

New buses add wheelchair capability to People Mover

By MARTHA ELIASSEN
Daily News reporter

To accommodate the growing popularity of mass transit in Anchorage, 15 new buses have been added to the municipality's People Mover fleet, Jim Dunn, transportation director, said Wednesday.

"They've been a long time coming," he said. "We're delighted to see them."

The new vehicles will allow the municipality to create six new bus routes as well as expand service on existing

routes, he said.

The pricetag for each bus is \$122,710. About \$1.5 million of the funding came from the federal transportation department through the Urban Mass Transit Administration. The state contributed \$100,000 and the municipality paid for the remaining \$320,000, Dunn said.

State funding came earmarked for a new Eagle River route, which will start July 20. Four of the most heavily used Anchorage routes will be expanded the same day.

The other five new routes will be added in August, and the rest of the routes will be expanded and revised at that time.

Manufactured by Flyer Industries in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, the People Mover additions seat 53 people, or 51 people if two of them are in wheelchairs.

The new buses have safety lifts to bring wheelchairs aboard, and special locks on the floor to hold the chairs in place, he said.

"This is the first time we've had the capability to do that," Dunn said.

Average capacity of the older buses is about 30 passengers, he said, and crowding has been a problem on some routes. Buses are generally filled to capacity during peak transit hours, and some routes are so popular passengers living close to town have not been able to get seats, said Dunn.

"Because of the greater capacity of the newer, larger buses, we can alleviate over-

crowding," Dunn said.

Not only are the new buses bigger, "they're attractive, comfortable, and well engineered," Dunn said. They're used in the Lower 48 by other transit systems and are reported to be economical to operate and maintain, he said.

There are now 52 buses in the People Mover fleet, 41 of which will be in service during peak hours.

The rest of the vehicles will be ready to go in case a bus breaks down, he said.