

# Arches National Park | Utah

## Visitor Access and Experience Planning

National Park Service  
US Department of the Interior



### *Dear Friends:*

Thank you for your continued interest in visitor access and experience at Arches National Park (the park). Since the National Park Service (NPS) last sought your feedback in 2021, it has completed several studies, including a two-year pilot of a timed-entry reservation system at the main park entrance, to gain a better understanding of visitor access, use, and experience issues and the various solutions that could address issues related to sustained high levels of visitation. The NPS is now seeking your feedback on your experiences during the pilot study and on other long-term strategies the park may consider to balance visitor access with resource protection and quality experiences. The NPS encourages your participation during this civic engagement phase and invites you to submit any ideas, questions, and comments on the information presented in this newsletter. Instructions on how to comment are included at the end of this newsletter.

Over the past 10 years, the NPS has conducted data collection efforts, studies, and feasibility analyses to explore management actions related to visitor access and experience at the park. Data collection has included information on vehicle congestion, entrance wait times and queue length, parking utilization, and visitor experience quality. The NPS will consider all previous actions, studies, and input from stakeholder engagement, in addition to feedback it receives during this current public comment period. Your input will be instrumental as the NPS considers the next steps to provide predictable, safe, and efficient visitor access to Arches National Park.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Brendan Bray, Acting Superintendent

Arches National Park

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## *Background Information*

Visitation to Arches National Park increased by 74% between 2011 and 2021, with record high visitation of 1.8 million visits in 2021. Nearly all visitors arrive by vehicle, with daily arrivals during the busiest months averaging 2,500 vehicles; on peak days more than 3,000 vehicles enter the park. More than 96% of visitors enter the park through the main entrance accessed via US Route 191, 4 miles north of Moab, Utah. Once inside the park, 96% of visitors in private vehicles visit at least one of the primary attraction sites: Delicate Arch, the Windows, or Devils Garden. This growth in visitation has resulted in parking congestion and long wait times at the entrance station that have diminished the quality of visitor experience at key attraction sites in the park accessed from the scenic drive corridor. In the past, these conditions have resulted in periods of temporarily restricted access to the park until congestion lessens, with the main entrance closed for as long as 3 to 5 hours.

The NPS has been considering visitor access management at the park since 1993, with the initiation of the Visitor Experience and Resource Protection (VERP) planning effort. In 2012, the NPS completed the Arches Alternative Transportation System and

Congestion Management Study, and in 2013, it completed the Parkwide Road Maintenance and Modification Environmental Assessment. Subsequently, in 2017, the NPS released an environmental assessment for traffic congestion management. The environmental assessment was terminated in 2019 based on stakeholder feedback indicating that additional information was needed before making long-term decisions about visitor access management. Since that time, the NPS has continued to gather information and data through timed-entry pilots at the main entrance (2022 and 2023), public and stakeholder meetings (2021 and 2022), the Visitor Use, Access, and Experience Study (2020), and other ongoing data collection efforts.

As noted above, the NPS implemented a pilot in 2022 and 2023 to study the effectiveness of timed entry into the park. Piloting provides an opportunity for the park to test temporary actions and learn from systematic evaluation of the actions. The systematic evaluation included testing, data collection, and monitoring. Additionally, operational changes were made to see how visitor access and flow could be improved at the entrance station. The outcomes of the pilots will inform long-term actions and future planning processes undertaken at the park.



## *Issues, Objectives, and Goals for Managing Visitor Access and Experience*

Based on past actions, studies, and stakeholder feedback, the NPS has identified several issues associated with congestion at the main entrance, along the scenic drive corridor, and at key sites accessed from the corridor. These issues include unpredictable temporary periods of restricted access at the main entrance to manage congestion in the park, hazards posed by roadside parking and pedestrian travel along roadways, degraded resource conditions and visitor experience quality in the park, and overburdened park infrastructure/facilities.



### *Objectives and goals for management strategies related to visitor access and experience include:*

Reduce congestion at popular park sites to allow freer movement of people on trails and reduce stresses in parking availability that contribute to parking competition and user conflicts.

Provide predictable access to key destinations (including Delicate Arch, the Windows, and Devils Garden) within the park and support a range of visitor experiences.

Provide adequate trip planning and traffic congestion information to visitors, including how to enter the park and what to expect upon arrival, using traditional mediums and emerging technology.

## *Strategies the NPS is Evaluating*

The list below presents potential strategies the NPS has been evaluating to better manage the distribution and flow of vehicles into the park while protecting resources and promoting high quality experiences for visitors. The ability to adapt to changing visitor use patterns is a key element of any strategy the NPS evaluates for visitor access management at the park. The NPS welcomes your feedback on these strategies.



### **Timed-Entry Reservation**

The timed-entry system would resemble the pilot programs, whereby visitors would be required to obtain a reservation to enter the park within a specific time window. Exclusions from the reservation requirement would be similar to the pilot programs.

### **Daily Reservation System**

This option would allow vehicles with reservations to arrive at the park any time between 6:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. A daily reservation system could provide more flexibility in visitor arrival time but less predictable access to popular sites in the park due to congestion in parking lots.

### **Mandatory Shuttle System**

Under this alternative, personal vehicles would be prohibited in the park, and a shuttle system would be the only means for visitors to enter the park.

### **Voluntary Shuttle System**

A voluntary shuttle system would provide visitors who choose to use the shuttle with an alternative to driving personal vehicles in the park.

### **Site-Specific Reservations**

Visitors would be required to obtain site-specific reservations to primary sites along the scenic corridor (i.e., Delicate Arch, the Windows, and Devils Garden).

### **Build for Demand: Existing Hotspots**

This strategy would include constructing more parking areas and infrastructure at popular destinations to improve access as park visitation grows.

### **Build for Demand: Entrance Station**

This strategy would redesign and expand the main (Moab) entrance to accommodate and process more vehicles as they enter the park and to prevent vehicles from backing onto US Highway 191.

### **Build for Demand: Secondary Roads**

This strategy would include the creation of another formal entrance station, with improved road infrastructure, into the park on either Willow Springs Road or Salt Valley Road.

## When Making Public Comments, Please Consider the Following Questions:

1

What issues, objectives, and goals should the NPS consider when evaluating the management of visitor access at Arches National Park?

2

What do you like or dislike about the strategies presented in this newsletter and why?

3

What other strategies should be considered and why?

4

What did you learn from the two years of managed access pilots at Arches National Park? What worked well for you? What could have been better?



# WE WANT YOUR FEEDBACK

### How to Comment

Please Submit ALL Comments No Later Than December 1, 2023.



Submit comments electronically at:  
<https://parkplanning.nps.gov/ARCHvisitoruse>



**Note:** Comments will not be accepted by fax, email, or any other way than electronically as noted above. Bulk comments in any format (hard copy or electronic) submitted on behalf of others will not be accepted. Before including your address, phone number, email address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment—including your personal identifying information—may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, the NPS cannot guarantee that it will be able to do so.

Following this comment period, the NPS will review all feedback received and plans to release a comment summary report in winter 2023.