

Bus system hooks up with Google Maps

Tourists, People Mover riders can now access routes, times on their phone apps or desktop.

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— Anchorage Public Transportation Director Lance Wilber

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Anchorage's buses have arrived — on Google Maps.

On Wednesday, the municipality announced that People Mover has partnered with Google to incorporate its transit data into the tech giant's mapping system.

That's good news for smartphone users, who can now look up People Mover bus routes to a destination using the Google Maps application. Desktop users can visit PeopleMover.org on the municipality website and enter information under

the header "Plan a Trip" now visible on the right side to access the feature.

The results come with walking directions to bus stops, travel time, transfer opportunities and a fare estimate.

"It's a great expansion of service for those who ride People Mover," Public Transportation Director Lance Wilber said Wednesday afternoon in a press conference announcing the rollout.

It's also a boon for tourists and could lead to a boost in

People Mover ridership, officials said.

Numerous U.S. cities, from New York to Chicago to Portland, Oregon, have already rolled out the technology. Anchorage officials started looking into it about four years ago, Wilber said.

"We're still going to have ride guides, there's still people who love to have that stuff on paper," Wilber said. "This is just another tool that works for the community."

In 2012, Brendan Babb

was part of a team of programmers who won the Anchorage Economic Development Corp.'s Hackathon with a working model for the application. Babb, a research technician for the Alaska Center for Energy and Power, had used the bus route feature on Google Maps while traveling in the San Francisco Bay Area to speak at academic conferences. He wondered, like others, whether it could come to Anchorage.

After the hackathon, Babb volunteered to work with the municipality's information technology department to develop the technology. That effort kicked into high gear within the last six months and included a monthlong review by Google.

The technology currently

draws on schedule data. Real-time bus data is provided by the BusTracker application.

BusTracker, Babb pointed out, is more helpful for those searching routes on a computer. It is less accessible for mobile users who now simply need to change the transportation mode in the Google Maps app when searching a route to a destination.

The plan is to make that data available to the public and other developers for the creation of mobile apps, Babb said.

"I'm excited that the data is in there," he said. "There's a lot of other applications that can use it, not just Google."

People Mover buses serve Anchorage and the Eagle River-Chugach area.