

Trenton lauded at Acadia gateway ceremony

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TRENTON - Despite freezing temperatures and ground as hard as concrete, officials held a ceremony Friday to celebrate the official start of the Acadia Gateway Center construction project.

The Route 3 center will function first as a maintenance and storage facility for the seasonal Island Explorer bus system and as a summertime park-and-ride parking lot for people who want to ride the propane-powered buses onto Mount Desert Island. Later phases of the facility are expected to include an intermodal transportation facility and a new Acadia National Park visitors center.

On Friday, local, state and federal officials used gold-painted shovels to turn over several clumps of loose soil that had been dumped at the construction site ahead of the event. Then they quickly hopped onto an Island Explorer bus and traveled a short distance down the road to Bar Harbor Biotechnology, where they spoke about the importance of the project.

"This is the essence of economic development," said state Transportation Commissioner David Cole of the cooperation among multiple governmental agencies on the \$14 million project. "Transportation takes many forms. It isn't just roads and bridges anymore."

Officials representing the town of Trenton, Maine's congressional delegation, the national park, Federal Highway Administration, Friends of Acadia, the state Transportation Department, Hancock County Planning Commission, and Downeast Transportation all took part in the planning process and were on hand to take part in Friday's ceremony.

Several officials specifically thanked the town of Trenton, which at first raised objections when state officials said they did not intend to get local approval for the project. As a result, DOT representatives met with Trenton officials and agreed to work with the town to address the town's concerns.

At the ceremony, Fred Ehrlenbach, chairman of Trenton's planning board, thanked local residents for voting in favor this past spring of a zoning change that allows the project to go forward.

"This project will do a great deal for the town of Trenton," Ehrlenbach said. "In the interim, it will create jobs. I think that will be a great benefit to the town."

Brewer construction firm Nickerson & O'Day has been selected to build the first phase of the project, which is expected

to be completed in 2011, officials said.

The fare-free bus system that transports tourists and commuters around MDI has been in operation since 1997 but has never had a permanent base of operations. The fleet, which has grown from eight to 36 buses over the past dozen years, has been dispatched from an office in Bar Harbor but the fleet has been maintained and stored seasonally in the parking lot of the local IGA supermarket.

Since its inception, the bus system has done much to ease seasonal congestion on MDI, officials said. It has transported more than 3 million passengers and prevented more than 11 tons of pollution from being produced and more than 1 million vehicle trips from being taken on MDI-area roads.

"There are few projects that make more sense than this one," Cole said.

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