

REQUEST FOR A CONCURRENT MILL CREEK CANYON SHUTTLE BUS NEPA STUDY

The Central Wasatch Commission respectfully requests that the USFS gives its support to complete a NEPA study of implementing a shuttle bus in Mill Creek Canyon concurrently with the ongoing NEPA being conducted by the FHA for the Mill Creek Canyon FLAP Grant.

STAKEHOLDER VOTE (TBD)

Past Shuttle Bus Study. Salt Lake County (SLCo) contracted with Salt Lake City-based Fehr and Peers transportation consultants in 2011-12 to study potential solutions to the growing traffic and parking problems in Mill Creek Canyon, and one of their recommendations was that SLCo pursue a pilot program of a shuttle system.

Current Conditions. Since the publication of that report, recreational canyon visitation has increased dramatically as a result of Utah having the fastest population growth in the nation (as of [the 2020 census](#)) and outdoor recreation participation has seen [substantial growth](#) since 2010 (enhanced by the global pandemic) in both winter and summer. Mill Creek Canyon has many days of overwhelming recreational use, resulting in dangerous and/or illegal roadside parking, and superfluous traffic by drivers who travel up the canyon only to find no legal parking spaces and return down the canyon. The high traffic volume is also a hazard to cyclists and pedestrians in the canyon and detracts from the overall visitor experience. Visitation to the adjacent Cottonwood Canyons has increased as well, prompting the Utah Department of Transportation to propose a gondola system up Little Cottonwood Canyon to alleviate traffic, and the Central Wasatch Commission to propose a Big Cottonwood Mobility Action Plan to address overwhelming traffic there. Anecdotally, congestion in the Cottonwood Canyons along with the implementation of paid parking has contributed to more recreational traffic in Mill Creek Canyon; however, no plans exist for addressing the increasing vehicle traffic in the canyon.

Support for Millcreek Shuttle. The 2015 Mountain Accord says “3.13.1. The signers of this Accord support piloting and potentially implementing a shuttle providing service in Mill Creek Canyon, with service to start before the summer of 2017, as recommended by the Mill Creek Canyon Transportation Feasibility Study completed in 2012. Incentives for using shuttle rather than private vehicles will be explored. 3.13.2. The signers of this Accord agree to work in good faith toward improvements to the road cycling and pedestrian environment in Mill Creek Canyon” Also, the 2003 UWCNF Forest Plan says “(G57) In the Tri-Canyon Area, cooperate with public and private entities to encourage the use of mass transit to access recreational facilities and programs adjacent to travelways.”, on p. 4-160 it says “The Forest Service will work actively with other parties to explore options for reducing private vehicular use within these Canyons.”, and on p. 4-162 “Visitors to the Tri-Canyon area will make increasing use of mass transit to reduce congestion on the highways, and mass transit opportunities will expand to include year-round operations.”

Conflict with FLAP Process and Shuttle Bus Pilot Study. In 2019 the CWC Stakeholders Mill Creek Canyon Committee met with the USFS, SLCo, and Millcreek City officials with a proposal

to move forward with the recommended trial shuttle bus. The USFS said that a trial could not be done, the Mill Creek Canyon road would require upgrading before a shuttle bus could be considered, and a NEPA study of a shuttle bus would be required.

In 2021, SLCo applied for a Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP) grant to improve the road in the upper canyon and was awarded \$19M, and currently a design and a NEPA Environmental Assessment of the road improvements are being developed concurrently. However, the project is only intended to modify the road itself and does not address the broader problem of excessive traffic, will not contain a plan for additional parking, and in fact may exacerbate traffic issues due to a more “efficient” road. However, the FLAP design plan *may* include lane width and parking/stopping areas that would accommodate shuttle buses.

Necessity for Concurrent NEPA Studies. To ensure that the FLAP road improvements will allow for a shuttle, a NEPA study for implementing a shuttle bus should be done concurrently with the FHA NEPA study of road improvements. This is critical to do concurrently because recommendations from the shuttle bus NEPA, such as shuttle stop infrastructure, will likely influence the needed road improvements.

Based on conversations with the USFS, we recognize that the USFS does not currently have funding nor personnel to complete this recommended NEPA study at this time. USFS support and a working partnership is needed so that the involved parties (i.e., CWC, USFS SLCo, and FHA) can move forward with the shuttle bus NEPA study.

Therefore, the Central Wasatch Commission requests that the USFS gives its support to complete a NEPA study of a shuttle bus system in Mill Creek Canyon concurrently with the ongoing NEPA being conducted by the FHA for the Mill Creek Canyon FLAP Grant. The CWC will work with the involved parties to define the required NEPA scope, raise the needed funding, and contract with a qualified consultant to complete the shuttle NEPA.

This NEPA study will hopefully allow for the shuttle to be implemented after (and possibly during) the road improvement project so that the real problem of auto traffic is addressed as quickly as possible once the road is suitable for a shuttle program. Additionally, necessary infrastructure such as shuttle bus parking areas and shuttle stops at trailheads and picnic areas should be implemented, or at least planned, in conjunction with the FLAP grant road improvement.