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NYC Transit   IMMEDIATE

Trip Planner Adds New Features to Service; Surpasses Calls to Travel Information Hotline

MTA New York City Transit has added another customer friendly option to its popular on-line travel itinerary service, Trip Planner, and introduced a new, smaller Widget that users can add to their desktop, officials announced today. Trip Planner is used by more than three hundred thousand commuters a month to plan trips using the bus or subway network.

To make using the on-line itinerary service even easier to use, programmers in NYC Transit's Internet Technologies group have added a 'preferred route function' to the customized options already available on Trip Planner. The preferred route option allows more knowledgeable customers to specify which routes they wish to take.

Using the Custom Planner page, users that are familiar with a particular route can select a starting train line or bus route as well as an ending bus route or train line and receive their preferred route to the location of their choice. This option works best with either one or two- legged trips, and is currently available on the desk top version of Trip Planner.

"We added the preferred route option as a direct result of customer feedback," says Fred Benjamin, Assistant Vice President for Customer Service. "All of the enhancements we've made to Trip Planner have been made to provide the tools riders want to see in an on-line itinerary planner. Each has made the program that much better and easier for our customers to use," added Benjamin.

Earlier this year, programmers added a walking time feature to itinerary results so customers would know the total travel time of their trip. The system now also has the ability to save previously used addresses so repeat users will not have to re-enter the same address or location.

In addition to the new option, NYC Transit also unveiled a new MetroCard-sized Trip Planner widget, a web application that allows customers to add Trip Planner to their website, blog, or personalized homepage. Earlier this summer Transit released its calculator-sized widget, which serves the same function. The smaller widget takes up less space than the calculator-sized widget. Customers can log on to Trip Planner to choose which size they prefer to add. Webmasters can also customize the widget for their site, by setting default values for the origin and destination by including fields in the querystring of the source URL.

Trip Planner has grown in popularity since it was first unveiled in December 2006, and recent numbers back that up. Visitors to www.tripplanner.mta.info outpaced telephone calls to the agency's travel information hotline for customized subway and bus directions over the past twelve months, such that Trip Planner has become customer's preferred option to obtain NYC Transit travel information.

According to NYC Transit's Customer Service Division, over the course of the past year, beginning in September 2007 and ending September 2008, Trip Planner visits saw a 148% increase, from 138,798 to more than 344,000 per month. During the same period, telephone calls to the travel information line declined slightly from 150,000 to a little more than 125,000 per month. By September 2008, there were 219,245 more visits to Trip Planner than phone calls to the information line. The total number of daily visitors to Trip Planner through September 2008 equaled 2,429,819, a 189% increase over the 841,963 visitors received through September 2007.

"This data represents to us that customers have a clear desire to access travel information when and where they want it," said Paul J. Fleuranges, Vice President of Corporate Communications at NYC Transit, citing that the travel information hotline is only manned within certain set hours in the day. "Trip Planner and the On the Go! mobile version have allowed us to serve more customers on a variety of platforms in an efficient manner even as we look to reduce operating expenses in this time of budgetary constraint."

NYC Transit Customer Services, a division of Corporate Communications, monitors traffic to both Trip Planner and the telephone hotline using software with the assistance of outside vendor Aspect Communications, and developments done from TIS applications/Internet Technologies.