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## **MTC website to help keep track of buses**

Ajai Sreevatsan

*Pilot project has been completed; seven routes mapped by Chennai City Connect*

**A screenshot of the new MTC website that is currently under construction.**

CHENNAI: How convenient would it be to know the exact arrival time of a Metropolitan Transport Corporation bus along a particular route at a bus bay nearby? With a new MTC website taking shape, you might soon be able to track all the 600-odd GPS-enabled buses in its fleet in real-time through an online interface.

A pilot project has already been completed and seven routes have been mapped by Chennai City Connect, an NGO working on issues concerning the city's transportation, who are acting as consultants for the MTC.

The schedule data of those routes is now available in General Transit Feed Specification (GTFS). It is a standardised format used by Google Transit, which is a public transportation planning tool, that overlays real-time data from the buses on to Google Maps.

Daniel Robinson, a coordinator at Chennai City Connect, said "The idea is to publish all the data in a usable, open format so that individual developers can create third party applications."

For example, Mr. Robinson says you can plan your own 'Discover Chennai' trail by selecting the historic spots that you want to visit and the application would give you the best route along with timings.

According to him, with more than 5.2 million passengers using MTC services every day, even minor tweaks to improve the passenger experience would have a profound impact.

The websites of 'Washington Metro' and 'Transport for London' offer multi-modal trip planning services.

That is, an option is available for commuters to plan the trip using two different modes (bus and train) or two different buses. Immediately after the websites were introduced, public transport ridership in the two cities went up by 18 per cent, says Mr. Robinson.

### Anna University study

Another related study being undertaken at the Transportation Engineering division in Anna University will not only let commuters know when a bus would arrive at the stop, but will also provide information on whether the bus is crowded.

Many MTC buses have started adopting electronic ticketing machines that digitally register passenger details, including boarding/alighting times.

The GPS on-board unit in MTC buses transmits the position of the vehicle every 10 seconds. "If the ticketing machines 'talk' to the GPS onboard unit through Bluetooth, occupancy details can be sent back to the control tower through GPRS," said a senior Transportation professor at Anna University.

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A pilot implementation is being carried out on two MTC routes. "Using the data, the number of passengers in a bus at any given point of time can be broadcast online. It will also reveal how people are travelling in the city."

According to him, by integrating real-time tracking with passenger details, bus movements can be evaluated.

"The route which is carrying the maximum number of people at a particular time can be monitored from the central control room. Identifying overloaded buses will become easy. It will also provide a scientific rationale to operate additional services," he added.