

Providing Cost-Effective and Reliable Public Transportation

*One of Three Priorities for Enhancing Alaska's Quality of Life and
Protecting a Healthy Environment*

The Need

According to recent estimates, over 14,000 vehicles enter Anchorage on the Glenn Highway daily from the Mat-Su. Current projections anticipate the congestion problems to get worse with demand on the Glenn exceeding capacity between Mirror Lake and Boniface Road as early as 2025. This congestion, combined with recent volatile gas prices, is increasing the use of public transportation services. Bus service in Anchorage and Mat-Su is experiencing double-digit ridership growth, park-and-ride lots are overflowing and nearly 800 people are on a vanpool waiting list.

An increase in public transportation options will reduce congestion, improve air quality, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and assist Alaska residents with the increasing costs and inconvenience of driving. However, Alaska is one of very few states that does not provide operating support for public transportation except as it relates to ferries. State funding for public transportation would offer immediate and long-term relief for residents struggling with skyrocketing transportation costs – quickly putting tires on the ground and creating the infrastructure to better serve the needs of commuters, residents and tourists today and into the future. In 2008, the Municipality of Anchorage and the Mat-Su Borough developed a Memorandum of Agreement committing both entities to cooperate in the development of a Regional Transit Authority (RTA) for the purpose of addressing the concerns listed above. An RTA works across local jurisdictions to plan and deploy multi-modal public transportation service funded by a variety of sources including federal, state, and local contributions combined with “fare box” revenue. RTAs exist across the country in communities large and small, and they are a proven effective and efficient approach to managing cross-jurisdictional service like that between Anchorage and Mat-Su. Additionally, the creation of an RTA is recommended in the current Long Range Transportation Plans for Anchorage and Mat-Su, as well as in a 2002 Commuter Rail Study commissioned by the Alaska Railroad Corporation.

The Proposal

Alaska's conservation community supports passage of Senate Bill 152 to help increased state funding for public transportation in Alaska to decrease the cost of travel, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and alleviate congestion. Sponsored by Sen. Charlie Huggins, SB 152 gives municipal governments the ability to create regional transit authorities. The bill would allow these regional authorities to accept state, federal, municipal and private funding and to take out bonds for transportation system projects.

The Benefits

- Improved air quality and reduced greenhouse gas emissions.
- Immediate relief for Southcentral residents struggling with congestion and transportation costs.
- Quickly puts tires on the ground to better serve the needs of commuters today and into the future.
- Showing that transit can work in a rural state like Alaska will encourage additional federal transit money

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2009 ACA Priority
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