

The Federal Government has no greater priority than to be a good partner to promote livable communities.

The morning paper carried a story about another independent study to chart the ecological vital signs of our national park systems.

Madam Speaker, I think this is an important area to pose attention to, first, because it shows how the Federal Government can lead by example, and, second, it serves as a powerful refutation that somehow the United States, being a huge and wealthy Nation, does not have to worry about things like sprawl and congestion, unplanned growth and loss of farmland, that we just pave more, continue to expand, create more of whatever land we wish of farm, housing or roads.

Madam Speaker, it is reminiscent of Alice in Wonderland's experience with the Mad Hatter's tea party. 'Yes, that's it' said the Hatter with a sigh, 'it's always tea time and we've no time to wash the things between whiles.'

'Then you keep moving round, I suppose?' said Alice.

'Exactly so,' said the Hatter, 'as the things get used up.'

'But what happens when you come to the beginning again?' Alice ventured to ask.

'Suppose we change the subject,' the March Hare interrupted, yawning. 'I'm getting tired of this. I vote the young lady tells us a story.'

Our tea party with the built and natural environment is not solved with more stories. We are going to have to face realities in our mature cities, small town America, fraying suburbs, even

in our national parks. There are limits to the strains we can put on the land in our transportation systems.

The numbers are staggering in our national parks and other federally-managed sites. In 1997, over 370 million visitors increasingly jammed on clogged parking lots, jammed highways, fragile and irreplaceable resources suffering damage from too many vehicles and too many people. Nearby gateway communities are also negatively impacted by trafficking, decreased air quality, but there is a new trend in thinking about how we solve these problems.

Part of the TEA-21 Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century called for a coordination and study between the Department of Transportation and the Secretary of the Interior. They have already produced recommendations for public transportation services at 128 sites that will enhance the visitor experience and protect the environment.

Madam Speaker, this new broach to transportation has already produced tangible results in a number of areas.

The Zion National Park in Utah, which has suffered from severe congestion, gridlock and destruction of natural resources, has helped to implement a new program, a shuttle bus system initiated in May of this year helps protect the fragile natural resources and protect visitors away as they visit from the canyon and provide services to the gateway community of Springdale.

The National Park Service has proposed a light rail transit system for the south rim of the Grand Canyon. It will allow visitors to leave their cars outside the park and ride the light rail train to a canyon view information plaza, there they can view exhibits, ride alternatively-fueled vehicles and hike along the canyon's rim. Construction has already begun on the information plaza in April, and the light rail system is expected to be in place by the spring of 2004.

It is also a priority to reduce traffic congestion in the Yosemite National Park. It is already implemented a 2-year demonstration program for a regional transportation system that would allow visitors to leave their cars outside the park and travel by shuttle bus into and around the Yosemite Valley.

Together activities like this will reduce reliance on private automobiles for visitors, allow for sustainable use and enjoyment of our public lands, improve the livability and quality of life in nearby communities, and allow visitors to better enjoy their experience.

Unlike the Mad Hatter, we cannot continue to just move to the next place at the party. Fortunately, this leadership shows how we can achieve this, not just for national parks, but as a model for American communities to make them safer, healthier and more economically secure.