



GOING-TO-THE-SUN ROAD CORRIDOR

Management Plan Newsletter

Preliminary Alternatives



A Message from the Superintendent

Dear Friends,

I am pleased to present the third newsletter for the Going-to-the-Sun Road (GTSR) Corridor Management Plan project. Newsletter three presents five **preliminary alternatives** for your early review. They outline various responses that park management could take to address issues that include congestion, parking shortages, and resource impacts along the GTSR, and prepare for changes in visitation, National Park Service (NPS) transportation, climate change, and funding. All the alternatives continue to allow private vehicles to drive the GTSR, and no changes are proposed to the operation of the Red Buses or Sun Tours.

The process to develop these alternatives included identifying goals, collecting data, review of public comments, and identifying thresholds that would trigger mitigation actions by park management.

I invite you to review and comment on these **preliminary alternatives**. Your comments will be used to inform further development, modification and analysis of these **preliminary alternatives** for the Draft Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). In this newsletter you will find a number of ways to contact us.

We have not yet selected a preferred alternative, nor completed the environmental analysis. That will be in the Draft Plan EIS. We anticipate it will be available for review and comment in fall, 2015. Public meetings will be held in the fall after the Draft Plan and EIS are released.

As we move forward in this process, please continue to be involved and share your thoughts and ideas about management of the GTSR corridor. Thank you for your participation and interest to date. Your comments received during scoping were extremely valuable and instrumental in helping the planning team develop this range of **preliminary alternatives**. I look forward to hearing more of your thoughts and ideas.

Sincerely,
Jeff Mow
Superintendent

INSIDE-

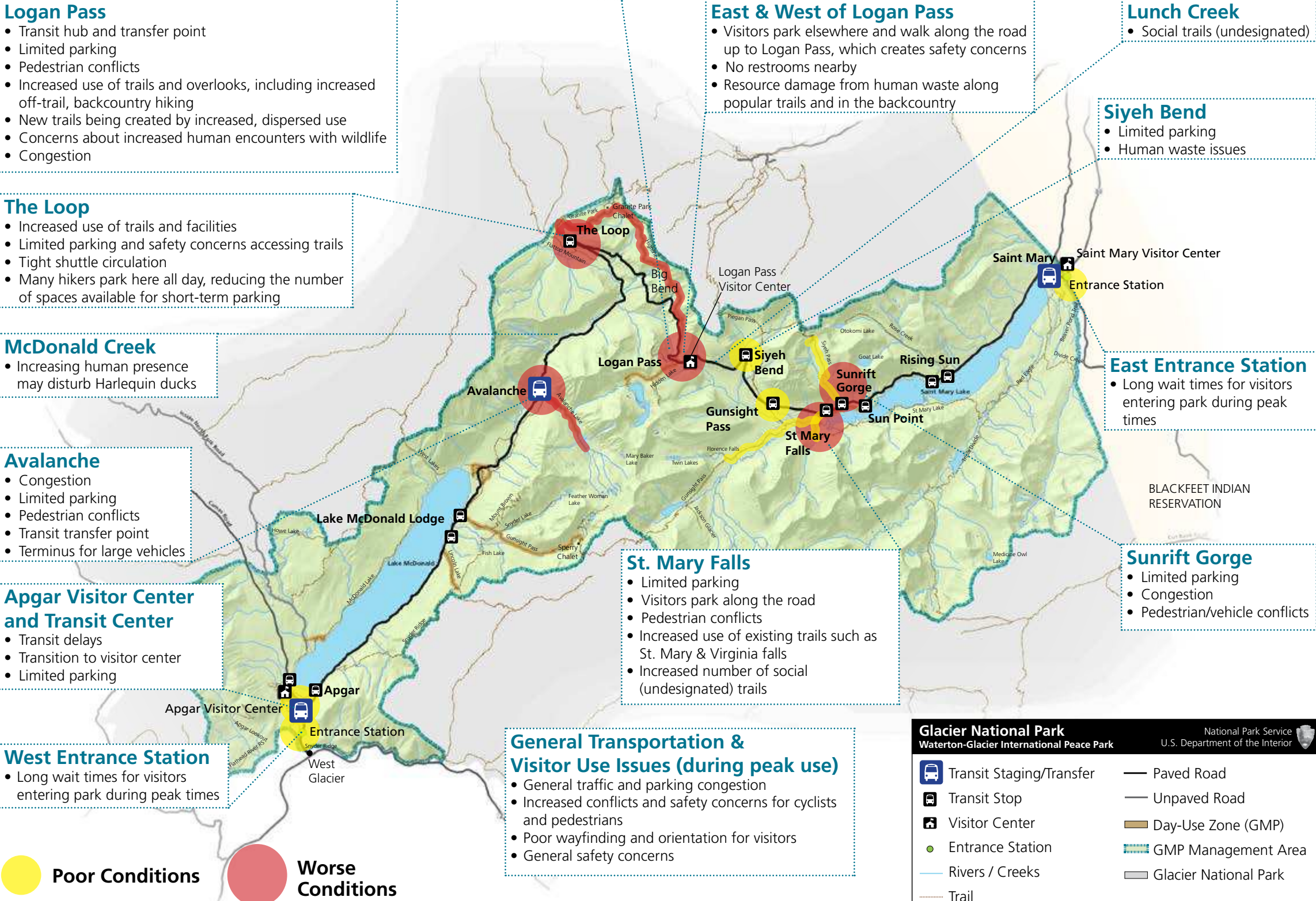
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WHY does the Going-to-the-Sun Road corridor need a management Plan?

- Park visitation is increasing and trends indicate it is likely to continue to increase.
- Visitation increases have already and will likely continue to add stress to existing facility infrastructure (parking and restrooms) and increase traffic congestion on the road.
- The number of hikers has significantly increased on some of the popular trails in the Going-to-the-Sun Road (GTSR) corridor by as much as 250% since 1988. This increase has resulted in crowding and multiple types of resource impacts.
- Popular areas, such as the Avalanche Creek area on the west side of the park, and the Logan Pass area, continue to be congested, resulting in safety issues and resource impacts.
- The shuttle system, launched in 2007, was intended to reduce congestion along the GTSR, at parking areas, and at pullouts. However, the road is still congested and the parking lots and pullouts are at capacity during peak visitation season.



GOING-TO-THE-SUN ROAD CORRIDOR MANAGEMENT PLAN



During peak times & peak season (end of June to end of August), certain areas in the corridor become

H O T S P O T S

WHAT are the vision and goals of the plan?

The Going-to-the-Sun Road corridor will be managed to provide all visitors with an opportunity to experience the scenic majesty and historic character of the park through a wide range of visitor activities, services, and facilities. The cultural significance and traditional use of the Going-to-the-Sun Road will be emphasized. The project’s vision and four goals outline the intent of the plan.

Vision

An integrated, sustainable, and flexible system of transportation and visitor use management strategies for the Going-to-the-Sun Road corridor will focus on protecting and minimizing impacts to resources, provide for visitor enjoyment, and leverage partnerships that help the park and surrounding region anticipate and respond to climate change and other emerging challenges and opportunities.

Goals

- Goal 1:** Manage transportation and trails in the corridor using adaptable, responsible climate friendly strategies.
- Goal 2:** Provide for visitor enjoyment while managing for appropriate levels and types of visitor use.
- Goal 3:** Protect natural resources conditions, processes and values.
- Goal 4:** Protect cultural and historic resources.



Development of Preliminary Alternatives

The National Park Service is required to examine a full range of reasonable alternatives when preparing an environmental impact statement. The **preliminary alternatives** propose different ways to meet the purpose and need and goals for the plan, while minimizing impacts to park resources. Some meet these goals better than others. Some of these **preliminary alternatives** may eventually be determined to not be reasonable alternatives, and therefore may not be fully developed and analyzed. These will be described as considered but dismissed. Reasonable alternatives must also be economically and technically feasible and show evidence of common sense.

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These **preliminary alternatives** were developed by park staff and the project planning team, including professional transportation planners from the National Park Service's Denver Service Center and the Intermountain Regional Office. They were also informed by work completed by contractors for socioeconomic resources, alternative transportation, and the University of Montana’s social science research.

Alternative 1 is the No Action alternative. Alternatives 2, 3 and 4 were developed using a traditional approach of forecasting or predicting a certain future. They describe different ways the park would respond to increasing visitation and longer visitor seasons due to climate change. These range from building more

parking, to increasing the shuttle system, to removing the shuttle system and implementing a reservation and/or timed entry system during peak season.

Alternative 5 describes a flexible management approach to allow the park to be able to respond to future changes in transportation, visitation, economics, funding and climate (referred to as change drivers). Scenario planning (a process used by industry) was modified and used to explore three possible futures, anticipate trends, consider risk, and brainstorm

ideas for proactive responses to future conditions on the GTSR corridor. Alternative 5 describes this adaptive approach. Change drivers that are beyond the park's control were identified and include transportation technology, visitation levels,



economics, climate change, and NPS funding availability. Triggers were identified to assist the park in identifying which future we are headed towards. Different management tools were identified, based on the possible future.



PRELIMINARY ALTERNATIVE 1 – No action



This alternative is required by the National Environmental Policy Act. It describes the conditions that would exist in the Going-to-the-Sun Road corridor if a plan was not prepared. It provides a baseline for evaluating the changes and environmental impacts that would or would not occur under the action alternatives. Response to increased visitation, changes in transportation, or other events is reactionary and on a project by project basis, rather than part of an integrated and long-term strategy.

PRELIMINARY ALTERNATIVE 2 – Build additional parking and infrastructure and maintain shuttle to accommodate increased visitation



This alternative would build additional infrastructure throughout the corridor. Outcomes would add parking and recreational capacity throughout the corridor. Shuttle operations would begin earlier in the spring. Expand opportunities to visit during the shoulder season.

- Grow partnerships with gateway communities.
- Expand parking throughout the corridor, including at Avalanche.
- Expand the shuttle system in areas that can't accommodate increased parking. Increase the shuttle hours of daily operation and increase months in use to include shoulder season.
- Protect and limit natural resource damage from increased use on trails. Widen, harden and/or install handrails on trails, add new trails, add restroom facilities to popular backcountry locations including Hidden Lake Overlook, Preston Park and Haystack Butte.

PRELIMINARY ALTERNATIVE 3 – Increase shuttles and manage the number of vehicles in the GTSR corridor



This alternative uses the shuttle system to accommodate the increase in visitation, but also manages the numbers of vehicles coming into the park at any one time. Vehicle entry is controlled by timed entries or a reservation system to assure a range of visitor experiences and parking and/or shuttle access is achieved without delays. Outcomes would include: reduced congestion and minimized need for additional infrastructure.

- Utilize a timed entry system or reservation system during peak season.
- Redesign west and east side entrances.
- Grow partnerships with gateway communities.
- Expand the shuttle system. Increase the hours of daily operation and length of season.
- Prohibit overnight parking, and implement parking time limits at some locations.
- Require day hike permits on some trails during peak season.
- Increase biking opportunities, such as bike only days on the GTSR, and develop bike trails.
- Protect and limit natural resource damage from increased use on trails. Widen, harden and/or install handrails on trails, add new trails. Add restroom facilities to popular backcountry locations including Hidden Lake Overlook, Preston Park and Haystack Butte.

PRELIMINARY ALTERNATIVE 4 – Discontinue shuttles and manage the number of vehicles in the GTSR corridor



This alternative removes the shuttle system and responds to the increase in visitation by managing the numbers of vehicles driving on the GTSR at any one time. Vehicle entry is controlled by timed entry or a reservation system to assure that once visitors gain entry, a positive park experience and parking are available without delays. Outcomes would include: a quality visitor experience by reducing congestion and eliminating need for additional development or other management actions in the GTSR corridor.

- Utilize a timed entry or reservation system during peak season.
- Grow partnerships with local businesses.
- Redesign west and east side entrances.
- Remove shuttle system.
- Offer more bike opportunities on the GTSR.

PRELIMINARY ALTERNATIVE 5 – Adaptive response to alternative futures



- Possible Futures –
- Congestion and visitor use dramatically increase and length of visitor season increases,
 - Slower increases in visitation and congestion, visitor season changes less dramatically.
 - Visitor use levels decrease and visitor season changes or remains the same.

This alternative offers a flexible decision-framework for how to respond to future events, trends, risks and threats that are uncertain or unknown. Changes in visitation, transportation technology, length of seasons, economics, population, land use, and park funding and support could each (or all) have an effect on visitor experience, resource integrity and park operations. Rather than assuming one fixed, or static future (as shown in Preliminary Alternatives 2, 3 and 4), this alternative allows park managers to adaptively respond to changing conditions.

Triggers would be established and monitored to identify emerging changes and determine when a response or action is triggered or when events indicate a shift toward one of these possible “futures.”

Preliminary triggers could include visitation levels, number of vehicles traveling through GTSR entrance stations, vehicle miles traveled on the GTSR, change in daily peak visitation times, shifts in the peak visitation season, trail use levels, wildlife behavior, and resource conditions. Outcomes would include: maximum flexibility and continuous monitoring of park conditions.

- Respond to increasing visitation and congestion using least restrictive actions first.
- Grow partnerships with gateway communities. Disperse visitors to other regional recreational opportunities.
- Expand the shuttle system with additional shuttles and additional shuttle stops. Increase the shuttle hours of daily operation. *Add other shuttle loops within the corridor such as Fish Creek to Apgar.
- *Prohibit overnight parking, implement parking time limits and/or require parking permits.
- *Increase biking opportunities such as bike only days on the GTSR and develop additional bike trails.
- Protect and limit natural resource damage from increased use on trails. *Widen, harden and/or install handrails on trails, *add new trails, *add infrastructure into the backcountry including restroom facilities at locations such as the Hidden Point Overlook and Haystack Butte.
- *Require day hiking permits for some popular trails.
- *Convert west side ball field to parking.
- *Prohibit over-length vehicle travel past Apgar Village and Rising Sun.
- *Convert one loop at Avalanche Campground to parking.

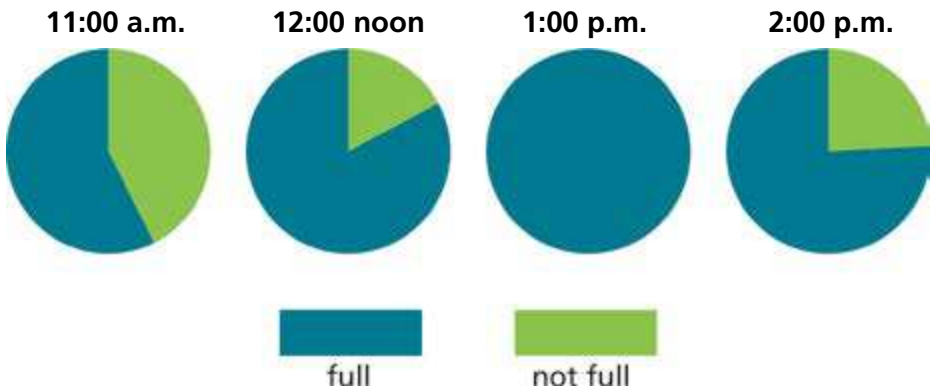
*Denotes actions that would only occur during peak season once triggers are reached.

ACTIONS COMMON to all Action Alternatives

- Retain the historic setting, character and fabric of the GTSR national historic landmark. Complete a Cultural Landscape Treatment Plan for the GTSR.
- Protect natural processes and the park’s natural ecosystem, including natural soundscapes and night skies.
- Embrace new transportation and communication technology as appropriate such as ride-sharing services, connected vehicles, electric vehicles, etc.
- Support a Travel Information Center to inform visitors and implement travel demand strategies to support easier travel and access to information about road congestion, full parking lots, and other conditions throughout the corridor.
- Offer a congestion app for smart phones.
- Enhance hiker biker opportunities in the spring and fall before the road is fully open and after it is closed for the season.
- Monitor and manage noise levels in the corridor.
- Promote visiting the park during non-peak season.



Avalanche Parking Lot
Parking Lot Use During Peak Hours - 2014



Sample of days and times from mid-July to mid-August 2014, University of Montana

UPDATE on Visitor and Transportation Research

The park has been collaborating with the University of Montana to extensively study visitor use of public and private transportation within the park, visitor experience as it relates to hiking, wildlife, vegetation, and other park attributes, and to model a variety of visitor flow patterns. Research has been ongoing since 2005.

Most recently, during the summer of 2014, the University of Montana conducted a visitor survey of drivers, shuttle riders and day hikers in the GTSR corridor. The

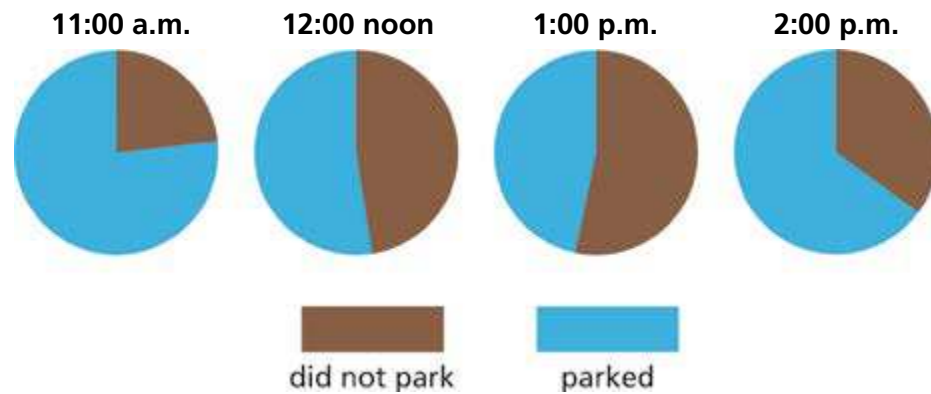
level of use on the road and trails in the corridor was also monitored. The parking lots at Logan Pass and Avalanche continued to be monitored to determine the average time it took visitors to find a parking place and how long the lots were full. Glacier experienced record visitation during 2014; by the end of December, over 2.3 million visitors were counted. The park will receive its 100 millionth visitor sometime this spring.

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The survey of drivers found that although drivers rated many experience items as acceptable or neutral, seeing too many cars on the roadway, the inability to park, and noise detracted from their experience. Parking may be the greatest detractor to the driving experience, negatively affecting nearly 40% of the drivers surveyed. Observations determined that only half of the vehicles visiting the pass from 12-3pm were able to

find a parking space. The survey indicates that there are two different types of driving experiences on the GTSR: transportation and recreational. Visitors driving from one place to the next to start a hike or for some other planned activity (photography, etc.) are participating in a transportation experience. Visitors driving the road in a less planned and direct way, or simply for pleasure, are likely doing so for a recreational experience. Although most visitors drift back and forth between a transportation and recreation experience, this simplification may help explain different behaviors and visitor preferences. Information about the shuttle system seems to be reaching drivers, but does not seem to be convincing them to ride the shuttle in a substantial way.

Logan Pass Parking Lot
Proportions of Vehicles that Entered the Lot During Peak Hours



Sample of days and times from July and August 2013 and 2014, University of Montana



The survey of shuttle riders showed that they are highly motivated and knowledgeable. They rate highly the service, conditions, and experience of riding the shuttle. According to survey responses, very few riders were unhappy with crowding on the buses but would prefer to see reduced time spent waiting to board a shuttle. Shuttle riders tend to be trip planners, and the shuttle riding experience may be less recreational and more functional when compared to the driving experience of the GTSR. The transfers at Avalanche (where large queues sometimes form) may be affecting the actual or perceived waiting time of people at that location. Visitors who ride the shuttle to Logan Pass seem to have received more information and are more convinced to ride the shuttle than visitors at Avalanche. Only half of all shuttle riders are leaving their cars at one of the transit centers. Point-to-point hikers account for approximately 30% of all shuttle rides in the corridor and riders typically leave their cars at Logan Pass and The Loop.

The GTSR corridor offers a diversity of experiences for hikers to have outstanding recreational opportunities. A major component of providing these experiences into the future is to provide hikers with enough information to allow them to self-select an experience that meets their expectations. While some visitor displacement is occurring within the corridor, the survey indicates little support for management actions that would restrict access to corridor trails. Solitude and soundscape quality



conditions were noted as the most impacted yet still acceptable for the majority of visitors. Many of the hikers in the GTSR corridor are using the shuttle. However, the frequency of shuttle use for a one-way hike in some locations is

causing conflict within different areas. Parking shortages occurring at Logan Pass and the Loop are in part due to the number of one-way hikers that leave their vehicles there for extended periods of time.

WHAT happens next?

Over the next several months, the park will further develop these **preliminary alternatives** for analysis in the draft plan and EIS. We anticipate releasing the draft plan EIS in fall 2015 for public review and comment. Public meetings will be held at that time.

After comments are reviewed, responses developed and changes are made, a final plan and EIS will be prepared in 2016. We are anticipating completing the planning process and issuing a Record of Decision in early 2017.

Public comments on the **preliminary alternatives** can be submitted at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/glac>. The park would like to receive comments by June 5, 2015.



FOR MORE PLAN INFORMATION:

<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/glac>

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GOING-TO-THE-SUN ROAD CORRIDOR Management Plan

