

Freedom Riders National Monument Bus Burning Site Master Plan and Environmental Assessment

Anniston, Alabama

National Park Service
US Department
of the Interior



Dear Friends,

We at the National Park Service (NPS) are pleased to announce the release of the Master Plan and Environmental Assessment (MP/EA) for the Freedom Riders National Monument Bus Burning Site. The park is inviting you to review the MP/EA, attend a public meeting, and help shape the future of the Bus Burning Site by providing comments on the MP/EA. This newsletter provides background on the planning process to date, the upcoming public meeting, summarizes the alternatives with a focus on the NPS preferred alternative, and shares information on how to provide your valuable feedback to the project team. We are truly grateful for your involvement and engagement in this process, and we look forward to your continued participation.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Rolando Herts, Ph.D.

Superintendent, Freedom Riders & Birmingham Civil Rights National Monuments



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Get Involved

ATTEND THE PUBLIC MEETING

The 30-day public comment period on the MP/EA begins on August 25, 2025 and ends on September 24, 2025. The National Park Service will hold a public meeting in Anniston, Alabama on September 9, 2025. During the meeting, NPS staff will give a short presentation on the plan process, collect public comments on the Master Plan and Environmental Assessment, discuss methods for further public comment, and answer questions.

Meeting Date and Location

September 9, 2025 at 6:00 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.

Greyhound Bus Depot
1031 Gurnee Avenue
Anniston, AL 36201

Learn More and Provide Comments at the Project Website

Access the MP/EA, learn more about the Freedom Riders, Freedom Rides campaign, and the planning process at the project website:
https://parkplanning.nps.gov/FRRI_Bus_Burning_Plan.



Please visit the website
and share your thoughts
with the team during the
comment period between
August 25, 2025 and
September 24, 2025.



Park Overview

The Freedom Riders National Monument was established by presidential proclamation on January 12, 2017, to commemorate the stories, places, and people involved in the 1961 Freedom Rides, a nonviolent campaign that brought national attention to the reality of segregation in the Southern United States and forced the federal government to take action toward ending segregation in interstate travel.

The day of violence associated with the Freedom Rides in Anniston and Birmingham on May 14, 1961, gave national exposure to the segregation issue in the Southern United States, and many other rides maintained the issue's visibility with the American public. More than 400 Freedom Riders and many individual rides pressed the federal government to act. On May 29, 1961, Attorney General Kennedy petitioned the Interstate Commerce Commission to issue regulations banning segregation, and the commission subsequently decreed that by November 1, 1961, bus carriers and terminals serving interstate travel had to be integrated.

The Freedom Rides and Freedom Riders made substantial gains in the fight for equal access to public accommodations. Federal orders to remove Jim Crow signs on interstate facilities did not change social norms or political institutions overnight, but the Freedom Riders nonetheless struck a powerful blow to racial segregation.

Freedom Riders National Monument, located in Anniston, Alabama, is composed of two sites. The first is the former Greyhound bus terminal where, on Sunday, May 14, 1961, a group of segregationists attacked a bus carrying African American and White Freedom Riders. The second site is where the segregationist mob continued

its attack on the bus, setting it on fire, after it broke down almost 6 miles west of Anniston. Photographs of the burning bus – which appeared in hundreds of newspapers on Monday morning – became some of the most iconic images of the civil rights movement.

Today, the National Park Service manages the Greyhound Bus Station (Bus Depot) in Anniston, Alabama, and the Bus Burning Site in Calhoun County. These two properties make up the discontinuous units of Freedom Riders National Monument and, along with other resources across the South that are necessary to the understanding of the Freedom Rides, contribute to the significance of the national monument. The Bus Burning Site has been altered since the time of the Freedom Rides, including the development of a state highway immediately adjacent and alteration of the original route that the bus traveled through the area. The National Park Service is focusing on the Bus Burning Site during this master planning effort, which will enhance other ongoing efforts at the bus station in Anniston.

With the help of our partners and stakeholders, the National Park Service drafted multiple preliminary design concepts for development of the Bus Burning Site that were then refined to the four alternatives presented in the MP/EA.

The MP/EA will provide long-term guidance for public access to and commemoration of the Bus Burning Site at the national monument. The MP/EA evaluates alternatives and management actions proposed for the Bus Burning Site and analyzes impacts that could result from implementing these alternatives. Upon conclusion of this planning effort and the decision-making process, one of the alternatives or a combination of actions from the alternatives will become the long-term master plan.



Photo by Joseph Postiglione / Anniston Star. Courtesy of the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute



Photo: Current Conditions

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the MP/EA is to provide long-term guidance for public access to and commemoration of the Bus Burning Site. The plan outlines an approach for providing opportunities to contemplate the stories and resources associated with the monument. It integrates the monument's natural and cultural resource protection goals and assesses impacts related to visitor experience.

The plan addresses a range of issues and opportunities associated with the Bus Burning Site including:

- Identifying and prioritizing necessary infrastructure to support visitor access, use, and safety, as well as NPS operations at the Bus Burning Site.
- Enhancing public understanding of the history and significance of the Bus Burning Site and its connection to the broader civil rights movement.
- Providing a cohesive visitor experience throughout the park's subunits and projecting a clear NPS identity in all areas of the national monument.

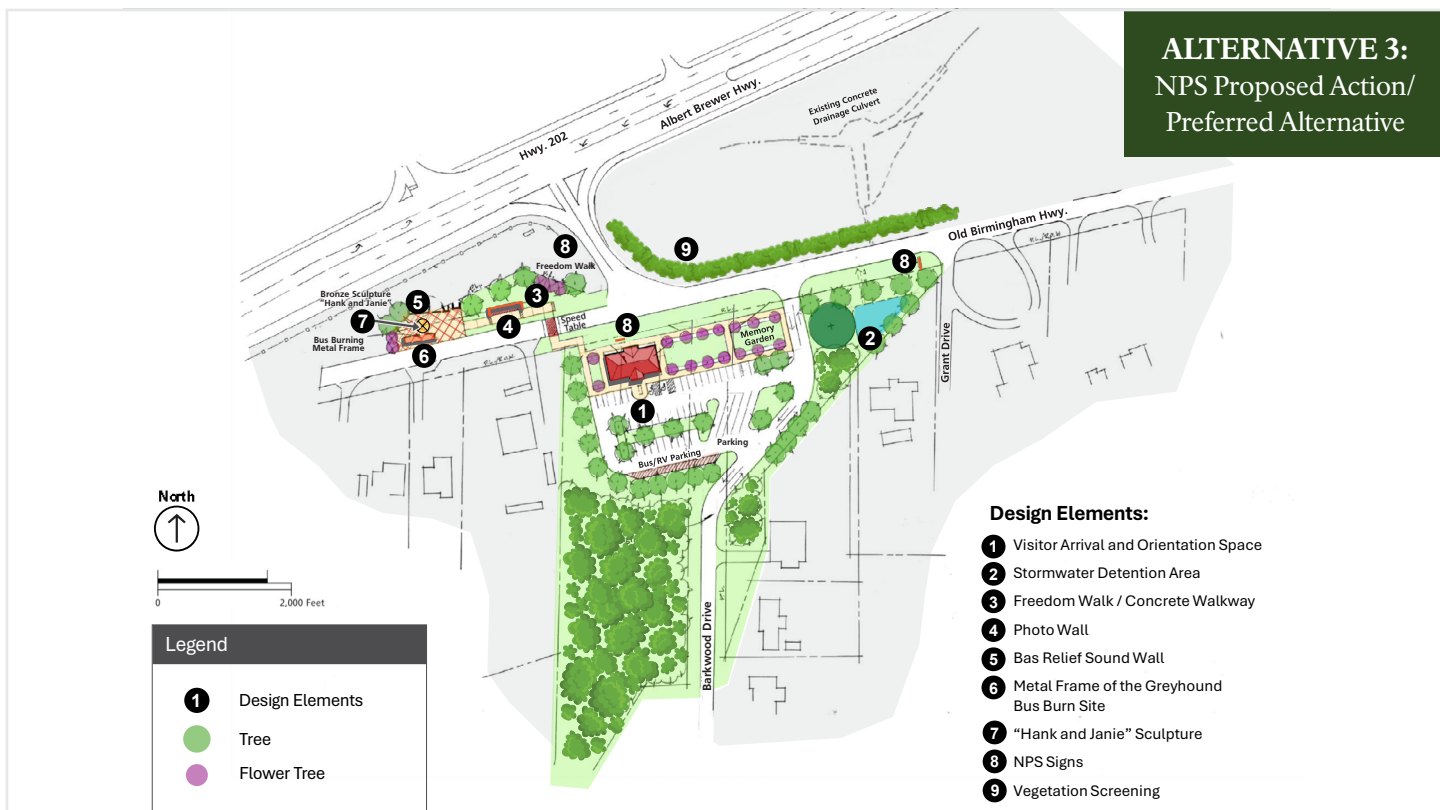
Alternatives

The MP/EA evaluates the following four alternatives:

- **Alternative 1:** No Action/Current Management
- **Alternative 2:** Existing Road Alignment
- **Alternative 3:** NPS Proposed Action / Preferred Alternative
- **Alternative 4:** Site Unification with Additional Buildout and Ramp Relocation

The NPS Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative (Alternative 3) is summarized in greater detail on page 4. Alternatives 2 and 4 are depicted on page 5.

More detailed information about each of the alternatives can be found in chapter 2 of the MP/EA which can be found here: https://parkplanning.nps.gov/FRRI_Bus_Burning_Plan



Alternative 3: NPS Proposed Action / Preferred Alternative

SITE LAYOUT:

This proposed action and preferred alternative would realign Barkwood Drive to the east, unifying and developing the segmented parcel south of Old Birmingham Highway, and would develop the northwest parcel that includes the historical location of the Bus Burning Site. The northeast parcel would not be developed, and the Highway 202 ramp would remain in its current location.

VISITOR ARRIVAL AND ORIENTATION SPACE:

Alternative 3 would provide a visitor contact station and interpretation elements south of Old Birmingham Highway and would realign Barkwood Drive to allow for increased parking, including oversized parking spaces for tour buses, behind the visitor contact station. Alternative 3 would also provide additional interpretive information about the Freedom Rides campaign in the area around the visitor contact station.

BUS BURNING SITE COMMEMORATION SPACE:

A Bus Burning Site Commemoration Space would be constructed at the site where the bus burning occurred and would include an installation of a metal frame depicting the Greyhound bus, including seats for the Freedom Riders and all others who were on the bus that day. A sound wall would be installed on the northern property line and would include an abstract of the Forsyth & Son Grocery story from the time of the burning. An interpretive photo wall along a concrete walkway would display images of the event.

BOUNDARY ADJUSTMENT:

The alternative provides a recommendation for a boundary adjustment that would add adjacent residential parcels of land at the end of Old Birmingham Highway to the monument. The boundary adjustment would allow for expanded preservation of the cultural landscape and serve future interpretation, educational purposes, and operational needs. It would also eliminate vehicular traffic at the end of Old Birmingham Highway and increase safety for visitors. Implementation of alternative 3 would not consolidate all NPS parcels but would reduce the number of crossings required for visitors.

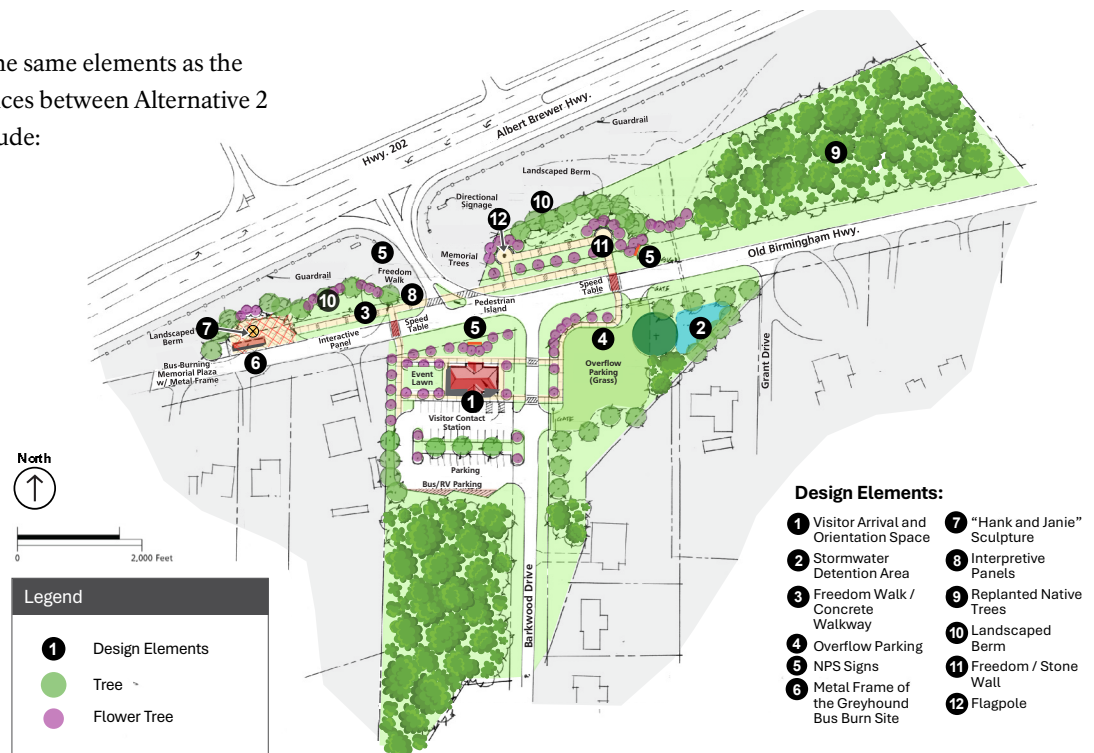
OTHER ELEMENTS:

NPS wayfinding, signage, concrete sidewalks, decorative paving, security and safety equipment (such as lighting and cameras), benches, and safety guardrails (along Highway 202) would be installed, along with traffic circulation and pedestrian safety measures such as crosswalks and speed tables. Disturbed areas would be revegetated with native vegetation to provide a contemplative park-like environment.

Alternative 2: Existing Road Alignment

Alternative 2 includes several of the same elements as the preferred alternative. Key differences between Alternative 2 and the Preferred Alternative include:

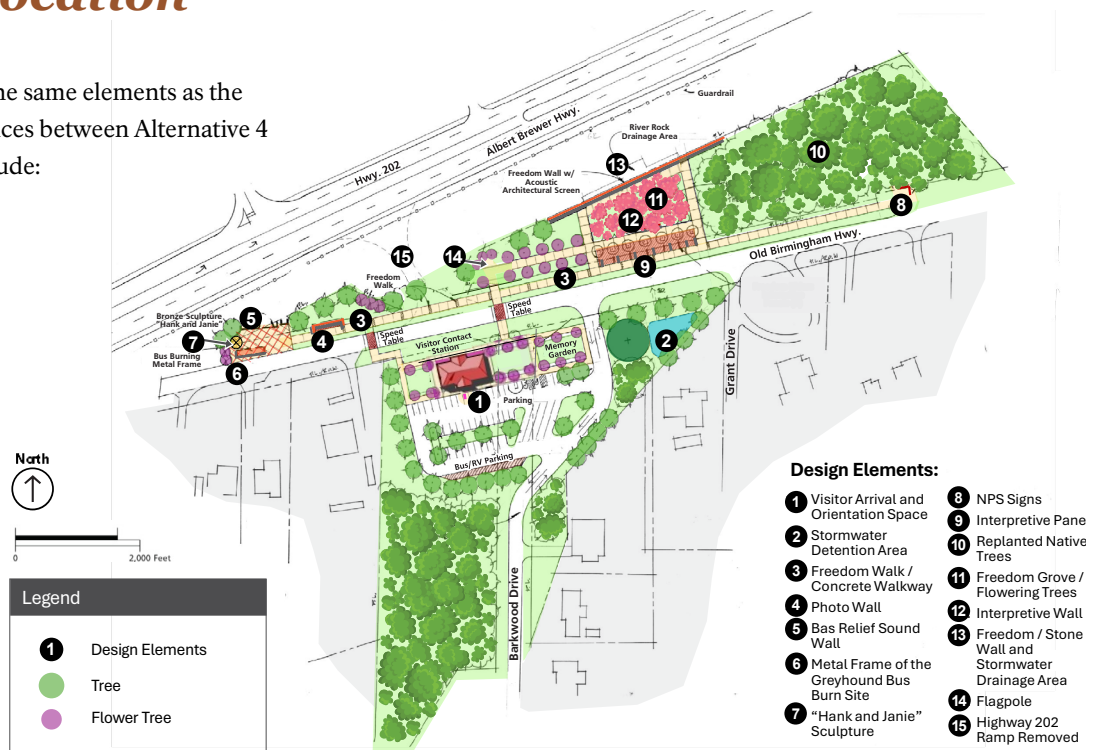
- No modifications to the existing roadway alignment, which would require more road crossings for visitors.
- Development of a Freedom Plaza on the northeast parcel that would include additional interpretive elements.



Alternative 4: Site Unification with Additional Buildout and Ramp Relocation

Alternative 4 includes several of the same elements as the preferred alternative. Key differences between Alternative 4 and the Preferred Alternative include:

- Removal of the Highway 202 off-ramp that currently bisects the northern two parcels.
- Development of a Freedom Plaza on the northeast parcel that would include additional interpretive elements.



Note: More detailed information about each of the alternatives can be found in chapter 2 of the MP/EA which can be found here: <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/FRRIBusBurningPlan>.

Schedule

August 25, 2025

Release of the MP/EA for public review and comment (we are here).

October 2025

Review and address public comments on the MP/EA and prepare the Public Comment Analysis Report

Winter 2025

Release final NPS decision document and MP

**The project schedule is subject to change.*



Photo: Existing Historical Marker at the Bus Burning Site

WE WANT YOUR
FEEDBACK



How to Provide Comments

Your participation will help to shape this project! The NPS will review comments from the public and stakeholders and will respond to substantive comments. The comment period is from August 25, 2025 to September 24, 2025. Please submit comments no later than September 24, 2025.



ON THE WEB (PREFERRED METHOD) AT:

[https://parkplanning.nps.gov/
FRRI_Bus_Burning_Plan](https://parkplanning.nps.gov/FRRI_Bus_Burning_Plan)



BY MAIL:

National Park Service
Denver Service Center
Attn: Freedom Riders NM Plan / Charles Lawson
1 Denver Federal Center, Building 50
Denver, CO 80225



IN PERSON AT THE PUBLIC MEETING:

September 9th, 6:00 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.

Greyhound Bus Depot
1031 Gurnee Ave.
Anniston, AL 36201

NOTE: The National Park Service will not accept comments via fax or any method other than those specified above. Please also note that your entire comment—including personal identifying information such as your address, phone number, and email address—may be made publicly available at any time. While you can request in your comment that we withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so. The National Park Service will not accept comments submitted by individuals or organizations on behalf of other individuals or organizations.