

Transit schedule just a text away

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Nathan Walters, a strategic marketing supervisor for ETS, unveils a new ETS text-messaging service for transit customers.

Photograph by: Brian Gavriloff , The Journal

Finding out when the next bus or LRT is scheduled to arrive just got a whole lot easier.

And it's free.

On Friday ETS unveiled a new pilot program. Through the use of a mobile phone, riders will gain access to bus schedule information by sending a text message to 31100, and almost instantly will get a return text with the requested information.

"We're changing how people interact with our services, and the next logical step is to deliver the information to the 60-per cent of our riders who use mobile phones," said Nathan Walters, ETS strategic marketing supervisor.

Toronto and Vancouver have already made similar advancements to the way people can access transit information.

There are three ways to use the ETS's newest service.

-Text the number of the bus stop and get the times when the next six buses should arrive; this includes all routes at that stop.

-If you're looking for a specific route, text the number of the bus, followed by a space, and then the route number. The times for the next six scheduled buses will also appear.

-Users can set up an online profile that will let them set up a customized list of favourite routes. In turn, it allows people to send blank texts to get bus schedules specific to a specific route.

The third step will not be in place until later next week, but newcomers to Edmonton, such as Jenna Bergl, plan to take advantage of the new service.

"I often check the Internet to find out when my buses arrive. I think this new program will be better, faster, and help me out," Bergl said.

High school student Caran Banes likes the new idea.

"It looks like it will be more convenient for everyone. I'm more likely to use it than Bus Link because you've got to listen to all those choices."

Walters did not say how much the project cost, only that Upside Wireless won the bid to subcontract the program.

He also said he expects about seven million texts to be sent out in the first year alone.

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