

BLUE ANGELS EXPRESS INITIATIVE

A Community Transportation Proposal

Improving Access During Pensacola Beach Red, White & Blues Week

Submitted for consideration to

Escambia County Board of County Commissioners • Mayor's Office, City of Pensacola
Santa Rosa Island Authority • Escambia County Area Transit
Public-Safety, Emergency-Management, Tourism, and Regional Transportation Partners



Concept artwork supporting the Blue Angels Express community transportation initiative.

Prepared by

Westley Bruggeman

Pensacola Resident & Transportation Professional

July 2026

Letter of Transmittal

To: Escambia County Commissioners, the Mayor's Office, Santa Rosa Island Authority members, ECAT leadership, and community partners

Dear Commissioners, Authority Members, Transportation Officials, and Community Leaders:

I respectfully submit the Blue Angels Express Initiative for public discussion and professional feasibility review. The proposal recommends consideration of an annual off-island park-and-ride shuttle program during Red, White & Blues Week and the Pensacola Beach Air Show.

This event is an extraordinary source of pride for Northwest Florida. It showcases the United States Navy Blue Angels, supports local tourism and businesses, and brings residents and visitors together. Its continued popularity, however, creates a recurring transportation challenge: limited roadway access, constrained public parking, early parking saturation, long traffic delays, and difficult access for employees, transportation providers, and emergency services.

The objective is not to dictate a final operating plan or criticize the event's success. It is to begin a constructive, data-informed conversation about whether a voluntary shuttle option could improve access while preserving the experience that makes this week special.

I respectfully request that the appropriate agencies review this proposal, consider a preliminary feasibility and cost study, receive public input, and evaluate a limited pilot program for a future Red, White & Blues Week.

Respectfully submitted,

Westley Bruggeman

Pensacola Resident & Transportation Professional

Executive Summary

CORE RECOMMENDATION Evaluate a voluntary, annual off-island park-and-ride shuttle connecting approved parking hubs with a designated Pensacola Beach loading area during the primary days of Red, White & Blues Week.

Red, White & Blues Week has become one of Northwest Florida's premier annual events. Tens of thousands of residents and visitors are drawn to Pensacola Beach, while the island's limited access routes and public parking must absorb concentrated demand within a short period.

Visitors may feel compelled to arrive before sunrise to secure parking for activities occurring much later in the day. Once public parking reaches capacity, some motorists search for alternatives while already inside the congested area. The pressure affects families, beach employees, businesses, transportation providers, residents, public-safety agencies, and the overall visitor experience.

The Blue Angels Express concept would allow participating attendees to park at approved locations outside the island's most congested area and board charter, transit, or contracted passenger buses. Service could operate on a continuous or scheduled rotation, with advance reservations, a limited number of walk-up spaces, accessible vehicles, secure hubs, and live service information.

A limited pilot using two or three hubs and a defined passenger capacity would allow agencies to evaluate demand, operating cost, travel time, traffic effects, accessibility, rider satisfaction, and public-safety performance before considering expansion.

1. Purpose and Requested Outcome

This proposal asks the relevant public agencies and community partners to determine whether the Blue Angels Express Park-and-Ride Program is feasible, affordable, operationally meaningful, and worthy of a limited pilot. It does not presume approval, commit public funds, establish a fare, select a contractor, designate a final route, or authorize any parking-policy change.

- Place the concept on an appropriate public agenda for discussion.
- Form a multi-agency working group with transportation, public-safety, tourism, business, workforce, and community representation.
- Conduct a preliminary feasibility, operations, traffic, legal, accessibility, and cost review.
- Engage the public through a transparent website, petition, and transportation-interest survey.
- Consider a limited pilot only after professional review and public input.

2. Existing Transportation Challenge

2.1 Limited access and concentrated demand

Pensacola Beach is reached primarily through the Pensacola Bay Bridge, Gulf Breeze, and the Bob Sikes Bridge. The practical eastern alternative through Navarre Beach is significantly farther for many Pensacola-area residents and visitors. During the primary air-show days, thousands of vehicles attempt to enter the same limited corridors during a concentrated period.

2.2 Early parking saturation

The source proposals report that Casino Beach provides approximately 3,100 public parking spaces and may reach capacity in the early morning. Visitors can feel compelled to arrive at 4:00 or 5:00 a.m. for a headline performance much later in the day. These figures and timing assumptions should be confirmed through official data during feasibility review.

2.3 Limited and costly alternatives

After public parking fills, visitors may search for other spaces while contributing to congestion. The source proposals also describe exceptionally high single-day private parking charges during air-show week, sometimes reported in the \$100 to \$200 range. Any formal study should document actual prices and available capacity before relying on those figures.

2.4 Transportation-provider constraints

Rideshare, taxi, and private transportation drivers can become trapped in traffic for several hours while completing a single beach trip. This reduces the number of drivers willing or able to serve the area and limits options for people who do not drive, lack a vehicle, have mobility limitations, or want to avoid adding another car to traffic.

2.5 Overnight vehicle placement

The proposals raise a concern that some vehicles may be placed at or near Casino Beach overnight primarily to reserve spaces for the following day. This issue requires evidence, public discussion, and a carefully tailored policy review that protects legitimate overnight users.

3. Community Impact

Visitors and families

Long delays, uncertain parking, early arrival requirements, high parking costs, and difficulty leaving and returning can make attendance impractical or less enjoyable.

Pensacola Beach employees

Restaurants, hotels, retail shops, beach services, hospitality operations, lifeguards, maintenance crews, and other employers depend on workers who must reach the island during peak congestion. Employees may leave home hours early or struggle to find appropriate parking.

Local businesses

Businesses benefit from event traffic but can face staffing disruptions. A smoother arrival and departure system may improve employee reliability and allow visitors to spend more time supporting restaurants, shops, hotels, attractions, and event vendors.

Residents and surrounding communities

Traffic pressure extends through Gulf Breeze, approaches to the bridges, and other regional roadways. A hub strategy should account for neighborhood effects and avoid relocating congestion without mitigation.

Public safety and essential services

Law enforcement, fire rescue, EMS, emergency management, tow operators, utility crews, and road-maintenance personnel rely on the same constrained corridors. Even a modest reduction in private vehicles could improve operational flexibility during an emergency.

Transportation providers

A coordinated high-capacity option could reduce dependence on individual door-to-door trips while preserving those services for passengers who specifically need them.

4. Proposed Blue Angels Express Program



Concept visualization only. Final vehicles, branding, hubs, routes, loading areas, and operators would be determined by participating agencies.

The proposed program would use approved off-island parking areas as temporary transportation hubs. Participating visitors would park at a selected location and board a charter bus, transit bus, or contracted passenger shuttle for direct transportation to a designated Pensacola Beach loading area. Participation would remain voluntary; visitors who choose to drive directly could continue to do so subject to applicable traffic and parking rules.

5. Suggested Operating Model

5.1 Off-island parking hubs

Potential locations for professional evaluation include:

- Pensacola Bay Center or nearby downtown parking facilities
- Pensacola State College
- University of West Florida
- Escambia County-owned facilities
- Fairgrounds or event properties
- Large shopping-center parking areas through private agreements
- Large church parking lots through temporary partnerships
- Other underused paved properties with safe vehicle and bus access

Final hubs should be selected using capacity, roadway access, bus circulation, lighting, security, accessible parking, pedestrian safety, restroom availability, neighborhood impact, and the ability to disperse demand among multiple locations.

5.2 Continuous or scheduled service

Service could begin early in the morning and continue until all post-show passengers have been returned to their vehicles. The source proposals suggest primary emphasis on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, with operating hours potentially beginning between 6:00 and 7:00 a.m. Final days, hours, frequencies, recovery time, and fleet size should be established through demand and traffic analysis.

5.3 Dedicated beach loading and traffic priority

A clearly marked loading and unloading area should be identified on Pensacola Beach. Whenever operationally and legally feasible, the shuttle fleet should use a dedicated lane, controlled access point, traffic-priority procedure, or law-enforcement-assisted turnaround. The program will not provide a meaningful alternative if buses remain trapped in ordinary traffic for several hours.

5.4 Reservation and ticketing system

- Advance online reservations
- A limited walk-up allocation
- Hub and departure-time selection
- Passenger-count selection
- Digital boarding pass or QR code
- Operating hours and prohibited-item information
- Weather, schedule, and service alerts
- Hub-capacity information
- Return-loading instructions
- Optional text-message alerts

5.5 Reasonable fare structure

A round-trip fare could help recover a substantial portion of operating costs while remaining more affordable than high-priced private event parking. Options for study include:

- Adult round-trip ticket
- Discounted child ticket
- Discounted family package
- Reduced fares for seniors, veterans, and passengers with disabilities
- Free travel for very young children
- Optional premium reserved-departure ticket

Final pricing should reflect actual costs for vehicles, drivers, fuel, staging, parking management, security, ticketing, insurance, accessibility, customer service, and event staffing.

5.6 Accessibility

The program should include wheelchair-capable vehicles and accommodations for mobility devices, older adults, and passengers needing additional boarding assistance. Accessible parking should be located near each hub's boarding area, and information should clearly identify accessible trips and assistance procedures.

5.7 Security and hub management

- Visible law-enforcement or security presence
- Adequate lighting
- Clearly marked vehicle and pedestrian lanes
- Safe boarding and queuing areas
- Trained staff or volunteers
- Temporary wayfinding signs
- Portable restrooms where needed
- Documented lost-child, medical, severe-weather, and emergency procedures

6. Recommended Pilot Program

A limited first-year pilot would reduce implementation risk and create real operating data. A potential pilot framework could include:

- Two or three off-island hubs serving different travel markets
- A limited fleet of charter, transit, or other legally eligible passenger buses
- Advance reservations and a defined passenger capacity
- A controlled beach loading and turnaround location
- Live customer information and service alerts
- Post-event rider, employee, and partner surveys
- Traffic, ridership, travel-time, cost, safety, and accessibility data collection

PILOT PRINCIPLE Start at a scale that can be operated reliably, measured honestly, and improved before expansion.

7. Casino Beach Overnight-Parking Review

As a related but separate matter, the appropriate authorities should review overnight-parking practices during Red, White & Blues Week. Possible options for public and legal review include:

- Temporarily prohibiting overnight parking before primary air-show days
- Closing and clearing designated sections overnight
- Reopening the lot at a publicly announced time
- Issuing event-specific permits
- Designating a limited overnight section
- Enforcing posted event rules when vehicles are used solely to hold spaces

Any policy should provide reasonable exceptions for hotel guests, employees, residents, authorized vendors, people with disabilities, and legitimate overnight beach users. The purpose should be a fair, transparent, and enforceable high-demand parking system-not punishment.

8. Agency and Partner Coordination

Partner	Potential role	Questions for review
Escambia County / City of Pensacola	Convening, sites, traffic coordination, public process	Authority, facilities, funding, procurement, neighborhood effects
Santa Rosa Island Authority	Beach operations, loading area, parking, visitor communication	Site circulation, beach rules, concessions, trolley integration
ECAT and transportation providers	Fleet planning, drivers, dispatch, accessibility, service design	Vehicle availability, labor, scheduling, maintenance, cost
Public-safety agencies	Emergency planning, traffic control, hub security	Priority movement, incident command, severe weather, evacuation
Tourism and business partners	Public information, workforce input, visitor experience	Demand, employee access, communications, sponsorship
Community representatives	Public needs, equity, accessibility, feedback	Hub preferences, acceptable fares, barriers, neighborhood impacts

9. Feasibility and Cost Study

Before a pilot is authorized, a preliminary study should address:

- **Demand** - Expected riders by day, hour, origin, party size, and accessibility need.
- **Hub suitability** - Capacity, leases or agreements, neighborhood effects, lighting, restrooms, accessibility, security, and bus circulation.
- **Fleet and workforce** - Vehicle type, quantity, driver availability, hours-of-service requirements, dispatch, maintenance, and contingency vehicles.
- **Traffic operations** - Travel-time reliability, bus priority, loading-area design, intersection control, and coordination with existing trolley service.
- **Financial model** - Capital and operating costs, fares, sponsorship, grants, public contribution, insurance, ticketing, and reserve requirements.
- **Legal and regulatory review** - Procurement, contracts, permits, accessibility, liability, data privacy, records obligations, and applicable transportation requirements.
- **Communications** - Reservations, multilingual and accessible information, weather notices, cancellations, refund rules, and media coordination.

10. Funding and Cost-Recovery Considerations

No specific funding source is assumed. The working group could evaluate a blended model using fares, event transportation funds, grants, tourism-related resources where legally eligible, sponsorships, parking-partner contributions, or other authorized sources. The objective should be reliable service and transparent accounting-not an artificially low fare unsupported by operating reality.

A pilot budget should separately identify vehicles and drivers, fuel, hub leases, security, traffic control, insurance, ticketing technology, customer support, signage, sanitation, accessibility, contingency capacity, communications, and post-event evaluation.

11. Anticipated Benefits

- **Reduced vehicle traffic** - Each successful full-size bus trip can consolidate the occupants of many private vehicles.
- **Improved emergency access** - Fewer vehicles in the most constrained area may improve movement for essential personnel.
- **More equitable access** - A reasonably priced option may help families, older adults, visitors without vehicles, and passengers with mobility needs.
- **Greater transportation availability** - High-capacity service can reduce the burden on individual rideshare, taxi, and private transportation trips.
- **Economic benefit** - Visitors spending less time and money on parking may have more opportunity to support local businesses.
- **Reduced fuel waste and emissions** - Consolidating passengers may reduce prolonged idling and slow-moving private vehicle trips.
- **Better visitor experience** - The event can be remembered for aviation, community pride, and family experience rather than parking anxiety.

12. Community Support and Public Survey

A public website should provide the complete proposal, a concise announcement, frequently asked questions, and a secure support and transportation-interest survey. Public reporting should display only an overall signature count and generalized, aggregated findings.

Suggested survey fields include:

- Full name
- County of residence and ZIP code
- Private contact number and optional email
- Resident, visitor, beach employee, business owner, transportation professional, or other role
- Past attendance at Red, White & Blues Week
- Parking and traffic experience
- Whether transportation conditions discourage attendance
- Whether a shuttle would increase likelihood of attending
- Likelihood of using an affordable shuttle
- Preferred hub area and acceptable fare range
- Optional accessibility needs and comments
- Explicit support, privacy, data-sharing, and quotation permissions

Personally identifiable information should never appear on the public website. Any information shared with authorized agencies should follow the final privacy notice, applicable law, and stated consent. Public reports should rely on totals, percentages, generalized locations, and comments used only with permission.

13. Pilot Evaluation Measures

Measure	What to track	Why it matters
Ridership	Reservations, boardings, no-shows, party size, day and hour	Validates demand and fleet sizing
Reliability	Hub-to-beach and return travel times; on-time departures	Tests whether service is a meaningful alternative
Traffic	Vehicle counts and corridor conditions using available agency data	Estimates congestion effects
Safety	Incidents, medical calls, lost-child events, near misses	Tests operating readiness
Accessibility	Accessible trips, assistance requests, rider feedback	Measures equitable service
Financial	Cost per trip, fare recovery, staffing and contingency costs	Supports future funding decisions
Experience	Rider, employee, business, and partner satisfaction	Identifies service improvements

14. Key Risks and Mitigation Priorities

- **Buses delayed in ordinary traffic** - Develop traffic-priority and turnaround procedures before launch.
- **Demand exceeds capacity** - Use reservations, clear capacity limits, standby rules, and real-time notices.
- **Demand is lower than expected** - Begin with a limited pilot and flexible contracting.
- **Hub impacts nearby neighborhoods** - Distribute demand, perform traffic review, and use staffed circulation plans.
- **Weather or event disruption** - Publish cancellation, shelter, refund, and communications procedures.
- **Safety or accessibility gaps** - Require documented training, accessible capacity, incident procedures, and agency review.

- **Public confusion about approval** - Clearly label all public materials as a community proposal until formally authorized.

15. Requested Government Actions

1. Place the Blue Angels Express Initiative on an appropriate agenda for public discussion.
2. Establish a working group involving Escambia County, the City of Pensacola, SRIA, ECAT, law enforcement, fire rescue, emergency management, tourism representatives, transportation providers, businesses, employees, accessibility advocates, and community representatives.
3. Conduct a preliminary feasibility, traffic, legal, accessibility, and cost study.
4. Identify and evaluate potential off-island hubs and a safe beach loading area.
5. Request fleet pricing and availability information from eligible public and private transportation providers.
6. Evaluate ECAT, charter, legally eligible school-bus, or mixed-fleet options as appropriate.
7. Develop traffic-priority, emergency, severe-weather, and passenger-management procedures.
8. Review overnight-parking practices during primary air-show days through a fair public process.
9. Consider a limited future pilot only after findings and public comments are reviewed.
10. Publish the findings, pilot framework, budget assumptions, and evaluation results for community review.

Conclusion

Red, White & Blues Week is a tremendous source of pride for Pensacola and Northwest Florida. Its popularity should be celebrated, but recurring transportation difficulties should not automatically be accepted as unavoidable.

The region already has parking facilities, transportation providers, transit resources, public-safety agencies, businesses, community partners, and the organizational capability needed to test a better approach. A voluntary off-island shuttle will not eliminate every delay, and not every visitor will choose to use it. It may, however, meaningfully reduce private vehicle trips in the most congested area, improve public-safety flexibility, expand affordable access, support the beach workforce, and create a more enjoyable experience.

The Blue Angels Express Initiative respectfully asks the appropriate agencies to study the proposal, invite public input, and consider whether a limited pilot can be responsibly developed for a future Red, White & Blues Week.

Respectfully submitted,

Westley Bruggeman

Pensacola Resident & Transportation Professional

Appendix A - Hub Site-Screening Criteria

- Usable parking capacity and documented owner authorization
- Safe ingress, egress, and internal bus circulation
- Distance from residential streets and mitigation of neighborhood effects
- Proximity to major travel corridors
- Accessible parking, boarding paths, and passenger assistance
- Lighting, security, staffing, and surveillance considerations
- Restroom availability or capacity for temporary facilities
- Pedestrian-safe queuing and weather protection where feasible
- Space for wayfinding, check-in, standby, and emergency access
- Ability to support multiple departures without blocking surrounding traffic

Appendix B - Items Requiring Official Validation

The combined source proposals contain preliminary factual statements and operating assumptions that should be validated before formal governmental reliance. These include:

- Event attendance estimates and demand by day
- Casino Beach public parking capacity
- Typical lot-fill times and traffic delay ranges
- Typical Blue Angels performance and event schedules
- Observed overnight-parking practices
- Private event-parking prices and capacity
- Available fleet, driver, and hub capacity
- Travel-time improvements achievable through traffic priority
- Legal authority and operational requirements for parking-policy changes
- Full pilot cost and eligible funding sources

Potential hubs, schedules, fares, routes, fleet types, passenger capacities, and traffic procedures described in this proposal are recommendations for study-not final commitments.