

The Other Bus



The Great American Outdoors Act is providing crucial funding – up to \$6.65 billion over five years – to fix our national parks’ crumbling roads, decaying buildings, outdated water systems and many more repair needs. This bill, along with other funding sources, is ensuring our parks can continue to welcome millions of visitors each year and protect the natural and cultural resources that tell our nation’s history.

Freedom Riders NATIONAL MONUMENT



On Mother’s Day 1961, the town of Anniston, Alabama made headlines when a mob of white segregationists at the Greyhound Bus Depot attacked a bus transporting an interracial group of thirteen passengers, known as Freedom Riders, who had been working their way through the South, testing the laws of integration in interstate travel. In a narrow alley alongside the depot, the passenger ssat aboard the bus as the mob slashed tires, rocked the bus trying to knock it over and attempted to break windows.

Later, after having pulled over to change a tire, the bus was fire-bombed by the mob just outside town. Images from the day ran in papers nationwide and spurred the federal government to enforce laws banning segregation in interstate travel.

In 2013, a brightly colored mural of the bus was painted on the alley wall facing the Bus Depot, and in 2017, Freedom Riders National Monument was established. This spring, part of the building on which the mural is painted—the end of a strip of storefronts—was donated to the park by The Conservation Fund. The majority of visitors to the site come from out of state and stop at several other Civil Rights-related attractions

along the way where they learn the history of deep-seated racism and the fight against integration in the Jim Crow South. The depot is on the Anniston Civil Rights Heritage Trail, a popular driving tour, and the park is developing an I-20 tour of Civil Rights stops in Jackson, Montgomery, Anniston, and Atlanta.

THE CHALLENGE: deteriorating historic structures and absence of park services and staff

The depot—a small, single-story brick building on a commercial stretch that hasn’t changed much since the 1960s—was open to visitors on weekends for a few months in 2021. But the park lacked the funding to continue staffing the site, so the current

BY THE NUMBERS:



\$6.3 million

investment from the GAOA to repair projects



2 years to complete

PHOTOS: Cover: ©National Park Service/Max Farley
Back Left: ©National Park Service
Back Right: ©Alabama Tourism Department/Chris Granger



visitor experience is wanting. The website reminds users that it's a new park and, "There are currently no visitor services." Instead, visitors stop at the Chamber of Commerce, where they get their park passport stamped and learn about the site from an informational kiosk that looks like a bus. Then they drive a few blocks to the Bus Depot on Gurnee Avenue,



a street with almost no greenery or shade. Nearby: a sewing shop, a general store, empty storefronts, and an abandoned Sinclair gas station. Visitors can peer in the depot windows, enjoy the mural, and listen to a five-minute audio clip from Hank Thomas, one of the original 13 Freedom Riders. (Even park staff acknowledges that five minutes is a long time to be standing in Alabama sun.) But they won't find a visitors center, bookstore, or gift shop. In most cases, they never interact with a park ranger, who would be able to discuss the importance of the events that took place. There is no way to track the number of visitors.

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THE PROJECT

Through an investment that is approximately \$6.3 million, the Great American Outdoors Act will rehabilitate Anniston's Greyhound Bus Depot and Mural Building. The depot will be restored to the way it looked in 1961—a living picture of what segregation looked like at the time. The work will also include hazardous materials abatement and roof replacement. Next door, the Mural Building will be renovated to provide visitor services. In both buildings, the investment will restore and preserve historic features and repair and rehabilitate critical systems such as mechanical, electrical, HVAC, and plumbing.

Also included in the investment: a project rehabilitating part of the A.G. Gaston Motel in Birmingham, where Martin Luther King Jr. and others planned non-violent protests of the mid-1960s. The motel, a unit of the Birmingham Civil Rights National Monument, has fallen into disrepair. The park service co-manages the site with the City of Birmingham, which has

already completed its \$10 million of renovation work.

THE IMPACT

This project provides a unique opportunity to preserve historic structures that help tell the story of the Freedom Riders and Civil Rights Movement. Not only will the historic buildings be protected, but they will finally be accessible to the public. Visitors will be able to step into the Mural Building to escape the sun, talk to an interpreter, purchase books, use the restroom, and stamp their passport books. At the Bus Depot, visitors will step into the past and learn about segregation. Fortunately, the timing coincides with the expected revival of the street: One block to the north, a beautiful federal courthouse just opened this spring; and new businesses, including a deli, have already helped increased park visitation. Once the project is funded, it will take approximately two years to complete. The facilities and systems addressed should not require major rehabilitation or replacement for the next 25 to 40 years.



The Great American Outdoors Act is successfully repairing infrastructure at hundreds of parks across the country. However, with a nearly \$22 billion backlog, much more is needed. We urge Congress to extend the Legacy Restoration Fund for an additional five years.

Preserving Our Past.



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Protecting Our Future.