

Tioga Road Rehabilitation Environmental Assessment Public Scoping Report



**National Park Service
Yosemite National Park, California**

May 18, 2010

Table of Contents

I. Introduction	1
A Project Background	1
B Project Purpose and Need	1
C Public Scoping Comment Review	2
D Results of Public Scoping.....	2
E How To Use This Document.....	2
II. In-Scope Concerns	3
A Public Health and Safety	3
B Vegetation	4
C Historic Structures, Buildings, and Cultural Landscapes	4
D Scenic Resources	4
E Visitor Experience and Recreation.....	4
F Transportation	5
III. Out-of-Scope Concerns	5

I. Introduction

This report summarizes public scoping comments submitted on the proposed Tioga Road Rehabilitation Project for which an Environmental Assessment (EA) is being prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Public scoping comments will be used to assist the park in developing a range of reasonable and feasible project alternatives that meet the purpose and need, including a No Action Alternative, and then analyzing the environmental effects of each alternative in the EA. A 30-day public scoping period for the Tioga Road Rehabilitation Project was conducted from February 4, 2010, through March 5, 2010. Two public open houses were held to inform interested parties about the proposed project and solicit comments from members of the public in order to understand the spectrum of concerns, interests, and issues that should be considered in the planning process. The first meeting was held at the public library in Groveland, California on February 18th from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. The second meeting was held at the Valley Visitor Center Auditorium in Yosemite Valley on February 24th from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. Comments were invited for submission by mail, fax, email, through the Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) system, and on comment forms that were made available during public scoping meetings. During the scoping period, 11 comment letters were received, generating 18 individual substantive comments. This report provides a summary of concerns expressed in these letters.

A. Project Background

The National Park Service has identified a need for extensive repairs to Tioga Road (Highway 120), which in the summer serves as a major travel corridor through Yosemite National Park and across the crest of the Sierra Nevada. Tioga Road is centrally located in the park; the portion considered in this project extends from Crane Flat (mile post 0) at an elevation of 6,200 feet to the May Lake Junction at an elevation of 8,400 feet. The Tioga Road Rehabilitation Project is intended to address various rehabilitation needs, including road surface and culvert and drainage system improvements, along a 27-mile stretch of the road from Crane Flat to the May Lake junction west of Olmstead Point and Tenaya Lake. The Tioga Road Rehabilitation EA, as required by NEPA, will guide the resurfacing and improvement of the road and its associated drainage features and will consider various alternatives along the route. The Tioga Road corridor traverses riparian and wetland areas and may also contain archaeological sites and other historic features such as stonework or culverts. The EA and associated wetland, Wild and Scenic River, and cultural resource studies will evaluate and disclose the potential impacts of the project to these and other park resources. The EA will provide comprehensive mitigation measures to minimize any impacts to the physical, biological, cultural, and social environment.

B. Project Purpose and Need

The purpose of the Tioga Road Rehabilitation Project is to rehabilitate, restore, and resurface approximately 27 miles of roadway. It also proposes to improve roadway drainage and management of roadside parking. The need for action arises from the road's high accident rate, increased use (with an average traffic count of 1,056 vehicles per day), and a "poor" inventory rating from the Federal Highway Administration. Construction is expected to begin in summer/fall 2012 and to be completed by summer/fall 2016.

The proposed project would repair and resurface existing roadway pavement and drainage facilities and formalize roadside parking throughout the project area. The existing road width is inconsistent, ranging from very narrow to the average width of 22 feet. The existing paved road will be pulverized and regraded as the road base. There will be spot reconstruction of failed subgrade and shoulder areas, and then the whole road will be resurfaced with new asphalt. Culverts would be evaluated for rehabilitation, reconstruction, or replacement. Superelevations will be reduced where necessary to improve safety. Adjacent parking areas and turnouts would be rehabilitated and resurfaced, as necessary. Informal turnouts would be evaluated for rehabilitation. All headwalls and other associated stonework would be evaluated and repaired, as necessary. Deteriorating curbs would be evaluated for repair and/or replacement. Areas disturbed by construction would be revegetated.

C. Public Scoping Comment Review

Public scoping letters received during the scoping period are reviewed and analyzed in a series of steps. For example, each letter received is first read to determine the discrete points expressed by the author, each of which is considered to be a “comment.” Each discrete comment is then “coded” in order to associate that comment with a particular resource topic or element of the plan (such as cultural resources or the plan’s relationship to other projects). Once all letters have been coded for individual comments, similar comments are grouped together and a “concern statement” is generated, which is intended to capture the main points expressed by the comments. The National Park Service planning team then screens each concern statement to determine if it is within the scope of the project. The purpose of the screening process is to identify what types of concerns were raised, whether a concern is within or outside of a project’s proposed scope of work, and how the planning team should address comments in the EA. An “In-Scope” screening code was assigned to those concerns that will likely be considered in the development of alternatives to be evaluated in the EA. An “Out-of-Scope” screening code was assigned to those concerns that were determined to be beyond the purpose and need, or “scope,” of this project.

D. Results of Public Scoping

During the 30-day public scoping period, the park received 11 letters from 9 individuals and 1 organization. The analysis of these letters identified 18 discrete substantive comments, from which 13 general concern statements were generated. The main public scoping concerns submitted to the National Park Service to consider during planning for this project include those of the following topics:

- Public Health and Safety
- Vegetation
- Historic Structures, Buildings, and Cultural Landscapes
- Scenic Resources
- Visitor Experience and Recreation
- Transportation

All comments, substantive or nonsubstantive, received during the scoping period have been duly considered and are now part of the administrative record for this project. The public scoping letters can be viewed on the park’s web site at <http://www.nps.gov/yose/parkmgmt>.

E. How To Use This Document

This Public Scoping Report is divided into two sections. The section titled “In-Scope” provides a summary of scoping concerns, by topic, which will likely be addressed in the project alternatives within the EA. The second section, titled “Out-of-Scope,” addresses comments that were determined to be beyond the stated purpose and need, or “scope,” of this project. Concerns presented in the “In-Scope” section include “supporting quotes,” which are verbatim excerpts from individual public scoping letters. These supporting quotes are followed by comment author attributes, such as whether the comment author was an individual or an organization (if an organization – a general description of the organization type), the city and state of residence of the comment author, and the assigned letter and comment number. For example, “(Individual, Merced, CA, #1-1)” is a letter from an individual from Merced, California; the letter was the first letter received; and the quote is the first coded comment from that specific letter.

For all topics, any actions resulting in changes to existing conditions would be presented as elements of the alternatives. The effects of these actions would be evaluated in the environmental consequences section of the EA.

II. In-Scope Concerns

As part of the project's planning process, the National Park Service will examine a range of actions to address the project's purpose and need. The EA will analyze a set of reasonable alternatives that address repairs and upgrades to Tioga Road, while protecting and preserving the historic character and use of the road and minimizing natural resource impacts. All actions relating to the Tioga Road rehabilitation will be evaluated in the environmental consequences section of the EA.

The National Park Service has screened public concerns raised during the public scoping period for the Tioga Road Rehabilitation EA. Based on this screening, the National Park Service finds the following public concerns, grouped by topic, to be within the scope of the rehabilitation project, and will consider these concerns in the development of a reasonable range of alternatives for rehabilitation of Tioga Road. Project implementation is contingent on the signing of a Finding of No Significant Impact by the National Park Service's Director of the Pacific West Region, and allocation of construction funding.

A. Public Health and Safety

Concern #1: Roadside vegetation limits visibility affecting safety along Tioga Road.

"Please help Tioga Road become safer by cutting down the trees that are growing alongside the road at such a rapid speed. Trees really cut down the visibility of animals and hikers along the road or running across the road and making it much more dangerous for all involved."

(Individual, Yosemite, CA, #10-1)

Concern #2: There are insufficient or poorly marked turnouts along Tioga Road that adversely affect the road's safety and efficiency.

"For driving safety, occasional turnouts with advance signing would be beneficial. At present, motor homes with drivers unfamiliar with the road create long queues. Impatient drivers then pass in unsafe situations. Good advance signing with strong messages would alleviate these driving hazards." (Individual, Soulsbyville, CA, #7-2)

"I am concerned that the proposal for additional parking along the road is going to create greater congestion and dangerous situations. Visitors will be more likely to find themselves in dangerous situations as cars are leaving and entering the road, as visitors are walking obliviously across the road from the greater number of parking areas, and from the distractions from greater numbers of people parking and sightseeing. A better solution might be to have fewer, but designated parking areas that are well off the road and the rest of the road signed for no parking unless an emergency."

(Individual, Sonora, CA, #6-1)

Concern #3: Widening of Tioga Road may not be an effective means to improve safety.

"Repaving and restoration efforts limiting road dimensions and alignment to existing standards must be a principal component of this road repair and rehabilitation project. Any proposals by highway engineers to widen the driving or shoulder widths to higher standards in a claim that wider is safer would be strongly opposed by our committee. Widening roads encourages higher speeds, imperils wildlife, diminishes the visitor appreciation of Park resources and is an ill considered alternative to addressing public safety issues on Park roadways."

(Sierra Club Yosemite Committee, #11-1)

Concern #4: Speed limits along portions of Tioga Road are not appropriate.

"The westbound speed limit on several steep downhill sections of the Tioga Road is excessive and should be reduced."

(Sierra Club Yosemite Committee, #11-4)

Concern #5: The developed trailheads along Tioga Road are a safety concern.

"It is actually extremely dangerous at the Cathedral Lakes trailhead and HWY 120. I have seen too many close calls of people either to or from the trailhead and an oncoming car misses them by only a couple of feet."
(Individual, San Jose, CA, #9-1)

B. Vegetation

Concern #6: Vegetation density and composition along Tioga Road should be restored.

"...something has to be done to curtail the exploding tree population along that road from Crane Flat all the way to the Tioga Entrance Gate. We are also losing the meadows in Tuolumne."
(Individual, Yosemite, CA, #10-2)

C. Historic Structures, Buildings, and Cultural Landscapes

Concern #7: Any improvements to Tioga Road should be in line with the historic character of the route.

"Replacing undersized and failing culverts and headwalls with appropriate historic design."
(Sierra Club Yosemite Committee, #11-2)

D. Scenic Resources

Concern #8: Previous work along the road has resulted in adverse affects to scenic resources.

"Please include in the scope of work the cleaning up of old asphalt and other debris left over from the realignment in the 60's(?)."
(Individual, Mill Valley, CA, #2-1)

Concern #9: Improvements to the road should not compromise its scenic attributes.

"The issue is the beautiful scenery being a distraction, not the quality of the road. I would hope that you would not suggest getting rid of the scenery to improve the safety of the road."
(Individual, Sonora, CA, #5-2)

"I was involved in the original controversy in 1956-1961. As a young person, I had travelled the Tioga Road many times from 1949 to 1961. With the "improved" Tioga Road in 1961, things changed. The new road did little for the esthetic beauty and simply pandered to the public's obsession to increase the volume of traffic and the speed of the traffic. Neither benefitted the beautiful setting and, in my personal opinion, made it a little less majestic. The original effort to get there was part of the appreciation. I would hope that the new project isn't motivated by the same economic interests that placed quantity above quality and convenience above the natural beauty."
(Individual, Sonora, CA, #5-X)

Concern #10: Tioga Road has insufficient roadside parking areas that allow for the enjoyment of the scenery.

"This plan should include off road scenic parking areas."
(Individual, Fresno, CA, #3-1)

E. Visitor Experience and Recreation

Concern #11: Visitor services signage along Tioga Road is insufficient.

"At Crane Flat, there is a road sign that says "next gas 26 miles" (I think it's 26). Driving past this towards Tuolumne Meadows you have no idea whether this is a reference to the gas station in Tuolumne Meadows or the ones in Lee Vining (and therefore that the TM gas station is closed for some reason). The sign should

read: "Next gas at Tuolumne Meadows (26 miles)."
(Individual, Mill Valley, CA, #2-3)

Concern #12: Roadside pedestrian traffic and use is an issue.

"Let's use this project to help people get out of their cars and away from the road, OK? Find somebody like me who likes to sniff around the park like an old dog, put them in the passenger seat of your truck and drive the road with them and ask them where they'd get out and wander around if they were in a sniffing mood. Take off your engineer hat and think like a visitor."
(Individual, Mill Valley, CA, #2-7)

"It is important to reduce pedestrian traffic along Tioga Road."
(Individual, Fresno, CA, #3-3)

F. Transportation

Concern #13: Delays and closures during rehabilitation may adversely affect transportation and visitor experience in the park.

"...what kind of delays and closures are anticipated?"
(Individual, El Portal, CA, #1-1)

III. Out-of-Scope Concerns

Two letters without substantive comments were submitted for consideration and some comments from the remaining letters were deemed nonsubstantive. These letters and/or comments did not provide enough information to be put in context, or were simply anecdotes about experiences related to Tioga Road. However, these letters will remain as part of the Administrative Record for this project.