



NEWS

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MTA TO EXPAND METRO WHEELS PROGRAM WITH GRANT MONEY
MONITORING OF METRO SYSTEM SERVICE BY PEOPLE IN WHEELCHAIRS
NOW TO INCLUDE VISION-IMPAIRED PASSENGERS AS WELL

The MTA has received a federal grant that greatly increases the amount of funding that can be used on an innovative program designed to link disabled riders and the MTA. The riders report on the quality of MTA's bus and rail service to the Authority via the Internet.

The grant is from Project ACTION (Accessible Community Transportation in Our Nation), a program authorized by the U.S. Congress to promote cooperation between the disabled community and transportation industry. The grant will be administered by National Easter Seals over an 18-month period. In that time, Metro Wheels will be broadened to include passengers with other forms of impairment.

"In one fell swoop, the Metro Wheels budget has increased its budget from \$10,000 to \$140,000 thanks to the strong support of Project ACTION which approved only seven technical assistance proposals submitted from organizations throughout the country," said Ellen Levine, MTA Executive Officer for Transit Operations. "The MTA's vigorous pursuit of these funds reaffirms the Agency's commitment to providing better customer service to all passengers."

Metro Wheels, which made its debut late last year, recruits passengers with disabilities who regularly use Metro Bus and Rail service to report daily on how well the MTA is doing. Feedback, which ranges from the condition of the bus and wheelchair lifts to the operator's conduct, are then relayed by the

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approximately 40 people enrolled in the program to the MTA over the Internet. Participants receive a free Metro pass for three months.

Information from participants is reformatted into daily, weekly and monthly reports that are forwarded to the operating divisions, MTA management, the MTA Board and all 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."

The current goal of Metro Wheels is to achieve a 50 percent reduction in wheelchair pass-ups.

The MTA is actively searching for additional volunteers to participate in the program so that the entire Metro Bus and Rail system can be included on a daily basis and more comprehensive information submitted.

With the Project ACTION grant funds the MTA intends to accomplish the following tasks:

- Provide Internet access through Web TV to volunteers who cannot afford a computer. Recruit volunteers to cover all geographical areas. Improve the reporting/monitoring system.
- Develop a program focusing on improving Metro Bus access for passengers with visual impairments. (In this 18-month period, the Agency also will consider developing a monitoring program for people with hearing impairments).
- Consider developing a multi-transit version of Metro Wheels, which would be made available to other Los Angeles County transportation agencies.

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.