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### **Island Explorer Postponing Service**

TRENTON, MAINE – Downeast Transportation, in consultation with its partners, has decided to indefinitely postpone Island Explorer bus system service for 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Island Explorer is a propane-powered, fare-free transit system that serves Acadia National Park and the surrounding communities. In 2019, the bus system carried more than 648,000 passengers. Service would normally begin June 23<sup>rd</sup> on Mount Desert Island and Memorial Day weekend on the Schoodic Peninsula, and run through Columbus Day.

To meet social distancing guidelines issued by the State of Maine and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Island Explorer buses could only carry 12 passengers each as compared to the normal capacity of 30 seated passengers and 14 standing. During busy times of the season, the bus system often operates at capacity and requires passengers to wait in queues for the next bus with room for riders.

“This is the most difficult decision I’ve had to make in my two decades with Downeast Transportation. We recognize that park visitors, residents, and commuters love the bus system, so we do not take this action lightly. But the safety of our employees and the general public is paramount. We’re confident that postponement is the right thing to do at this time.” said Paul Murphy, Executive Director at Downeast Transportation.

“Ensuring the health and safety of our visitors, employees, volunteers, and community members is the highest priority for Acadia National Park,” said Superintendent Kevin Schneider. “Postponing Island Explorer service at this time is the most prudent action to take.” Murphy indicated that Downeast Transportation and its partners will continue to meet throughout the summer to evaluate whether conditions allow for operating the service. Factors to be weighed include social distancing guidelines and the number of drivers that Downeast Transportation is able to hire. “Typically, we hire around 120 drivers for the entire season,” said Murphy. “Many of these are local school bus drivers who return to their regular jobs in the fall, so we depend on drivers who travel to the region to provide service in the fall. That could be challenging this year.”

“The Island Explorer is among the most popular programs that Friends of Acadia helps fund,” said David MacDonald, FOA president. “So this is a tough decision to make, but we fully support the need to prioritize health and safety. Together with our funding partners at L.L.Bean, FOA pledges to remain flexible and prepared to help in the future should there be a recommendation to resume some level of service later in the season.”

Downeast Transportation continues to operate commuter bus routes from Bangor, Ellsworth, Cherryfield, and Milbridge to Bar Harbor on weekdays. It also operates limited public

transportation routes throughout Hancock County for travel deemed essential under Governor Mills's guidelines. Downeast Transportation adheres to social distancing guidelines on these routes. It has also implemented a comprehensive cleaning regimen to ensure the safety of drivers and passengers.

For questions about transit options, visit [www.downeasttrans.org](http://www.downeasttrans.org) or call (207) 667-5796.

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