



## ADVANCED PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

### Customers jump on Metro Transit online trip planning service

**Seattle area population makes immediate use of new service. Online application is an extension of call center system introduced in 1999. Data from three counties to be integrated this summer.**

Customers logged onto a new Web Trip Planner for Metro Transit of King County, Wash., and made almost 4,400 trip plan requests on one day in early January, just over a month after the service was introduced. That week, the average number of trip requests on weekdays was almost 3,600, which is a lot for a new service. By the end of the month, just about that many trip requests were made on a Sunday during a snowstorm.

**Trip planning "has been the most requested application from our Web customers for years."**

"They have really rocketed out of the starting gate," says Marc Ferguson, technical program manager for Trapeze Software Group, which supplied the software for the Web Trip Planner. He attributes the fast take-off to a technically savvy population with a pent-up demand.

Martha Woodworth, project manager at Metro Transit, says, "It

has been the most requested application from our Web customers for years. We've gotten really good feedback from users thanking us for doing this, finally."

The service offers door-to-door transit trip planning for Metro Transit and Sound Transit Express routes. Users can create plans by choosing among several parameters, including departure time, arrival time, the fastest trip, the trip with fewest transfers, the trip with the least walking, and a trip accessible by wheelchair. The plan includes walking directions and information about bus stops.

The Web Trip Planner is an extension of a call center application introduced by Metro Transit in 1999 after several years of development. The software for the system is Automated Transit Information System (ATIS), now called Info-Agent after Trapeze Software Group purchased it from ManTech Systems Solutions Corp. at the end of last year (see following story).

King County and neighboring Pierce and Snohomish Counties col-

lectively chose the ATIS product and entered into individual contracts with ManTech for the installation and development of the system. Woodworth anticipates that the three separate data sets will be integrated, with each agency still updating its own data, sometime this summer.

"Developing your data is the biggest problem with making systems like this work. The software at this point is pretty close to off the shelf," Woodworth says. "Most properties have schedules that reside in the scheduling system and have information about stops and stop sequences that reside in a different system, and never the twain shall meet until you hit a customer information system." She says Metro Transit invested "quite a bit of money on programming time to integrate those two data sets and provide the geographical basis that would allow us to feed it into the trip planner."

#### IVR for ATIS/Info-Agent

Ferguson says the next frontier in customer interface to the ATIS/Info-Agent system is interactive voice response or IVR. He says the Washington Area Metropolitan Transit Authority "is the front-runner" in that development, with a request for proposals currently on the street to add a speech recognition interface to its ATIS trip planning system.

*Metro Transit Web Trip Planner is available at <http://transit.metrokc.gov>. The Trapeze site is at [www.trapezesoftware.com](http://www.trapezesoftware.com). **ITS***

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