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MBTA: Mobile apps will be able to track Green Line trains by 2015

Posted by Matt Rocheleau January 22, 2013 04:56 PM

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By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

The MBTA plans to make upgrades to the Green Line by 2015 that would allow smartphone-carrying riders to track in real-time the whereabouts and expected arrival of the line's trains, officials for the transit agency said.

Trains on the T's other major lines – the Red, Orange and Blue – have been tracked by mobile applications since the fall of 2010, when the agency made real-time train location data on those lines available to private software developers, who have created numerous smartphone applications. The T made real-time data on bus locations available to software developers in fall of 2009.

The "light rail" Green Line is currently equipped with a different, less-sophisticated tracking system than the "heavy rail" lines, the Red, Orange and Blue. The system does not output enough location information to track trains precisely enough to make arrival predictions, said Joshua Robin, director of innovation for the T.

But, for nearly the past year and a half, the T has been working to design a

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more modern tracking system that would generate more detailed information about trains' locations.

Robin said the design, which would work using a combination of sensors and GPS technology, is nearing completion.

It would allow for software developers to add real-time Green Line train tracking to existing and new smartphone applications, he said.

The T would also be able to activate “[countdown clocks](#)” for underground Green Line stations and stations along the D branch where there are existing, overhead electronic message board signs.

The countdown clocks have been activated on a rolling basis since August inside stations along the Red, Orange and Blue lines. A dozen more clocks were activated on Monday bringing the total number of stations with them to 42, with plans to turn on the clocks at 10 more stations, officials said.

The T plans to have the new Green Line tracking system installed by 2015, officials said.

The project would cost \$15 million. It was announced during a [public meeting](#) last week.

Richard A. Davey commutes to his job as state transportation department secretary via the Green Line.

Like many others who ride the line regularly, Davey said he “was starting to feel left out” by the fact that the T’s other three main subway lines offer real-time tracking.

Right now, “If you’re waiting inside Boylston Station on the outbound platform and you hear a train come rumbling down the tracks, you’re just hoping it’s the right one,” he said.

And, for Green Line riders waiting at outdoor stations, sometimes faced with unpleasant weather: “We want to give customers – if they have to wait 10 or 15 minutes for a train – information so that they can have another option. Maybe they can walk across the street and wait in a coffee shop or what have you,” he said.

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“If we can just make our customers’ experiences a little more comfortable it goes a long way to starting someone’s day off, or ending it, on a positive note,” he said. “The experiment elsewhere on the subway has gone really well. We’re excited [to add it to the Green Line]. And, in the meantime, we ask for customers to continue to be patient with us.”

The Green Line is the second-busiest train line the T runs. Average weekday ridership on the Green Line was about 236,100, according to the agency’s latest system-wide estimates from 2010. The Red Line’s average weekday ridership was slightly higher, at about 241,600.

The line consists of 66 stations and stops across four branches, the B, C, D and E, which each run above-ground trolleys that sink into underground subway tunnels as they roll from points west toward downtown Boston.

T spokesman Joe Pesaturo said that the project to update the Green Line’s tracking system is an example of the type of improvements that the state transportation plan that Governor Deval Patrick [unveiled this week](#).

“These are the types of things we can accomplish if that plan is adopted,” he said. “It’s not enough just to maintain current levels, riders want better service.”

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