

MEMORANDUM

DATE: February 23, 2024
TO: Mayor & City Council (Council)
CC: Mercy Rushing, City Manager
FROM: Mineola Parks and Open Spaces Advisory Board (Board)
SUBJECT: Consideration to open the Mineola Nature Preserve (Preserve); April 6-8, 2024

Background

Mineola, Texas is poised to experience a Total Solar Eclipse on April 8, 2024. Plans were initially made to host a 3-day event to generate revenue for the City. Out of concern for the community, the Council voted in a special session, on January 10, 2024, to 1) cancel the 2024 Mineola Eclipse Fest and 2) close the Preserve to the public on April 6-8, 2024.

Situation

The Preserve serves as a public venue for the outdoor enjoyment of Mineola's citizens. Numerous citizens have expressed their concern to Parks Board directors regarding the 3-day closure of the Preserve.

Recommendation

The Board is seeking the Council's consideration on the following:

1. Opening the Preserve for regular hours of operation on Saturday, April 6 and Sunday, April 7, 2024
2. Opening the Preserve for limited hours of operation on Monday, April 8, 2024, from 8 am until 5 pm with *controlled entry* and *limited capacity*. The Board proposes a limited capacity of 1000 people and will provide volunteers to staff the main entrance of the Preserve so as to not burden City resources. All other entry points would be closed to the public. The Board will not advertise or promote the opening of the Preserve. Additionally, the Board will not seek fundraising, vendors, or entertainment for visitors. A controlled presence at the Preserve will help to protect and safeguard this valuable City asset.

MEMORANDUM

DATE: February 23, 2024

TO: Mayor Lankford & City Council

VIA: Mercy Rushing, City Manager

FROM: David Madsen, Fire Marshall/Emergency Management Coordinator
Chief Charles Bittner, Chief of Police/Public Safety Coordinator

SUBJECT: Parks Board Request to open the Mineola Nature Preserve April 6-8, 2024

Background Information:

The Parks and Open Spaces Advisory Board is asking you to consider opening the Preserve to regular traffic April 6-8. Their proposal is attached to this memo.

In a Special Meeting on January 10, 2024, Councilman Newman made a motion to close the Mineola Nature Preserve to the public on April 6-8. The motion was seconded by Councilman Tuck and resulted in a tie vote. Mayor Lankford broke the tie in favor of closing the park to the public for the entire weekend.

Recommendation:

It is still the recommendation of Emergency Management Staff and all Department Heads that the Preserve remain closed April 6-8. This is based on the following points:

1. **Resource Allocation:** The primary concern of first responders is the allocation of resources. With limited personnel, it will be difficult to manage emergencies in both the city and the preserve simultaneously. This is a valid concern that we feel should be taken seriously.
2. **Traffic Management:** Increased traffic within the city limits could pose significant challenges for emergency response times. It is essential to have plans in place for managing traffic flow and ensuring that emergency vehicles can move freely when needed.
3. **Risks in the Park:** Opening the park to visitors during such a busy time raises concerns about safety and the ability to respond to emergencies effectively. Because the park is geographically separated and resources are already stretched thin, responding to incidents within the park could be delayed, potentially putting visitors at risk.
4. **Public Safety:** Ultimately, the primary responsibility of the city council and first responders is to ensure the safety of residents and visitors. While it's understandable that there may be interest in opening the park for the eclipse, this must be balanced against the need to maintain public safety and emergency response capabilities.

Given these concerns, we ask that the council decide to maintain the closure of the park for the entire weekend and day of the event to ensure that resources can be focused on managing

emergencies within the city limits. We are asking you to weigh the potential benefits of opening the park against the risks and challenges it presents. The reason we recommend closure is because we feel the risk is greater than the reward. We feel that by splitting our resources between two geographically separated locations, we will not be able to respond appropriately, thereby putting our citizens and visitors at risk.

However, we would be willing to allow the park to be open for regular visitors on Saturday and Sunday. The influx of visitors is expected to be on Monday the 8th, which makes that day our primary concern.

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Eclipses

Solar eclipse jam: How to avoid getting stuck in traffic on April 8, 2024

News By [Jamie Carter](#) published 6 days ago

Expect a traffic jam for the ages on eclipse day — and plan ahead to avoid it.



Comments (1)



Traffic is backed up in the northbound lanes of Interstate 57 following the solar eclipse on August 21, 2017 near Johnston, Illinois. (Image credit: Scott Olson/Getty Image)

Buckle up — there's a total solar eclipse coming on April 8 — and everyone will be talking about traffic.

Many who traveled into and within the path of totality last time around on August 21, 2017, will recall the long and tedious traffic jams on the way home after the eclipse.

The [total solar eclipse on April 8](#), will traverse North America from Mexico to Canada via the U.S. Although another one happened less than seven years ago, this one is longer in duration, has a wider path of totality, and occurs over or close to many major cities. It will also happen in a part of the world where millions of people have either experienced or heard eyewitness accounts of how spectacular totality is. The potential is for millions of visitors to flock to the path of totality, defying predictions.

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Complicating matters will be the uncertain weather prospects, which are more likely to mean cloudy skies in April than in August. Will that put people off? Or merely add to traffic in the hours before the eclipse? A massive influx of visitors into rural areas could cause issues, clogging

highways and parking lots, and you'll need to prepare accordingly to avoid the eclipse jam.

Here's how to avoid getting stuck in traffic on April 8.

1. Sacrifice duration

If you're lucky enough to live inside the path of totality on April 8, there's a great argument for simply staying home and watching it in your backyard. Most globe-trotting eclipse-chasers would give their right eye for such a chance.

However, it likely comes with the fact that unless you live on the centerline, you won't experience totality for as long as you could if you drive to another location. Resist that temptation, relax and stay home. Even if you're close to the path's edge, you'll likely experience totality for a minute or two. For context, the last total [solar eclipse](#) occurred in Australia, Timor Leste and Indonesia on April 20, 2023. It lasted for between 58 seconds and 1 minute 16 seconds. "Put it this way — if you stay in your backyard and get one or two minutes in totality, it will be a peak life experience and you will never forget it," Michael Zeiler, eclipse cartographer at [GreatAmericanEclipse.com](#) told Space.com.

2. Stay overnight after the eclipse

The best way to beat the traffic is not to join it.

If you arrive at the location in the path of totality on April 7 and book a couple of nights' accommodation, you can leave on April 9 and not experience any of the madness on the roads. If you're lucky enough to live in the path, but you're hosting friends and family for the eclipse, encourage them to stay over on April 8 instead of sitting in traffic after the eclipse.

3. Stay put after totality



Stay after totality to watch the partial phases instead of waiting in traffic.

(Image credit: Bloomberg / Contributor / Getty Images)

All of that buildup, and then suddenly, it's all over, and everybody leaves. A total solar eclipse is the event's climax, but either side is a partial solar eclipse lasting about 80 minutes on April 8. Sure, the moment of totality may have passed, but staying where you are to watch the entire event go into reverse after totality is worth doing for more reasons than simply paying respects to [the moon](#).

Put it this way, you can either watch the partial eclipse, or you can sit in traffic. With so many people heading off home, there's no way you are going to beat the traffic by leaving seconds after totality. That said, if you are going to wait around after totality, you may as well do so for at least a few hours.

4. Use real-time traffic reports

Whether you leave right after totality or a few hours later, using a navigation app on your smartphone makes sense to let you know how bad the traffic is. You could even let it dictate when you leave. In the Google Maps app, press the layers button in the top-right and choose the traffic option in the map details section. It will guide you home the quickest way, likely avoiding major highways, though when heading home, be sure to have plenty of water and snacks in your vehicle just in case you get stuck.

5. Do the opposite to everyone else

By now it will be tricky to book a hotel in the path of totality, especially if you plan to go to Texas. However, a judiciously planned road trip that has you come into the path from a different angle to everyone else will mean you can visit the path just for the eclipse and then get on with your road trip. For example, Texas Hill Country is the place everyone's talking about. It has the best chance of clear skies in the U.S., according to [climate statistics](#), and it's where many major events are being planned. Kerrville is [predicted](#) to have as many as half a million visitors on April 8, largely because it's on Interstate 10 from San Antonio.

However, look at [the map of the path](#) in this area, and you'll notice that San Antonio (and nearby Austin) are south of the centerline. So plan a road trip that has you visit west or north of there, which won't be anywhere near as jammed. While Kerrville will be extremely busy, the likes of Rocksprings, Junction, Brady and Uvalde will be far less visited.

6. Stay in a city



Cleveland, Ohio, is one of several major cities in the path of totality that has a large number of hotels. (Image credit: Yuanshuai Si / Getty Images)

This is one of the most urban total solar eclipses ever. The 115 miles (185 kilometers) wide, 10,000 miles (16,000 km) long path of totality on April 8 crosses a ton of cities, including Mazatlan, Durango, and Torreón in Mexico, Austin, San Antonio, and Dallas in Texas, Little Rock in Arkansas, Indianapolis in Indiana, Cleveland in Ohio, and Buffalo and Rochester in New York. Find a hotel in any of them and stay over on April 7 and 8, and

you'll not encounter any traffic. Best of all, you can walk out of your hotel on the big day and experience the eclipse without worrying about traffic.

Related: [Total solar eclipse April 2024: 10 of the biggest cities within in the path of totality](#)

7. Use public transport

Even if you cannot find a hotel in a city on the path, the likes of Houston, St Louis, Cincinnati, Detroit, Chicago and Pittsburgh are close or within easy bus/train distance. To save on time and costs, take a night bus ([Busbud](#) is handy) between where you live and one of these cities. If you'd rather take the train, one example is Amtrak's [Empire Service](#), which runs daily between New York City to Rochester, Buffalo and Niagara Falls, all of which are in the path of totality, though you would need a hotel on either side. There are also a few scenic rides on April 8, such as Adirondack Railroad's [The Eclipse Train](#), a 5.5-hour round trip from Utica to a viewing area near Old Forge, New York for a 2-minute 50-second totality.

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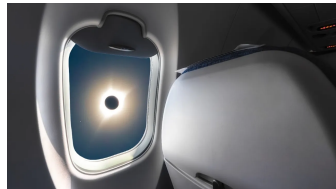
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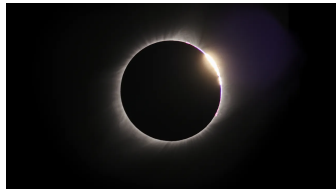
Contributing Writer

Jamie is an experienced science, technology and travel journalist and stargazer who writes about exploring the night sky, solar and lunar eclipses, moon-gazing, astro-travel, astronomy and space exploration. He is the editor of [WhenIsTheNextEclipse.com](https://www.whenthenexteclipse.com) and author of [A Stargazing Program For Beginners](#), and is a senior contributor at Forbes. His special skill is turning tech-babble into plain English.

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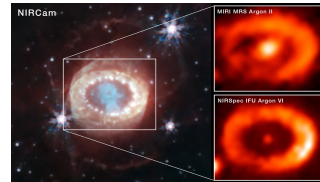


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