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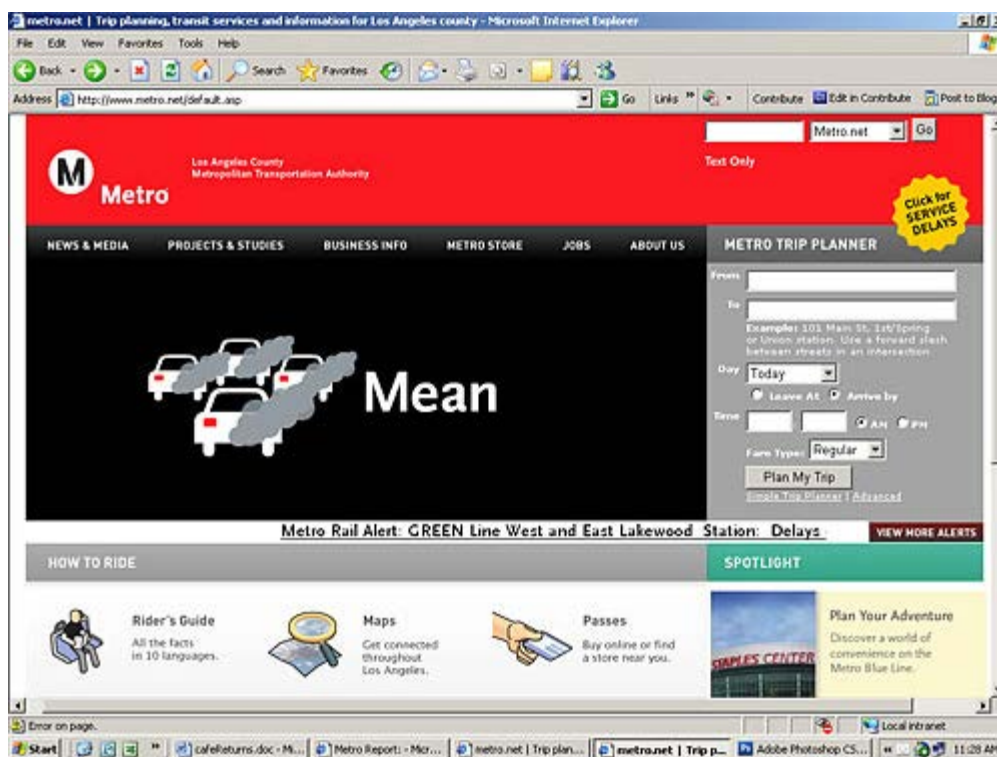
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New 'ticker' style alert in the center of the metro.net homepage notifies web, mobile users of service delays.

## New Emergency Alert on metro.net Homepage

By VIVIAN L. TRAN

(Feb. 12, 2009) A new emergency service alert available on the metro.net homepage alerts passengers when major, unscheduled delays occur on Metro Rail.

When activated by Rail Operations, the emergency web service alert appears as a ticker on the homepage. The ticker provides timely information about impacts to service, bus bridge options and when service is restored.

The new web service alert was officially launched Jan. 27 and it couldn't be ready soon enough. Last week, Rail Operations activated the new web feature for the first time with extended delays on the Gold Line and Red Line.

"It was officially activated last week and it worked flawlessly," said Roman Alarcon, director of bus and rail operations control. "We're really excited about it. Now the public has a new vehicle to get up-to-the-second information about rail delays that they never had access to before."

The new web service alert is updated directly from Rail Operations when service delays reach 20 minutes or more. The ticker alert will display multiple alerts on different rail lines simultaneously, if necessary. Once posted, the alerts can be viewed by at least 5,000 different mobile devices

in addition to the website.

On Feb. 5 at 8:17 a.m., the Gold Line southbound train broke down due to mechanical failure between the Chinatown and Lincoln Heights stations.

"We were preparing to evacuate passengers, and we were delayed about 25 minutes before we were able to move the trains. Luckily, we were able to move the train and we didn't have to evacuate the passengers," said Hector A. Guerrero, rail transportation manager for ROC.

Later that evening at 8:09 p.m., the Red Line had mechanical trouble as it headed westbound between Hollywood and Western.

"We were single-tracking, or using one track, to transport the passengers along, and our service delays were at least 20 minutes," Guerrero said.

Guerrero said the new web service alert allows Metro Rail to better communicate urgent information to its riders.

"It offers quicker information to the patrons who can make a decision on whether to take alternate transportation, like a bus or drive," Guerrero said.

Before the emergency web service alert was implemented, passengers relied on the TPIS monitors that are available only at Metro Rail stations, Guerrero explained.

"So patrons have to come to the station mezzanine or platform itself to see if there's a service delay. The new alert allows patrons to see the delay before they get to the station," Guerrero said. "Now they can stay mobile and stay informed."

Rail Operations made previous attempts during the past five years to alert passengers about service delays in a timely way.

"I've tried using Twitter as an alert service and Metro's web alert service works much better and quicker," Guerrero said. "I love the new web alert system. It's efficient and an inexpensive way to keep our passengers informed while using Metro's own resources."

The new rail alert is the result of joint efforts from Rail Operations, ITS and Communications.

Members of the ITS team who provided the technical expertise were Bob Makuh, Bahram Chaudhry, David De La Ysla and Tom Tan. They created an application to capture the information from the ROC and automatically update it on the website.

Joe Simpson of Creative Services enabled the new web feature to meet ADA Compliance standards in two ways: It pauses when online users mouse over the message, and there is an alert link that customers can click on to view details of each emergency alert at a glance.

Emergencies from recent earthquakes, fires, floods and several rail-related accidents have made such a web service alert more pressing.

"This is a tremendous benefit to the public and our customers especially if we can expand it to the bus side," said Marc Littman, deputy executive officer of public relations. "It tells our passengers there's going to be a delay and gives a general reason why – to let them know if their train or

bus is going to be there when they expect it. That just goes hand-in-hand with good customer service. Now it's automatic, which we weren't able to do before, and it's much quicker."

- *Vivian L. Tran is the project manager for the emergency web service rail alert.*