Automated Passenger Counters Give Valuable Data on Metro Bus Ridership

By Bill Heard, Editor
(September 16) Automated Passenger Counters now installed on some 60 Metro Buses, are generating reams of valuable information the MTA can use to improve customer service.

So much good data, in fact, that the agency wants to extend the use of APCs and even purchase its own passenger counting devices. Currently, each Metro Bus division has been assigned buses equipped with leased APCs that are scheduled on various runs throughout the week.

"The MTA can use the information provided by the APCs to better manage our bus operations," says Dana Woodbury, deputy executive officer, Operations Planning and Scheduling. "APCs can help determine the number of buses needed, monitor schedule adherence and aid in adjusting schedules."

The goal is to equip 15 to 20 percent of the Metro Bus fleet with APCs. That's enough, Woodbury says, to properly monitor passenger loading and on-time performance.

The APC system now being used is able to determine to within 10 to 15 percent accuracy the number of passengers who rode the bus during its runs. The APCs use Automatic Vehicle Location Systems (AVL) with GPS (Global Positioning System) devices to pinpoint the location of each bus stop while the sensor records the number of passengers. Infrared sensors are mounted at the front and rear doors to detect embarking and disembarking passengers.

Urban Transportation Assoc. of Cincinnati installs and services the APCs, retrieves the data each week, processes and analyzes it and provides a report to the MTA. The agency currently is negotiating with the vendor for up to two more years of service, while the MTA prepares specifications to aquire its own APC units.

"APCs will change the way we collect and analyze transit service data," says Rodger Maxwell, project manager. "They'll provide a large volume of data we can use to more accurately identify service problems and successes. Our schedule checkers then can look into the specific causes of the problems."

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