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TOS Leslie Elliott, working the window at Division 15, gives Operator Martin Perez his route assignment -- often called a "paddle" or "running board" for the day.



Photos: Ned Racine

Division Paper Records will be TOAST with New Software System

- Two-year project will automate bus and rail operator assignments and scheduling

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(Feb. 2, 2007) In an age when computers routinely record, analyze and report employee time, work assignments and scheduling, supervisors at Metro's operating divisions are still doing many of those time-consuming tasks the old-fashioned way -- with pen and paper.

The daily comings and goings of bus and rail operators, whether they are on vacation or sick leave, who's on call to fill in for an absent operator, and myriad other details are recorded by hand.

Then, the information is entered into a computer program called TOTS, the Transit Operator Trends System.

"This was necessary back when computers were often quite unreliable and it was prudent to have a paper backup," says Ed Muncy, director of Service Performance Analysis. "Nowadays, computers are extremely reliable and TOTS is outdated."

Muncy and a team that includes members from Operations, Information Management, Safety, Human Resources and the operating divisions are

working on a project to implement a state-of-the-art computer software program with accompanying hardware that will replace TOTS and bring a new level of efficiency to the record-keeping system.



TOS Karla Aleman makes a final check of paperwork accumulated during a day's operation at Division 15. Division supervisors who handle the "markup" function are responsible for recording operator time, vacation, sick leave, absences and other personnel information.

The project's name is TOAST – Transit Operator Activity Scheduling and Tracking. The \$7.6 million project was approved by the Board in May, 2006 and really began to pick up steam in December, 2006 with the awarding of a contract to Giro, Inc., of Montreal.

Giro also designed and markets the HASTUS bus scheduling software system to the transit industry, including Metro.

Maintenance has M3 system

The new tracking system won't include maintenance employees, who's time and task records already are recorded in the M3 system. M3 also provides data on vehicle maintenance and parts inventory management.

Giro's software system currently is in use by transit agencies in Oakland, San Diego, Phoenix and Long Beach, and other medium-sized properties. It also is employed in Montreal, which has some 1,600 buses, and by a Scandinavian transit agency that operates about 6,000 buses.

The TOAST project will have the most impact on the transportation operations supervisors (TOS) who are responsible for "markup" and "window" tasks at the operating divisions.

TOSs who perform "markup" post weekly bus and rail operator schedules and provide substitute operators to fill work assignments left vacant by illness, vacation or other reasons. "Window" TOSs issue the bus line route and time point documents, called "paddles" or "running boards," to operators making the daily rollouts.

The new software will maintain rosters and assignments for the 4,000 bus and rail operators at Metro's 15 operating divisions. It will take into account employee absences, vacations, sick leave, call backs and other information needed by a TOS to draw up daily work schedules and assignments.

With the new system, Muncy believes TOSs will be more efficient, make better decisions and will be able to spend more time with employees. "If we free them from the paperwork, they can do more supervision."

Acquire, configure and test

Between now and August 2008, the TOAST team will be acquiring, configuring and testing the hardware and software needed for the new

system.

In October 2008, the system will be installed as a prototype at an operating division – probably Central City Division 1. After the system passes all tests at Division 1, the TOAST team will begin installing the equipment at the remaining 14 bus and rail divisions.

During the installation period – lasting about three weeks per division – the staff at each division will receive comprehensive training on using the new software.

The equipment will include not only computers for TOS use, but also at least three kiosks at every division where operators will sign in, receive their work assignments and any work-related messages posted since their last work period.

The TOAST team is planning a call-in system with an automated interactive voice that will relay assignment information.

Muncy also expects the new software will eventually give bus and rail operators the ability to check their work assignments from home by accessing the system through the Intranet.

With the complexity of the hardware and software, the need to install the system at the operating divisions and at Metro Headquarters, and taking into account the extensive testing and the employee training, Muncy says the TOAST project won't be completed until early 2009.

"It takes a long time to get everything situated because you have a lot of technology that has to work together," he explains. And he notes that since the wages for bus and rail operators amount to about \$240 million a year, "you don't want to goof that up."