



National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Comments about the study can be directed to:

Superintendent  
Great Smoky Mountains National Park  
107 Park Headquarters Road  
Gatlinburg, TN  
37738

Email:  
grsm\_superintendent@nps.gov

Website:  
www.nps.gov/grsm/gsmsite/home

The National Park Service cares for the special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.



National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Great Smoky Mountains National Park  
107 Park Headquarters Road  
Gatlinburg, TN 37738

EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA™

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



# Newfound Gap Road Environmental Assessment

August 2004, Volume #2

## Background and Purpose

The National Park Service, in cooperation with the Federal Highway Administration, is in the process of preparing an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Phase II portion of the Rehabilitation of Newfound Gap Road project, in conformance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Phase I of the project, rehabilitation of the 10½-mile section of Newfound Gap Road from the Newfound Gap Parking Area south to just north of the Collins Creek Picnic Area, is more routine in nature and has been Categorically Excluded from the NEPA Process. The work of this project, Phase II, will include resurfacing the 6½ miles of badly deteriorated roadway and proposed intersection improvements along Newfound Gap Road in Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The project study area is located in Swain County, North Carolina, and extends from approximately 500 feet north of the Collins Creek Picnic Area to the southern Park boundary with the Cherokee Indian Reservation (see map on inside). The intersections scheduled for study include the intersections of Newfound Gap Road with:

- Collins Creek Picnic Area
- Smokemont Campground
- Tow String Road
- Park Circle Drive
- Oconaluftee Visitor Center
- Blue Ridge Parkway
- Big Cove Connector Road (Saunooke Bridge Road)

## Alternatives Studied

Several initial alternatives for adding left-turn lanes have been evaluated at each of the study locations. For the Collins Creek Picnic Area, the Smokemont Campground, Park Circle Drive, and the Big Cove Connector Road, the initial alternatives included widening on the west side, widening on the east side, and widening symmetrically (an equal amount on each side of the road). Alternatives at Tow String Road included realigning both Newfound Gap Road and Tow String Road to provide better sight distance. Alternatives at the Oconaluftee Visitor Center and at the Blue Ridge Parkway included various ways of adding or extending turn lanes while reducing the road from four lanes to two lanes, as well as retaining a four-lane section. Non-construction alternatives also were considered, including changes in speed limit, signing, traffic demand management, traffic signals, rumble strips, and additional enforcement. Following the initial screening, the construction alternatives that remain under consideration for further study include the following:

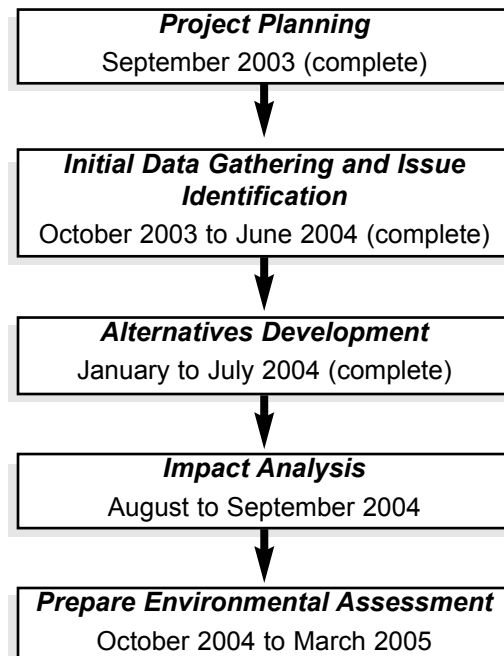
### Alternatives Retained for Further Study

- Collins Creek Picnic Area - provide a left-turn lane by widening to the east.
- Smokemont Campground - provide a left-turn lane by widening to the west.
- Tow String Road - provide a left-turn lane by widening to the east; improve sight distance by realigning Tow String Road to the north.
- Park Circle Drive - provide a left-turn lane by widening to the west.
- Oconaluftee Visitor Center - lengthen the left-turn lane by widening to the west; channelize the two-lane northbound traffic to single-lane traffic just south of the parking area.
- Blue Ridge Parkway - provide a southbound left-turn lane from Newfound Gap Road by cutting into the median.
- Big Cove Connector Road - provide a left-turn lane by widening to the west.

In addition, a no-build alternative would be retained for study for each of the study areas.

**Planning Process and Schedule**

NEPA is a procedural law that provides a process for agencies to make an analytical study of the impacts of alternatives and requires agencies to involve interested and affected members of the public. The planning process provides a framework for striking a balance between the use and preservation of natural and cultural resources. The NEPA process follows these steps, with the schedule for this project shown by each step:



Phase I of the Rehabilitation of the Newfound Gap Road project is currently in the design development phase, but with currently unavailable funding, it is unknown at this time when it will be advertised for contract award. Phase II of the project, currently in the planning phase, is programmed to be advertised for contract award in Fiscal Year 2006.

The NEPA process allows interested members of the public to participate in the decision-making process.

**Public Meetings Held**

Public meetings were held on January 26, 2004 in Cherokee, NC, and on January 27, 2004 in Gatlinburg, TN. These meetings provided an opportunity for the public to learn about the project and to discuss their comments and concerns with the study team. The National Park Service, the Federal Highway Administration, and consultant staff were available at those meetings to answer questions and to address concerns. Several boards were displayed illustrating various aspects of the project, including

- Study Area
- Purpose and Need
- Topics to be Addressed in the Environmental Assessment
- Water Resources
- Intersection Diagrams
- Traffic and Safety (turning movement counts, accidents, and level of service)
- Study Process
- Project Schedule

Nine citizens attended the Cherokee meeting, including representatives of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI) and a representative of the Sierra Club. Four citizens attended the Gatlinburg meeting. Comments expressed by citizens included the following items, all of which are being considered in developing the Environmental Assessment:



- If possible, coordinate the Smokemont Campground sewer line project with the road project to minimize the number of times the corridor is disturbed.
- The bridge replacement on Tow String Road should be considered in the EA process.
- Turn lanes are needed for safety. The turn lane at Mingus Mill has made a positive difference.
- It is important that Newfound Gap Road be open to traffic during construction.
- Install emergency call boxes along the road.
- Several citizens were interested in the timing of construction.
- Improvements to Newfound Gap Road are needed.
- The Park's General Management Plan requires that traffic demand management be considered prior to construction of road improvements.
- Sight distance should be indicated on display maps.
- Reduction in speed and enforcement should be considered as measures to improve safety.
- Wildlife crossings should be considered to reduce impact on animals (road kill).

Additional public meetings are anticipated to be held in spring 2005.

