



You are Invited to Participate

The National Park Service (NPS), in cooperation with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), has initiated planning efforts for Section 8D of the Foothills Parkway (Section 8D) between Wears Valley and the Gatlinburg Spur (the Spur). At the same time, NPS is continuing planning efforts on Metcalf Bottoms Access Improvements in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park (the Park). NPS is seeking public feedback on both projects during a 30-day civic engagement period. In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Section 8D and the Metcalf Bottoms Access Improvements projects are considered “similar actions.” In other words, these projects share similar geography, timing, purpose, and other features but have independent utility and could proceed independently.

The public is encouraged to share observations, concerns, and ideas about the information presented in this newsletter. This information will be used to refine the elements and alternatives under consideration, identify issues, and ensure that NPS has the information needed to move forward in the planning process. After considering input received during this civic engagement period, the Park will refine preliminary alternatives and determine if it is appropriate to move forward with the formal NEPA, National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), and other environmental compliance processes. The NEPA and NHPA processes will offer additional opportunities for public involvement, including a public scoping period at the beginning of the NEPA process and a public comment period to solicit input about the NEPA document prepared by the Park.

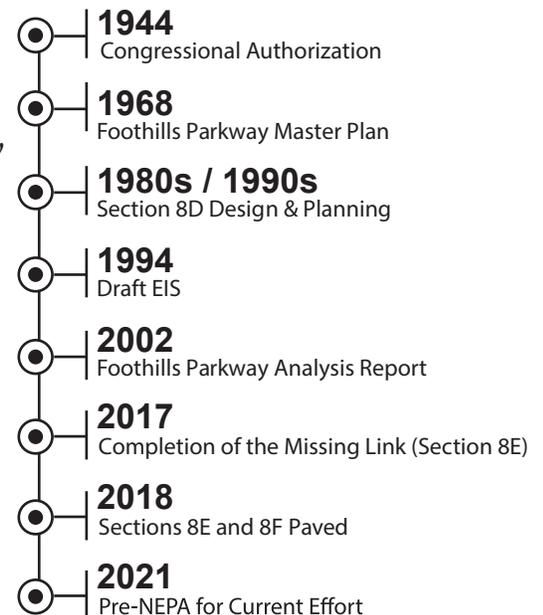




Background

In 1944, the US Congress passed Public Law 232 authorizing the construction of the Foothills Parkway adjacent to Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The Parkway would extend for 72 miles between US Route 129 to Interstate 40. Approximately 38.6 miles of the Parkway have been constructed and are open to visitors. The Parkway remains the only congressionally mandated parkway in the United States not completed. One section that has not been developed is Section 8D (approximately 9.8 miles), a corridor from US Highway 321 (Wears Valley Road) to US 441/321 (the Spur) between the cities of Pigeon Forge and Gatlinburg. Construction of Section 8D was previously evaluated in a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Draft EIS) published in 1994; however, a Final EIS was never completed because environmental issues and wall failures during the construction of Section 8E in the mid-1980s led NPS to pause the construction of future segments until Section 8E was completed. The first mile of Section 8D in Wears Valley was preliminarily designed and analyzed within the Wears Valley Mountain Bike Trail System Environmental Assessment in October 2020, so the current planning process is focused on the remaining 8.8 miles.

Line Springs Road/Wear Cove Gap Road currently provide access between US 321 and Little River Gorge Road. Wear Cove Gap Road was originally constructed in 1900 as an 18-foot-wide gravel road paralleling the drainage of Sweetwater Valley. The road was paved in the late 1980s to reduce dust. *The Metcalf Bottoms Access Improvements & Wears Valley Mountain Bike Trail Network Feasibility Report (Feasibility Report)* examined the feasibility of various access improvements into Metcalf Bottoms, including improvements or changes to the existing access along Wear Cove Gap Road as well as new roadways with direct access into the Park from the first mile of Section 8D. Prior to developing *the Feasibility Report*, the Park obtained initial public input on *the proposed Metcalf Bottoms Access Improvements* during a civic engagement public comment period from April 20 through May 22, 2020. Comments received during that period were reviewed and incorporated into *the July 2020 Feasibility Report*. The park has refined *the Feasibility Report* findings into a preliminary range of alternatives, which are included in this newsletter for public review and comment. Figure 1 displays the project area.



Foothills Parkway Timeline

Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose of the proposed action is to:

- Construct Section 8D of the Foothills Parkway between Wears Valley Road and the Spur; and
- Address safety and traffic flow issues in the Metcalf Bottoms area to provide high-quality visitor experiences, protect park resources, improve safety along Wear Cove Gap Road, and alleviate existing and future motor vehicle congestion to complement overall visitor access and traffic flow on the Tennessee side of the Park.

The proposed action is needed to fulfill the intent of the 1944 legislation that authorized construction of the Foothills Parkway and to address safety, congestion, and visitor access in the Metcalf Bottoms area. Traffic volume on Wear Cove Gap Road exceeds design capacity and creates safety concerns, especially for large vehicles. The high volume of park-related traffic is also a concern on Line Springs Road outside the Park. Current access along Line Springs Road/Wear Cove Gap Road was not designed to accommodate the volume or size of vehicles that currently use it. The steep and winding road can be a challenge for large vehicles, including recreational vehicles that cannot make a sharp 90-degree turn at the bridge to the Metcalf Bottoms Picnic Area. Additionally, the lack of separation between pedestrians and vehicles at the Metcalf Bottoms Picnic Area is a concern, specifically near the one-lane bridge and where vehicles need to back up onto Wear Cove Gap Road to exit the parking area for the restroom facilities.

Great Smoky Mountains National Park

Foothills Parkway Section 8D / Metcalf Bottoms Access Improvements
Civic Engagement - Fall 2021

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

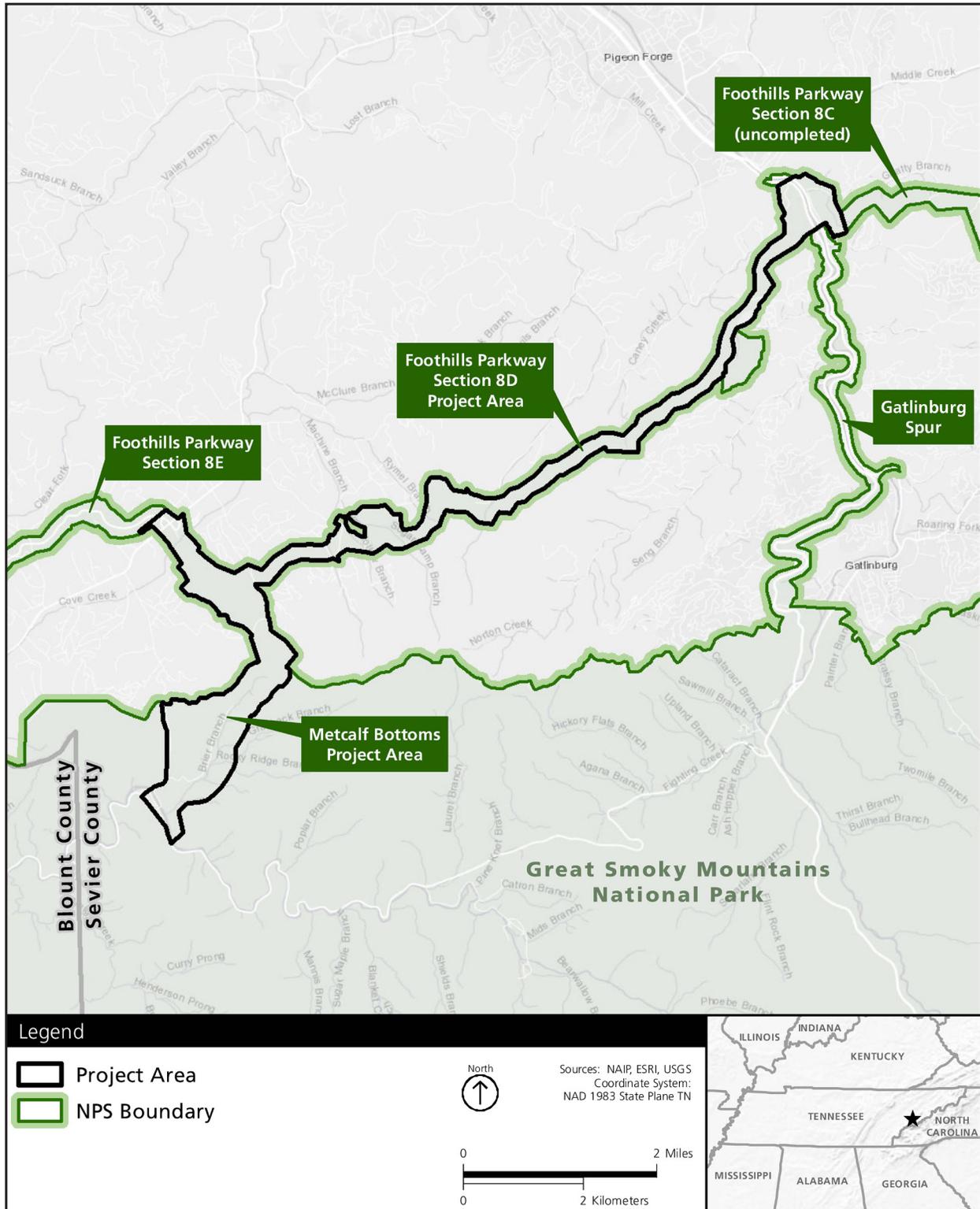


Figure 1 | Project Area



Preliminary Alternatives

Foothills Parkway Section 8D

NPS and FHWA originally completed baseline studies and preliminary designs for Section 8D between the late 1980s and early 1990s. This information was used to define the proposed action and alternatives analyzed in the 1994 Draft EIS and will be used as preliminary designs for the current planning effort. Currently, the preliminary conceptual design for Section 8D includes:

- Approximately 8.8 miles of new Parkway connecting Section 8E in Wears Valley to the Spur within the authorized corridor, which ranges from 500 to 1,000 feet wide.
- A two-lane roadway, approximately 24 feet wide with 4-foot shoulders, and a posted speed limit of 25 to 35 miles per hour.
- An approximately 1,000-foot tunnel through Crooked Arm Ridge.
- A bridge over the Spur and West Prong Little Pigeon River with an interchange between Section 8D and the Spur.
- Details for handling and disposing of pyritic materials that could be uncovered during construction of the proposed tunnel.

Technical studies related to water resources, karst features, wildlife, vegetation, protected species, cultural resources, traffic, soundscapes, viewsheds, and socioeconomics are underway to support NEPA and NHPA compliance. After the surveys, design review, and this public comment review are complete, NPS will refine the preliminary range of alternatives for additional public comment during the public scoping period, anticipated during the first half of 2022.

Metcalf Bottoms Access Improvements



View from Little Brier Gap

The existing Line Springs Road/Wear Cove Gap Road is an approximately 20-foot-wide asphalt road. Sevier County owns and maintains Line Springs Road (from US 321 in Wears Valley to the Park boundary at Wear Cove Gap); the Park owns and maintains Wear Cove Gap Road. A one-lane wooden bridge over the Little River provides access to the Metcalf Bottoms Picnic Area and Little River Gorge Road. This two-lane paved road was not designed to serve as a primary entrance to the Park or to support current levels of visitor and local traffic. Use of this route as an entrance has increased traffic through the Metcalf Bottoms Picnic Area and has resulted in conflicts related to large recreational vehicles attempting to navigate the one-lane bridge over the Little River. To address access issues on Wear Cove Gap Road, a selection of alternatives from the 2020 Feasibility Report are proposed for further evaluation. The



preliminary action alternatives are provided in Figure 2.

The preliminary alternatives include:

- Making no changes, or the no action (Alternative 1).
- Close Wear Cove Gap Road to thru traffic and construct a turnaround between the Park boundary and Little Greenbrier Road. Existing access would be maintained to Little Greenbrier School and Cemetery and to Little Greenbrier Trailhead (Alternative 6).
- Reclassify portions of Wear Cove Gap Road to one-way, exit-only and construct a turnaround between the Park boundary and Little Greenbrier Road. Existing access would be maintained to Little Greenbrier School and Cemetery and to Little Greenbrier Trailhead (Alternative 7).
- Improving existing Wear Cove Gap Road to meet NPS design standards and allowing oversized vehicles to safely make turns (Alternative 5).
- Connecting the first mile of Section 8D and the Metcalf Bottoms Picnic Area using one of three options (Alternatives 2, 3, and 4). These alternatives could include one-way entry or exit only options.

The alternatives also consider the need for vehicle turnaround areas and trailhead access. Under any of the preliminary action alternatives, the existing bridge over the Little River would be replaced with a two-lane bridge, better aligned to accommodate the turning radius of larger vehicles, and the existing bridge would be maintained for pedestrian access. Additionally, all new bridge options would retain the same number of picnic sites and would improve motor vehicle/pedestrian separation within the picnic area. Three options for the new bridge location include:

- Extending Wear Cove Gap Road directly across the Little River at the first 90-degree bend downstream of the existing bridge.
- Realigning a new bridge to remove the 90-degree turn in the general vicinity of the existing bridge.
- Constructing a new bridge upstream.

NPS is not considering any improvements to Line Springs Road because that road is outside the Park and under the jurisdiction of Sevier County.



One-lane bridge at Metcalf Bottoms Picnic Area

Great Smoky Mountains National Park

Foothills Parkway Section 8D / Metcalf Bottoms Access Improvements
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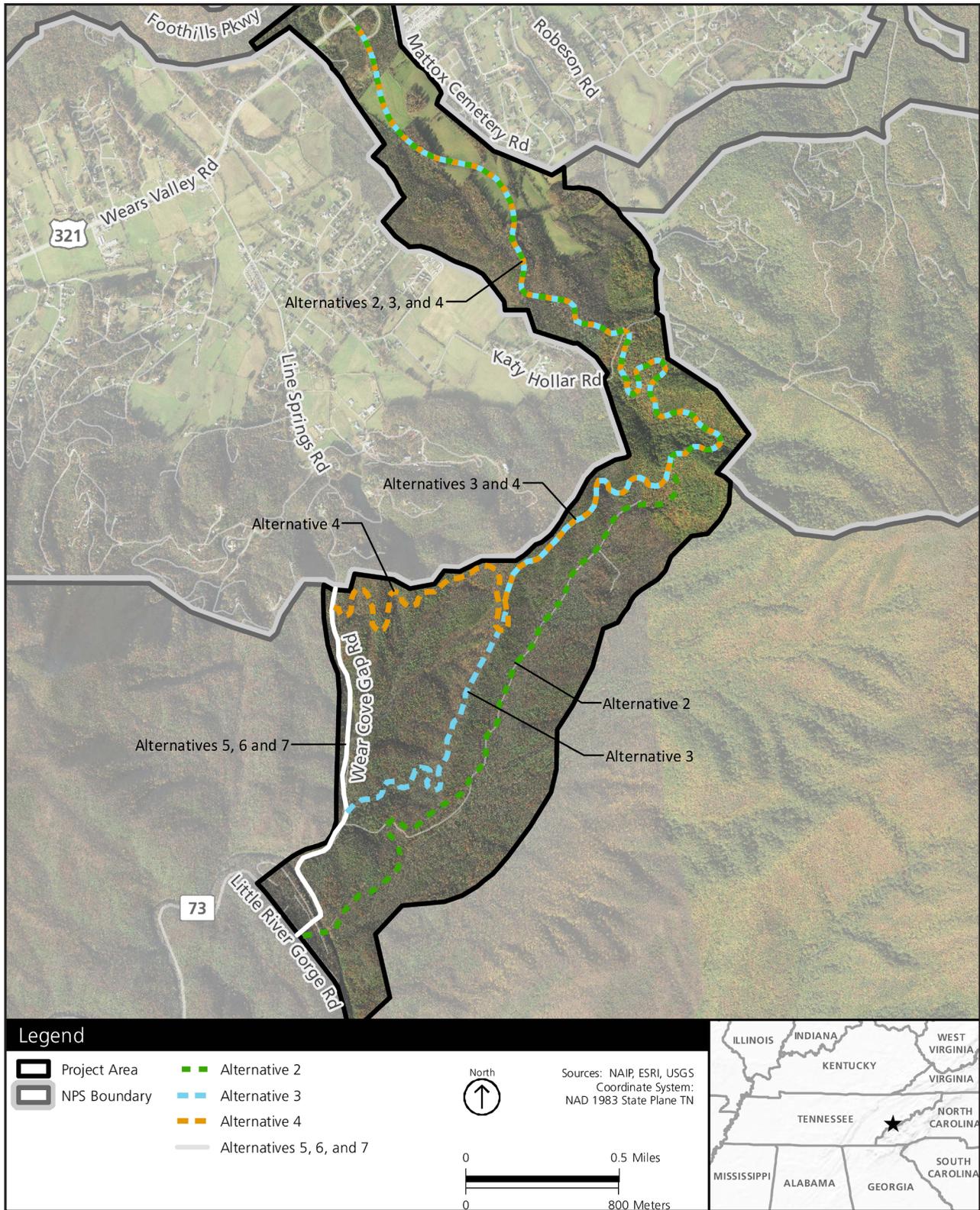


Figure 2 | Metcalf Bottoms Access Improvements Preliminary Alternatives



Schedule

This civic engagement period provides an opportunity for the public to be involved in the planning process. The public will have additional opportunities to provide input as outlined below. The comment period will be open through October 31, 2021. Once NPS has reviewed all public and agency comments on the proposed project and range of alternatives from the Feasibility Report, NPS will prepare the preliminary range of alternatives for NEPA analysis and start the public scoping comment period for additional public input. An additional opportunity for public comment will be provided when the NEPA document is released.

April/May 2020	Civic engagement period 1 (Metcalf Bottoms Access Improvements)
October 2021	Civic engagement period 2 (We are here)
Winter 2021	Review civic engagement comments and finalize supporting resource studies
Winter 2022	Develop the preliminary range of alternatives
Early Spring 2022	Public scoping period
Late Spring 2022	Prepare the internal draft EA
Summer 2022	Release EA for public review/public comment period
Fall 2022	NPS decision

Virtual Meeting Schedule

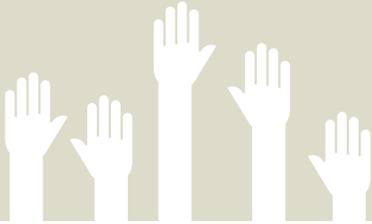
The Park will host a virtual public meeting from 5:00 to 6:00 p.m. on Thursday, October 14, 2021. Park staff will present an overview of the proposal from 5:00 to 5:30 p.m. and will then be available to answer questions from the public until 6:00 p.m.

To attend the meeting on October 14, 2021, please use this link and join the meeting 5 to 10 minutes early to test your connection.

Meeting Link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85645135682>

Telephone Access: +1-312- 626-6799

If you would like to call in on listen-only mode and not view the presentation, please call (312) 626-6799 and enter Webinar ID 856 4513 5682.



Your participation will help shape these projects.

How to Comment

Until **October 31**, there are a variety of ways you can submit comments:



Submit comments electronically (preferred method):
<https://parkplanning.nps.gov/Section8D>



Submit written comments by mail to:
Great Smoky Mountains National Park
Section 8D/Metcalf Access Civic Engagement
107 Park Headquarters Road
Gatlinburg, TN 37738

The public comment period ends on **October 31, 2021**.