

## CTA unveils system to keep passengers well-informed about service changes

Riders will eventually be notified about equipment breakdowns and emergencies

By Jon Hilkevitch  
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The CTA may still have miles to go on the road to providing reliable, world-class service, but at least customers will now know what they are getting into before leaving home or work.

The Chicago Transit Authority on Tuesday introduced reforms, including e-mail alerts, to keep passengers better informed about routine service changes and, eventually, disruptions caused by equipment breakdowns and emergencies.

Riders can sign up at [www.transitchicago.com](http://www.transitchicago.com) to receive planned service-change notifications because of construction, special events and other situations. They also can view a new video on train emergency-evacuation procedures on the Web site.

The video and a new brochure explaining what rail passengers should do in an emergency are an attempt to end a string of recent incidents in which panicked passengers fled stranded subway trains on their own because no CTA personnel provided instructions.

Beginning early next year, CTA customers can subscribe to emergency alerts sent as text messages to mobile phones or as e-mails to BlackBerry-like devices, officials said.

The new efforts mark an acknowledgment that the CTA is in the communications business as well as being a transportation provider.

CTA President Ron Huberman conceded that providing accurate and frequent communications, especially when needed the most, has been a chronic failure at the CTA.

"Over the last year, it has been very clear we have to change the way we communicate," he said.

Pace, the suburban bus agency, has had an e-mail subscription service for about two years, said spokesman Patrick Wilmot. Riders can sign up at [www.pacebus.com](http://www.pacebus.com). Metra does not offer e-mail alerts. The commuter railroad is upgrading its Web site, [www.metrarail.com](http://www.metrarail.com).

In an emergency, the CTA will dispatch a "tactical field team" focused on keeping customers informed, he said. An emergency information hot line will also be established.

The new measures will include technology to offer real-time, detailed announcements aboard trains and buses from the CTA's control center, instead of the current pre-recorded messages that tend to be of little use in making alternative travel plans and often are repeated over and over to the annoyance of riders.

On new rail cars scheduled to begin entering service in 2010, a video system will allow train operators and control-center personnel to view what's taking place in individual cars. In addition, real-time maps will show the train's location and upcoming stops to help travelers.

Part of the communications-improvement plan involves making the CTA Web site easier to use, Huberman said. By early 2009, the new home page will display the status of each rail line as well as bus routes affected by major delays because of planned or emergency service rerouting.

During the next year, new electronic message boards and fixed signs will be placed at CTA rail stations. The message boards will announce how many minutes until the next train arrives and provide instructions and travel information during service disruptions and emergencies, officials said.

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