

## **Information and Information Management**

Information management and technology at the MTA is managed by the Information Systems Manager. This is a new position that has been in place for less than a year. Prior to that time, the Director of Planning and Scheduling undertook this responsibility. The current collection of software and hardware at the MTA has grown incrementally on an as-needed basis.

There are approximately forty-six desktop computers and over twenty applications currently in use at MTA. The software in use consists of a wide variety of general business and transit specific applications.

Among these specialized programs:

- Midas, used in the scheduling and dispatching of the ACCESSRIDE service
- DOS based GFI, used to manage data from the GFI fare boxes
- A DOS based bus driver and service scheduling system
- The "Turley" maintenance data management system
- The TSI training program, used in the safety and training department.

The business applications consist of a variety of word processing, accounting, and spreadsheet applications. In addition, the Manager of Information Systems has created and maintains an MTA web site.

There are many technological accessories available to transit systems, futuristic in nature, where the economic case for deployment is currently unclear. To the credit of the agency, we observed none of this type equipment in use at MTA.

The MTA has recently purchased and installed a personnel records management system (ABRA). Although currently in use, no training was purchased with the installation, and the staff has been learning the program on the job.

The Manager of Information Systems has a long list of improvements to the current system that he is working on, including:

- Upgrading the server from Novell 4.1 to internet-ready Novell 5.1
- Expanding email (currently limited to a few workstations)
- Acquiring a windows-based transit scheduling system that incorporates bus and paratransit services
- Moving to a universal office processing software in place of the current collection of applications
- Upgrading the GFI software to a windows-based system

- Continual upgrades of office hardware
- Improving the links among the accounting, purchasing, maintenance, and grants accounting applications
- Acquiring new software and hardware to support customer service sales, ACCESSRIDE tickets sales, mobility checks, and other non-cash media
- Adding applicant tracking to the Abra software
- Improving customer service and complaint tracking
- Increasing internet access speed
- Acquiring maintenance software for vanpool maintenance
- Acquiring swipe card payroll software
- GPS for actual time tracking of buses
- Windows based software for the customer service telephone system.

### **Conclusions**

Information management and technology in the transit industry, like most other industries, has expanded and become increasingly sophisticated over the past several years. The MTA has opted for a series of incremental improvements to meet the short-term needs of the organization. This has led to creation of a somewhat limited system that is not well integrated and has little connectivity.

The list of tasks being undertaken by the information systems director is substantial and will address many of the shortcomings of the current situation.

### **Recommendations**

The Director should develop an overall MIS and IT strategy that brings the MTA up to acceptable standards of operational efficiency. This may require the use of an outside expert to evaluate the current systems environment and make recommendations for upgrading.

The Director should assure that all users are proficient in the systems that are critical to the performance of their jobs, and develop a training program to overcome any deficiencies. This would include training with the Abra personnel records system which we noted was purchased without the associated training program.

### **Cost Implications**

It may be possible to develop a complete MIS plan using the Director and staff from McDonald headquarters under the current contract. If the skills to do this are not available through McDonald, then a consulting contract needs to be carried out. Such a study could run as high as \$50,000.