

PRELIMINARY ISSUES AND CONCERNS

Public Scoping: Construct New West Entrance
Station – Joshua Tree National Park



ABSTRACT

Constructing a new West Entrance Fee Station is Joshua Tree's highest priority capital improvement project. A successful project would resolve long-standing issues regarding traffic and fee collection.

[Joshua Tree National Park](#)

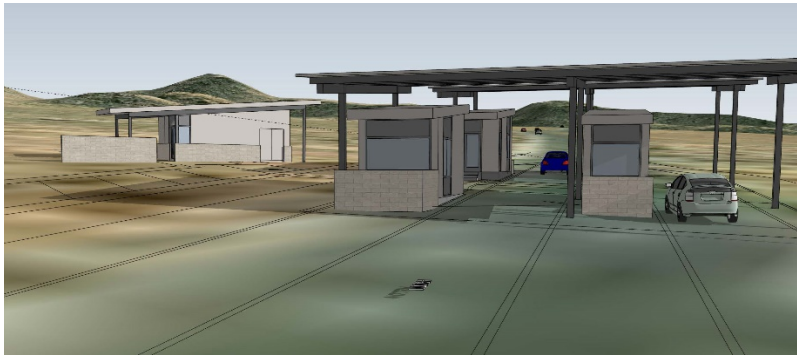
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Introduction

This project addresses issues with the inadequate size and location of the existing West Entrance Station located on Park Boulevard. The location of the existing station causes excessive traffic back-up outside the park that results in drivers doing unsafe maneuvers to try and bypass the line, and traffic congestion causing blocking of nearby private driveways and county streets. The situation causes considerable wait times for entrance, inefficient fee collection, and unsafe working conditions with idling cars and cars doing unsafe maneuvers to circumvent the line.



Objectives

- **Priority Project.** To address issues related to the long back-up of cars that impact adjacent communities just outside of NPS boundary, the park has identified this project as its top capital improvement project and has indicated this priority to the public. The

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park has been saving recreation fee funds for several years in order to construct the facility. This project has overwhelming support from the community.

- **Address Community Concerns.** The local community wants the issues that impact them to be resolved. During pre-NEPA, the park has received a package of 20 letters from the Monument Manor Neighborhood Association related to the issues they want resolved. The letters expressed support of the location of the new fee collection station and believe that the station is far enough up the road that there will no longer be queueing of cars beyond NPS boundary.
- **Off-Grid and Desert Mid-Century Modern.** The proposed new entrance fee station is located in an undeveloped desert setting. For setting compatibility, two key design concepts were part of the planning of the building and structures. First, the complex will be off-grid for electrical and data. The complex will be powered by a solar PV array with battery storage and data communication will be via satellite. Second, the building architecture is uniquely compatible with desert dwellings built mid-century. The complex will be compatible, yet unique, to other mid-century modern buildings associated with the park's historical landscapes and buildings.
- **Keeping Project on Schedule.** The project has support from the local public, especially the community just outside the West Entrance boundary. Because of funding shortfalls, the project has been delayed which has frustrated the public. To the extent possible, the park wants to keep the project on schedule.

Proposed Action Description Summary

The proposed action and preferred alternative is located approximately 2,550 linear feet east of the Park boundary. While the location is just around a curve in the road, the slope of the site and lack of rocks, trees or other obstructions still allows for high visibility in both directions. This location allows for more cars to queue.

The proposed action has two locations where project activities will take place:

Existing West Entrance Station Location:34.093484, -116.264885

Site 2 (Alt. 2 Preferred) Location:.....34.089806, -116.258905

Actions at Existing West Entrance Station:

- Demolish the existing single fee collection kiosk at the park's west entrance.
- Grind and remove striping that directs traffic to/away from fee kiosk
- Expand the parking area at the existing entrance area and construct a new accessible path to the park entrance sign.
- Remove and replace signage

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Actions at Site 2 Preferred Location

- Site Clearing - Prepare site for construction.
 - Clearing and Grubbing, strip and store topsoil, remove and protect 16 Joshua Trees
 - Remove existing asphalt and roadside swales
 - Earthwork / Grading of Site approximately 24,500 sf (Max disturbance 1.5 acres)
 - Widen the main park road to 5 vehicle lanes, including inbound and outbound bypass lanes
- Water utility trenching from existing West Entrance Station to the new station.
 - Trench for water
 - Electrical:
 - On-Site PV Array with battery storage and back-up generator
 - Data - Satellite
- Construct four new tandem (two per island, slab on grade) fee collection kiosks with curbed islands and connecting walkways.
- Construct separate staff comfort station/breakroom and materials storage room building with extended roofline (~630 sf); and adjacent staff parking spaces (9).
 - Construct On-site Sewer system which will be a septic tank with leachfield for the staff comfort station.
- Construct two large steel-framed shade shelters over fee collection kiosks to reduce sun directly shining on service windows and fee collectors.

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Figure 1: Disturbance Footprint



Alternative to Proposed Action

- No Action. The No Action alternative for this EA means there would be no project, park fee operations would continue to be done at the existing fee station. For this No Action alternative, the no action alternative would be the same as the baseline condition in which the other two action alternatives would be compared.
- Site 1
 - Site 1 is approximately 1,525 ft from the park boundary
 - The same site plan of four fee collection kiosks, a separate comfort station/storage room and small NPS-only parking area would be located at this site.

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Issues and Concerns – Pre-NEPA Civic Engagement / Internal Scoping

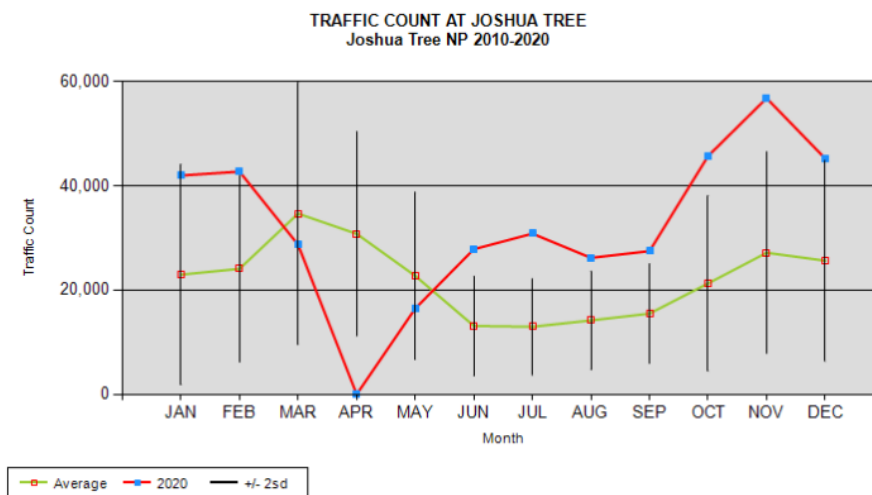
The following issues and concerns were raised during pre-NEPA Civic Engagement and internal scoping.

Excessive long traffic back-up outside the park boundary:

- Drivers doing unsafe maneuvers to try and bypass the line, including driving on the wrong side of the road, and driving thru open desert areas.
- Traffic congestion causing blocking of nearby private driveways and county streets outside NPS boundary
- Emergency vehicle access is hampered when there are long lines that form for entry into the park.

Considerable Wait Times for Entrance

- The existing West Entrance Fee station is only one kiosk. West Entrance can receive over 55,000 cars per month during the parks busy season. The chart shows 2020 traffic counts. During 2021, during the first five months, the traffic count has been over 45,000 cars per month. Despite efforts to get traffic diverted to other entrance stations, this is the park's most popular entrance. The volume of cars waiting to enter the park causes long waits and diminished visitor satisfaction.



drivers to go to

Inefficient Fee Collection

- For the volume of cars, the existing West Entrance station only has one kiosk and window. Although the park is utilizing other methods to collect fees (VUA's with tablets) and campaign to buy passes on-line, the configuration of the kiosk is not efficient for fee collection and pass-thru traffic. When lines get so excessive, for safety and visitor

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satisfaction reasons, the line is flushed and allowed to pass thru. This causes loss of revenue to the park.

Unsafe Working Conditions for VUA Staff

- Park Visitor Use Assistant (VUA) staff collecting fees are in hot conditions where excessive numbers of idling vehicles backed-up to enter the park cause emissions to build-up around the fee collection area. VUA's also mix with idling cars while in queue if collecting fees with tablets in order to help expedite entrance.
- The existing fee station is not accessible and does not meet ABAAS standards.
- The ingress and egress of VUAs into and out of the station has safety issues.

Specific Impacts of Concern:

- Clearing of ground to accommodate the new West Entrance Station would cause impacts to 16 Joshua Trees. The Joshua Tree is a State of California Candidate Species for protection under the California Endangered Species Act. Although the Joshua Tree does not have any federal protection under federal ESA, the health and viability of Joshua Trees is important to the park. As such, the park is committed to relocating these trees to adjacent areas, or back within the construction footprint after final grading has occurred.
- JOTR wildlife ecologist has determined the project would have an effect, but not likely to adversely affect (NLAA) the desert tortoise. Informal consultation has been initiated with the USFWS on this "Effects Determination". With the park committed to enacting measures to minimize harm, USFWS concurrence is expected. Informal consultation is occurring thru a Programmatic Biological Assessment (PBA) that is currently in-prep, but close to being finalized.
- JOTR Cultural Resource specialists have determined the proposed undertaking has the potential to affect historic properties. California State Historical Preservation Office (SHPO) has concurred on the park's determination. The park has developed a Draft MOA to address the adverse effect and has consulted with PWR staff on content. The Draft MOA will be part of the public review and comment for scoping and the Draft EA.

Public FAQs

Why is a new West Entrance Fee Station needed?

JOTR is proposing to relocate the west entrance station from the park boundary 5 miles outside the town of Joshua Tree, California to a new site located another one-half mile inside the park. The existing entrance station consists of a single fee collection kiosk, small parking area, and comfort station, approximately 250' inside the park boundary. Just outside the park boundary, private homes and driveways have proliferated. With significant increases in visitation, the

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vehicle queue of visitors entering the park often backs up past the park boundary for one to one and a half miles, blocking driveways, streets and impeding community circulation and services. By relocating the entrance station further into the park and expanding the number of fee collection kiosks, the vehicle queues will decrease and the risk of impeding neighbors and communities will be greatly reduced if not totally eliminated.

When will construction start?

Following a successful NEPA compliance process, the park estimates Construction could start in late Summer 2022.

How long will construction last?

From when the construction starts, construction is expected to take 8-12 months.

Will Park Boulevard be closed for construction?

Park Boulevard will remain open during construction. A by-pass road will be built to allow construction to move around the construction area where the new fee station will be located.

Will the new West Entrance Station fix the traffic that backs up into local community?

By relocating the entrance station further into the park and expanding the number of fee collection kiosks, the vehicle queues will decrease, and the risk of impeding neighbors and communities will definitely be reduced and most likely eliminated.

How many lanes and pay stations will the new West Entrance Fee Station have?

The new West Entrance Fee Station will have two lanes leading inbound through the two island of 4-kiosks and an additional lane that bypasses the fee kiosks. Kiosk windows will open depending on how much traffic is entering the park, with up to four kiosk windows available to open at the park's busiest times.

What will happen to the existing West Entrance Station?

The existing pay station kiosk will be removed along with all road markings, signs and striping. This will only be done after the new fee station is completely operational. Visitors will still be able to access the restroom and parking that currently exist at the site. Depending on funding availability, there will be some striping and parking changes done at the existing fee station parking area. These improvements would be done after the existing fee kiosk has been removed and the new fee station is operational.

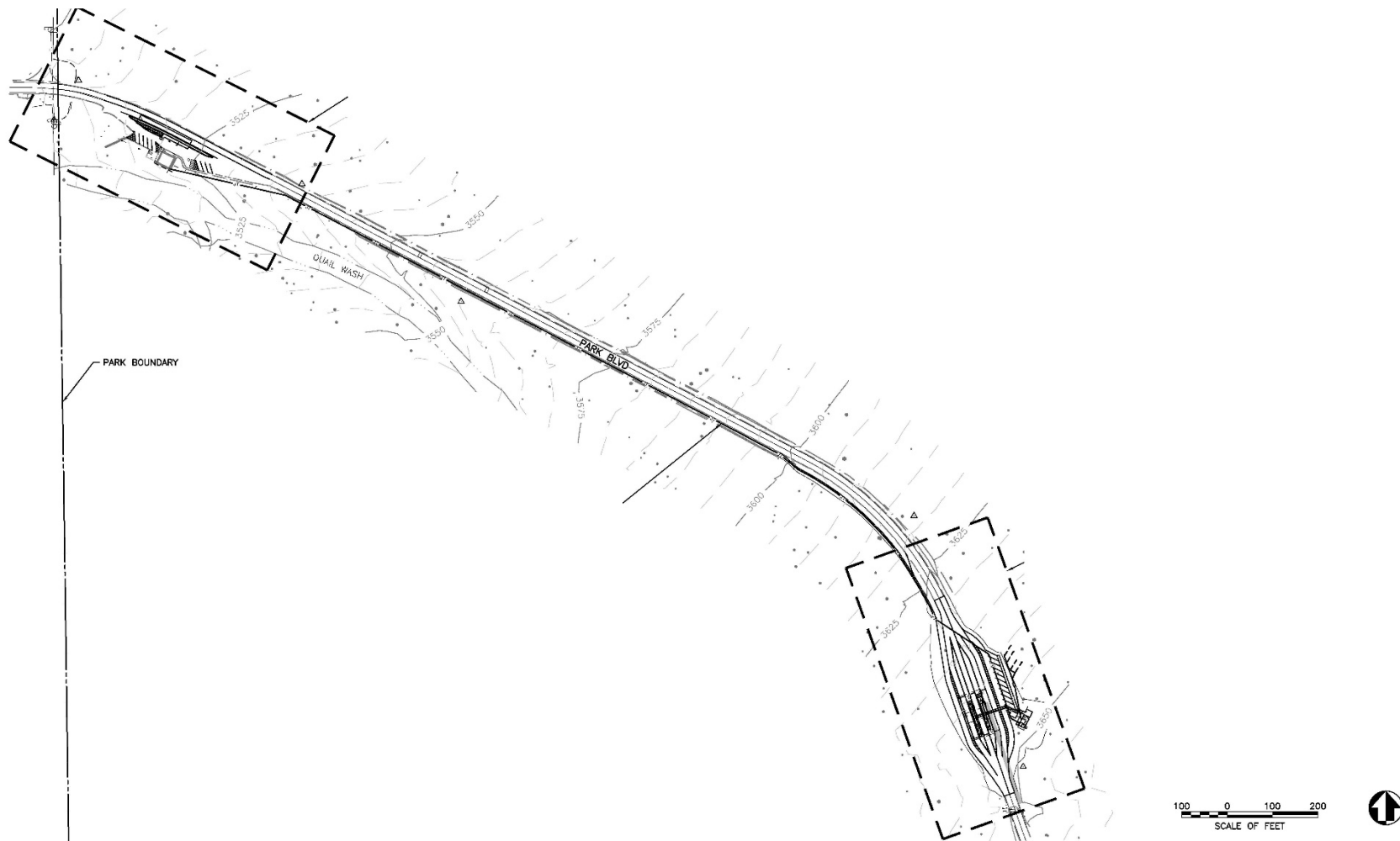
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Will there be any visitor amenities at the new West Entrance Station?

There will not be any visitor amenities at the new Fee Station. Visitor amenities (restroom, parking, and access to entrance sign) will remain at the existing fee station for our visiting public.

Draft Design Development Drawings

Figure A: Drawing Showing the Existing West Entrance Station and the Location of the Proposed New Station



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Figure B: Footprints of Construction Area and Asphalt Removal

