUCATION, PARTNERSHIPS



## LONE PINE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

120 South Main Street ~ P.O. Box 749 ~ Lone Pine, CA 93545  
(760) 876-4444 ~ Fax (760) 264-9675

Feb. 26, 2008

Office of Program Management  
Federal Transit Administration  
1200 New Jersey Ave. SE  
E44-417  
Washington DC 20590

Re: Inyo National Forest application for ATPPL Grant funds.

To Whom It May Concern:

The Lone Pine Chamber of Commerce supports the grant application of Inyo National Forest for ATPPL funds. These funds will be used to address transportation issues in the Whitney Portal recreation area in the Inyo National Forest.

The Whitney Portal has become a major destination for tourist, hikers, photographers, and climbers. The idea of parking in Lone Pine with a shuttle service to the Portal seems an answer to several major considerations, such as environment impact, traffic, etc. However, without a technical study, we can not know for sure just what all the problems are or what needs to be accomplished to correct these problems. This grant will secure funds to hire a transportation engineer to analyze Whitney Portal and make recommendations as to what would best serve the area's needs.

The Lone Pine Chamber of Commerce supports this proposal and we thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Kathleen New  
President/CEO