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MTA Headquarters   IMMEDIATE

MTA and AT&T Launch Challenge to App Developers: App Quest 3.0

MTA Makes Never-Before-Seen Data Available for First Time To Help Generate the Next Generation of Mobile Apps

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), AT&T, Transit Wireless, the NYU Center for Urban Science and Progress (CUSP) and ChallengePost today announced the opening of App Quest 3.0, the third annual challenge seeking to generate the best transportation-related apps for New Yorkers using MTA data. App developers will be able to compete for a total of $50,000 in prize money being contributed by AT&T.

More information about App Quest 3.0 can be found at http://mtaappquest.com

To increase MTA transparency and to give developers new forms of data to work with, the MTA is releasing four new sets of raw data. App developers will be able to use the new data and merge it with existing data to create apps that have never been seen before.

The new data sets are:

• Train departure times, current on-time status and track assignments for all LIRR and Metro-North stations enabled on the Train Time™ system. This is the data that is currently available through the official Metro-North Train Time™ and Long Island Rail Road Train Time™ apps and websites.

• From MTA Bus Time™, historical bus locations every 30 seconds over more than three months.

• Historical train arrival estimates at every station on the ①②③④⑤⑥Ⓛ subway lines, Ⓢ 42nd Street Shuttle and the Staten Island Railway every five minutes, starting Wednesday, Sept. 17, 2014.

• Newly reformatted and easier to use data on turnstile counts at each subway station.

And to enable the possibility of greater navigation functionality of apps, App Quest 3.0 will incorporate the use of experimental wireless PROMObeacons that have been set up at the Grand Central-42nd Street subway station. The PROMObeacons can transmit to beacon-enabled apps to allow the apps to know the precise location of an app user within a subway station. That could help sensory impaired people, or people unfamiliar with the layout of given subway stations, find their way through a station. The PROMObeacons have been installed by Transit Wireless as an experimental "proof-of-concept" beta test to take place as part of App Quest 3.0. The beacons will not receive any data from smartphones, and they will only transmit data to smartphones if a user affirmatively opts to enable location services underground.

"We have been extremely impressed with the creativity, functionality and all-around usefulness of the apps that have been built with MTA data since we began posting it online four years ago," said MTA Chairman and CEO Thomas F. Prendergast. "Apps foster greater MTA transparency and help our customers use our system more effectively, so we hope to see the creation of even more great apps. We are delighted to be partnering with AT&T, NYU CUSP, ChallengePost and Transit Wireless to stimulate the creativity of app developers and to help generate more apps that will further enhance our customers' experience."

"The continued expansion of underground connectivity in addition to the wealth of information available to the MTA provides us with the opportunity to use technology to enhance the daily experience of millions of transit riders and AT&T is excited to be a leader in these efforts," said Marissa Shorenstein, AT&T New York State President. "The innovative solutions that have been developed as part of App Quest in previous years have greatly benefited New Yorkers and we look forward to seeing the ideas created with the new data being provided to developers."

"We are 'beta-testing' the PROMObeacon technology in underground stations for App Quest 3.0 as we continue to enhance technology for the NYC subway ridership, so the opportunity to allow app developers to apply this technology during the hackathon was ideal," said William Bayne, CEO of Transit Wireless. "We are pleased to support the MTA and AT&T with our underground technology solutions and to be involved with the hackathon this year.

"App Quest is the best transit-related grassroots software initiative in the world," said Brandon Kessler, CEO of ChallengePost, the web platform powering the competition. "It has repeatedly served as a launch pad for apps which have gone on to achieve enormous commercial success. It also provides New Yorkers with high-value apps that save them money and make their rides more efficient."

While all transportation-related apps that use official MTA-released data are encouraged, the App Quest organizers are particularly interested in these four types of app categories:

• Snapshots and analysis of rider feedback and their observations in subways, buses and railroads.

• Real time maps of MTA bus, subway and railroad routes for smartphone apps and other mobile devices.

• Transit apps enabling instantaneous trip planning, combining any mode of MTA transit.

• Apps connecting with wireless beacons in subway stations to help sensory impaired people navigate safely, and for people unfamiliar with New York's transit system.

Apps that are entered into the App Quest 3.0 challenge will be eligible for these prizes:

Accessibility Innovation Track

• Grand Prize for Best Accessibility App for Disabled MTA Customers - $10,000

• Runner-up Prize for Best Accessibility App for Disabled MTA Customers - $7,500

Consumer/Transit Rider App Track:

• Grand Prize for Best Transit Rider App - $7,500

• Runner-up for Best Transit Rider App - $5,000

Additional Non-Track Prizes:

• Best Way-Finding Application for Novice Transit Riders - $5,000

• Best Data Visualization App - $5,000

• Best App Using Crowd-Sourced Data - $5,000

• Popular Choice Award - $5,000

• Large Organization Recognition Award - Non-cash, recognition only

App developers will have until February 3 at 5 p.m. to submit their apps for consideration. Winners will be announced in mid-March.

Challenge Post will post information about all of the apps on a central webpage, and the public will be able to cast their votes from Feb. 12 to Feb. 25 to determine who wins the Popular Choice award. For the other prizes, the apps will be judged by a panel of experts in technology and customer service:

• Barbara Cohn, Chief Data Officer, NYS Office of Information Technology Services

• Rachel Haot, New York State Chief Digital Officer & Deputy Secretary for Technology

• Brad Hargreaves, Co-Founder of General Assembly

• Todd Haselton, Executive Director of Mobile, TechnoBuffalo

• Scott Heiferman, CEO and a Co-Founder of Meetup

• Andrew Nicklin, New York State Director of #OpenNY

• Michael Salvato, Program Manager, Enterprise Asset Management, MTA

• Marissa Shorenstein, President of AT&T New York

• Omar Usmani, Executive Partner at Aeon Nexus Corp.

App Quest 3.0 will include a Developer Day on November 22 at NYU CUSP in downtown Brooklyn that will offer competitors a chance to participate in person or virtually to connect with experts on the MTA data sets. Participants will also be able to form, join, or expand teams during a teammate match session. To register, visit: http://cusp.nyu.edu/event-registration/?ee=120

The MTA currently provides 20 sets of data for app developers, including real-time service status for all lines, real-time elevator and escalator status, data on items in the MTA's lost and found units, and real-time bus locations and subway arrival estimates for trains on eight subway routes and the Staten Island Railway. The MTA also publishes daily traffic volumes at its toll plazas, and the volume of subway customers using each bank of turnstiles at each station every four hours, and at each station based on type of MetroCard. Three to four times each year, the MTA publishes schedules for all MTA services, in raw, machine readable data formatted for app developers.

The MTA releases its data to app developers freely over the Internet. There is no charge to access MTA data. For app developers who have an app that is free to download and wish to use MTA trademarks, such as logos and subway line icons, the MTA waives the fee it would normally charge for for-profit uses of its logos.

This is the third App Quest challenge. Last year, $40,000 in prize money was awarded to six apps: Citymapper (Grand Prize and MTA Wish List Award), Subculture.FM (Second Prize), Transit App (Third Prize), Accessway (Honorable Mention), Bus NYC (Honorable Mention), and Moovit (People's Choice Award). For a complete list of the winning apps and what they do, see this press release.

In its 2011-2012 App Quest challenge, the MTA awarded prizes to 10 apps, with Embark NYC receiving the Grand Prize. For a complete list of the 2012 winners, see this press release.

While the MTA has released nearly 10 of its own official apps, the MTA also encourages its customers to use apps built by third party developers by including them in its online App Center gallery, which can be found here: http://web.mta.info/apps/