

The people movers are here

By GAIL MILLER
Daily News Staff Writer

Crowds of people, torrents of questions, and a shortage of buses marked the kick-off day of the borough's new People Mover public transit system Monday.

Twenty-five new bus drivers, armed with a strenuous week of training, survived the hub-bub, heat and confusion with a maximum of patience and cheerfulness.

CITIZENS, who turned out in mass, took advantage of the first week of free rides by filling most buses to capacity enjoying long-awaited sight-seeing and city-exploring.

"What a lovely way to see the city," said one elderly couple, on an Eagle River run in a busload of 20.

"Let's see, what'll we do next? Go ride the downtown looper, go to Goose

Lake, or ride Route 11 for the fifth time?" said Steven Gray, 12, to Joe Hicklin, 15, at 5 p.m. They had been shuttling citywide on People Mover buses since early morning.

"KIDS ARE riding today just for a lark," said driver Jim Temberton.

By 5 p.m. several of the 12 buses which ran Monday reported passenger totals of 250 each for the first day of the new system which begins its half-hour runs at 6:30 a.m. and stops at 9:30 p.m.

A day of "growing pains" officially began at 9:30 a.m. on the Park Strip when Odette Foster, vice chairman of the Borough Transportation Committee, slammed a bottle of champagne over a bus bumper and splashed Borough Mayor Jack Roderick.

DURING THE DAY one bus broke

down in Mountain View, another had a flat tire and two suffered vapor locks from the heat. Four smaller city buses, awaiting the installation of 40-gallon gas tanks, streaked back to the borough offices between runs to fill their 16-gallon tanks.

The People Mover "hot line" phone number was belatedly installed at 10:30 a.m. and until then police handled an onslaught of 600 phone calls from citizens with questions about the new system. The number is 272-4411 for information on the system.

Hand-waving riders flagged down buses at almost all street corners. There are 40 new bus stops and until 1,000 more are installed bus drivers will pick up riders on any corner.

SIX REFURBISHED 1967 buses recently were driven up the Alaska Highway to begin work Monday. Six

more are due within the next few weeks.

The system operates every half hour, charging 25 cents and its routes include Eagle River and Oceanview-Hamilton Park.

Buses generally traveled 10-15 minutes behind schedule Monday, coping with rush hour traffic, street flaggers, and bus stops swamped with questioning riders.

"THERE WILL BE slow, steady progression" as time schedules are tightened and more equipment is added to the People Mover fleet," a borough spokesman said.

Today People Mover route maps and time schedules are obtainable from any bus driver, downtown store, City Hall, and the log cabin Visitor Information Center at 4th Avenue and F Street, which is the downtown transfer spot for all buses.