



Photo by Patrice Gillespie Smith/SDOT

High-tech van analyzes condition of city streets

By JOURNAL STAFF

It won't win many car show prizes, but this odd-looking van can do what your average sports coupe can't: assess city road conditions.

The vehicle, called the Automatic Road Analyzer, or ARAN, uses cameras, lasers and global positioning system technology to measure the condition of roads and identify which ones need repair.

Mayor Greg Nickels showed off the vehicle at Wallingford Center yesterday as he unveiled a \$8.4 million road-paving proposal, which he will deliver to the City Council along with the rest of this 2006 budget on Sept. 26.

The paving budget still falls short of the \$14 million the Seattle Department of Transportation says it needs to preserve existing street conditions. The

city's maintenance backlog is more than \$300 million, according to the department.

Here's how ARAN works: The city of Seattle hires a consultant to drive the vehicle over more than 1,500 lane miles throughout the city. It takes six to eight weeks to do all the driving. The city does not own the vehicle.

ARAN comes replete with crack-detection systems, road-roughness and friction indicators, and something called a rutbar, which measures the severity of road rutting.

The road assessments are being conducted every other year. The first time the high-tech van was used in Seattle was in 2003.

The current assessment began a few weeks ago. Afterwards, the consultant will turn the road data over to the city.