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DOT AWARDS CONTRACTS FOR "PARATRANSIT" VEHICLES

The award of two contracts totaling \$1.2 million for the construction of prototypes of special-use vehicles was announced today by the U.S. Urban Mass Transportation Administration.

The Department of Transportation contracts were awarded to Minicars, Inc., Goleta, Calif., for \$598,990, and to McFarland Design, Santa Barbara, Calif., for \$651,030.

The vehicles will be built for a wide range of services, such as shared ride taxicab, dial-a-ride and special door-to-door transportation for elderly and handicapped persons. The vehicles will provide services that do not require the capacity of vans or small buses.

The vehicles will carry a driver and up to six passengers. A ramp will permit wheelchair passengers to enter and exit vehicles.

An evaluation team representing the International Taxicab Association, the American Public Transit Association and the National Center for a Barrier Free Environment selected McFarland Design and Minicars. Each contractor will build three prototype vehicles.

The evaluation of mockup vehicles designed by the contractors was completed in April 1980.

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UMTA will test one vehicle from each contractor. The other vehicles will be evaluated by paratransit and transit operators, handicapped persons, the automotive industry, and the public.

The evaluation team said there is a need to test up to 100 vehicles in actual service to determine their suitability, effect upon trip demand, productivity and operating costs.

Paratransit operators expressed interest in forming a consortium to purchase a limited number of these vehicles for evaluation purposes. The group recommended that UMTA assist in the planning and monitoring of the demonstration and disseminate the results.

Improved paratransit services could be provided, especially for handicapped person, by incorporating these vehicles into existing taxicab operations, the team said. The paratransit vehicle could account for up to 25 percent of taxi fleets.

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