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Transit authority implements program to allow riders to track buses

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For many commuters, the answer to the question, "When does the next bus stop here?" is in their pocket or purse.

The Indiana County Transit Authority is implementing RouteShout, a way for riders to use text messaging to learn how soon the next bus will arrive at a particular stop.

"We're trying to improve our communications with the public," said John Kanyan, IndiGO's executive director.

Kanyan said new signs that have a printed code on them are going up at bus stops. When someone wanting to catch a bus enters the text message code listed on the sign, he or she will receive information on when the next scheduled bus is due at that location.

Texting INDMALL to 25252, for example, will list buses scheduled to arrive at the Indiana Mall in the next hour.

Kanyan said it is IndiGO's goal within two years to have its buses equipped with GPS systems so the reply text message will display the real-time arrival of the next bus rather than the scheduled arrival time.

The new sign posts were acquired through a federal grant, and the RouteShout program is being added to IndiGO's services through a licensing agreement with the Pittsburgh company that created it.

Also in the future, IndiGO's schedule and routes will be uploaded into the Internet search engine Google. When the system is in place, a person who wants to travel to a particular destination may log onto google.com/transit, enter the starting point and destination, and the Web site will plan the best IndiGO bus route for that trip.

All of the Route Shout signs should be up by the end of September, and the new service is already receiving 75 to 100 text messages daily, Kanyan said.

IndiGO's Persons with Disabilities program is also growing in popularity. PwD provides a reduced-fare shared ride service for people who have a disability, are ages 18 to 64, live in Indiana County and need transportation to or from an area not served by other transportation services.

PwD rides can be used for getting to medical appointments, recreational activities, jobs, appointments at social service agencies and for shopping.

The cost of a PwD trip within Indiana Borough and White Township is \$2.60 each way, and \$2.85 each way elsewhere in the county. PwD rides may also be scheduled to Pittsburgh for appointments at

medical providers on Tuesdays and Thursdays only, for \$7.50 each way.

Kanyan said the number of PwD rides has been growing since the program's inception, and jumped from about 170 in July to more than 230 in August.

PwD rides should be scheduled no later than 2 p.m. one business day prior to the appointments, and further in advance when possible.

Kanyan said there are other changes in the works at IndiGO.

n IndiGO's shared ride service has been renamed ``Van Go." The Van Go system operates in addition to IndiGO's network of fixed bus routes, and provides small accessible IndiGO vehicles that pick up passengers at their home and deliver them to a destination of their choice.

n Two new 30-foot compressed natural gas buses will join IndiGO's fleet by July.

``We're committed to CNG," Kanyan said, adding that natural gas is a more economical bus fuel and causes less pollution to the environment.

Older diesel buses replaced by the CNG vehicles will be kept as spares.

n Some IndiGO bus shelters - some that are 18 years old - will be replaced with new ones.

n And the IndiGO directors are considering using a consultant to manage advertising that can be displayed inside and outside the transit buses and in the shelters.

IndiGO operates transit vehicles over 16 public routes. On a typical day, about 20 IndiGO vehicles of all types are on the county's roads and streets, and - when Indiana University of Pennsylvania classes are in session - about 2,500 people ride IndiGO vehicles each day, Kanyan said.

Anyone wanting to schedule a PwD or Van Go ride, or wanting more information on other IndiGO services, may call (724) 465-2140 or (800) 442-6928.

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