

Midtown is an ideal locale for a transit hub

By LANCE WILBER

A Midtown transit center could improve transit operations and the passenger experiences for Anchorage.

Consider a family with a limited budget looking for convenience, cost savings and affordable amenities; or a recent graduate searching for a place to live near a mix of job opportunities; or an elderly couple seeking safe, reliable, and accessible transportation to services, housing and shopping opportunities in one place. A location to suit all these considerations that is close to and surrounded by public spaces, parks and retail services, while also offering easy access across town is possible.

Visualize an environment where folks young and old can navigate through their daily lives with less concern over how to get from one place to another and instead focus more of their time on family and friends. The idea of a Midtown transit center complemented with quality mixed-income housing and commercial business can provide all of that. Development centered around transit hubs has been very successful in a number of urban areas.

For 40 years, downtown Anchorage has served as the focal point for operations and customer support of the People Mover bus system. Thirteen of the 14 bus routes converge in downtown. While downtown remains a key destination for riders and will continue to into the future, Anchorage has witnessed substantial development all across town necessitating a change for continued quality transportation options throughout the city.



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The entire bus system could improve by locating the hub of its operations in the center of Anchorage (i.e. Midtown), rather than at its northern edge. Housing and retail development in South Anchorage, expansion of University and medical facilities in the U-Med district and influx of retail space on the east side have strained bus travel times with the need to make transfers downtown. It is important for People Mover to keep up with these development trends to become more attractive to riders, maximize resources and continue to transport passengers to and from where they want to be. A relocation of the hub of bus operations will save time for our passengers. These savings could benefit the budget and/or our service by reducing costs or expanding service with the same dollars.

Property in Midtown that could suit the operational and development needs of a transit facility has yet to be secured. Recently the mayor visited the congressional delegation about the viability and opportunity to acquire a piece of property in Midtown, which could very well serve as a location for a transit center. There is also a tremendous opportunity at that property

to build public-private partnerships to construct amenities and complementary residential and commercial spaces in a development with a first class transit system all blended in one location.

The ultimate goal of the project is to improve the efficiency of the existing transit system and improve the experience of its passengers today as well as its service needs into the future. A Midtown transit center could become that vibrant central transit hub to serve residents and visitors with a proficient fixed-route bus system together with a design style that attracts quality housing and local services that embrace the use of public transportation.

People Mover is working to raise the bar for public transportation in Anchorage, and play a role in developing a healthy, economically and vibrant Anchorage. A Midtown transit center could be a major step in that direction. It is important to create a dialogue among riders, employers, service providers and community leaders as we work towards this goal. Please join us.