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Soto Demonstrates Metro's TripMaster at URISA Conference

By Laura Kloth
Staff Writer

(Oct. 20, 2009) A unique opportunity to display Metro's TripMaster capabilities arrived via an unusual route for Sr. Programmer Analyst Patrick Soto.



Sr. Programmer Analyst Patrick Soto touted TripMaster current and future capabilities at the recent Urban Regional Information System Association (URISA) National conference in Anaheim.

Soto already had plans to attend this year's Urban Regional Information System Association (URISA) National recent conference in Anaheim, but when he learned that conference organizers wanted him to speak about his work on the TripMaster software package and how it's used to power Metro's widely used Trip Planner, he was pleasantly surprised and more than eager to oblige.

Soto, a certified as a Geographic Information System (GIS) Professional, figured URISA attendees, who typically include a number of GIS experts, would serve as the perfect audience to show what TripMaster could do.

According to Soto, TripMaster can be used not only as a portable "Open Source" web application, but it's development also evidenced what can be accomplished when "interdepartmental and inter-regional agencies" collaborate to transport transit riders safely across Southern California.

During his presentation, Soto explained that TripMaster provides Transit Telephone Information Centers and direct transit users with various travel options for people using public transit.

"It is an integrated, multi-modal, multi-carrier public transit itinerary planner," that just in the past year has served up more than five million transactions (itineraries) each month, Soto told his audience.

A legal metamorphosis

Soto, an 18-year Metro employee, first worked on TripMaster in 2003, and was recognized along with several other Metro employees for implementing a number of money-saving changes to the software package after the technology experienced a legal metamorphosis and Metro took expanded control over its development.

Heading the effort to reconstruct the software was Sr. Departmental System Analyst Douglas Anderson, who headed a team made up of staffers from Metro's ITS & Customer Relations departments.

TripMaster is referenced by public transit users in four counties in addition to Los Angeles - Ventura, San Bernardino, Orange and Riverside – integrating the routes and schedules for 70 transit service providers.

The technology, Soto said, could potentially be utilized in as many as ten counties.

No media glitter and glitz

Answering the question of how does TripMaster compare to Google's transit trip planner, Soto said, simply, that Google is in the media business while Metro's goal is operating and maintaining an efficient public transportation system.

"If we do it wrong, they'll call our board. If Google does it wrong, who are they going to call?" he said. "The point is if I get someone's college student or their mom on the bus from Point A to Point B, and do it properly, safe, courteous, reliable, on time and clean. That's what this is about."

Overall, Soto said he was pleased with the audience's response and "surprised at the level of interest." URISA officials have invited Soto to speak on the subject at the upcoming "GIS-Transit 2009" Conference.

"I am proud to say TripMaster is valued as an example of 'leading practices' in the industry," he said.