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Assembly OKs Van Tran study

By MATT BUXTON mbuxton@newsminer.com

The Borough Assembly green-lighted a proposed privatization study of the borough's door-to-door van transit system for disabled and elderly riders at its Thursday night meeting.

The approved study, which has a \$25,000 budget, will examine the costs, savings and

concerns of contracting out the Borough's Van Tran service that provides rides to qualified riders within bus line service areas.

It addresses concerns of borough assemblymembers who,



Hutchison

during budget talks earlier this year, found that a ride on the wheelchair-equipped vans costs the system about \$70. That's almost twice as much as similar services



Dukes

Assemblyman Michael Dukes who co-authored the bill with Assemblywoman Diane Hutchison.

Both Anchorage and Juneau's paratransit systems are privatized, and Dukes said he felt it would be worth exploring a similar option for Van Tran.

"Wethoughtitwasagoodideato

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Seattle viaduct closure may be 'Viadood'

Commuters expect worst as Alaska's namesake road is demolished

By GENE JOHNSON Associated Press

SEATTLE — The so-called "Carmageddon" in Los Angeles this summer was a bust — but its Seattle-based sequel "Viadood" is being billed as the real deal.

Beginning tonight, one of Seattle's two north-south highways will close for nine days through downtown so crews can demolish the southern end of the Alaskan Way Viaduct, the aging, earthquake-vulnerable elevated highway being replaced by a waterfront tunnel.

Transit officials mailed people free bus tickets, added ferry trips across Elliott Bay to West Seattle and met with downtown businesses to encourage them to allow telecommuting. Nevertheless, there's no shortage of fretting about where the 110,000 vehicles that take State Route 99 over the viaduct on a typical weekday will go.

"Caution: 'Viadood' Ahead," The Seattle Times blared in a front page headline Thursday. The city's Cascade Bicycle Club warned of the "second-coming of 'Carmageddon'" and urged people to dust off their bikes to avoid the mess.

"There's not one detour route that can carry that amount of traffic," state Transportation Department spokesman Travis Phelps said Thursday. "If drivers continue to do their everyday thing, you could see widespread congestion across Puget Sound."

In July, a 10-mile section of one of the nation's busiest highways — Interstate 405 in Los Angeles — was closed for a weekend as workers tore down part of a bridge. Commuters feared "Carmageddon," but drivers largely kept off the road. Traffic was fine.

Traffic planners in L.A. had several things going for them: It was a weekend, it was summer, and the closure was just a couple of days.

Seattle's shutdown will encompass a workweek. It's fall, so fewer people are on vacation. And it will probably rain — a factor that can make for bad traffic even when major roads are open.

Officials are hopeful Seattle residents have gotten the message and will do what they need to do to avoid an epic traffic jam. Though it's inconvenient, they expect people will be willing to change their commuting patterns for a week.

Highway 99 and I-5 are Seattle's two major north-south arterials, and given the city's shape — essentially an hourglass bordered by water — those routes are crucial. Highway 99 also is an important road for residents of West Seattle, because it links the West Seattle Bridge with downtown. The viaduct was built in the 1950s and damaged in the region's 2001 earthquake.

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Wainwright soldier remembered

Man found dead in Afghanistan; Army is investigating death

By SAM FRIEDMAN sfriedman@newsminer.com

Before he died in Afghanistan under circumstances that still are being investigated, Private Danny Chen may have been bullied by soldiers in his unit. But at a military memorial for the 19-year-old soldier Thursday it was clear he also was loved by soldiers and military families he met during his 10-month Army career.

Almost all the soldiers speaking at Fort Wainwright's Southern Lights Chapel Thursday remembered Chen as a quiet, serious soldier who was committed to both the Army and his family.

Chen was the only child of Chinese immigrants who moved to New York to provide a better life for him, according to multiple news reports written about him in recent weeks. He reportedly wanted to be a soldier from the time he was eight years old and had dreams of becoming a New York City police officer.

Chen joined the Army in January and went to basic training in Georgia. He was at Fort Wainwright for a few months before deploying to Afghanistan two months ago.

He died Oct. 3 in Kandahar province Afghanistan. The Army Criminal Investigations Division said he was found in a guard tower with a gunshot wound to the head. His parents say military authorities have told them he was bullied and beaten by other soldiers, according to multiple news accounts. The Army still is investigating his death.

Thursday's memorial service was similar to services for fifteen members of the 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division who have died in combat since the unit deployed in April. An Army chaplain and soldiers



Eric Engman/News-Miner

Sgt. 1st Class Bobby Gates straightens the combat boots on the display Thursday before the memorial service for Pvt. Danny Chen of the 3rd Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment Thursday morning at the Southern Lights Chapel on Fort Wainwright.

who knew Chen spoke about him over a display of his boots, cap and rifle. The service ended with a 3-volley salute and a bugler playing taps.

"Our grieving is complicated by the yet undetermined circumstances around his death," rear detachment chaplain Maj. Steve Lambert said.

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Sourdough Jack sez:

"No takers? Why in my day we worked sun up to sun down, up hill both ways through snow."

A lot of jobs



But few takers Page A8

Alexander gets medal at White House

By MARY BETH SMETZER msmetzer@newsminer.com

Late Thursday evening Clarence Alexander was still smiling after an unforgettable day in the nation's capitol, surrounded by family members.

The 72-year-old Gwich'in Athabaskan was one of 13 Americans awarded the 2011 Presidential Citizens Medal by President Barack Obama in the White House East Room.

The award is the second highest civilian honor and recognizes the every day heroes who commit themselves to their communities.

Such is the case with Alexander, a lifetime resident of Fort Yukon, a Yukon River community northeast of Fairbanks.

Alexander had no formal educa-



The Associated Press

President Barack Obama awards the 2011 Presidential Citizens Medal to Clarence Lee Alexander of Fort Yukon during a ceremony Thursday in the East Room of the White House in Washington.

tion, but during his lifetime he has dedicated himself to improving the

quality of life and natural environment in his community.

"Never in my life did I think that I would be in the White House shaking hands with the president for working diligently in something I believe in," Alexander said.

Alexander served as Fort Yukon Chief for a dozen years, but the award is specific to his work related to the Yukon River Inter-Tribal Watershed Council which he co-founded in 1997, and his efforts leading to the closure of open-burning dumps and the removal or recycling of millions of pounds of waste.

The council was formed in response to common contamination concerns of communities along the Yukon, from

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