

Best Practices Guidance: Paul S. Sarbanes Transit in Parks Program

Prepared for the U.S. Forest Service

December 2009



the
VOLPE
center

John A. Volpe National Transportation Systems Center
Research and Innovative Technology Administration
U.S. Department of Transportation

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Introduction

The Paul S. Sarbanes Transit in the Parks (TRIP) Program makes funds available to federal land management agencies, including the U.S. Forest Service (FS), and their partners for alternative transportation planning and implementation projects. While there is some limited guidance available from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) to all participating agencies, there is no guidance specifically targeted toward the unique needs of the FS.

This best practices document is one of three documents that seek to help FS unit staff and agency partners better understand the TRIP program. This set of documents will help FS unit staff decide whether to apply for TRIP funds and, if so, exactly what resources, information, and commitment is required. While the other two documents provide an overview of the program and provide step-by-step details for filling out the application, respectively, this best practices document compiles best practices and lessons learned from past applications for the benefit of future applicants.

The best practices document is presented in two sections. The first section focuses on best practices and analyzes sixteen successful FS applications from FY 2007 and FY 2008 and summarizes the highlights as they relate to five sections of the TRIP Program application and the application in general. The second section focuses on lessons learned and reports the results of conversations with FS staff who submitted successful TRIP Program applications from three FS units. These staff members were responsible for completing the applications and completing tasks such as including deciding to apply, collecting and analyzing data, making the case for TRIP Program funding, and packaging the final application. The lessons learned section provides a background of the FS units and summarizes conversations with primary staff responsible for submitting the applications on three successful FS units.

Section 1: Best Practices

The best practices distill the knowledge, experience, and results of past FS TRIP applicants for the benefit of future applicants. These best practices are the results of an analysis performed on sixteen funded FS TRIP Program applications, seven from 2007 and nine from 2008, to identify common best practices¹. The analysis, summarized in Table 1 and Table 2, was divided into the following six subject areas, the latter five of which correspond with sections of the TRIP Program application:

- General best practices;
- Executive summary / description;
- Demonstration of need;
- Visitor mobility and experience benefits of project;
- Environmental benefits of project; and
- Operational efficiency and financial sustainability of project.

The general best practices are described below and are followed with best practices for each of the application's five sections.

General Best Practices

Include relevant data

A common best practice found in all the applications reviewed was the inclusion of significant, relevant data, both qualitative and quantitative, related to geography, land area, population, visitor demand, transportation capacity, and transportation demand. Numeric figures were included in the text and used to build a strong case for the TRIP Program funding request. Describing specific instances during which the existing transportation system failed, or instances in which alternative transportation improvements at other similar public lands were successful, support the case for planning or implementation investments. For examples, see the application from Coconino (2008), Valles Caldera (2008), or Mount Baker Snoqualmie (2008).

Include specific examples

Successful applications describe examples of past events that clearly demonstrate the extent of a transportation challenge. Other applications describe results of alternative transportation systems on other public lands that have been successful. Inclusion of examples provide context and demonstrate thoughtfulness and completeness. For examples, see the application from the Inyo (2008), Valles Caldera (2008), Coronado (2007), Coconino (2008), or Mount Baker Snoqualmie (2008).

Engage in pre-planning

Many successful applications refer to previous studies and reports. Pre-planning activities may involve the FS unit, local and regional partners, or frequently, a Transportation Advisory Group (TAG). A TAG consists of transportation experts from multiple agencies who convene at a public land to identify and analyze solutions to transportation challenges. If aligned with the TRIP Program proposal, recommendations from past reports provide legitimacy and strengthen the case for a planning or implementation project. For examples, see applications from the

¹ The 2006 application form and guidelines were significantly different, thus 2006 applications were excluded from the analysis.

Mount Baker Snoqualmie (2008), White Mountain (2008), Inyo (2008), Humboldt-Toiyabe (2007), Coronado (2007), or Wasatch-Cache (2007).

Divide large projects into smaller, individual phases

The applications from 2007 and 2008 contained several examples of large projects that were broken into several smaller, more manageable TRIP funding requests. This practice has several advantages. First, depending on the competition in a given year, a smaller funding request may be more likely to obtain funding than a multi-million dollar request. Second, projects that have received partial funding can make the case that additional phases will contribute to the “operational efficiency and financial sustainability” of the overall project. Third, subsequent applications may leverage the fixed costs associated with the original application. That is to say, fewer resources will be required for research, planning, and completion of subsequent applications after the original investments are completed and funded. Finally, progress in earlier stages can demonstrate the FS ability to accomplish the work and finish what has been started. For examples, see applications from the Inyo (2007, 2008), Hiawatha (2007, 2008), or Wasatch-Cache (2007, 2008).

Leverage past applications and applicants

A FS unit need not only leverage its own previous application, but it may refer to other FS or public lands applications for guidance. Several successful applications recycled or borrowed organization, formatting, and even text from previous successful trip applications. Previous applications may be culled for ideas of what types of information to include or how to present it. Furthermore, FS applicants may reach out to FS staff of past successful applications to discuss strategy or obtain application tips. For examples, see applications from the Inyo (2007, 2008), Hiawatha (2007, 2008), or Wasatch-Cache (2007, 2008).

Executive Summary / Description

Be brief, descriptive, and focused

The executive summary and description sections are used to sell the project at a high level. They should be interesting, factual, and make a compelling argument in favor of the TRIP Program funding request. Successful applications include only enough background to give context to the project, and highlight the major components of the project and why it is necessary. Supporting information is more appropriate in later sections of the application. For examples, see applications from the Mount Baker Snoqualmie (2008), Tongass (2007), Humboldt-Toyaibe (2007), or Hiawatha (2007).

Include maps, diagrams, and photos

Many successful applications included relevant and supporting maps, diagrams, and photographs to complement the text. These elements highlight needs, provide context to the transportation problems, and provide the reviewers with visual overviews of the project area to enhance understanding. Examples may be found in applications from the Inyo (2007, 2008), Tongass (2007), or Hiawatha (2007).

Demonstration of Need

Include quantitative data when available

Successful applications make the case for why a planning or implementation project is necessary with logical text and supporting quantitative details related to geography, land area, population, visitor demand, transportation capacity, and transportation demand. The demonstration of need section should include more quantitative details than the executive summary / description section. For examples, see applications from the Valles Caldera (2008), Tongass (2007), Humboldt-Toiyabe (2007), or Coronado (2007)

Include data tables where appropriate

While most applications interspersed quantitative information within the text, several applications included tables containing relevant transportation infrastructure and demand information. For examples, see the Valles Caldera (2008) or Wasatch-Cache (2008).

Demonstrate “need” in a variety of ways

Successful applications sourced a variety of inspirations of “need”. For example, an existing system may be unable to meet existing demand, may be environmentally destructive, may contribute poorly to visitor experience, may be unsafe, or may be unable to meet a congressional mandate. See applications from the Hiawatha (2007) or Valles Caldera (2008).

Refer to supporting documentation

Refer to any materials or reports that legitimize the needs specified in this section, including surveys, testimony from public meetings, previous planning documents, or congressional legislation. TAG assessments and FS unit studies provide supporting documentation to legitimize project needs. For examples, see the Valles Caldera (2008), Coconino (2008), Tongass (2007), or Wasatch-Cache (2007).

Visitor Mobility and Experience Benefits of Project

Focus on quantity and variety of uses supported

Successful applications describe popular uses in the FS unit and how these uses are both positively and negatively affected by the transportation system. In some cases, there may be competing demands among uses that precipitate the need for the proposed project. In others, specific uses may require transportation to be feasible activities for visitors. Specifying the types and volume of uses conveys that the applicant has made an effort to understand how the project will benefit the public. For examples, see applications from the Coconino (2008), Valles Caldera (2008), and Wenatachee (2007).

Suggest potential ramifications if the project is not selected for TRIP funding

In addition to describing project benefits, some successful applicants predicted possible negative outcomes under a “do-nothing” scenario. For example, without alternative transportation systems, transportation demand may exceed capacity or the environment (and therefore the visitor experience) may be degraded. Suggesting negative outcomes under “do nothing” scenarios may be an effective technique, as long as the predictions are reasonable. For an example, see the application from the Wenatachee (2007)

Describe dynamic conditions; past, present and future

Factors such as climate, visitor demand, or regional population are not static factors and will likely change over time. Applications that recognize changing conditions convey attention to

detail and foresight and add legitimacy to the application overall. See the applications from the Valles Caldera (2008) and Inyo (2007).

Environmental Benefits of Project

Explain benefits of action and no action

Successful applications suggested not only how a planning or implementation project may benefit the environment, but also how the environment may suffer if a project is not selected. For examples, see the Hiawatha (2007 or 2008).

Include performance metrics that will be used to monitor the project

Particularly for planning projects, several applications suggested specific performance metrics to monitor project accomplishments. Noting specific metrics of interest demonstrates knowledge of the issues and implies a desire to stay on track and deliver what is being proposed. For examples, see applications from the White Mountain (2008) or Valles Caldera (2008).

Address carrying capacity issues

As requested in the application, several successful applications directly addressed carrying capacity of the natural environment. Even if the specific carrying capacity of the FS unit is not known, explaining how additional transportation infrastructure investments are expected to mitigate impacts of increased visitation, etc demonstrates insight into transportation challenges. For examples, see applications from the Inyo (2007), Tongass (2007), or Wenatchee (2007).

Operational Efficiency and Financial Sustainability of Project

Include references to past studies and reports

Many successful applications refer to previous reports and studies that suggest the proposed project is beneficial to the FS unit or the region. Support of a given planning or implementation project by external organizations adds legitimacy to the request for TRIP Program funding and conveys to reviewers that the given project is widely agreed to be the most efficient in the long term. For examples, see the White Mountain (2008), Wasatch-Cache (2008), Valles Caldera (2008), or Wenatchee (2007).

For multi-phase projects, demonstrate the later phase of the project leverages and complements funding from the earlier phase of the project

The existence of several multi-phase projects demonstrates the willingness of the TRIP Program to fund a project for multiple years. Subsequent applications communicate a desire by a FS unit to continue improving its transportation system. Furthermore, subsequent applicants are able to make the case that their projects, when combined with the original projects, have additive benefits that far outweigh the costs of the subsequent phase. For examples, see applications from the Inyo (2007, 2008) or Hiawatha (2007, 2008).

For implementation projects, explain and justify the budget table with a narrative

Application budget tables need to include a narrative which further outlines funding sources, timing and amounts. Detailed budget explanations provide clarity and completeness, thus conveying that the applicant has put considerable thought into the budget development. This also allows explanations that display reasonable budget projections. For examples, see the Hiawatha (2007) or Inyo (2007).

Table 1 - Overview of best practices from funded 2007 TRIP Program applications.

Year	Forest Unit	Type	Project	Description	Demonstration of Need	Visitor Mobility & Experience Benefits of Project	Environmental Benefits of Project	Operational Efficiency and Financial Sustainability
2007	Coronado	Planning	Transportation analysis and feasibility study to evaluate the best transportation system for visitors to and throughout Sabino Canyon	Bulleter Broken out by project sponsor, who is paying for what Includes maps and diagrams Clearly worded	Detailed and quantitative description of characteristics such as population, visitation, land area, dates and age, parking and transportation, and use and users	Well conceived ideas regarding what benefits will be evaluated and how	Well conceived ideas regarding what benefits will be evaluated and how	Provides examples with local context
2007	Hiawatha	Implementation	Project involves replacement of passenger ferry, tour bus, dock rehabilitation, and construction of terminal facilities	Lists exactly what will be planned/implemented Provides only enough background to provide context for the request Maps / photos	Invokes the Grand Island legislation which requires Forest Service to provide water transportation and notes the current infrastructure does not meet demand	Quantitatively specifies how the current transportation system is not meeting the needs of visitors and how the future transportation system will better meet their needs	Envisions a "do nothing" alternative as one with private automobiles and associated disbenefits	Is specific and quantitative where possible Lists the years in which investments are necessary Uses narrative form to justify and explain the budget table
2007	Humboldt-Toiyabe	Implementation	This pilot project will test the market support and provide operational data for a ski season shuttle service from Las Vegas, Nevada to the Las Vegas Ski & Snowboard Resort, located on the Spring Mountain National Resource Area	Is brief and descriptive	Includes demand statistics such as Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT) and capacity limitations Mentions a previous report and a TAG assessment that each suggest a shuttle as a possible solution to congestion issues	Quantitatively specifies how the future transportation system will better meet the needs of visitors	Explains why other solutions are either ecologically insensitive or unsafe	Cites specific plans or reports which have recommended this step as an efficient and cost effective one
2007	Inyo	Implementation	Continuation of 2006 ATPPL funding to cover bus leasing and other costs at Reds Meadows	Includes maps and pictures	Incorporates both the needs of the Park Service as well as the Forest Service Uses bullets to effectively organize the justifications	Includes quantitative statistics regarding visitor benefits such as less parking demand and less private vehicles	Directly addresses carrying capacity and admits that though a specific carrying capacity has not been defined, current visitation patterns, even after the alternative transportation system began,	Justifies and explains the budget table with narrative
2007	Tongass	Implementation	Design, procurement, and implementation of Intelligent Transportation Systems at Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center	Includes a map Clearly explains the existing conditions Uses bullets to describe project activities	Describes problem in detail Invokes previous planning studies that suggest effective courses of action	Suggests a wide range of visitor benefits	Notes that this project will not itself increase carry capacity but will help to manage visitor demand	Suggests the project is consistent with the most recent planning study and is the best of available options
2007	Wasatch-Cache	Planning	Develop a range of transportation alternatives for Albion Basin to include a study of the existing road and trail system, potential transit modes, visitor survey, economic analysis, and baseline environmental condition survey	Succinctly described transportation problem in the first sentence Clearly numbered factors to be studied in the effort	Includes a bulleted list of complaints compiled in the National Visitor Use Monitoring Study for the unit Invokes guidance provided by the visiting TAG team	Qualitative description of transportation issues facing the unit	Outlines what the environmental assessment portion of the planning study will address	Describes how efficiency and financial feasibility will be addressed in the planning study
2007	Wenatchee	Implementation	This proposal replaces a ferry dock at Lake Chelan	Is brief and descriptive	Describes importance of the transportation infrastructure and the technical reasons for replacement	Emphasizes the volume of use this project would support and estimates the volume of users affected if the project is not completed	Directly addresses carrying capacity	Describes how this project is part of and complements a larger recreation system

Table 2 - Overview of best practices from funded 2008 TRIP Program applications.

Year	Forest Unit	Type	Project	Description	Demonstration of Need	Visitor Mobility & Experience Benefits of Project	Environmental Benefits of Project	Operational Efficiency and Financial Sustainability
2008	Chugach - Eyak	Planning	This is a project to develop a comprehensive long range plan for an integrated motorized and non-motorized transportation system in the Copper River, Prince William Sound and Gulf of Alaska area	Includes a detailed outline of steps to be completed during the planning process	Includes qualitative description of needs	Provides specific examples of time and savings gained by repurposing existing resources	Includes qualitative description of benefits	Suggests what funding sources are available and will be analyzed
2008	Coconino	Implementation	Add eight feet of asphalt paving to the forest highway project to support the access of bicycles from the City of Flagstaff to the Coconino National Forest	Includes detailed quantitative statistics Describes the local and regional importance of the project	Points to popular magazines which contribute to tourism in the area Summarizes negative public comments from a community meeting Acknowledges lack of bike lanes is frustrating for bikers and drivers	Describe what uses and users the project supports	Suggests this project is compatible a previously granted categorical exclusion	Includes a bulleted list of specific studies and reports that have recommended this course of action
2008	Hiawatha	Implementation	Project involves construction of an island bus maintenance/storage building, construction of a fueling station to support the alternative transportation system, and installation of interpretive signs at bus stops	Refers to a field report done by consultants Describes how this application funds the second phase of a multi-phase effort Includes a map	Makes the case that the second phase project will strongly support and complement the first phase	Invoked benefits from previous application	Invoked benefits from previous application Makes the logical case that on-island fueling facilities will reduce potential for fuel spills in Lake Superior	Makes the case that the second phase project will strongly support and complement the first phase
2008	Inyo	Implementation	Second year of Reds Meadow transportation shuttle reimbursement for bus leasing and costs	Request is similar to previous TRIP request	Request is similar to previous TRIP request	Request is similar to previous TRIP request	Request is similar to previous TRIP request	Request is similar to previous TRIP request
2008	Inyo	Planning	Comprehensive transportation study and development of a multi-agency Master Transportation Plan for the Eastern Sierra	Clearly states the goal of the planning effort Describes four key elements of the planning effort	Refers to previous FTA and Forest Service studies Provides detailed examples of existing facilities exceeding their capacity	Specifies how data will be collected and what it will be used for Addresses all components of the question: mobility, accessibility, and safety	References previous TAG assessment Refers to the benefits provided by other successful TRIP programs	Suggests this planning effort will fill the current inefficient planning vacuum
2008	Mount Baker Snoqualmie	Planning	The study will develop a range of transportation alternatives for the Mt Baker-Snoqualmie NF (MBS) on four east-west highway corridors	Clearly outlines the goals and stages of the planning study Refers to the TAG assessment	References goals from Forest Service Strategic Plan Adds legitimacy to cause by including testimony of Forest Service Chief Gail Kimbell before the US House of Representatives Committee Provides quantitative details	Suggests possible visitor benefits of alternative transportation systems	Suggests possible environmental benefits of alternative transportation systems	Suggests possible efficiency and financial benefits of alternative transportation systems
2008	Valles Caldera	Planning	Strategic Planning of a Low Volume Motorized Transportation System	Includes maps, a table, and photos	Includes references to other park plans Includes a table summarizing uses and use volume Includes detailed examples of past experiences both good or bad	Suggests future growth in traffic and states the planning effort will seek to address transportation under those conditions Refers to previous negative experiences	Suggests qualitative and quantitative performance metrics to be addressed during the planning study	Provides language from the congressional act that created the unit as justification for the study
2008	Wasatch-Cache	Planning	Mill Creek Canyon Transportation Feasibility Study	Is brief, descriptive, and well organized	Includes a table of geographic, transportation, and visitor infrastructure characteristics in the study area	Includes results from a previous survey of visitors	Specifies what tasks the planning study will undertake to evaluate environmental benefits	Suggests alternatives must be consistent with the forest unit plan
2008	White Mountain	Planning	Planning study to address traffic congestion and greenhouse gas emissions related to existing and projected increases in private automobiles	Provides background and overview of the area Uses an outline format to organize the objectives of the planning grant	Refers to a TAG assessment Describes distinct user groups and what their needs are	States explicitly what transportation factors will be studied during the planning study	States explicitly what environmental factors and transportation metrics will be studied during the planning study	Notes the goals of the study are symbiotic with those of the WMNF Monitoring and Evaluation Guide

Section 2: Lessons Learned

To obtain lessons learned from the TRIP Program application process, staff members from three FS units were interviewed. The FS units were chosen based on the extent of their experience with the program and with the uniqueness of the projects completed. White River National Forest was chosen for its widely recognized shuttle system which has been funded in part by the TRIP Program. Hiawatha National Forest and the Inyo National Forest have both had projects successfully funded through the TRIP program in multiple years.

White River National Forest

Snowmass Wilderness Area, White River National Forest, Colorado
Contact: Martha Moran, Recreation Staff, Aspen-Sopris Ranger District

Background

The Maroon Bells – Snowmass Wilderness Area is a popular scenic destination, attracting over 100,000 visitors annually. Located in the White River National Forest, the 14,000 foot mountain peaks of the Maroon Bells are among the most photographed in North America (Figure 1). In order to reduce the impacts of vehicular traffic on the area, private motor vehicle access to the site has been restricted since the late 1970s with limited parking available during peak times. A mandatory bus shuttle system operates during the peak season, allowing visitors to access the Maroon Bells site from the Aspen Highlands Ski area with a free connecting service from the Aspen Rubey Park Transportation Center.

Figure 1: The Maroon Bells, White River National Forest



The Roaring Forks Transit Authority (RFTA) operates the mandatory shuttle service in partnership with the FS. In 2005, the successful shuttle service provided over 71,000 rides within a narrow eight-mile corridor; resulting in a net reduction of approximately 270,800 vehicle miles traveled and conserving a net 8,100 gallons of fuel that year. With travel forecasts predicting continued visitor growth and RFTA transit services nearly at capacity, there was a clear need for

Maroon Bells to improve its existing shuttle system and to mitigate impacts related to traffic congestion, noise pollution, and air quality.

TRIP Program

The White River National Forest (WRNF) successfully applied for an implementation grant through the TRIP Program in 2007. The WRNF requested grant funds to purchase multiple hybrid buses and advanced ITS technology that would improve and expand the existing alternative transportation system. Newly purchased hybrid buses would transport visitors to the Maroon Bells during the summer and transport visitors, residents, and employees to and from ski areas located on WRNF during the winter.

The Maroon Bells recreation staff initially heard about the TRIP Program through other FS units and through its transportation partner, the RFTA. Aware of its growing transportation needs, the WRNF had an alternative transportation project in mind and a clear vision for what to accomplish. In addition, a previous site review completed by the Volpe Center and regional FS managers had helped the WRNF identify specific transportation needs and solutions for their alternative transportation system.

A major challenge for the WRNF was that staff had little grant writing experience and even less capacity to take on new projects. As a result, the FS decided to leverage the resources and skills of its transit partner, RFTA, to assist in developing parts of the application. As a long-standing transit agency, the RFTA had grant writers and planners on staff that had significant experience specific to transportation funding programs.

In developing the application, quantifying projected benefits and addressing all evaluation criteria was a challenge for the FS unit. It took roughly four weeks to compile the required data for the application and produce the project budget. The RFTA assisted by providing relevant expertise and guidance in this area.

Lessons learned

The WRNF was able to complete a successful application by leveraging the skills of its transit partner. Although this strategy required more coordination with partner applicants and additional stakeholders, the partnership remained incredibly beneficial. According to the FS staff, partnering with a transit agency was critical to the application process and its success would not have been possible without it.

The partnership continues to provide additional benefits for Maroon Bells. Since the RFTA is better aware of potential funding sources for transportation related projects, it keeps the WRNF recreation staff informed of potential funding sources and partnership opportunities.

Hiawatha National Forest

Grand Island National Recreation Area, Hiawatha National Forest, Michigan

Contact: Ted Schiltz, Recreation Program Manager

Background

The Grand Island National Recreation Area is a 13,000 acre island located in Lake Superior approximately one-half mile from the mainland community of Munising, Michigan. As part of the Hiawatha National Forest (HNF), Grand Island attracts over 5,000 visitors annually to enjoy

its scenic natural beauty and history (Figure 2). Visitors can access the island via a passenger ferry or private watercraft. Although there are restrictions in using passenger vehicles on the island, a limited number of passenger vehicles can be transported to the island using the FS tug and barge.

Figure 2: Grand Island National Recreation Area



Shuttle buses provide interpretative tours and ground transportation on the island. The Alger County Transit agency (ALTRANS) operates the shuttle bus service in partnership with the FS. In order to operate the transit system, HNF was transporting fuel for all shuttle buses from the mainland using portable containers. This fueling method proved to be highly inefficient and it produced negative environmental impacts as a result of minor fuel spillage. In addition, the shuttle buses were frequently transported back to the mainland for vehicle maintenance and storage needs, creating unnecessary ferry trips. These issues reflected a need for increased operational efficiencies and mitigation of negative environmental impacts.

TRIP Program

The HNF successfully applied for an implementation grant through the TRIP Program in FY 2008. The HNF wanted to use grant funds to construct bus maintenance facilities and a fueling station directly on the island that would better support the existing alternative transportation system and reduce the use of passenger vehicles on the island.

The HNF heard of the TRIP Program through a ranger district, and staff quickly submitted an application but was unsuccessful. After this initial attempt, the recreation staff officer contacted the FS-WO to request feedback on why the application was not accepted. Specific improvements were provided to enhance the application for the next funding cycle. In addition, the recreation staff officer contacted the FTA-WO program lead to clarify questions on the application.

Throughout the application process, the HNF took advantage of a wide range of resources for assistance. They utilized the TRIP Program website to research and uncover examples of past projects and applications which exhibited strong applications. The forest staff also participated in a TRIP Program webinar, which provided an overview of the program goals and outlined other available resources. In gathering data, the Forest looked to its transit partner, ALTRANS. ALTRANS had quantitative information on the shuttle system and the passenger ferry ridership readily available and provided additional guidance in estimating costs for the project. Through a combination of conversations with program contacts, information on the TRIP Program website,

and guidance from a transit partner, the HNF completed its application and resubmitted for a successful grant award.

Lessons learned

According to the Hiawatha staff, having a clear vision or plan of what the FS unit wanted to accomplish and utilizing the available program resource staff were key factors in their success. Although forest staff did not have significant grant writing experience, they were able to fill in gaps in their skill set through contact with TRIP Program staff and other FS resource staff.

Forest staff suggested that contacting resource staff at the regional level or contacting other FS units that have previously applied to the program can be very helpful. Contacts in other National Forests with TRIP program experience were helpful for prioritizing information and building a strong case for the HNF.

Inyo National Forest

Inyo National Forest and Devils Postpile National Monument (NPS), California

Contact: Matt Peterson, Lands and Wilderness Staff Officer

Background

The Devils Postpile National Monument is located on the western slope of the Sierra Nevada, south of Yosemite National Park and north of Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks. The monument is located within the Inyo National Forest (INF) in an area known as the Reds Meadow Valley. The Reds Meadow Valley is a highly popular scenic destination, attracting visitors interested in hiking, fishing, and other outdoor activities. The FS administers the land in the Reds Meadow Valley that surrounds the Devils Postpile and is responsible for its access roads.

The Reds Meadow-Devils Postpile (RM-DP) shuttle bus system has been in operation for over 28 years and is one of the longest running and most successful shuttle systems developed on FS lands (Figure 3). The mandatory shuttle service protects the valley environment from vehicle traffic and helps to protect visitors from the traffic safety hazards involved in using the steep and narrow access road into the valley. Despite the continuing success of the shuttle bus system, significant operational costs and negative noise and air impacts of the existing vehicles highlighted the need for the IFS unit to evaluate options for a more sustainable transportation system.

Figure 3: Reds Meadow/Devils Postpile Shuttle on its way into Reds Meadow



TRIP Program

The IFS successfully applied for a planning grant through the TRIP Program in 2006. The unit sought to fund a feasibility study that would analyze potential transportation partnerships and options for cleaner and more fuel efficient vehicles.

A major goal of the INF was to develop a clear vision for the future of the existing alternative transportation system. According to the FS unit staff, it was critical to have a plan for the future that would enhance their existing system by truly evaluating what the needs were. As a result, the FS unit worked closely with a TAG to assess the existing transit operations. The TAG conducted a comprehensive site visit, providing transportation planning expertise and offering recommendations on service planning, operations, and on other areas of the system. Ultimately, the FS unit used the TAG recommendations to produce a long term strategy for the system.

Throughout the application process, the FS unit worked closely with its National Park Service (NPS) partners. At the regional level, the NPS units had expertise with the TRIP Program and had an organizational strategy driving regional submissions. The NPS partner reviewed the FS unit's application and provided suggestions on the project scope, cost estimates, and overall proposal. Inyo forest staff also submitted a draft of their application to FS program resource staff at the national level for assessment. The FS unit found the FS program resource staff highly accessible and knowledgeable on the application process.

Lessons learned

The IFS unit had a strong foundation of past successful applications and projects. In addition, the FS unit used multiple reviewers experienced with the TRIP Program to provide guidance on its applications, giving the forest staff a wide range of recommendations. Overall, the FS unit found the application process relatively straightforward, but recommends working with a TAG group prior to submitting an application to assist in developing a clear transportation plan.