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Metro's 'Talking Bus' in Full Operation by Mid-Summer

- Automated voice system installed on 2,500 buses
- Pilot program gets favorable comments from riders

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(May 17, 2005) By mid-summer, Metro Buses will be talking to their riders.

That is to say, the new Automated Voice Annunciator system (AVA) will be operational on 2,500 of Metro's 2,600 buses and will be ready to announce bus stops throughout the county.



[Who said that?](#)

Earlier this year, AVA was thoroughly tested during a pilot program using 29 Venice Division 6 buses. It has now been installed on all Westside/Central Service Sector buses and will be phased in over the next couple of months in the other four service sectors, according to ATMS Project Manager Tom Pope.

"We're getting favorable, real favorable comments from people," says Bus Operations Center Director Tom Jasmin. He notes that calling the major stops, transfer points and points of interest will ensure that Metro complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

During the pilot project in the Westside/Central sector, Jasmin dispatched a team of transportation operations supervisors under the direction of Kevin Dukes to drive the Division 6 bus lines and evaluate the voice system.

Checked the accuracy

Over a two-month period, the TOSs checked to see that AVA announced each stop, whether the announcement was accurate and if it was pronounced correctly.

The AVA computer system holds the names of all 18,500 stops on the 189 Metro Bus lines and, during the test phase, three TOSs listened to every single announcement. Adjustments were made and, in some cases, announcements were re-recorded.

"When we get full fleet implementation and the regular bus operators are running the routes, I'm sure we'll make more corrections," says Pope.

When AVA is implemented at a division, a bus assigned to a particular route – or to more than one route – will be programmed to announce the stops in sequence on both the out- and in-bound runs.

As the bus approaches a stop, AVA will announce that stop and the next one along the route. An external speaker will announce the bus

line and destination to patrons waiting to board.

'Help for the sight-impaired'

"AVA is a real help for the sight-impaired at bus stops, especially in the downtown area where multiple bus lines serve a stop," says Jasmin. "There could be up to 100 people waiting for buses."

The AVA system is flexible enough to adapt to changes in bus routes and to the elimination or addition of stops. The names of new stops also can be recorded and included in the AVA computerized inventory.

But, even though Metro will rely on AVA to make most bus stop announcements, the operator remains in control. In the event of systems failure, for example, the operator can use the PA system to call requested stops.

The operator also can adjust the volume of the internal speaker and soon will be able to adjust the external speaker volume. Currently, external speakers are turned off between 8 p.m. and 6 a.m. to avoid disturbing neighbors along the bus routes at night.

AVA is the most "public" element of the Automated Transportation Management System. ATMS includes an automatic passenger counter, voice data radio, a Global Positioning System-based vehicle locator, and a vehicle diagnostic and equipment monitoring system.

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