

1 Mobile Transit Rider Information Via
2 Universal Design and Crowdsourcing

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4
5 Aaron Steinfeld (steinfeld@cmu.edu)
6 John Zimmerman (johnz@cs.cmu.edu)
7 Anthony Tomasic (tomasic@cs.cmu.edu)
8 Daisy Yoo (jiseony@andrew.cmu.edu)
9 Rafee Dar Aziz (raziz@andrew.cmu.edu)

10
11 School of Computer Science
12 Carnegie Mellon University
13 5000 Forbes Ave
14 Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 15213 USA
15 412-268-6346 (phone)
16 412-268-6436 (fax)

17
18 Corresponding author: Aaron Steinfeld
19

19 **ABSTRACT**

20 Extensive interviews with riders of the Pittsburgh bus system revealed that, as the top
21 priority, riders want to know the current location of buses. Using a universal design
22 methodology, we designed a system, named Tiramisu, to foster a greater sense of community
23 between riders and transit bus service providers. Our design focuses on crowd-sourcing
24 acquisition of information about bus location and fullness, predicting the arrival time of buses,
25 and providing a convenient platform for reporting problems and positive experiences within the
26 transit system. This will create a user community of riders that are participating in the delivery of
27 service. Tiramisu also supports specific information and reporting needs for riders with
28 disabilities, thereby providing greater independent mobility around the community. Early field
29 testing of Tiramisu suggests our approach is both feasible and potentially viable. In summary,
30 Tiramisu is valuable enough for riders to commit time and effort to its use to produce a sustained
31 user community.

32

32 INTRODUCTION

33 **Information and Accessibility**

34 The emergence and ever increasing adoption of both web 2.0 communication technology
35 and smart phones has begun to change the service delivery landscape for transit. This new
36 technology and infrastructure allows for ongoing, real-time information exchange between riders
37 and service providers. Riders can literally function as sensors within system, feeding in a range
38 of information. Transit services can leverage the devices riders carry to push out dynamic
39 information, such as alerts about construction, traffic accidents, and water main breaks. This
40 dialog between service providers and their customers can produce a much more dynamic service
41 system than could ever be imagined in an era of printed, paper schedules. This more reactive
42 system will significantly improve the quality of the service, especially for communities like
43 people with disabilities, who have a significantly higher rate of dependency on these services and
44 their support infrastructures.

45 To demonstrate this opportunity, we are developing and deploying Tiramisu¹, a mobile
46 web 2.0 system intended to connect riders and a transit service. The Tiramisu system allows
47 riders to generate and share GPS traces and fullness ratings via their mobile phones. This data is
48 then aggregated in order to provide real-time arrival and fullness information. The riders
49 collectively generate the information they desire, circumnavigating the need to install expensive
50 commercial systems. In addition, Tiramisu allows riders to report problems with the service and
51 allows the transit service to push out dynamic information about temporary states of the current
52 service that are filtered and displays to the specific riders who are affected by these changes.

53 Our approach comes from “citizen science” – a concept where citizens individually
54 collect small pieces of information and aggregate them together in order to gain more insight and
55 control over their world (Paulos, 2008). The primary mission for the Tiramisu system is to
56 increase information exchange in a universal design manner in order to support higher quality
57 transit experiences and greater independent mobility around the community. In addition, we hope
58 to create a sense of ownership of the public service by the citizens that use it by having them co-
59 construct part of the service they use. We seek to do this through a sustainable community of
60 practice model that involves transit consumers and service providers in a collaborative dialog.
61 This type of data collection and sharing by riders surfaces currently unknown information to the
62 transit service providers, thereby enhancing their ability to plan schedules, adapt to dynamic
63 conditions, and prioritize accessibility improvements in areas where riders are actually
64 experiencing problems. Utilization of this new source of data will enable service providers to
65 implement total quality and continuous improvement practices more effectively.

66 **Status Quo and Related Work**

67 The general problem all riders face, especially people with disabilities, is uncertainty and
68 anxiety around transit service delivery. For example, when riders arrive at a stop near a
69 scheduled time, they have no way of knowing if they have just missed their desired vehicle, if
70 the vehicle is seriously delayed, or if some unexpected event has temporary cancelled the service
71 at this location. Riders feel “out of control.”

¹ Tiramisu means “pick me up” in Italian.

72 Under the status quo, drivers are the most natural point of communication for riders;
73 however, drivers have many other concerns they might deem more critical to their job, such as
74 safety and their own on-time performance. They do not possess real-time information about the
75 location of other vehicles beyond their historic knowledge and they have little time to provide
76 high quality information about routes, destinations, and schedules. When riders ask questions
77 such as, “Does this bus go to the hospital?” a typical response might be, “No, you want the 61C.
78 It will be here in about 5 minutes.” when in fact, it might be completely full and unable to take
79 additional passengers, extremely delayed, the wheelchair lift may be broken, or another bus
80 going to this location might arrive sooner. By leveraging the communication network that
81 already exists in the mobile phones riders carry to exchange information, drivers can be freed of
82 this responsibility, and riders can have a more satisfying transit experience.

83 There are efforts to provide information to riders using mobile devices, some of which
84 are designed specifically for people with disabilities. For example, the Travel Assistance Device
85 (TAD) tested in Tampa, Florida directly supports riders with cognitive disabilities (Barbeau et
86 al., 2010; Winters et al., 2010). In addition to TAD, a number of groups have explored delivery
87 of transit information via mobile devices (e.g., Biagioni et al., 2009; Li & Willis, 2006; Masood
88 & Nicholas, 2003) and other approaches have been used to support overall system navigation for
89 riders with cognitive disabilities (Repenning & Ioannidou, 2006). There has also been concerted
90 effort to support the general wayfinding needs of people who are blind or low vision using GPS
91 (e.g., Humanware; Nuance) and directional LED beacons (Crandall et al., 2001).

92 There are also commercial systems on the market designed to support transit information
93 delivery via mobile phones. A good example is RouteShout, which supports interaction through
94 SMS and through applications designed to run on Android based phones and Apple’s iPhones.
95 Google has also recently deployed Google Transit into their Android map application. These
96 systems are heavily focused on providing schedule and routing information and have limited, if
97 any, methods for dialog between riders and transit service providers.

98 At the service level, there has been very little work on enhancing the information
99 exchange between transit agencies and their riders. This state of affairs is unfortunate since better
100 methods for acquiring input from people with disabilities have been highlighted as pressing need
101 (Transportation Research Board, 2001). Therefore, the team has included service modeling in the
102 research plan and used these findings to help guide our process (Yoo et al., 2010).

103 **Reporting – Single Event Scenarios**

104 Large, complex service organizations regularly have difficulty in knowing where there
105 are barriers to services and where services are being effectively delivered. In the context of
106 accessible public transit, this difficulty manifests itself as inaccurate information about
107 accessibility barriers and cases where riders feel their agency is doing well. Most transit agencies
108 do not have the resources to initiate systematic accessibility reviews of their entire system using
109 conventional approaches such as longitudinal field studies, focus groups, and targeted surveys.
110 These expensive and time consuming methods often fail to address both the immediate and long-
111 term needs of riders and agency staff due to challenges in prioritization and tracking over time.

112 Traditional methods for documenting accessibility barriers include telephone customer
113 service centers, voicemail, letters, emails, and community discussions. These “hard to track,
114 archive, and share” methods lack good tools for revisions, grouping of cases, and tracking cases.
115 Furthermore, service providers may not be able to monitor them for insight on how to improve
116 their service offerings. New approaches are needed to promote adoption of best practices
117 (National Council on Disability, 2005).

118 Passengers often encounter problems but then lack immediate information on how and
119 where to report the problem. In addition, many traditional reporting systems, such as calling a
120 customer service representative, do not allow for feedback on the state on the problem and
121 confirmation that it has been recognized, assigned, and addressed. Without adequate feedback,
122 riders making the effort to report problems can feel their efforts are falling into a “black hole.” In
123 recasting riders as the owners of their transit service and not simply consumers of the service,
124 web 2.0 technology can help riders to share their concerns with others, identify persistent and
125 high priority problems, convey tips and hints on how to use a system most effectively, and
126 consider the financial and social impacts of the service changes they request. People with
127 disabilities obtain more benefits from system state information than other riders since surprises
128 can lead to significant delays and detours (e.g., broken elevators). Similarly, travel trainers
129 accumulate information on how their clients can best use a system.

130 Therefore, we propose that citizen science reporting approach is especially effective since
131 information can be aggregated, analyzed and shared in a cost effective manner. In addition, data
132 collection via mobile devices can streamline reporting processes by automatic capture key details
133 (e.g., location, time of day, traceability to rider for follow-up questions and feedback, etc).

134 **Reporting – Continuous**

135 If mobile methods of data collection are used, it is also possible to incorporate continuous
136 rider reporting. In the case of Tiramisu, we are targeting collection of real-time bus location and
137 fullness estimates from riders. This information is then used to predict real-time bus arrival and
138 fullness estimates into the future.

139 Providing real-time arrival information alone can increase ridership as much as 40%
140 (Casey, 2003). This data is particularly important to people with disabilities. For example, they
141 may be more vulnerable to exposure in severe climates or have medical needs that require
142 attention on a timely basis. People with disabilities have also expressed concern about risk of
143 theft and other crimes while waiting at bus stops. This aligns with findings for riders without
144 disabilities reported that real-time arrival information system led to higher perceptions of safety
145 (Ferris et al., 2010b). Results from this prior work included free form comments specifically
146 regarding fear of waiting at night and at unsavory stops.

147 Unfortunately, real-time arrival data is expensive to implement and typically does not
148 include information such as fullness. Engineering solutions for obtaining fullness are possible,
149 but incur even higher costs. The high capital and operating expenses associated with proprietary
150 real-time arrival data systems is the primary reason cited by agencies interviewed by the team for
151 lack of adoption. The issue of fullness has been cited during our interviews with riders who use
152 wheeled mobility devices. Without this information, they do not know if they will be able to get
153 on the bus they are waiting for. As with single event reporting, these issues can be resolved
154 through citizen science approaches.

155 **SYSTEM DESIGN FACTORS**

156 Early in the development of Tiramisu, the team identified four general factors that
157 directly affected the design of the service and the implementation requirements. Universal design
158 was founding principle of the design process and rich media event reporting was identified as a
159 valuable approach early in the project. The remaining factors (crowd-sourcing and dynamic
160 information push) surfaced during interactions with stakeholders.

161 **Universal Design**

162 Transit and public services have a mandate to support people with disabilities and other
163 disadvantaged populations. In general, public services are designed to benefit everyone, but also
164 to create a sense of fairness through their focus on services more specifically for disadvantaged
165 communities. In our project, we seek to find harmony between in the needs of all riders by
166 adopting universal design principles. The basic premise of this design philosophy is that
167 designers should focus on services and systems that work for everyone within a single design. In
168 taking this approach, designers consider the needs of all users from the start, instead of adding
169 tacked on modifications designed to support the letter, but not the spirit of the ADA and similar
170 laws.

171 Today, unfortunately, many transit information services are less than fully accessible. For
172 example, static information such as signs indicating bus stops work well for most riders, but they
173 fail blind and low-vision riders. Providing fully accessible systems at each stop (e.g. text and
174 audible schedule information) is costly and is usually reserved for major transit terminals.

175 Our focus on universal design influenced several areas of Tiramisu. The preliminary
176 fieldwork that investigated the information needs of riders and of transit service providers (Yoo
177 et al., 2010) included interviews with a range of disabled as well as non-disabled riders. The
178 interface and interaction design for the system were tested with disabled users. This testing
179 resulted in additional functionality.

180 **Multimedia Single Event Reporting**

181 Earlier work by the team on how riders want to report problems examined rider
182 preference, ease of use, usefulness, and social comfort when reporting accessibility barriers
183 (Steinfeld et al., 2010a). Our investigation examined factors for modalities of the Notes (text,
184 audio) and Media (none, photo, video) for both riders without disabilities and wheeled mobility
185 device users. Participants documented representative problems in a simulated bus shelter using
186 all six combinations (e.g., reporting a water damaged schedule sign using audio and photo). The
187 results suggest that text with photos should be supported, and that riders do not perceive the use
188 of video as adding additional value in terms of communicating the problem they wish to
189 document. Both groups had a strong preference for the use of photos with text notes. This work
190 evaluated rider preferences for communication but did not measure the effectiveness of the
191 communication for the service provider.

192 To confirm that the use of photos and texts could form effective communication, the team
193 convened a two-person panel that independently rated each participant's generated problem
194 report collected from the previous study. Each report was rated on 7-point scales in terms of
195 Detail, Context, and Clarity. The definitions provided to the panelists were:

- 196
- 197 • *Detail*: Problem understandability. Is there enough to understand out what the problem is...
198 whether the step is 1" or 3", is it clear there is a maintenance problem, etc.
- 199 • *Context*: Scenario understandability. Can you tell what the item is and what the influences
200 are... a step into a door vs. a step on a sidewalk, etc
- 201 • *Clarity*: Are there issues with the media that are masking the information... focus,
202 grammar, background noise, tremor, etc

203 Statistical analysis showed no functional differences between text and audio notes. As
204 with the preference and social comfort ratings seen in the prior study (Steinfeld et al., 2010a),
205 Photo scored consistently well for all three measures (Figure 1). Tukey HSD post hoc analysis of

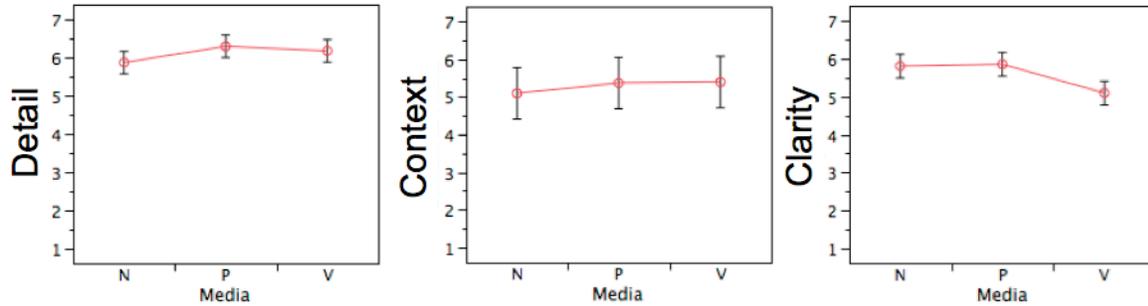


Figure 1. Panel ratings for report quality on Detail, Context, and Clarity for the Media conditions of None, Photo, and Video (1-7, higher is better)

206 an ANOVA showed that no media (None) was significantly worse than the Photo or Video for
 207 the detail ($F=19.3$, $p<0.0001$) and context ($F=8.6$, $p<0.001$) present in the report. Video was
 208 significantly worse for clarity ($F=54.6$, $p<0.0001$), most likely due to unwanted motion in the
 209 video and unnecessary footage at the start and end of the clips. While in-vehicle video has
 210 proven to be a valuable tool for capturing adverse events in transit systems, it does not seem to
 211 add much value to the information riders could collect and deliver to the transit service.

212 For this reporting, speed and ease of use is critical. Interviews and interaction concept
 213 testing by the team (Yoo et al., 2010) revealed that riders rarely encounter infrastructure
 214 problems that meet the perceived cost-benefit threshold for reporting. The benefit side of the
 215 equation is the perceived likelihood that a report will actually be seen and acted on. Analysis of
 216 survey questions about experiences with reporting problems to the local transit agency showed
 217 low rates of feedback and perceived timely resolution of the problem (Steinfeld et al., 2010b).
 218 This finding was not surprising given parallel reports from the transit agency that the customer
 219 service representatives rarely have time to return calls for issues other than lost and found (Yoo
 220 et al., 2010).

221 Using a single application for transit information sharing streamlines the experience and
 222 supports pre-loading of important real-time details (e.g., current location, route, etc), thereby
 223 lowering the perceived cost of submitting a report.

224 On the benefit front, we feel that providing methods for service providers to quickly and
 225 asynchronously provide feedback on reports is an important feature of the system. This feature
 226 has been shown to work well for groups like ParkScan.org (Neighborhood Parks Council, 2007)
 227 and our research plan includes field tests of these methods.

228 **Crowdsourcing Continuous Data Collection**

229 We are pursuing a crowd-source model for generating and disseminating real-time
 230 vehicle estimates rather than integrating a commercial system. A crowd-sourcing approach,
 231 assuming you can get a critical mass of participants, provides several advantages. First, it is
 232 significantly cheaper for the transit service than commercial systems due to the fact that it
 233 leverages a technical infrastructure that is already in place. Second, it allows for collection of
 234 many different kinds of dynamic information such as fullness of vehicle, available space for
 235 bikes, space for wheelchairs, etc. Third, the constant use of this service by many riders provides
 236 a platform for ongoing dialog between the transit service and riders.

237 Crowd-sourced systems and other online communities must deal with the issue of
 238 motivating participation. While many crowd-source models benefit from altruistic participants
 239 and a sense of ownership (e.g., ParkScan.org), our evidence suggests that this behavior is not

240 prevalent in transit riders (Yoo et al., 2010). We suspect this difference is based on two factors.
241 First, riders view transit as a “means” rather than the “ends.” In a sense, riders engage with
242 transit service not for the specific experience of the ride, but in order to efficiently achieve a
243 different goal that requires them to move within a city. Second, riders of public transit services
244 interact with the service much more like a consumer than other public services (e.g. visitors to
245 public parks). Riders pay a small amount for each journey or they repeatedly purchase passes.
246 This constant financial transaction may frame riders thinking of the service as a consumable
247 service as opposed to a public good enabled by taxpaying citizens.

248 Work in the field of online communities has shown that there are key influencing factors
249 for motivating participation (e.g., Ren et al., 2007) and that establishing successful online
250 communities requires careful design. Factors like community identity and bond can be designed
251 into the user interaction with the system to foster motivation. For this application, motivating
252 users to sustain their relationship with the community is critically important. We recognize this
253 as a challenge in the design of our system, and we are currently experimenting with several
254 motivational models.

255 **Dynamic Information Push**

256 Our research with transit agency representatives showed a strong positive reaction to
257 having the ability to push out dynamic schedule changes with short notice (Yoo et al., 2010).
258 Agency representatives told a story about a parade triggered by the success of a sporting
259 championship. This parade, with only two days notice, forced them to make a large number of
260 routing changes. In order to prevent riders from waiting at stops that buses would never visit,
261 they literally sent their employees out on the street to find stranded riders and send them towards
262 the closest, temporary stops.

263 Some agencies have elected to use Twitter as a method for pushing real-time information
264 out to transit users. One important feature of Twitter is that users can set up automatic mobile
265 phone text messages. Twitter has also been suggested as a source for gathering real-time data
266 from populations during evacuations and public planning (e.g., Brabham et al., 2010; Turner et
267 al., 2010).

268 Some agencies use Twitter heavily and amass a large number of subscribers
269 (“Followers”). In order to understand the effect of Twitter, we analyzed Port Authority of
270 Allegheny County (PAAC) transit agency as a case study. PAAC is an interesting example
271 because there were two large-scale disruptive events in Pittsburgh in one year – the 2009 G20
272 meeting and a week of major snowstorms in February 2010. Based on an analysis of PAAC’s
273 Twitter account looking at 222 days outside the two crisis regions, the account normally has an
274 average of 2.1 new followers per day. The G20 occurred early in PAAC’s use of Twitter and
275 their account had 777 followers when the event started. The account gained 50 followers over the
276 next two days. The snowstorms occurred about four months later. Two storms over five days left
277 the region largely immobilized with many roads unplowed and major arteries severely
278 constricted for over a week. PAAC used Twitter heavily during this crisis, often copying and
279 pasting internal messages straight into the account (Schwartzel, 2010). Word of mouth about
280 these updates led to giant increases in followers. For example, 151 followers joined on February
281 9th and were rewarded with 214 new messages the following day. No large drop in followers is
282 present in the data after the snowstorms and the number of followers has steadily grown since the
283 crisis. This phenomenon is not unique to bus transit services. Similar spikes in followers were
284 seen for airlines during the Icelandic volcano ash cloud delays in the spring of 2010

285 (TwitterCounter, 2010). There seems to be a willingness within transit agencies to share dynamic
286 information and a desire among riders to receive this information in a mobile, electronic form.

287 Our analysis of PAAC Twitter traffic revealed additional interesting behavior. Users
288 posted questions and the agency posted replies to user questions on the PAAC Twitter feed. This
289 two-way communication reinforced the value of this information resource and supported
290 sustainability of this Twitter community.

291 Unfortunately, there are barriers to using Twitter for dynamic information. One speaker
292 at a recent workshop remarked that an organization they worked with required multiple layers of
293 approval for each Twitter posting (Zmud & Andrews, 2010). This approval process is obviously
294 not suitable for the types of rapid updates required for real-time changes. Experts at the
295 workshop recommend letting a designated employee post independently. Another barrier is that
296 tweets are posted to all users, regardless of relevance. Syntax can vary and descriptions can be
297 both narrow and broad (e.g., 61C vs. all routes in Oakland), thereby making it hard for a rider to
298 rapidly extract relevant information. We are currently designing a system that captures Twitter
299 traffic and routes the traffic directly to the relevant users.

300 **SYSTEM DESIGN**

301 **User Interaction Design**

302 This section details the rationale for specific design choices and the general interaction
303 design. Specific features have been implemented and fielded (see Pilot Study, below) but others
304 are still under development. The design of the mobile client app includes two main methods for
305 contributing data. First, users can trace vehicle location and fullness and contribute Twitter-like
306 messages. All of this data is linked to specific vehicles and stops. Second, riders can report single
307 event observations with the option of including an accompanying photograph.

308 Tracing vehicle location and fullness is akin to a commercial automatic vehicle location
309 (AVL) system combined with real-time fare counting. As mentioned earlier, awareness of
310 whether there is room for a wheelchair to board a vehicle is extremely valuable to riders who use
311 wheeled mobility devices. Therefore, the fullness reporting includes designation of four fullness
312 levels (empty, seats available, standing room only, and full) as well as three wheelchair levels
313 (room, not sure, no room). The separation is necessary since a wheelchair can fit onboard if there
314 is room for people to stand when vacating the wheelchair parking area. The range in size of
315 wheelchairs and scooters (D'Souza et al., 2010) suggests that a yes/no option for ratings of
316 wheelchair room is too simplistic.



Figure 2. The user interface design showing arrival times, fullness, and messages for a specific stop (left) and the tagging interface for reporting (right)

317 Arrival and fullness data is accessed from bus stops, much like arrival time is found in
 318 AVL-based systems (e.g., NextBus; Ferris et al., 2010b). The screen for information at a stop
 319 (Figure 2, left) shows data for each bus as Scheduled, Historic, or Real Time. The latter occurs
 320 when a fellow user is collecting a trace. The middle case occurs when enough traces have been
 321 collected to provide a confident estimate based on historical patterns. The former case occurs
 322 when confidence does not meet threshold. Fullness is expressed similarly and specific icons are
 323 used to indicate wheelchair room. Recent messages logged by riders are shown with the bus data
 324 and the agency has the ability to push alerts to the trip banner at the top of the screen. Riders can
 325 begin tracing vehicles simply by pressing the “T” button next to each upcoming vehicle. There is
 326 potential for riders to abuse the fullness ratings. Users who intentionally over-rate fullness can be
 327 identified and filtered based on conflicting data from fellow riders and APC data.

328 Prior work suggests that location-aware selection of stops and routes is important (Ferris
 329 et al., 2010a) and this is supported through both map and list modes. List views are necessary for
 330 people who cannot use map interfaces easily. Another option is the ability to mark stops and
 331 routes as favorites for rapid retrieval. This is helpful for riders who have cognitive disabilities
 332 and/or limited dexterity and is useful for any rider who visits specific stops regularly.

Tiramisu
Mon 07:35 pm
the real-time bus tracker

Live Map
History
Report
Now tracing 15 39

Trip ID #7276 <h2 style="margin: 0;">71A Inbound b</h2> Negley - Downtown via Oakland			
Traced by 3 riders			
Next Stop Craig at Centre			
<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; border-right: 1px solid #ccc;"> Scheduled Time 07:42 PM </td> <td style="width: 50%;"> Real-Time 07:49 PM </td> </tr> </table>		Scheduled Time 07:42 PM	Real-Time 07:49 PM
Scheduled Time 07:42 PM		Real-Time 07:49 PM	
Current Status + 7 min delay			
Historic Status -1 min ~ + 12 min More			
Fullness Full			
Reports 1 opened / 5 closed More			

Tiramisu
Mon 07:35 pm
the real-time bus tracker

Live Map
History
Report
Now tracing 15 39

List

Issue ID #1215
 Status opened
 Severity Normal

Tags
 vehicle

Reported by
 A0XP
 7/29/10 3:24 pm

Contact

Report
 There's a broken seat blah blah blah...

Relative Routes: 71A (#7265), 71C (#7282)

Attached Photo



Reported at



Comment

Figure 3. The designs for live tracking (top) and detailed report views (bottom)

333 When riders want to file a report related to a
334 specific experience they simply press the Report
335 button in the persistent navigation bar. This is
336 primarily to support logging of accessibility barriers
337 and positive experiences. However, in keeping with
338 the focus on universal design, we have not
339 constrained the single event reporting interface to
340 this domain.

341 To streamline the interaction, the time, date,
342 and rider location are recorded automatically and
343 the first screen has simple yes/no toggles for
344 classification (Figure 2, right). The next screen has
345 a field for a text description of the problem and an
346 optional attachment of a picture. Voice notes are
347 also planned for users who prefer this alternative
348 (Steinfeld et al., 2010a). Riders can also access their
349 latest reports.

350 All designs are being implemented to
351 support screen readers, both on the mobile client
352 and web interfaces. However, not thinking about
353 accessibility from the beginning can limit options
354 during development. Therefore, the website for the
355 system was designed from the wireframe stage to
356 support accessibility features (Ayoob et al., 2010).
357 In parallel, student course teams have developed a
358 number of concept designs over the past year and
359 some of the ideas generated by these teams are being
360 incorporated into the project's core efforts. One
361 student team interviewed participants from cities with
362 real-time arrival systems and learned that riders like
363 to keep webpages open while at home and work in order
364 to time their departures more precisely. This has been
365 incorporated into the design (Figure 3, top). The web
366 interface can also be used by riders, agency staff, or
367 other interested parties to see submitted reports and
368 their current state (Figure 3, bottom). The same website
369 will also support detail views of historical patterns.
370 This has been highlighted by transit trainers as useful
371 for finding routes appropriate for their clients (Figure
372 4).

367 Pilot Study

368 While the website and full feature set was being
369 developed, an earlier version of the system was
370 deployed and pilot tested as a closed beta (Zimmerman
371 et al., submitted). Features like messaging were not
372 present but real-time and historic data for fullness
373 and arrival time and reporting were functional with a
374 simplified version (Figure 5). The goal for this pilot
375 was to find software bugs and improve algorithms, so
376 riders with disabilities were not explicitly recruited
377 and none participated. Having said this, accessibility
378 is important to the team and even this preliminary
379 version fully supported screen reading using the iPhone's
380 VoiceOver feature.

375 The pilot included data from 28 people over a span
376 of 38 days. Participants returned after a few weeks
377 to complete a survey and receive payment for their
378 assistance. Riders were recruited from a specific region
379 of the city to increase the chance their contributed data
380 would directly benefit their fellow participants. This
381 appeared to be the case and sampling of stops

Trip ID #7276

71A Inbound b

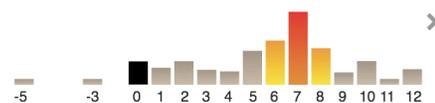
Negley - Downtown via Oakland

Monday (06:11 PM ~ 06:46 PM)



Traced by
674 riders

Historic Status
-5 min ~ + 12 min



Fullness
Standing



Reports
1 opened / 5 closed

More

Figure 4. The design for the route history view

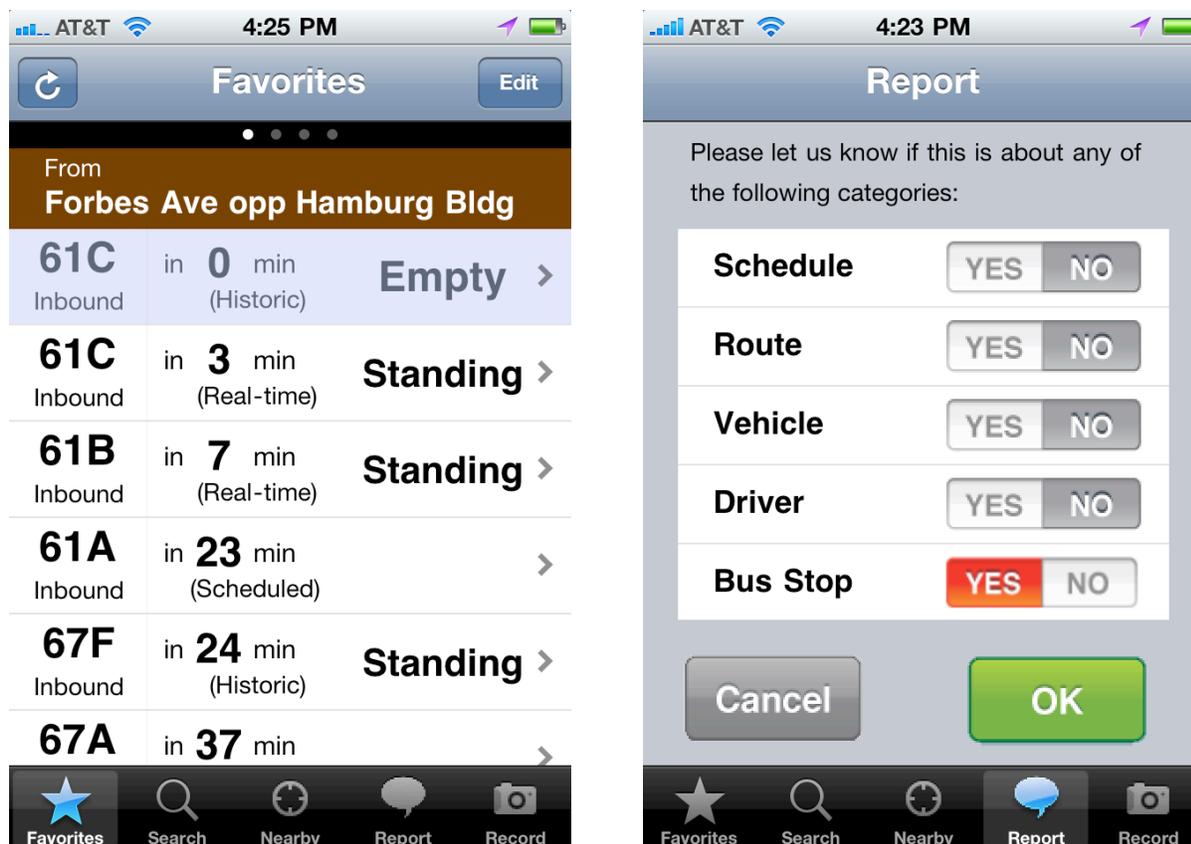


Figure 5. Example screenshots from the pilot version of the mobile client

379 within this transit corridor frequently revealed at least one real-time and several historic buses.
 380 Rider data was narrowed to 21 days each for analysis, with a focus on the 14 days prior to
 381 payment and 7 days after payment. Riders contributed data for 56% of the time when using the
 382 app. Individual rows in viewed arrival pages (e.g., Figure 5, left) shown to participants contained
 383 either historic or real-time data 13% of the time (2,132 out of 16,263). This is a very good rate,
 384 given the number of possible buses and the limited number of participants.

385 Participants in the pilot predominately reported issues with the system, which was
 386 expected and desired since this was a software beta test. However, 14 participants submitted a
 387 total of 22 reports specific to the transit system. In prior work (Steinfeld et al., 2010b), riders
 388 who use wheeled mobility devices reported at a much higher rate (58% of respondents) than their
 389 peers without disabilities (17%). The latter aligns well with the data seen in this pilot.

390 The pilot included exit interviews designed to inform design decisions related to end user
 391 motivation for sustained participation. Participants saw value in even this limited version of the
 392 system – almost all continued to use the app after payment. Some participants explicitly
 393 requested that we not delete the app during the interview and one changed their regular commute
 394 in order to catch a bus that was historically less full. A detailed analysis of the pilot study can be
 395 found in Zimmerman, et al (submitted).

396 DISCUSSION

397 This paper is intended to provide a summary of early Tiramisu development and provide
 398 context on why certain design decisions were made. Early testing of the system suggests our

399 approach is potentially valuable enough for riders to commit time and effort into sustaining the
400 envisioned user community. There are, however, issues that still need additional attention.

401 **Methods for Routes With Low Ridership**

402 The crowd-source model for tracking buses clearly will not work well if there is no
403 crowd. Additional technology may be needed for rural transit agencies and routes with low
404 ridership. Traditional AVL systems are still expensive for these cases. We have identified two
405 low-cost methods for providing a minimum threshold of vehicle location data. First, colleagues
406 have mounted commodity mobile phones on shuttle bus dashboards. Using a simple tracking
407 application, the phones report their location to a central server for rider use (Carnegie Mellon
408 University, 2009). Placing a Tiramisu equipped phone on a bus and having the driver start a trace
409 at the beginning of each run is an obvious analog. Another approach is to use roadside detectors
410 to document when buses pass key checkpoints. This is less effective but still provides potentially
411 useful data. However, neither approach provides rider-contributed data and therefore limits the
412 ability to establish and nurture a community of users. We are also exploring incentive models. It
413 is easy to envision deals, discounts, and other approaches to motivate use.

414 **Interaction Improvements**

415 Our experience in the realm of machine learning systems for white-collar tasks (e.g.,
416 (Freed et al., 2008) leads us to believe that there are significant opportunities for streamlining
417 various tasks related to data collection by riders, report handling by agency staff, and
418 communication between all parties. However, it is important to design the interaction with
419 machine learning carefully since improper user interaction can neutralize the potential for
420 machine learning to make a positive impact (Steinfeld et al., 2007).

421 **Evaluation**

422 As stated, the pilot test was designed to identify system problems, inform design choices,
423 and facilitate algorithm development for arrival estimates. Our research plan includes a full-
424 community field test that will both test the system at a large scale and permit evaluation of
425 system benefit and use. This process will begin soon, possibly before publication of this paper,
426 with a public release of Tiramisu.

427 **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

428 The authors would like to thank colleagues in the local Pittsburgh area who facilitated
429 participant recruitment. We would also like to thank Marynel Vázquez for her assistance with the
430 reporting quality data, colleagues at the Port Authority of Allegheny County for their assistance
431 with data related to the G20 summit, and TwitterCounter for their assistance with data during the
432 snowstorms.

433 The Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center on Accessible Public Transportation
434 (RERC-APT) is funded by grant number H133E080019 from the United States Department of
435 Education through the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research. Additional
436 funding was provided by Traffic21 at Carnegie Mellon University, a program developed with the
437 support of the Hillman Foundation.

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