

People Mover buses could soon have an edge at traffic signals

By JAMES HALPIN
jhalpin@adn.com

The city is proposing to equip some People Mover buses with electronic devices that could let them breeze through green lights — as other motorists wait behind red about 45 seconds longer.

The proposal, which is in an ordinance submitted by Mayor Dan Sullivan, calls for a test run of the system on two routes — No. 7 along Spenard Road and No. 9 along Arctic Boulevard — and a later study to examine the results, said Jody

Karcz, director of the Public Transportation Department.

“One of the biggest complaints we hear is that (the bus) takes two to two-and-a-half times longer, and whatever we can do to speed up that bus, it’s going to help ridership,” Karcz said. “If we can turn a bus around 15 to 20 percent quicker and operate more service for the same amount of money, that’s a pretty good deal.”

Similar systems used elsewhere have

See Back Page, PEOPLE MOVER

PEOPLE MOVER: *Fire department still gets to go first*

Continued from A-1

shaved 6 percent to 25 percent travel time for bus commuters, she said. The plan could also cut pollution from idling buses, she said.

The test would use the same system already in use by the Anchorage Fire Department, which allows engines responding to emergencies to clear a path of green lights. If a fire truck and a bus hit the same intersection at once, the fire truck would win the light, she said.

Out of 271 traffic signals in the city, the test would affect about 20 lights, mostly at less congested intersections, Karcz said. Thoroughfares like Northern Lights Boulevard and Minnesota Drive would not be affected, though several lights along Dimond Boulevard would.

Fifteen of the city's 55 transit buses would be equipped with the devices, which cost between \$800 and \$1,000 apiece and are funded by a federal grant. With them, buses could clear a given intersection about 45 seconds faster, Karcz said.

But that means drivers on the other side of the equation could be waiting up to 45 seconds longer. And that doesn't go over too well with some commuters.

Tom McGrath, the 58-year-old owner of Frigid North Co., said some traffic lights around town already hold up his delivery drivers too long, and this proposal would waste even more of their time. The problem, he said, is that bus service gets worse

adn.com

WHAT DO YOU THINK? Comment on the city plan.
adn.com/anchorage

and the city answers by throwing more taxpayer money into it.

"The only thing that money cannot buy is more time, and so now they're going to take my time away from me, too," McGrath said. "To me, it's wrong. Everybody on the road is equal, or should be. ... To what extent can government take away our freedom? That's what it amounts to."

Others commenting on the Daily News Facebook page and in response to a solicitation of views were likewise reluctant to give buses the upper hand. "Forget the light controls, let them take their turn," one critic of the proposal said.

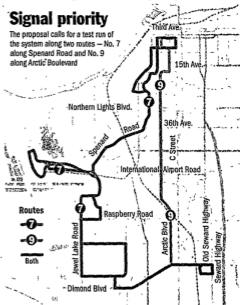
Assemblywoman Sheila Selkregg said she'd probably support the proposal, though the real issue is that People Mover needs more buses.

"You want those buses to be as efficient and as fast as you can possibly make them because that keeps the ridership up," she said. "But we haven't invested in the core service, so it does seem strange to be allocating resources to change the lights when we barely have a bus service on the road."

The proposal is up for a public hearing at the Assembly meeting Tuesday.

Signal priority

The proposal calls for a test run of the system along two routes — No. 7 along Spenard Road and No. 9 along Arctic Boulevard



Source: People Mover

NEVIN POWELL / Anchorage Daily News