

Extract from Passenger Transport: “New Technologies Make Trip Planning Easier than Ever” – By Maureen Minehan

©2008 Passenger Transport, American Public Transportation Association
New technologies make trip planning easier than ever, By Maureen Minehan
Extract from Special to Passenger Transport - Sept. 8, 2008, Vol. 66, NO. 34, p.10-11

September 2008 – Recent technology developments are giving public transit systems the tools they need to provide their customers with faster, more accurate trip planning information whenever and wherever they need it. From the introduction of Google Transit to the online city transit guide HopStop, agencies nationwide are offering new ways for riders to travel more efficiently and to make the most out of their public transit experience.

In addition, upgrades to existing trip planning tools on transit system websites are reaching out to riders as never before, enabling them to get instant, real-time information on a variety of platforms as well as regional information across multiple transit systems.

The makers of all these technologies are in agreement on a fundamental goal: to increase ridership on public transportation.

...

GIRO

Another third party resource is GIRO Inc.'s *HASTINFO*, the trip planning and schedule information module of the venerable *HASTUS* technology. Initially introduced in 1989 as installations for call centers exclusively, *HASTINFO* added its web version for self-service public access in 1998, and in 2005 developed a set of generic trip planning web pages for transit agency use.

Earlier this year, GIRO launched the latest enhancement of *HASTINFO*, which enables riders to use interactive map displays, powered by Microsoft's Virtual Earth™ platform. With it, users select origins and destinations by simply clicking on a stop/landmark on the screen of their computer or web-enabled wireless device. Once a request is submitted, *HASTINFO* updates the map to show the optimal transit route.

According to François Carignan, GIRO senior account manager, the latest release of *HASTINFO* is now being used by 16 transit systems, including Florida's Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority (PSTA). "*This is our second year using HASTINFO and it has enabled us to give our customers 24/7 trip planning assistance, especially when our customer service staff is off duty,*" said PSTA Customer Relations Manager Terry Parks. "*With rising fuel costs we're seeing increased ridership and this tool lets our customers get the best travel options... and lets them see the shortest distance, the fastest route and the fewest transfers to get where they're going.*" Parks added that PSTA offers *HASTINFO* in four languages English, Spanish, German, and French.

Combining Forces

Fortunately, with so many interesting options available, transit agencies don't need to choose one over the other. "*It's not mutually exclusive. Agencies shouldn't look at Google Transit as a replacement for their own trip planners. Instead, they should look at Google as another channel for distribution,*" said Jessica Wei (a strategic development partner at Google).

...

GIRO also sees the synergy as beneficial. "*So far, Google appears to complement HASTINFO,*" said Carignan, "*and it seems to appeal to a different audience than an in-house trip planner.*" Carignan also noted that to accommodate GIRO clients who wanted to upload their scheduled data to Google Transit, GIRO began providing a Google Transit interface for its recent software versions.

By greatly simplifying the process of traveling from one place to another - and making mobility more user-friendly (and dare we say) more fun - there's no doubt that these technological developments will continue to play a critical role in enabling transit systems to provide more amenities to customers and to help make public transportation an essential part of their everyday lives.