

Success story

ONE OF Anchorage's more interesting success stories is the People Mover bus system.

Started up in 1974 after a vote of the people the previous year, the People Mover will carry about 3.4 million passengers this year. About 12,000 passengers per day ride the buses on 17 different routes.

The system was once considered an expensive concession to political correctness and seemed to be used largely by greens for trips too long for their bicycles. In the early days, the sight of mostly empty buses caused many of our more practical citizens to grit their teeth.

But nowadays, the People Mover is more heavily used and promoted as a work force delivery system, carrying people to work who either don't have cars or are unable to drive for some reason.

The system isn't cheap. Its operating budget is more than \$17 million and the cost is heavily subsidized. The total includes passenger fares of about \$2.5 million, federal support of \$3.1 million and about \$11 million in municipal funds. Washington kicks in another \$5 million for capital investments.

Among those who appreciate the People Mover system are managers at Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport, where many employees from one-car or no-car families would otherwise face expensive options for getting to work.

The bus system will probably never be self-supporting, but it seems to be filling a legitimate need and doing it rather well.