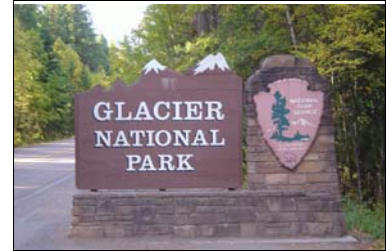




## Glacier Park Feasibility Analysis

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This section presents a feasibility analysis for Eagle Transit to operate future services under contract with Glacier National Park (GNP). A Draft Implementation Plan for transit services within Glacier has been completed. Transit service within the park is a mitigating measure due to the reconstruction of the *Going-to-the-*



*Sun Road* (GTSR), an approximate eight-year reconstruction effort of the road leading from West Glacier, over Logan Pass, to the town of St. Mary on the east side of the pass.

Service options have been developed and refined and are comprised of two main routes on GTSR which meet at Logan Pass. The other component is a circulator route from the planned Apgar Transit Facility, located inside the west entrance to the park at the southern end of Lake McDonald.

Service would be provided approximately 63 to 69 days per year depending on weather. For planning purposes, the midpoint of approximately 65 days of service has been used. The two GTSR routes and the Apgar Circulator route would all operate on 30-minute headways, allowing for timed transfers at Logan Pass between the GTSR routes and at the Apgar Transit Center between the West GTSR route and the Apgar Circulator route.

### SYSTEM COMPONENTS AND COSTS

According to the *Transit System Implementation Plan - Draft Report*, a total of 17 vehicles would be needed to operate the service. While the report does not specify the number of peak or average daily vehicles per route, estimates have been made. This was done to determine operating costs for the east and west side service components. It is envisioned that separate providers may contract with GNP for service based upon the fact that the park is divided by Flathead and Glacier county lines.

However, at this point, this represents mere speculation. Table VIII-1 presents the draft implementation plan's features of service and costs. This information was taken directly from the draft report. As shown in Table VIII-1, service is projected to cost approximately \$790,000 annually, based upon estimated cost for 65 days of service. However, this represents the cost for all GNP services and is required to be allocated to the east and west sides. The reason for this is that Eagle Transit would be eligible under current operating policy to operate the west side service only. Another entity, such as Blackfeet Transit on the east side, would be an agency eligible to operate that service. Public transit/transportation agencies are the most beneficial to operate the service. There are several reasons why this is so:

- Eligible to use national park revenue as local match for 5311 general public service funding from FTA.
- Existing program for drug and alcohol testing for drivers.
- Existing drivers' training program.
- Management experience.
- Proximity to park.
- Existing or future connections to park.
- Existing maintenance program for vehicles.

This is not a comprehensive list of the advantages toward coordinating efforts between the park and a nonprofit public transit agency such as Eagle Transit. However, it provides a glimpse of the contracting or partnership advantages.

<b>Table VIII-1 Allocated Service Characteristics</b>					
<b>Service</b>	<b>Vehicles</b>	<b>Daily Service Hours</b>	<b>Total Daily Hours</b>	<b>Annual Hours</b>	<b>Annual Cost</b>
Apgar Circulator	2	17	34	2,210	\$143,650
GTSR West Side	6	17	102	6,630	\$430,950
GTSR East Side	3	17	51	3,315	\$215,475
<b>Totals</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>12,155</b>	<b>\$790,075</b>
<b>Totals veh w/spares</b>	<b>17</b>				
<b>Estimated Spare Ratio</b>	<b>35%</b>				
<i>Note: Based upon \$65/hr operating costs.</i>					
<i>Source: Draft Transit System Implementation Plan, GNP, May 2005, LSC 2005.</i>					

## ALLOCATED COSTS

As mentioned, to determine the feasibility of operating the Glacier services, the costs needed to be allocated between services and service areas. The LSC Team attempted to allocate service and costs based upon the description of scheduled service in the draft implementation report. Based upon the schedule of services, it was determined that of the 17 buses, six would be needed to operate the West GTSR and two additional vehicles for the Apgar Circulator. This leaves three buses for the East GTSR service and the remaining for spare vehicles. Table VIII-2 presents a summary of estimated allocated service and costs. This is based upon \$65.00 per service-hour. This is higher than what it costs Eagle Transit to operate; however, the additional maintenance and management operations would warrant this increase. As shown in Table VIII-2, allocated costs for the west side service would cost approximately \$431,000 annually for 65 days of service. However, the draft implementation plan mentions that additional ITS and facility maintenance would bring the total operating costs to an estimated \$945,600, 16 percent higher than the estimated \$790,000 costs for operations. For planning purposes, the \$790,000 operating costs will be used until a final ITS plan and cost is developed.



<b>Table VIII-2 Funding Advantages</b>			
<b>Agency</b>	<b>Full West GTSR Operating Cost</b>	<b>Total Leveraged Funds FTA</b>	<b>Additional Funds for Eagle Transit</b>
Flathead Agency	\$430,950.00	\$916,914.89	\$485,964.89
<i>Notes: *Assumed GNP pays 100% operating costs</i>			
<i>** Assumes a 53% federal match and 47% local match for operating 5311 assistance</i>			
<i>Source: LSC, 2005</i>			

## SERVICE AGREEMENTS

Currently GNP uses four different arrangements to provide park visitors with transportation services. These include:

- *Concession Contracts:* Operator has self-sufficient service, no GNP revenues invested.
- *Service Contract:* GNP contracts and pays for service. Either GNP or other entity may own vehicles and facilities.
- *Partnership Arrangements:* Partnership with other public and/or private entities, including local transit agencies.
- *Park Operated:* Obviously under this option, the park would operate the service directly.

The draft implementation plan states that under a partnership arrangement, “there are no obvious partners for transit service operations.” However, Eagle Transit and Blackfeet Transit are two such transit agencies who could partner with Glacier National Park.

## **ADA COMPLEMENTARY PARATRANSIT**

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act, complementary paratransit service must be made available when and where fixed-route services are provided. Any agency providing fixed-route public transportation service must provide complementary services for the disabled. Generally, national parks must also be accessible or make every attempt at being accessible for persons with disabilities. There was no mention of paratransit services, only that the buses would have wheelchair tiedowns. This service requirement should be examined in more detail to determine if ADA compliance with complementary paratransit service is required in the park. This obviously would increase the costs of service by as much as \$140,000 to \$150,000 annually.

## **ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES**

There are obvious advantages to partnering with GNP on this future endeavor; however, many disadvantages may also become apparent. First, from a fiscal responsibility standpoint, the use of visitor revenues as local match for additional 5311 FTA funding is a wise use of funding. Second, capital advantages are apparent, and in this case, this refers only to vehicle capital. Finally, with the leveraged funds, this may mean additional services could be provided by Eagle Transit.

## **Financial**

As mentioned, under the current FTA environment, a transit service provider is responsible for 47 percent local match to operate any 5311 general public service in Montana. As shown in Table VIII-2, this would equate to approximately \$917,000 in leveraged FTA funding, of which approximately \$486,000 can be used for additional services. This is approximately \$20,000 less than the existing total Eagle Transit budget. In other words, this an extremely large amount of additional funding for Eagle Transit alone. From a fiscally-responsible standpoint, this would make more financial and public service sense than hiring a private operator who would not be eligible for the matching FTA funds.

## **Capital**

There are many decisions regarding the type of vehicles to be used, the procurement process, contract or partnership agreements, and a host of others which GNP will have to make in the very near future if service is to begin in 2006. The vehicles which GNP wish to operate would really be limited during the 65 days of service to the park. However, these vehicles could be leased to Eagle Transit for use the remaining portion of the year. So, for the summer season, Eagle Transit would have additional operating dollars for service; however, there would be no local match for vehicles. One way to leverage capital through FTA may be to have Eagle Transit purchase the vehicles through the 5311 grant application process on behalf of GNP using the Park Service funds as the local match. This would leverage more dollars for Eagle Transit to purchase additional buses to operate increased service, particularly from the valley to the west GNP entrance at West Glacier. This may be advantageous to both GNP and Eagle Transit.

## **Labor**

This would include Eagle Transit hiring additional drivers based upon seasonal service in the park and possible additional service to the park and other parts of Flathead County. The may very well involve a full-time on-sight supervisor in the park. This position would be year-round as it will take time to recruit and train seasonal drivers, and evaluate system performance, vehicle performance and maintenance functions, as well as a host of other duties. This may be true for service on the east side as well, although there are fewer drivers and this may become a

duty of the west side supervisor only. This additional position would be staffed by an experienced supervisor with management experience. This staff position would likely have a base salary of approximately \$35,000 to \$40,000 annually with additional benefits as appropriate.

## **Legal**

A number of legal issues exist through this partnership. First, several questions arise such as:

- Would drivers have to be in the current County Teamsters Union?
- Are there competitive bid issues which need to be addressed prior to direct contracting with Eagle Transit?
- What are the responsibilities of each—GNP and Eagle Transit—for the provision of service?

These and a host of other questions will need to be examined as the process progresses. Prior to any contracting, the Flathead County Attorney, National Park Attorney, and State Attorney General should review all contracts for legality issues which may arise.

## **Timing**

Obviously, timing is an issue. The current Montana Department of Transportation (MDT)/FTA Grant Application Cycle is underway with applications generally due to MDT February 1, 2006. However, under the new SAFTEA-LU transportation bill, MDT is re-evaluating its funding cycle and surplus of funds for 2006. This may allow agencies to turn in grant applications after February 1 at a date to be determined. However, GNP will need vehicles and an operator to be ready to implement service beginning in June 2006. This may create a timing issue for vehicle procurement for the park and force them to purchase vehicles on their own. Timing of specific issues will be addressed as they arise and are identified.

## **PARTNERSHIP IMPLICATIONS**

The implications for partnering with GNP could increase the services Eagle Transit provides over the course of the next decade. While it is difficult to determine the

exact advantages partnering would have, suffice to say, these implications could be abundantly positive. The main question which needs to be answered is:

- ***Should Eagle Transit operate the Glacier National Park transit service?***

At this point, it does appear beneficial for Eagle Transit and GNP to partner to leverage additional operating funds and possible capital funds for service. However, GNP has mentioned that they may like to see a capital agreement reached between GNP and the provider. This will make the provider fund a portion of the costs of vehicle purchases. If this were to occur, it is unlikely that Eagle Transit could procure this additional funding to match vehicle purchase. However, if GNP purchases the vehicles outright, Eagle Transit is in a position to operate such service. However, without additional capital during the summer months, Eagle Transit would have the operating funds but no vehicles to operate these additional services. After the park closes for the season, Eagle Transit would then have access to these vehicles to operate them for additional Flathead County services. The dilemma is, Eagle Transit can operate the services but would be short vehicles during the 65 days that the park is open if the additional funds were applied to operating services.

One option which could be explored is the leasing of vehicles during this 65 days to provide additional GNP connections from the valley and increase services provided by Eagle Transit. One such possibility is that Big Sky, Montana or another area may possibly have vehicles which could be leased during this time to operate the summer service. The other viable option is to use the local match from GNP to purchase capital with a portion of funds and have the remaining for 5311 operating match.