

Protect America's National Parks and Gateway Economies: Preserve Commercial Tour Access and Grow Group Travel

Supporting Economic Growth, Efficient Park Management, and Sustainable Funding

America's National Parks welcome millions of visitors annually and generate substantial economic activity for gateway communities across the country. Commercial tour operators are a critical partner in delivering visitor access, reducing congestion, and supporting local businesses.

Recent National Park Service (NPS) fee policy changes and potential dramatic increases to commercial tour fees create uncertainty for commercial tour operators, international visitors, and communities that depend on tourism revenue. Policymakers should ensure that efforts to strengthen park funding do not unintentionally reduce visitation, increase congestion, or harm local economies.

Why Commercial Tours Matter

Improve Park Operations and Visitor Management

Commercial tours help the NPS manage growing visitation by:

- Reducing the number of individual vehicles entering parks
- Mitigating parking shortages and entrance station congestion
- Streamlining visitor movement and access
- Providing organized transportation that lowers operational burdens on park staff

Drive Economic Growth

Commercial tour visitors are high-value travelers who stay longer and spend more in gateway communities.

National Park visitation supports:

TOTAL ECONOMIC IMPACT

\$69.8^B

DIRECT VISITOR SPENDING

\$39.8^B

JOBS NATIONWIDE

515K

Reduced visitation resulting from higher fees would directly impact local businesses, hospitality providers, and state and local tax revenues.

2024 U.S. MOTORCOACH
INDUSTRY ACTIVITY

TOTAL ECONOMIC IMPACT

\$158^B

DIRECT TRAVELER SPENDING

\$69.8^B

TOTAL TAX REVENUE

\$27.7^B

FEDERAL, STATE, & LOCAL TAX

JOBS SUPPORTED

890K+

NATIONWIDE

PASSENGER MILES TRAVELED

37.6^B

PASSENGERS TRANSPORTED

400M



**American
Bus Association™**
100 Years



Why a Per-Passenger Fee Structure Doesn't Work for Group Travel

The NPS's new international visitor fee structure as applied to CUA-permitted passengers creates significant challenges for commercial tour operators and the communities that depend on visitor spending. While the industry supports sustainable park funding, a per-passenger fee model is poorly suited for group travel.



Group tours are planned and sold 12–18 months in advance. New per-passenger fees cannot be easily incorporated into existing contracts, forcing operators to absorb unexpected costs and creating pricing uncertainty for future bookings.



Per-passenger fees discourage the very travel model that helps parks operate more efficiently. Commercial tours consolidate visitors into a single vehicle, reducing congestion, parking demand, and traffic at park entrances. Penalizing group travel with additional per-person charges undermines these operational benefits.



Higher costs reduce international visitation and local economic activity. As tour prices increase, demand declines, leading to fewer overnight stays, lower visitor spending, and reduced tax revenue for gateway communities and small businesses that rely on park tourism.



A vehicle-based fee structure remains the most efficient and predictable approach, supporting visitor access, park operations, and economic growth while providing revenue for the National Park System.

Policy Recommendation

Commercial tours move more visitors with fewer vehicles. They are part of the solution to congestion management, economic development, and visitor access. Fee policies should incentivize—not penalize—the group travel model that reduces congestion, supports local economies, and improves the visitor experience. Congress and the Department of the Interior should protect this vital sector while pursuing sustainable funding solutions for America's National Parks by:

- Passing the **America the Beautiful Act (S.1547)**
- Opposing per-passenger entrance surcharges on commercial tours
- Clarifying that CUA-operated tours are not subject to passenger-based fees
- Aggregating park-based CUA reporting into a single national dataset to improve transparency and provide policymakers with the information needed to shape effective group travel and park access policies.

