



[I've been pushing this for nearly a decade now](#), and [now it looks like it's finally happening](#) (no thanks to me):

If Dora Chavez knew exactly when her bus would arrive she could hustle to make it on time, stroll easily to the stop, or call work to say she would be late.

With a new [Metro program](#), Chavez will be able to do just that by using her phone or computer to get real-time information on when a bus will arrive at any of Los Angeles County's more than 15,000 Metro stops.

Dubbed NexTrip, the online service uses GPS and other technologies to track buses on their routes. It is "designed to help take the guesswork out of bus arrival and help you to get to your stop at the same time as your bus," according to the [Metropolitan Transportation Authority](#).

"Our customers are always looking for better and easier ways to get information about our buses," said Robin O'Hara, the agency's systems project manager. "When you're standing at a stop and you're wondering if your bus has gone by or if you're early and you don't know what time it is, it's nice to have access to that information."

Wondering when a bus will arrive — and waiting impatiently — is a common experience for many bus riders. ***Chavez, 35, a barista who took Line 733 from Mid-City to Union Station, said she only wished Metro had "thought about this sooner."***

[The Philadelphia region is doing the same thing:](#)

Next week SEPTA is expected to launch its much-anticipated TransitView, an online tool that will provide real-time updates on buses.

General Manager Joe Casey said Thursday that the program will launch June 2. ***Riders have been asking about the launch of real-time bus updates ever since SEPTA launched TrainView, a tool for Regional Rail trains, a few years ago.***

Emphasis added: this is such an easy call that it is probably worth a study to figure out why it wasn't done earlier. In the grand scheme of things, 400K is a pittance. But now comes the hard part.

How do SEPTA and the MTA figure out how to let people know that this service is available? Stories in the LA Times and the Philadelphia Enquirer are just the beginning. This would also make a good study, in real time: tracing the pathways by which the information about the service is disseminated and comparing it to ridership to and from different neighborhoods. Perhaps some ways of communicating information are better than others. Maybe advertising in Starbucks would work better than coming to community meetings. Or radio PSAs might work well. The rollout of these programs will reveal, I suspect, that while transit agencies know where their buses are, they have no clue where their riders are.

Public agencies, particularly in southern California, do a lousy job of public outreach — perhaps because everyone is in their car all the time. When the City of Los Angeles redid the Housing Element of its General Plan a few years ago, it conducted all of *four* public meetings. The [Move LA conference is in three weeks](#): this is a wonderful opportunity for Los Angeles MTA to partner with civil society to get this done right.

In any event, the rollout of these technologies presents a wonderful opportunity to study transit and commuter behavior, as well as an opportunity for agencies to do something creative.