

You provide car pool; city provides van

By TOM BELL
Daily News reporter

Now's your chance to get the government to subsidize your commute to work.

The Federal Highway Administration and the Anchorage Transit Department will be lending passenger vans to people who commute to work.

Each van comes equipped with cellular phones, airline-type seats and reading lights for every passenger.

The catch: You'll need to form a car pool.



Please see Back Page, VANS

VANS: 12 set to go Feb. 1

Continued from Page A-1

Twelve 14-passenger Chrysler vans will be available starting as soon as Feb. 1, and six more will be ready later this year.

Car-pooling groups, except for the driver, will have to pay for fuel, insurance and maintenance costs.

The vans cost about \$35,000 each. The Federal Highway Administration paid for 80 percent of the cost, and the city picked up the rest.

The federal government also gave the city \$70,000 to run the program, which officials hope will reduce traffic congestion and air pollution.

The cellular phones in each van are intended to ease communication between the vans' drivers and passengers waiting in their homes, said Bob Kniefel, director of Anchorage's Public Transit Department.

"We're trying to make car pooling as efficient as possible," he said.

Kae George, who travels almost 500 miles a week commuting between her Wasilla home and her Anchorage job, figures the van program will save her more than \$200 a month in gas and wear-and-tear on her car.

She saw a few of the maroon-colored vans parked at the Alaska State Fair.

"They're beautiful," she said. "I've been waiting and crossing my fingers for a long time waiting for the program to get started."

The program is geared toward commuters from Eagle River, Chugiak, Girdwood and the Mat-Su valleys. There should be



BOB HALLINEN / Anchorage Daily News

Bob Kniefel, director of Anchorage's Public Transit Department, said that nine van pools have been formed so far and will receive a vehicle like this one.

at least 10 people in each van, with two people designated as drivers, Kniefel said. Drivers must complete a one-day training course, to be set up on a Saturday.

So far, nine van pools have been formed and will receive a vehicle, Kniefel said. If the program is successful, he said, the city has money to buy six more vans.

Kniefel said people will be selected based upon where they live, with preference given to long-distance commuters.

He said Alyeska Resort has shown

interest in obtaining some vans for workers who commute from Anchorage.

The Transit Department also runs the federally funded Share-A-Ride program, which recently registered its 7,000th active participant. The program uses a computer to match people with other commuters living or working near them.

People interested in signing up for either program should call 562-POOL.