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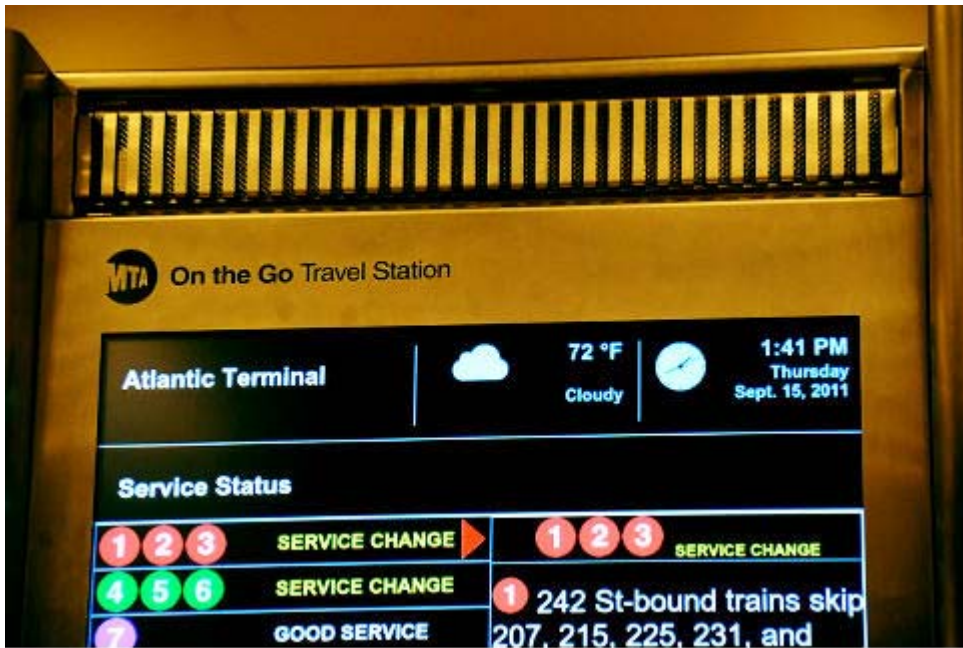
MTA's subway 'iPad' may signal new era of better rider relations



PETE DONOHUE

Monday, September 19th 2011, 4:00 AM

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John Roca/News

The MTA's new Travel Station (above and below) provides directions and service-change info via a 47-inch touchscreen.



John Roca/News

The new MTA 'iPad'

What do you think of the MTA's new "On the Go! Travel Station?"

- I will definitely be using it, it sounds very useful.
- What a waste of money! They should clean up the stations instead.
- It won't make a difference.

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Even the most disgruntled of subway riders might have to concede Monday is a good day for straphangers.

At the [Bowling Green](#) subway station in [lower Manhattan](#), transit officials on Monday morning will unveil the first "On the Go! Travel Station."

It's an interactive, 47-inch touchscreen providing a wide array of information about what's happening below - and aboveground.

In addition to travel directions, riders can learn about planned and unplanned service changes - and if the elevators and escalators at their destination station are working.

With the tap of a finger, a rider can summon a map of the neighborhood above and scroll in any direction to see the streets of adjacent neighborhoods.

The high-definition screen also features third-party applications for riders to review shopping and dining options in the area - and even get walking directions and distances. The time and weather are displayed at the top of the screen while a news ticker tape runs across the bottom.

"This puts at our customers' fingertips an enormous amount of information they have not had access to before," said [Paul Fleuranges](#), an [NYC Transit](#) division vice president.

The Travel Station is a giant tablet, a supesize straphangers' [iPad](#) with content the Metropolitan Transportation Authority can change by remote.

The potential in terms of information and applications is limitless, and there's nothing exactly like it anywhere, officials said.

Finally, an answer for vacationers who come home to the city and gripe about the inferiority of our system compared to a [Luxembourg](#) trolley. The big tablet is so nifty, transit officials from [France](#) are heading to the city to check it out.

"It's really cutting-edge," said [Andrew Bata](#), an NYC Transit division chief in the office of Strategic Innovation and Technology.

The information system was developed jointly by NYC Transit and [Cisco Systems](#). In the next few weeks, the pilot will be expanded to the [Long Island Rail Road](#) area of [Penn Station](#), [Metro-North's Grand Central Station](#) and two other major subway hubs: Atlantic Ave.-Pacific St. in [downtown Brooklyn](#) and [Jackson Heights-Roosevelt Ave.](#) in Queens.

Cisco is paying for the six-month pilot program, but costs aren't expected to be a hurdle if the MTA decides to install more of the big tablets.

The lower half of the screen is dedicated to advertising. Ad revenues should quickly cover rollout expenses - and then provide a stream of additional income for the authority, officials said.

The Travel Station's sleek, stainless steel enclosure was designed by [Masamichi Udagawa](#) of Antenna Design New York, which came up with the award-winning designs for the [MetroCard](#) vending machine and the Help Point Intercom, which has been added to the permanent collection of the [Museum of Modern Art](#).

Still, no one would be terribly surprised if the MTA flubs yet another technology project.

There's always the chance of technical glitches, subway vandals, financial problems, biblical flooding or swarms of locusts wreaking havoc. But this feels different.

The MTA has been making progress when it comes to communicating with riders - even if the news isn't all good. There are the next-train countdown clocks, the text alerts and the improved website.

With the Travel Station, the muchmaligned authority could be turning a corner. It may be on the way toward improving not only the system but how riders feel about it.

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