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As MBTA turns 115, T chief says he's proud of system history, modern innovation efforts

Posted by Matt Rocheleau August 30, 2012 04:31 PM

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By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

As the MBTA prepares to mark its 115th anniversary this weekend, leaders of the continent's oldest subway said they are proud not only of the public transit agency's historic beginnings, but also of recent steps and future measures to continue to modernize the system.

"It's nice to be the oldest subway in the United States. And I also think we're the most innovative," Acting General Manager Jonathan Davis said by phone Thursday.

On Saturday, the T will turn the big 1-1-5.

On its birthday, the agency plans to unveil train-arrival countdown clocks at Park Street Station, which was the first of two subway stations to open in Boston on Sept. 1, 1897; the other was Bovlston Street Station.

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Boston on Sept. 1, 1897, the other was Boylston Street Station.

The countdown signs, which tell riders when the next trains will roll in, [debuted](#) at South Station earlier this month. Davis said Thursday that the signs in that station are “working very well,” riders have expressed appreciation for them and that he is excited to see the pilot program expanding.

He also said he’s looking forward to the imminent launch of a pilot [mobile ticketing](#) program on the commuter rail.

The “mini” pilot program is scheduled to debut on the Kingston/Plymouth, Middleborough/Lakeville and Greenbush lines next week. Riders who have signed up will help the T test out a free application that allows commuter rail customers to buy and display tickets on their smartphones. The app is expected to fully launch this fall and will be available to iPhone, Android and Blackberry users.

Davis said his top birthday wish for the T is “to see our ridership continue to grow.”

On Thursday, the T [unveiled ridership figures](#) for July, the month the agency implemented controversial [fare hikes and service cuts](#).

The numbers show that ridership dropped one-tenth of one percent from July 2011, spokesman Joe Pesaturo said. Analysts had projected ridership would decrease by about 5.5 percent, he said.

“I am pleased that people continue to find our service convenient and affordable,” Davis said. “We basically saw no drop in overall ridership year over year as a result of the fare increase.”

Still, during July, ridership on the subway and the RIDE paratransit service decreased, while bus, commuter rail and ferry ridership increased.

Davis said MBTA staff will continue to closely monitor ridership figures in the coming months before making any final judgments on the effects of the fare increases and service reductions.

System-wide, the slight dip in overall ridership from last July ended the T’s longest-ever streak of ridership growth at 17 months.

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That streak had pushed the T to set a record for ridership in a single fiscal year of just over 400 million and the system for the first time averaged a daily ridership of more than 1.3 million.

Davis said that other birthday wishes for the T is that the system becomes “100 percent accessible” to all people, and that it is “adequately funded.”

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