Why doesn't DART share its real-time data with other apps?

dallasnews.com/opinion/editorials/2023/07/28/why-doesnt-dart-share-its-real-time-data-with-other-apps

July 28, 2023

By <u>Dallas Morning News Editorial</u>
2:00 AM on Jul 28, 2023 CDT

The route 47 Dallas Area Rapid Transit bus rides down Commerce Street in downtown Dallas on Friday, June 30, 2023. (Juan Figueroa / Staff Photographer)

If you use public transit in the Dallas area, you probably face a familiar dilemma every day: Should I wait for a bus that's running late, or should I try to find another way to get where I'm going?

That decision becomes harder to make when real-time data about DART buses and trains is not readily available. According to <u>Transit</u>, an app that partners with hundreds of transit agencies across the world to display routes, DART is the largest transit agency in the U.S.

that doesn't share real-time data. This means that when you open apps like Google Maps to see when your bus is coming, you'll see what's scheduled at each stop, but no information on delays.

DART does have text and email alerts and its own GoPass app, where riders can get information about delays. The alert service is helpful, but only riders who sign up proactively will get that information, and while the app does show real-time data, its user interface is clunky.

The agency has historically suffered from low-ridership and should make it easier for riders to plan trips, if it has any hopes of making DART mainstream.

Greg Elsborg, chief innovation officer at DART, told us that the agency does not share its real-time data because of its on-demand ride service, Go Link, which serves one-third of the agency's total area. Go Link is DART's solution to providing last-mile connections for passengers who can request car rides in areas like Rowlett and Farmers Branch where the agency does not have a well-developed network of bus or light rail routes.

GoLink is a service for individual riders, so you can't display real-time data for it when people search for transit options on Google Maps. That makes sense, but it's not a great reason to not share real-time data for bus and light rail routes, which still make up the backbone of DART's services.

Elsborg said that around 50% of riders use the GoPass app where they can book GoLink rides and see real-time information on normal routes. This isn't a very high number, considering that DART says its own app is the most comprehensive way for riders to see all of the transit options, including special services like GoLink.

Hexel Colorado is a software developer in Dallas who relies on DART for most of his transportation needs. He thinks sharing real-time data can help DART benefit from the open-source software community.

"It takes several years before a piece of software or an app becomes really smooth," Colorado said. "I wish that DART wouldn't bank so hard on pushing their own proprietary product and just open up their APIs."

In a car-centric city like Dallas, taking public transit is often not incentivized. As DART makes strides to improve safety, it also needs to make customer experience as convenient as possible.

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