

**Friends of Acadia Comments on the Acadia National Park Draft Transportation
Plan/Environmental Impact Statement
June 26, 2018**

Friends of Acadia (FOA) would like to thank the National Park Service for the opportunity to comment on the *Acadia National Park Draft Transportation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement*. Our national park is more popular than ever, evidenced by the 58% growth in visitation seen at Acadia over the last decade. The current traffic congestion and crowding issues are unsustainable, and change is needed to ensure that Acadia National Park remains a distinctive place of natural beauty, ecological integrity, rich cultural history, and joyful connection with the outdoors for future generations.

Friends of Acadia supports the preferred alternative, Alternative C, and we commend the National Park Service for providing forward-thinking solutions to address traffic congestion, enhance the visitor experience, protect natural resources, and improve visitor safety. We also thank the National Park Service for reaching out to stakeholders extensively during the planning process and offering ample opportunities for the public to provide feedback on the issues and ways to address them.

Below are the elements of the draft transportation plan that Friends of Acadia would like to highlight in our comments:

- 1. We support the adaptive management approach that the National Park Service is using in this plan and recommend that the National Park Service prioritize filling staff positions to adequately monitor, understand, and manage public use, and adjust/improve management tools, such as reservation systems, as needed.** Visitor use patterns will likely change as the plan is implemented, so it will be important for the park to understand the effects that new management practices are having on popular visitor destinations, as well as the sites that have traditionally offered a quieter visitor

experience. In order to effectively do so, the National Park Service must prioritize not just the implementation of projects, but also adequate staffing to monitor, understand, and manage public use.

2. **We support implementing time entry reservation systems for Cadillac Mountain, Jordan Pond, and Ocean Drive.** Reservation systems for these locations should help reduce traffic congestion and improve the visitor experience by enhancing safety and reducing visitor frustration due to lack of parking. Friends of Acadia helped fund the creation of visitor use and transportation models for Cadillac and Ocean Drive that should help the National Park Service design the reservation systems efficiently and effectively based on current visitor patterns. These models will also enable the National Park Service to predict how any potential modifications to the reservation system could change visitor usage.
3. **We support limiting the size of vehicles on the Cadillac Mountain Road and other locations in the park where warranted for safety concerns.** Large buses and RVs currently are not able to navigate one curve without traveling into the opposite lane, which presents safety hazards. Limiting the size of vehicles according to the road geometry will eliminate these concerns.
4. **We request that the National Park Service consider ways to reduce the impacts of the Ocean Drive reservation system on people who use the park frequently, including possibly scaling back the hours and season for which reservations are required on Ocean Drive.** The visitor use model for Ocean Drive shows that parking lot capacity is exceeded on a typically busy summer day between the hours of 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. In recognition of these usage patterns and “peak times”, and in acknowledgement that the Ocean Drive corridor also involves “through drivers” (unlike Jordan Pond and Cadillac Mountain), FOA would suggest that the park consider a less expansive time frame when reservations are required on Ocean Drive than the 4 a.m. – 9 p.m. time period listed in the draft plan. The 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. timeframe during July, August and September would be a reasonable starting point, given the existing data, and it could be adjusted in future years as visitor use is monitored and as right-lane parking is eliminated.
5. **We request that the National Park Service accommodate volunteers and employees as new reservation systems are established.** Friends of Acadia hosts seasonal staff and volunteers who work throughout the park including at Jordan Pond, Sieur de Monts, Cadillac Mountain, and along Ocean Drive. We respectfully request that the reservation system be set up so that employees, volunteers, and researchers doing business in the

park are able to secure parking either through a special permit system or dedicated parking spaces.

6. **We support the proposal to phase out or significantly reduce right-lane parking along the Ocean Drive portion of the Park Loop Road as other alternatives are made available.** The existing practice of hundreds of cars parked in the right-hand lane creates unsafe conditions for park visitors and creates vehicular congestion that detracts from the visitor experience; it is also inconsistent with goals and strategies outlined in park management plans.

7. **We support the plan to construct a new parking area at Eagle Lake and to identify solutions to address roadside parking at Acadia Mountain. We encourage the National Park Service to also explore safer alternatives to growing roadside parking along Route 198 (Parkman Mountain and Brown Mountain Gatehouse trailheads) and Route 102A (Wonderland and Ship Harbor trailheads).** In both areas, visitation appears to have exceeded parking capacity, and automobiles are parking on the roadsides, creating safety concerns and natural resources damage on the road shoulders. We agree that Eagle Lake should be the highest priority for reducing roadside parking, but Routes 198 and 102A should be added to the list of areas of concern.

8. **We support increasing transit services and improving the Acadia Gateway Center in Trenton and the ANP Visitor Center property in Hulls Cove as facilities for visitor access to transit.** Friends of Acadia has supported and helped fund the Island Explorer since its initiation. Over 7 million passengers have ridden the bus system, and we anticipate that transit demand will grow as vehicle reservations are implemented in the park. FOA has also invested in the Acadia Gateway Center in Trenton. Combined with the ANP Visitor Center in Hulls Cove, we believe these facilities have great potential to work in tandem as vital short- and long-term facilities where different sectors of the visiting public can “park and ride” and access important information about their visit to Acadia. These facilities provide an opportunity to reduce congestion and improve the ANP visitor experience for generations to come.

In conclusion, Friends of Acadia would like to thank the National Park Service for putting forward many positive ideas to address traffic congestion, improve safety, prevent natural resources degradation, and enhance the visitor experience. We look forward to working in partnership with Acadia National Park to implement cooperative projects in the months and years to come to diversify how visitors access and enjoy the park.