

# Alternative transit goes for a ride at the mall

## ■ DIMOND CENTER:

Shoppers drive in, learn about other options.

By ZAZ HOLLANDER  
Anchorage Daily News

Outside, the parking lot at Dimond Center was full of cars and pickups, everybody vying for a spot on a hot sunny day.

Inside, Anchorage's first alternative transportation fair wasn't quite as busy. Shoppers in sporadic clumps drifted by a series of tables that started near Gottschalk's and turned a

corner. Many walked by the exhibits without looking.

Mike Rowlett, a dad in a black Jack Daniels T-shirt, pushed his 2-year-old son in a stroller over to the People Mover table and signed up for a drawing for a free bus pass.

Judging by the crowded parking lot, Rowlett is an exception to the average Dimond shopper: He doesn't drive.

The Anchorage resident walks to work at the Muldoon Fred Meyer. His wife gave

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# FAIR: *Mall*

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Rowlett and his son, Gavin, a ride to the mall Saturday afternoon. "We're taking the bus home," he said.

Fair organizer Nancy Killoran, People Mover's marketing director, gave Gavin a little yellow car. She recognized a good advertisement for alternative transportation when she saw one. A guy who walks to work pushing a kid in a stroller. Perfect.

"He has one of the best transportations, I think," Rowlett said, looking down at Gavin. "He just sits around and watches people."

The fair — actually a line of exhibit tables that snaked around a corner near Gottschalk's — emphasized the options available to people trying to break their car habits.

Exhibits ran the gamut from Segway scooters to Yup'ik and Tlingit kayak paddles.

"Alaskans do it differently," Killoran said. "We've always done it differently."

People Mover parked a bus outside for tours, along with an AnchorRides van specially designed to transport qualified disabled riders.

Inside, panels at one booth talked up carpooling and the city's Share-A-Ride program. Another booth provided reams of information about air quality, especially in winter, when idling engines can generate clouds of exhaust.

Probably the most popular exhibit was the Segway, that motorized, computer-guided scooter that is steered by the rider's body movements. Lean forward to go forward; lean back for reverse.

Andy Hilowitz, who owns one of only six Segway rental companies in the country, said commuters can take advantage of its sweat-free ride to get to work or buzz around downtown.

"It's not going to replace cars. It's not meant to," Hilowitz said. "But it fills a short-distance niche that bicycles can't."

Juneau police plan to test the devices in police work, and Alaska State Troopers will try them out in their patrols at the upcoming Alaska State Fair.

Jane Anderson, who took a ride on a Segway on Saturday at the mall, concluded she liked it. But she wondered how well it would travel on Anchorage's gritty sidewalks. "It would be fun just to hop on to go to the store instead of getting in your car," Anderson said.

And, yes, she said, she and her family drove to the mall.

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■ Daily News reporter Zaz Hollander can be reached at [zhollander@adn.com](mailto:zhollander@adn.com).