Bandelier National Monument
Frijoles Canyon Visitor Access Plan

ITE 2016 Meeting
Tuesday July 12
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Bandelier National Monument’s Frijoles Canyon (FC) Visitor Access Plan addresses a decades-long problem of accommodating visitation levels above the limited parking capacity. Located in a steep canyon, Bandelier is famous for cavates and ancient pueblo dwellings carved into the soft volcanic ash of a super volcano located 50 miles northwest of Santa Fe, New Mexico.
Today’s Agenda

- History of the project
- Obstacles we confronted
- Lessons learned
Need for a Transit System

- Geographic Obstacles
  - Frijoles Canyon contains the park’s primary resources and visitor center.
  - Parking in the canyon is very limited due to steep terrain, archaeology, and water resources. Congestion has been a concern for decades (the park has sometimes turned away visitors in peak season).
Need for a Transit System

- Parking Limitations
  - 86-space parking lot along the Frijoles Creek built by CCC is only available parking
  - Visitor center parking is now restricted in monsoon season (May-September) due to flood risks. Primary access is via shuttle (mandatory from 9am – 3pm daily) since 2012.
Need for a Transit System

- Fire and Flooding

- Before 2011, visitors could also park across the creek via a small bridge. The Las Conchas Fire and subsequent flooding from a burnt-out watershed destroyed 40% of parking in Frijoles Canyon.
The Solution - Emergency Shuttle

Partnership with Atomic City Transit helped provide Emergency Shuttle. Without shuttle service during peak visitation, most visitors would be turned away. Park capacity should not be defined by parking capacity.
Transit System

- 23-mile roundtrip transit route (3 stops)
- 1 bus shelter and signs
- 2 buses run every ½ hour
  May-October
- 108,359 boardings in 2015
Partnership

Owned and operated by Atomic City Transit (Los Alamos County), cost is divided between Los Alamos, Bandelier, and FTA 5311 grants. Currently, the system runs at no cost to the visitor, operating from May through October.
Transit service is provided by Atomic City Transit/ Los Alamos County through a multi-year cooperative agreement with BAND.

Atomic City Transit (ACT) is responsible for bus ownership, capital replacement, operations/maintenance and drivers. This is a key economic development driver for Los Alamos.

The service could be discontinued at any time.
Options for Visitor Access 2011-2015

0) No Action, emergency transit ends in 2016

1) Frijoles Canyon Parking Improvements and Travel Demand Management

2) Peak Season Internal Shuttle

3) Peak Season Internal Shuttle Plus Weekend Community Shuttle

4) Peak Season White Rock & Ponderosa Shuttles

4a) Transit with a partner (preferred)

5) Reservation system (reevaluated in 2015 and re-dismissed)
Revised Project Approach

- Workshop in July 2015 explored simplified, lower-cost approaches for visitor access in Frijoles Canyon only.

- Transit with a Partner option is light on capital improvements, focuses on immediate visitor access needs and is financially sustainable.

- Compliance has changed from an EA to a Cat X.
Alternatives

1) No Action, emergency transit ends in 2016

2) Transit with a partner (preferred)

3) Seasonal parking management by contractor

4) Seasonal reservation system (dismissed)
Summary of Findings for Preferred Alternatives

- Concept tested and proven 2012-2015
- Low costs for capital, O&M, and staff
- Financially sustainable with a transportation fee and partnership business model
- Bandelier pays less than 1/3 of the total system costs
Key Takeaways

1) Strip down to essential service
2) Don’t build your way out of a problem
3) Don’t be afraid to ditch your work
Summary of Findings

- Concept tested and proven 2012-2015
- Low-costs for capital, O&M and staff
- Financially sustainable with a $9 transportation fee
- BAND pays less than 1/3 of the total system costs
- Atomic City Transit/Los Alamos County is a willing partner
- Transit system maintains visitor access and positive experience while protecting visitors and staff from risks
- Low risk to both partners, system could be discontinued at any time