



NEWS

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MTA BUS AND TRAIN PASSENGERS WHO ARE DISABLED BENEFIT FROM NEW SAFETY AND RELIABILITY PROGRAMS

A new safety system designed to protect the sight-impaired from rail station loading mishaps soon will be tested on the Metro Red Line as part of the MTA's continued effort to develop innovative programs to assist passengers with disabilities.

The "platform surface tactile system," comprised of 6-foot by 4-foot, textured plastic pads installed on station platforms where train doors open, will allow passengers with vision impairments to feel the area where the train doors open for safe boarding. The new devices, if they prove successful during a test later this month, could be installed at 444 locations on all Metro Red, Blue and Green line stations. The cost of the program is estimated at \$550,000.

"This is just one program we are launching to assist the disabled community," said Ellen Levine, Executive Officer for Operations. "We also have started a Metro Wheels program where we have asked riders with disabilities who regularly use our bus and train service to report to us daily on how well we are doing."

Levine said the program started four months ago and now has 40 volunteers participating. The customers, after using the service, report over the Internet their experience with the service, describing how the wheelchair lift on a bus worked, how they were treated by the operator, and other information.

Volunteers receive a monthly Metro pass and are provided with Internet access.

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The purpose of Metro Wheels is to achieve a 50 percent reduction in wheelchair pass-ups and access failure in the short-term and to achieve sustained improvement in the long-term.

"So far, the results are much better than what we had first expected," Levine said. "We can do better. We will do better."

The MTA is actively searching for additional volunteers to participate in the program so that the entire Metro Bus system can be blanketed on a daily basis and more comprehensive information submitted. Information is reformatted into daily, weekly and monthly reports that are forwarded to the operating divisions, MTA management, the MTA Board and volunteers.

"Metro Wheels provides instant feedback to the MTA's 11 bus operating divisions on a daily basis about each ride attempt," Levine said. "It gives weekly and monthly statistics on system-wide and division level performance. Most importantly, however, it elevates the voice of the customer."

During the next year, the MTA will develop a separate monitoring program that addresses the concerns of customers with visual impairments and will explore another for riders with hearing disabilities.

Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 requires public agencies to identify the status of their compliance with the ADA in all programs, facilities, communications and employment. The act also requires the adoption of a Transition Plan to identify the agency's program for correcting areas of non-compliance.

Passengers with disabilities seeking additional information on Metro Wheels should call (213) 922-4340, or check the MTA's Internet website at www.mta.net.

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