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Resources

▸ Safety

▸ Pressroom (web)

▸ CEO Hotline

▸ Metro Projects

▸ Facts at a Glance (web)

▸ Archives

▸ Events Calendar

▸ Research Center/ Library

▸ Metro Cafe (pdf)

▸ Metro Classifieds

▸ Retirement Round-up

Metro Info

▸ Strategic Plan (pdf)

▸ Org Chart (pdf)

▸ Policies

▸ Training

▸ Help Desk

▸ Intranet Policy

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ATMS 'Smart Bus' System Will Improve Service Safety, Reliability

By KIM SIM

PHOTO BY KIM SIM

Transportation Operations Supervisor Sandra Noflin monitors buses from her new controller console in Bus Operations Control.

(March 16, 2004) When Metro Bus operations controllers put in the call to Sheriff's deputies about a bus hijacking, Feb. 20, they were aided by the newly implemented Advanced Transportation Management System.

Using ATMS, Bus Operations Control personnel were able to determine the exact location of the bus and a description of the armed suspect. Deputies arrived within minutes.

Without ATMS, "the response time would have been greater and the deputies probably would not have been able to apprehend the suspect," says Tom Jasmin, Director of Operations Control.

ATMS is a high-technology package that includes a voice and data radio network, an automatic vehicle location system, a video surveillance system, automatic passenger counter and an automatic voice annunciator.

Also in the package are computer-aided controller consoles, a new communications equipment room, and an Emergency Dispatch Center at Metro Red Line Division 20.

Improves communications

The goal of ATMS is to improve communication between operators and controllers and provide passengers with more reliable transit information.

Installation started in September 2003 at the Regional Rebuild Center. Now, more than two-thirds of Metro Buses have the new equipment.

Between 15 and 20 buses are converted each day, according to ATMS project manager Tom Pope.

Metro's entire revenue bus fleet ATMS Phase 1 equipment installation project is on schedule to be completed by the end of April tested in July and fully operational by September. Metro will take complete control of the system from Motorola in March 2005.

"You can have more consistent coverage," Transportation Operations Supervisor John Cohen says of the new system. "Especially on the

Metro Rapid. Now you know exactly where they are at all times."

One feature of ATMS, the Radio Frequency Local Area Network, or RFLAN, will ensure that things go smoothly in the bus yard.

System queries a bus

Each time a bus enters or leaves the yard, the system queries the bus to make sure its software is up-to-date. This includes any changes in scheduling that previously would have required paper assignments to be handed out to the correct bus operators.

"It automatically checks every bus when it comes and goes," Pope says. "It checks the system, says you're fully within the system-wide configuration parameter and that everything's updated; everything's fine."

ATMS Phase 2 is another work-in-progress for the creation of script recordings for Metro's 18 thousand stops and zones for the automatic voice annunciator. The audio and visual next-stop announcement feature was added onto the ATMS package after funds became available.

The script will include "all major stops, transfer points and points of major interest," Jasmin says. "It's a feature for our customers, particularly for the blind and the hearing impaired."

Bus controllers, bus operators, field supervisors and roving mechanics have already been retrained for ATMS. Training for the division maintenance and transportation staffs will start the week of March 22.

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