

Relax, sit back and enjoy the ride

By DWAYNE ATWOOD

Daily News business reporter

David Shipp is a People Mover bus driver who has been shuttling passengers around the streets of Anchorage for almost 20 years. Shipp, 47, has a route that runs from Providence Alaska Medical Center to Mountain View. He is originally from Springfield, Mo., and said he is a baseball fan who enjoys coaching girls fast-pitch softball at East High School. Shipp recently

was selected as the driver of the year from among roughly 80 drivers who operate the city buses. He said he earns about \$19 per hour.

I get up, generally, at about 4:15 a.m. and I kind of stumble around the house for a while and watch the early ESPN and brew my pot of coffee. And I try to get out of the house by at least 25 minutes until 6 a.m. I am supposed to clock in at 5:56 a.m. I still have not taken my

first sip of coffee by the time I get on the bus. My first trip departs Providence hospital at 6:13 a.m., and I drive until 2:51 p.m. ...

We don't get to drive the same bus every day. You just go out there and whatever is the first in your designated line, you jump in it and make sure it is running properly and you start your day. ...

Generally, I handle at least 175 to 250 people a day. I have a route that starts out at the university and goes through north and south Mountain View and goes by the Brother Francis Shelter and Alaska Native Medical Center. So I have a fairly consistent and high level of ridership.

I have driven Mountain View the majority of the time that I have been driving. But I have driven just about every route in the system. ...

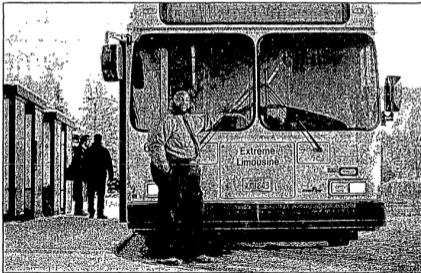
You have to know when to be aggressive and when to back off (when driving a bus). You can't let your frustrations get to you. People hate to drive behind buses. You have to make sure you are out of the way when they make their little, stupid maneuvers or mistakes. Most everyone has difficulty with lane changes and signaling.

If you are about to change lanes and you put your turn signal on, immediately, everybody for the next quarter mile speeds up. Because they want to make sure they get in front of you. They are coming up on your bumper, and you either have to back off on your acceleration and let them go or bull your way into the area you are trying to get into. Sometimes you have to fake them out by turning on your turn signal and you keep going straight. Then everybody shoots by you.

After about the first five to eight years you are still learning the ins and outs of driving. But after you have been at it for a while the driving becomes secondary to the customer relations.

Anchorage is the biggest village in Alaska.

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M. SCOTT MOON / Anchorage Daily News

David Shipp says almost two decades behind the wheel have taught him patience and given him an idea of what to expect from other drivers. "People hate to drive behind buses," he says. "You have to make sure you are out of the way when they make their little, stupid maneuvers or mistakes."

WORKING: Bus driver knows roads

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You have got people from a lot of rural areas who are coming here and you have got a lot of people from out of state. I have had people give me cards. I have had people bring me juice during the summer, or people will wave. So you develop at least a passing relationship the longer you are on a route. You recognize the people and the people recognize you.

But there is the guy who gets on and you say, "Good morning," and he says, "What's so good about it?" Or you roll up to this lady who has been standing outside for an extra 40 minutes because the other bus in front of you went by seven minutes early and she is cold and ready to let somebody know about her discomfort.

You have got to take it and you apologize. You just don't take it personally, because most people are just looking at a uniform. You can't take it home with you. I guess that becomes your philosophy over the years. The people are really the big attraction for me, because there is always something different.