

# Urban/Rural Public Transit

Commissioner of Highways, Walt Parker, announced today that the Department of Highways is moving forward in placing new emphasis on urban and rural public transit planning.

The prospect of continuing availability of capital grant funds for both urban and rural systems and future prospects for increased operating funds makes it imperative that Alaska develop an overall capacity to deal with this situation.

Plans are going forward for a federally-funded public transit coordinator.

Larger communities will continue to deal directly with the Urban Mass Transit Administration as in the past.

This avenue is also available to smaller communities but Parker noted, "The State has an overall obligation to insure that communities are aware of what programs are available to them and it is the ability to provide this service that is being improved in the department."

Out of \$2 billion appropriated by the Congress in the 1972 UMTA Act for capital grants for rail transit, only \$43 million has been allocated to the cities thus far.

Parker noted, "If cities are going to be serious about improving their public transit and installing first-class systems, they had better be more responsive to the funding that Congress has provided. As noted in a recent editorial in the Anchorage Daily News, Los Angeles is attempting to match \$800 million in federal grants by securing \$200 million in state funds.

This same 80-20 match is available to other communities. A \$30 million bond issue would make possible the eventual construction of a \$150 million light rail system.

If communities are going to take serious steps towards eventual public transit systems, they must think in these terms. The Department of Highways is moving as rapidly as possible to

provide the kind of arterial system throughout Anchorage that will enable the local bus system to operate as efficiently as possible,

The balance between the immediate demands for a better arterial system and the larger necessity for efficient inexpensive public transportation is exactly the way in which the Department of Highways would like to move.

This calls, however, for a joint effort in which the local communities must take the lead in systems planning. The Department of Highways will provide all available help in securing joint use of rights-of-way, funding, and engineering backup.

First, however the basic commitment of the community to a rail system must be apparent and this the Department of Highways cannot provide.

A bond issue that would provide the matching funds for an expanded system would probably be regarded by both the State and federal governments as evidence of that kind of commitment."