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Driver Tom Burton gets behind the wheel of the new hybrid bus in the Sanford Ocean Shuttle route. The bus is one of the three new hybrid diesel-electric buses introduced last month by York County Community Action Corp. for its Shoreline Explorer service.

Staff photo by Melissa Wood

It's a better way to go

The state's first hybrid bus plies the Ocean Shuttle line between Sanford and Wells.

By **MELISSA WOOD**

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There's something different about the new bus on the Sanford Ocean Shuttle line. Sure, to commuters and visitors who use the shuttle to get around town or over to Wells, it looks like a bus and sounds like a bus.

But it's better than a bus. It's a hybrid. The Sanford Ocean Shuttle is one of the three new hybrid diesel-electric buses rolled out June 26 by York County Community Action Corp. for its Shoreline Explorer routes. They are the first of their kind in the state.

"For us, this is an exciting time," said Connie Garber, transportation director of York County Community Action Corp.

A CLOSER LOOK

The Sanford Ocean Shuttle runs seven days a week from 5:55 a.m. to 9:35 p.m. Fares are \$5 for a round trip from Sanford to Wells, \$1 for rides in-town Sanford, and \$25 for a 12-ride multi-pass. Children ages 3 to 15 ride at half fare, and children under 3 ride free.

For more information and a schedule, visit www.shorelineexplorer.com/.

"We're hoping as the economy recovers and people do have more employment that folks will consider using public transportation."

According to Garber, the implementation of the new hybrid buses fulfills one of the original goals of the Shoreline Explorer bus system, which was to have clean fuel vehicles operating on the road. "The whole concept of the Shoreline

Explorer was to help reduce congestion, improve air quality, and provide public transportation that was fun for people who live in the area and people who are visiting the area," said Garber.

Until this year, however, they had been borrowing vehicles from other routes in the York County Community Action Corp. fleet to fill in as they looked for a greener solution.

Garber said other alternatives had been studied, such as the propane-fueled buses used for Bar Harbor's Island Explorer routes, but discovered that those buses need a special maintenance facility, which they didn't have. Similarly, Portland's fleet of compressed natural gas buses also requires special facilities.

"We knew we wanted a clean fuel vehicle," said Garber, "so that left us with a hybrid."

Built in Kansas, the buses cost \$215,000

"Bus" see page 4

Hybrid diesel-electric bus a first in state

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each. Some of the money was provided through the Maine Department of Transportation and the Federal Transit Administration as part of the statewide Explorer initiative, which includes the Island Explorer, the Mountain Explorer in Bethel and the Sugarloaf Explorer in Carrabassett Valley.

York County Community Action Corp. also had to secure local funding for the new buses, which, Garber said, comes from "anywhere and everywhere we can find it," including businesses that buy advertising on the vehicles and the fares that riders pay.

Garber explained that the hybrids operate primarily on electric power supplemented by diesel. The diesel helps start the engine, which is able to run without assistance from the diesel fuel until the speed gets up to around 30 miles per hour.

"So these are ideal for situations that are stop and go be-

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cause the electric engine does all the work," said Garber.

She said that York County Community Action Corp. expects the buses to bring down fuel use and costs as they require less fuel and less service due to air brakes that reduce wear and tear on the vehicles' breaking systems.

Because of some differences in handling the vehicles, drivers for the Shoreline fleet attended training before they began op-



Members of York County Community Action Corp. presented the new hybrid bus that will serve the Sanford Ocean Explorer line. From left, Tom Burton, bus driver; Mary Field, project manager; Michelle Wilson, graphic designer who designed the Shoreline Explorer logo; Connie Garber, director of transportation; and Don Caron, bus driver. Staff photo by Melissa Wood

erating the new buses. Tom Burton, who drives the Sanford Ocean Shuttle, said it did take some getting used to.

"I learned you cannot jump out in front of cars very quickly because it's slow on the get-go," he said.

He also reports that so far, passengers love the new buses, which also feature air conditioning, destination signs in front, a wheelchair lift and the ability to carry up to two bicycles in the front.

The Sanford Ocean Shuttle runs from Sanford, beginning at the School Street parking lot, to Wells Beach. Of the three buses in the Shoreline Explorer fleet, the Sanford Ocean Shuttle is the only year-round route. Garber said the route was created after York County Community Action Corp. hired a consultant to look at traffic between Sanford and Wells. The consultant found they needed a way to connect Sanford's job seekers

with Wells' potential jobs.

"In the summertime they relied on a lot of kids in high school in the Sanford area to come and work," said Garber. "Most of them didn't have drivers license and many didn't bother to look for summer jobs in Wells because they couldn't get there."

Sanford's labor pool doesn't just include teenagers looking for summer jobs. "With the closing of manufacturing, that created a situation where you had a labor pool in Sanford that didn't have a way they could afford to get to job or school unless they could walk there," said Garber.

To help fill this need, the Sanford Ocean Shuttle connects to York County Community Action Corp.'s WAVE (Wheels to Access Vocation and Education).

"The two systems work really closely together," said Garber. "In some instances, a WAVE van will pick someone up and bring them to the School Street parking lot and (they can) get on that bus and go all the way to Wells."

Burton said he's noticed many passengers who are using the service to attend summer classes York County Community College, a stop along the route. Garber said that people also use it to get to the Amtrak Downeaster station in Wells and for getting around in-town Sanford.

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