

Anchorage launches sophisticated trip-planning tool

Users find fuel-efficient routes for commuting on grant-funded LinkAK.

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Commuters in Anchorage and the Mat-Su have a new way to plan their routes.

A website called "LinkAK," funded by Anchorage Metropolitan Area Transportation Solutions, a joint city-state transportation planning agency, launched

this week. The trip planning tool works like a much more sophisticated version of Google Maps, incorporating Anchorage's trail system and a variety of transit options.

A person who enters trip information into the site can gauge routes by foot, bike, car pool, van pool and automobile, as well as the People Mover and Valley Mover public transit networks.

"Carshare, bikeshare, ride-share, rail, taxi and paratransit booking" should be among the

options incorporated in the future, officials said in a statement.

LinkAK also includes an estimate for how many calories would be burned on a route, or how the trip will affect the environment by estimating the amount of carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas, produced by a trip powered by fossil fuel. The website, however, doesn't estimate CO2 produced by the metabolism of a living, breathing bicycle commuter or pedestrian.

Officials hope to cut back on

traffic congestion and help ease commutes for residents. In a statement, AMATS coordinator Craig Lyon called the tool "the first of its kind in our state."

A California-based company, RideAmigos, developed the system with AMATS and Esri, a geographic information system mapping company also based in California. It works on mobile devices without an app, officials said.

RideAmigos lists 24 other

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clients besides Anchorage, most of them colleges and local transportation agencies.

The city used a \$120,000 federal grant to pay for the system, said city spokesperson Myer Hutchinson. He said annual upkeep is estimated

at \$70,000 a year, and will be funded the next three years through AMATS transportation improvement money.

Find the link at www.linkak.org. Businesses can call 907-242-8254 to ask for a demonstration.