GAO
Accountability * Integrity * Reliability

United States General Accounting Office
Washington, DC 20548

November 15, 2002

The Honorable Joe Skeen
Chairman
The Honorable Norman D. Dicks
Ranking Minority Member
Subcommittee on Interior and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
House of Representatives

Subject: *National Park Service: Opportunities to Improve the Administration of the Alternative Transportation Program*

Almost 280 million people visited U. S. national parks in 2001, many touring the parks in private automobiles. Frequently, particularly during the summer months and on holiday weekends, some of the more popular parks experience traffic congestion. When this occurs, it detracts from visitors' enjoyment of the parks and damages natural resources as vehicles idle on congested roads or are parked on unpaved areas when parking lots are full. Each year, as peak vacation periods approach, prospective park visitors are made aware of these conditions as newspapers and television present stories and images of frustrated visitors in bumper-to-bumper traffic at some of the large, highly visited parks like Yellowstone, Yosemite, and Acadia.

To alleviate these conditions, some parks offer visitors alternatives to driving their own vehicles, such as shuttle buses or trams. Congress encouraged the use of such alternatives through enactment of the Transportation Equity Act of the 21st Century in 1998. Among its many purposes, this legislation authorized funding for enhancing or developing park transportation systems to improve visitors' experiences and reduce damage to natural resources throughout the national park system. To administer these funds, the National Park Service established the Alternative Transportation Program in 1998. Program objectives include relieving traffic and parking congestion; reducing air, noise, and visual pollution; enhancing visitor experience; preserving natural and cultural resources; and improving safety conditions.

Funding for the program has averaged about $9.5 million per year from fiscal year 1999—the first year funds were obligated under the program—through fiscal year 2002. So far, the Park Service has approved funding for 185 transportation projects in 75 parks. Project scope and costs vary considerably. They range from small planning projects, such as a $4,000 project to

examine transportation alternatives at Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park in Virginia, to large construction projects, such as a $2.2 million project at Grand Canyon National Park to fund the initial design and construction phase of a proposed light rail system.[1] Planning projects approved as part of the Alternative Transportation Program may focus on determining if a transportation system is needed, while construction projects may focus on expanding an existing system or implementing the initial stage of a large system such as the Grand Canyon's. In the case of the Grand Canyon, a recent study estimated that the entire light rail system, if it is completed, may cost as much as $300 million, including operations and maintenance costs.[2] A Department of Transportation study estimated that over the next 2 decades, total funding needs for alternative transportation systems throughout the Park Service, including operations and maintenance costs, could be as much as $1.5 billion.[3]

In light of the increasing significance and potential costs of dealing with transportation in the national park system, we reviewed the Park Service's administration of the Alternative Transportation Program. Specifically, we are reporting on the Park Service's processes for (1) ensuring that alternative transportation projects are needed and cost-effective, and (2) evaluating the performance of the program. It is important to point out that in addressing these issues our work focused on the agency's process for reviewing and approving projects. Accordingly, we did not evaluate whether any specific project was in fact needed and cost-effective. In conducting the work, we examined agency files for a sample of 20 projects—10 planning projects and 10 construction projects—that account for 54 percent of the total program funding for fiscal year 2001 through fiscal year 2003. The details of the scope and methodology used in our analysis are in enclosure I.

Results in Brief

The Park Service's process for ensuring that transportation projects are needed and cost effective could be strengthened. Park Service policies require, among other things, that park managers justify the need for a proposed transportation project and its cost-effectiveness through the collection and analysis of specific supporting data, such as an analysis of possible alternatives and operating and maintenance costs. However, this information is not required to be provided to headquarters officials when they are reviewing proposed projects for approval and prioritization. Instead, the agency allows park managers to justify proposed projects by providing descriptions of how they would meet broad agencywide objectives such as protecting natural resources or enhancing the experience of park visitors. As a result, proposed transportation projects are routinely approved and prioritized by Park Service headquarters officials based on these broad descriptions without the benefit of supporting information demonstrating the specific need for the proposed projects or their cost-effectiveness. Only 1 of the 20 project files we examined included information demonstrating the need for and cost-effectiveness of the proposed project. Under these circumstances, the Park Service cannot ensure that its process for approving and prioritizing transportation projects is effective in identifying the most meritorious projects. Park Service officials acknowledge that the approval process needs to be revised and told us they plan to change the process so that park managers will be required to provide this supporting information when submitting future project proposals.

---

[1] Planning projects emphasize data collection, problem identification, and analysis of alternative solutions. Construction projects focus on building transportation systems or procuring new equipment such as rolling stock.

[2] Grand Canyon National Park, *Draft Report to Congress on Transit Alternatives*, July 2001.

[3] Federal Highway Administration, Federal Transit Administration, *Federal Lands Alternative Transportation Systems Study*, August 2001.

The Park Service has not developed an effective process for evaluating the performance of the Alternative Transportation Program. Currently, the agency does not have a process for systematically or objectively determining what, if any, progress the program is making toward meeting its objectives. For example, a major objective of the program is to improve the quality of visitor enjoyment by relieving traffic and parking congestion in parks. However, because the agency has not established goals for reducing such congestion or identified how congestion will be measured, the agency has no objective means of evaluating performance. Accordingly, determining what is being accomplished by an individual project or the program as a whole is based on the subjective judgments of agency managers. This results in diminished accountability since there is no effective way to determine what is being accomplished with the funds provided, and no effective means for providing agency managers or Congress with assurance that the projects are the most effective in achieving the results desired for the program.

This report contains recommendations aimed at improving the project approval process and enhancing the agency's evaluation of the program's performance. We discussed a draft of this report with Park Service officials, who told us they agree with our recommendations and are planning to implement them. We also requested comments from the Department of the Interior, but none were provided.

Background

Visitation rates in U. S. national parks have grown significantly in the past 2 decades. From a total of about 220 million visitors in 1980, visitation is approaching 290 million today. As parks host more visitors, many park transportation infrastructures have not kept pace.

Congress placed increased emphasis on transportation in and around national parks by passing the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) in 1998. The legislation provided federal land management agencies, including the Park Service, with increased responsibilities for managing transportation activities. Funding for meeting these responsibilities has been provided through the Department of Transportation, which annually funds the Park Service to initiate or expand alternative transportation systems where appropriate, to manage adverse impacts of increased traffic, and to reduce the adverse effects of private vehicles on natural and cultural resources, and on visitor experiences.

Proposed alternative transportation projects are initiated at the park level. After preliminary screening at the regional level, proposed projects are reviewed by headquarters officials. A team of senior headquarters and field officials rate and prioritize project proposals against broad objectives linked to the agency's mission and strategic goals. These include such objectives as providing visitor services, protecting natural resources, and protecting health, safety, and welfare.

Of the 185 projects that the Park Service has approved since the program began, 131 are planning projects, which emphasize data collection, problem identification, and analysis of alternative solutions. The remaining 54 projects are construction projects, which focus on building transportation systems or their components, or procuring new equipment such as rolling stock. The median cost of planning projects has been $75,000, while the median cost for construction projects has been $419,000. Enclosure II includes information on the number and estimated costs of projects approved under the Alternative Transportation Program since it began.

The Park Service Could Strengthen Its Review and Approval Process by Ensuring That Proposed Projects Are Needed and Cost-Effective

Among other things, Park Service policies require that individual park managers justify the need for a proposed project and its cost-effectiveness by analyzing alternatives, including those that do not involve construction, and by providing total cost estimates that include information on operations and

maintenance costs. However, this information is generally not provided to agency decisionmakers when they are approving and prioritizing project proposals. Instead, project proposals are approved and prioritized based on generalized descriptions of how proposed projects will contribute to accomplishing broad agencywide objectives. Without the benefit of having specific information about project alternatives and total project costs, the agency cannot ensure that its process for approving and prioritizing transportation projects is effective in selecting the most meritorious projects. Agency officials told us that they agree with our analysis and plan to revise the process by requiring that this information be provided to agency decisionmakers when projects are being considered for approval.

Under current Park Service requirements, the need for and cost-effectiveness of each proposed project is to be demonstrated by supporting information and analysis. Specifically, the Park Service's policy manual[4] requires park managers to fully explore alternatives before making a decision to design or construct new transportation systems or to expand existing systems. The alternatives are to include those that do not involve new construction such as improving the flow of traffic through the park by rerouting cars. If these alternatives will not achieve satisfactory results, then park managers may pursue new construction projects if certain conditions are met. These conditions include demonstrating that the projects will not cause visitation to exceed the area's ability to handle increased levels of visitation, commonly referred to as "carrying capacity."[5] To support a project's cost-effectiveness, the Park Service's policy manual requires park managers to consider estimated total costs when planning, designing, and constructing transportation projects.[6] In making this determination, total costs are to include all costs incurred over the project's useful life, including expenditures for acquisition, construction, and annual operations and maintenance. In addition, Director's Order Number 90 and a related Director's Memorandum require park managers to conduct an analysis to demonstrate that each proposed project is the most cost-effective way to meet the park's transportation needs. For construction projects with cost estimates of $500,000 or more, the Director's Order requires managers to consider the purpose of the project and its estimated costs and expected benefits, then evaluate alternative designs to determine whether a different design could achieve the same purpose at a lower cost without sacrificing performance, reliability, quality, or safety.

To determine whether this kind of key information was being provided to Park Service decision makers in approving and prioritizing proposed projects, we reviewed 10 approved planning projects and 10 approved construction projects that we judgmentally selected from the most recently approved projects. These recent projects included all of those approved for funding during fiscal year 2001 through fiscal year 2003. We selected the 10 planning projects with the highest estimated costs. However, because construction projects with estimated costs of $500,000 or higher are subjected to an additional review, we wanted to review projects whose estimated costs were above and below this threshold. Accordingly, we selected the five construction projects with the highest estimated costs above this threshold, and the five construction projects with the highest estimated costs below the threshold. Collectively, the 20 projects sampled represented 54 percent of the total estimated costs of $29.8 million for all projects approved for the 3-year period. A brief description of these projects is shown in table 1.

---

[4] U.S. National Park Service, *Management Policies 2001*, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, section 9.2, p. 107. December 27, 2000.

[5] Park managers are required to identify visitor carrying capacities for managing public use of their parks (section 8.2, p. 81 of the U.S. National Park Service *Management Policies 2001*, December 27, 2000).

[6] U.S. National Park Service, *Management Policies 2001*, December 27, 2000, section 9.1, p. 100.

Table1: Listing of Alternative Transportation Projects in Our Sample

Park unit/state	Project purpose/description	Estimated cost	Planned fiscal year funding
Planning projects			
Cape Cod National Seashore--Massachusetts	Develop a comprehensive long-term transportation plan to propose solutions to present traffic congestion and parking problems.	$300,000	2001
Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park--Tennessee[a]	Evaluate traffic congestion and impacts of relocating a major highway around the park as part of a regional transportation study.	400,000	2002
Golden Gate National Recreation Area--California	Reduce automobile congestion by examining future shuttle system, and satellite parking options.	310,000	2001
Great Smoky Mountains National Park--Tennessee	Collect park capacity data and information on alternatives as part of Phase II of a park transportation planning study to address increased congestion in and around the park.	286,000	2001
Great Smoky Mountains National Park--Tennessee	Collect data on biological and cultural resources potentially affected by a transportation system as part of Phase III of a park transportation planning study.	337,500	2002
Great Smoky Mountains National Park--Tennessee	Develop an environmental impact statement as part of Phase IV of a park transportation planning study.	299,200	2003
Keweenaw National Historical Park--Michigan	Analyze potential alternative transportation systems that will protect park resources and provide safe visitor access to the park and surrounding areas.	300,000	2003
Mesa Verde National Park--Colorado	Examine potential transportation systems, including a gondola system, to address congestion and safety concerns.	460,000	2001
National Capital Parks-Central--Washington, D.C. area	Develop transportation system to replace a 30-year old system that cannot effectively address congestion in the nation's capital.	286,000	2001
Northeast Region--Boston, Massachusetts area	Develop new information services for improving visitor access to NPS sites in and around Boston Harbor.	266,000	2001
Construction projects			
Acadia National Park--Maine	Implement changes to existing transportation system: Installation of electronic destination bus signs, purchase of bicycle trailers, and conversion of existing building into bus depot and information station.	481,600	2003
Cuyahoga Valley National Park--Ohio	Construct four station shelters and platforms for existing system to enhance visitor access and provide a safer environment during inclement weather.	468,000	2003
Cuyahoga Valley National Park--Ohio	Rehabilitate unsafe railroad crossing signals used for a historic railway through the park.	338,200	2001
Fire Island National Seashore--New York	Construct a ferry terminal and support facilities to improve access to the national seashore and reduce dependency on automobiles.	420,000	2001
Grand Canyon National Park--Arizona	Construct a 480-space parking lot and visitor orientation center to allow visitors to park their cars and take the transit system to the park, thus addressing current safety and noise concerns.	3,300,000	2003
Grand Canyon National Park--Arizona[b]	Select and fund contractor for managing the design and construction of a light rail system to alleviate increasing park congestion, and completion of an archeological mitigation study.	2,227,000	2001
North Cascades National Park--Washington	Determine feasibility and design of a floating dock facility, including an on-shore shelter with restrooms and orientation displays to improve access for disabled visitors and improve visitor information.	432.000	2003
Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area--California [c]	Design and lease or purchase of a 26-passenger shuttle system, including construction of a parking area and public restroom to mitigate increased congestion, pollution, and noise.	1,130,000	2002
Yosemite National Park--California	Expand shuttle service in park by procuring additional vehicles to meet increased demand.	3,100,000	2002
Yosemite National Park--California	Develop a new traffic information system to help park address increased congestion and resource degradation.	990,080	2001

[a]Subsequent to project approval, the Park Service has decided to fund this project outside the Alternative Transportation Program.

[b]Due to congressional concern about costs, this project was re-focused to include a report on alternatives to the light-rail system.

[c]During the course of our review, this project was re-scoped into a smaller project, with initial funding of $175,524 authorized for fiscal year 2001.

Source: National Park Service project files.

The Park Service policy and implementing guidance covering need and cost requirements apply to both planning and construction projects. However, planning projects are often initiated for the very purpose of collecting data and completing analyses to determine if a transportation system is needed. Consequently, in reviewing planning project proposals, we determined if the information provided in the proposals included plans to study non-construction alternatives and develop capacity studies, and whether they included plans to estimate total costs or the project's cost-effectiveness.

Our detailed analysis of the 20 project proposals showed that park managers have often submitted project proposals that describe project need but usually do not contain information on non-construction alternatives or park capacity. In addition, while each of the proposals included information on estimated project costs, the cost information typically did not include operations and maintenance costs or information on the cost-effectiveness of the project. As shown in table 2, only 1 of the 20 project proposals we reviewed—Mesa Verde—contained all of information as depicted by the "✓ " in each of the four columns in the table.

Table 2: Information Provided in Alternative Transportation Project Proposals

Park/project	Need criteria		Cost criteria	
	Proposal addresses non-construction alternatives	Proposal addresses park capacity data	Proposal addresses total cost—including operations & maintenance	Proposal addresses analysis of cost-effectiveness
Planning projects				
Cape Cod – long-term transportation plan				
Chickamauga – regional transportation study	✓	✓		
Golden Gate – shuttle system planning study	✓	✓		
Great Smoky Mountains – transportation planning study, phase II		✓		
Great Smoky Mountains – transportation planning study, phase III		[a]		
Great Smoky Mountains – transportation planning study, phase IV		[a]		
Keweenaw – Study of potential alternative transportation systems				
Mesa Verde – transportation system planning study	✓	✓	✓	✓
National Capital – replacement of existing transportation system	✓		✓	
Northeast Region – new traffic information services	✓			
Construction projects				
Acadia — new bus signs and construction changes to existing system	✓			
Cuyahoga Valley — construction of station shelters/platforms		✓		
Cuyahoga Valley— rehabilitation of railroad crossing signals		✓		
Fire Island—construction of ferry terminal and support facilities				
Grand Canyon—construction of park and ride facility	✓	✓		
Grand Canyon—design and construction of light rail transportation system	✓	✓		
North Cascades—feasibility and design study of floating dock				
Santa Monica—design and construction of shuttle system[b]				
Yosemite—development of traffic information system[c]	✓			
Yosemite—procurement of additional buses				

[a]To be completed in Phase II.

[b]Subsequent to project approval, this project was re-scoped into a smaller project with a lower cost estimate.

[c]The objective of this construction project objective is a traffic management system with a small construction component. Thus, although the proposal does not indicate that non-construction alternatives were considered, the project itself could be considered a non-construction alternative to building a transportation system.

In the case of Mesa Verde, the proposed project was for an analysis of transportation solutions to ease increasing vehicle congestion and visitor safety concerns in the park. The proposal attempted to demonstrate the need for the project by including both a discussion of a possible non-construction alternative—a ticketing system that would redistribute vehicles to less congested areas of the park during peak months—and a plan to collect and analyze park visitor capacity data to identify and quantify congestion issues throughout the park. In terms of project costs, the proposal stated that cost estimates—including operations and maintenance costs—would be developed for each alternative and that a cost-benefit analysis would be completed that would show the most cost-effective alternative. Including Mesa Verde, only 5 of the 20 project proposals in our sample provided the information or plans to collect the information on both need criteria—an analysis of non-construction alternatives and capacity studies. In table 2, these five proposals are those having ✓ 's in the first two columns. Only the Mesa Verde project addressed both cost criteria.

The reason park managers submit project proposals without this information is because agency officials use a standard agencywide project application process that does not differentiate between transportation projects and other projects. The Park Service elected to use this process to allow park managers the flexibility to describe how a project meets broad agencywide objectives. However, the Park Service officials responsible for managing the program recognize that in using this process, transportation related proposals routinely lack the kind of key information that is required to be developed and analyzed by park managers to demonstrate the need for projects and whether they are cost-effective.

Until this kind of information is routinely provided to the Park Service officials as they review, approve and prioritize proposed projects, the agency cannot ensure that it is effective in selecting the most meritorious projects. Park Service officials acknowledge these concerns and told us they plan to enforce these data requirements for all projects to be considered for funding in fiscal year 2004 and in later years.

Developing a Performance Evaluation System for Measuring Program Results Would Improve Accountability and Decision-Making

The Park Service has established program objectives that support the strategic goals of the agency, but it has not yet developed a system for evaluating the performance of the Alternative Transportation Program in meeting these objectives. Without such a process, it is difficult for the agency to demonstrate if, and to what extent, the Alternative Transportation Program and individual transportation projects are accomplishing the desired results.

The Park Service has identified a number of objectives for the Alternative Transportation Program. These objectives are broad and include such things as enhancing visitor experience, preserving natural and cultural resources, and improving or sustaining economic development opportunities, as well as transportation-related objectives such as relieving traffic and parking congestion, reducing air, noise, and visual pollution, reducing or eliminating overflow parking, and improving safety conditions. While these objectives provide needed intent and focus for the program, there is no process for measuring the performance of the program, or individual projects, in meeting these objectives. For example, a major objective of the program is to improve the quality of visitor enjoyment by relieving traffic and parking congestion in parks. However, because the agency has not established performance goals for reducing such congestion or identified how congestion will be measured, there is no effective means of evaluating performance to determine what, if any, progress is being made. In the absence of specific programmatic performance goals and measures, evaluating the results of the program, and individual projects, is based on the subjective judgments of program managers.

So far the Park Service has defined progress under the Alternative Transportation Program by identifying various administrative activities that have been completed during the first four years of the program.

These achievements have included such actions as completing a planning guidebook, issuing transportation bulletins, organizing and conducting training conferences, and developing a program plan. However, while these kinds of administrative activities are important aspects of managing the program, they do not identify what the program is accomplishing in terms of meeting its objectives.

The lack of measurable performance goals and measures has two adverse consequences. First, accountability is diminished because there is no effective way to determine what is being accomplished with the funds provided. Second, there is no effective means for providing agency managers or Congress with assurance that the projects being funded are the most effective in achieving the results desired for the program.

Developing performance goals and performance measures for assessing and evaluating progress would enable the Park Service to better determine how effectively program objectives are being met and could improve accountability by setting performance targets for agency managers. According to the Department of the Interior's fiscal year 2003 budget request, the department is seeking to redirect funds from lesser performing programs to higher priority or more effective ones. Moving to a performance-based approach to managing the program would be consistent with this initiative. It would also be consistent with the best practices of top-performing businesses and government agencies as well as the administration's objective of putting greater emphasis on performance-based management.

Further, developing a performance-based process for managing the program could also improve the ability of agency decision makers to evaluate individual project proposals. By showing how their projects directly contribute to measurable program goals, agency officials could improve the project approval and prioritization process by more effectively assessing the relative contributions of competing proposals.

Park Service officials are taking steps to develop and implement a more effective performance evaluation system for the Alternative Transportation Program. As part of this effort, the agency has developed plans for collecting data that can be used to improve decision-making and form the basis for developing program performance measures. In addition, according to a Park Service official, the agency is examining transit system performance measures used by external organizations that could be adopted by the Park Service. The official stated that the agency plans to develop guidance that will include performance information to assist park managers with the development of appropriate performance objectives and measures. However, this guidance will not be completed until the end of fiscal year 2003.

Conclusions

The Park Service can improve the administration of the Alternative Transportation Program by strengthening its project approval and prioritization process to ensure that proposed projects are needed and cost-effective. To get this done, the Park Service needs to require park managers to provide key information demonstrating the need and cost-effectiveness of proposed projects when they are submitted to headquarters. This should include an analysis of alternatives—including alternatives that do not involve construction, an analysis of park capacity data, cost estimates that include operations and maintenance costs, and information showing that the proposed project is cost-effective. Currently, this information is not routinely provided to agency decision-makers responsible for approving and prioritizing proposed. Providing this additional information would improve the effectiveness of the Park Service's decision-making process by ensuring that proposed projects are needed and cost-effective solutions to valid transportation problems.

Regardless of which projects are funded, the agency needs to develop an effective means for evaluating the performance of the program so that program and park managers are more accountable for what is being accomplished with the funds provided. Today, the agency has no objective means for making these

determinations. Performance evaluation—including the development of performance goals and measures—is a critical component for measuring progress and justifying continued program funding. Moreover, moving to a performance-based evaluation process is consistent with the best practices of top-performing businesses and government agencies as well as with the administration's objective of putting greater emphasis on performance-based management.

The Park Service acknowledges that improvements are needed in both the project approval process and in developing a performance-based management and evaluation system for the program and has plans for implementing improvements in each of these areas.

Recommendations for Executive Action

To strengthen the Park Service's process for approving and prioritizing alternative transportation projects and to better ensure that the Alternative Transportation Program achieves its desired results, we recommend that the Secretary of the Interior require the Director of the National Park Service to:

- Implement the agency's plans for requiring that each construction project proposal submitted for headquarters approval include documentation supporting the need for a proposed project — including an analysis of non-construction alternatives and park capacity data. Similarly, planning proposals should ensure that this kind of information is developed by identifying plans for obtaining it.

- Implement the agency's plans for requiring that each construction project proposal submitted for headquarters approval include an analysis supporting the project's cost-effectiveness, including total project cost estimates and anticipated annual operations and maintenance costs. Similarly, planning proposals should ensure that this kind of information is developed by identifying plans for obtaining it.

- Implement the agency's plans for developing a performance evaluation system, including the development of performance goals and measures, so that there is an objective basis for determining whether the program and individual projects are accomplishing the desired results.

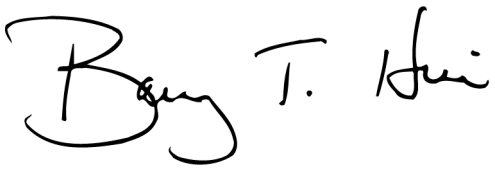
Agency Comments

We discussed a draft of this report with Park Service officials who told us they agree with our recommendations and are planning to implement them. We also requested comments from the Department of the Interior, but none were provided.

- - - - -

As agreed with your office, unless you announce the contents of this report earlier, we plan no further distribution until 30 days from the report date. At that time, we will send copies of this report to the House and Senate Appropriations Committees, the House Committee on Government Reform, and the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs. We will also make copies available to others upon request. In addition, the report will be available at no charge on the GAO Web site at http://www.gao.gov.

If you or your staffs have any questions, please call me at (202) 512-3841, or Cliff Fowler, Assistant Director, at (202) 512-8029. Key contributors to this report are shown in enclosure III.



Barry T. Hill
Director, Natural Resources and Environment

Enclosures

Enclosure I

Scope and Methodology

To determine how the Park Service evaluates the need for and cost-effectiveness of projects it approves under the Alternative Transportation Program, we collected data on all project proposals approved for funding from fiscal year 1999, the first year program funds were obligated, through fiscal year 2003, the latest year for which projects have been approved. During this period, the Park Service approved 185 planning and construction projects proposed at 75 national parks and park units nationwide. The agency provided data from its database of project proposals detailing the number, estimated cost, location, and description of proposed projects, as well as whether they were classified as planning or construction projects, and whether they were approved and funded. For those projects that had been approved, we gathered records about programmed funding year and costs, obligated funds through fiscal year 2001, and estimated project costs through fiscal year 2003. We analyzed this data to derive aggregate summary information such as the total number of projects approved for funding, average costs of projects, and the range of project costs. We reviewed agency policies, memoranda and directives, administrative documents, and guidance included in calls for proposals, and interviewed Park Service and Department of Transportation officials in headquarters and regional offices, Park Service officials in national parks, and national environmental organizations. In addition, we visited four national parks that had transportation projects approved since the inception of the program, and interviewed Park Service staff, concessionaires, community members, local government officials, and representatives of local organizations.

To determine how effectively the Park Service reviews and approves transportation projects, we selected 20 approved projects for detailed review from the fiscal year 2001 through 2003 project call. Our selected projects represented 54 percent of the total estimated costs of $29.8 million for all projects approved for the 3-year period. We included 10 planning projects and 10 construction projects to determine how the approval process was completed for the different types of projects. For planning

projects, we selected the 10 projects with the highest estimated costs. Because the Park Service has an additional review process for construction projects with estimated costs of $500,000 or more, we selected the five highest-cost construction projects above this threshold, and the five highest-cost construction projects below the threshold.

To determine how the Park Service evaluates the performance of the Alternative Transportation Program, we examined previous reports on performance evaluation completed by GAO and other organizations, descriptions of Park Service objectives and Alternative Transportation Program objectives, the fiscal year 2001 Park Service Annual Performance Report and fiscal year 2003 Annual Performance Plan, the Alternative Transportation Program Plan, Park Service policies and guidance related to planning, a summary of program achievements to date, and a critique of the program by an agency under the Department of Transportation. In addition, we interviewed Park Service and Department of Transportation officials about the process.

We conducted our work between June 2001 and June 2002, in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Enclosure II

Alternative Transportation Program Projects Approved Fiscal Year 1999–Fiscal Year 2003

	Planning projects		Construction projects		Total projects	
Fiscal Year	Number	Dollars	Number	Dollars	Number	Dollars
1999	34	$2,941,996	5	$4,964,754	39	$7,906,750
2000	40	4,533,423	16	4,140,097	56	8,673,520
2001	33	4,296,898	19	8,872,044	52	13,168,942
2002	14	2,307,270	7	6,092,500	21	8,399,770
2003	10	1,679,200	7	6,536,600	17	8,215,800
Total	**131**	**$15,758,787**	**54**	**$30,605,995**	**185**	**$46,364,782**

Note: Project costs for fiscal years 1999 through 2000 are based on obligations; project costs for fiscal year 2001 are based on obligations and project estimates; and project costs for fiscal years 2002 and 2003 are based on project estimates.

Average cost of planning project = $120,296

Median cost of planning project = $75,000

Average cost of construction project = $566,778

Median cost of construction project = $419,050

Construction projects = 29.2 percent of all projects, but 66.0 percent of project funding.

Source: National Park Service files and GAO calculations.

Enclosure III

GAO Contacts and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contacts

Barry T. Hill (202) 512-3841
Clifton Fowler (202) 512-8029

Acknowledgments

In addition to those named above, Thomas Kingham, Arturio Holguin, Christine Colburn, Donald Pless, and Cynthia Norris made key contributions to this report.

(360105)