

TRANSPORTATION IN THE NATIONAL PARKS

ISSUE

Motorcoaches bring millions of visitors to national parks and wilderness areas each year and should be regulated in a way that is mindful of the industry's contributions to a vibrant and environmentally balanced tourism program in these areas. However the use of motorcoaches in some parks is unfairly restricted, which negatively impacts the viewing experience of the traveling public and the positive congestion mitigation effects offered by motorcoaches.

BACKGROUND

As the most fuel-efficient way to travel, motorcoaches are environmentally friendly and offer travelers a conservation minded way to access national parks. Since each motorcoach carries as many as 55 passengers, they significantly reduce the number of cars in the national parks, as well as the associated congestion and emissions, thereby helping to maintain the beauty of our national park system. Simply put, motorcoaches can help the national park system stay clean.

As part of the growing travel and tourism industry, motorcoach operators are closely tied with (and often are) tour operators and can be a helpful tool through which the National Park Service can promote travel to its "Hidden Treasures" destinations programs. These operators also offer access to national parks for certain targeted populations who do not currently have full opportunity to visit our national parks including the disabled community.

Too often, though, regulations have the direct effect of punishing motorcoaches, rather than rewarding them for the benefits they provide. Excessive access fees, lack of parking, limited park access and inadequate transportation facilities within and around our National Park Service all stand in the way of increased motorcoach service. In addition, the practice of requiring passengers to leave a motorcoach for a park service vehicle also stands in the way of efficiency as well as service.

Other issues that prevent service include the competition of public agencies for transportation opportunities in the National Parks. For example, one recent transit agency initiative on the Capitol Mall virtually duplicates the service accomplished by three private operators. The transit agency uses federal funds to undercut the private carriers' service. Finally, the effort of Park Service venues to limit the number of group tickets that may be purchased is likewise destructive of the bus industry. The motorcoach industry seeks to be regulated in a way that promotes motorcoach access to our nations' natural treasures rather than deters it.

ABA POSITION

ABA supports efforts to expand the use of motorcoaches within the national parks and wilderness areas. We seek opportunity for increased participation of the private sector in the development of mass transportation options for national parks and federally managed areas open to the public. We seek a fair and open process for bidding on service within the national parks. We support the development of a process that includes all modes of transportation in formulating solutions to the problem of congestion in parks and wilderness areas.

