New Metro Phone System

Metro will be installing a new IP phone system within the next six months, which will greatly improve the operations and offer greater capabilities to the Customer Service Center staff.

Metro is one of the last departments in the city to receive this updated system. Water, police and fire are all on this system already. So, a lot of the bugs have already been worked out and our City IT people have a very good handle on implementing this project.

We are just scratching the surface on the capabilities. We plan on easing into new features and making adjustments as necessary. The goal is that customers will really never know anything changed except possibly in a positive manner, i.e. they get through more readily or they don't get a busy signal as often.

Metro is working on getting its entire facility re-cabled for this system. As it stands now, we feel this might be implemented sometime in late summer or early fall.

Nothing is set in stone at the moment. We're exploring different features that would probably be relevant to our customer service operations and discussing how they would fit into our daily interactions with customers.

Some of the highlights include:

- Ability to increase the number of customers who can access the system and wait on hold for a customer service representative.

  As it stands now, we have 10 phone lines. Which means that if five customer service representatives are speaking with customers, there is only room for 5 people to enter the system and wait on hold; the rest receive a busy signal.

  This new system will allow for an unlimited number of people to access the system and get into the call queue.

  We'll have to speak with our project coordinator to confirm, but we're hoping there will be a notification as to how long the wait time is. (A wait time announcement is pretty common in this new technology.)

- We'll have better ability to provide common fixed-route information in pre-recorded messages. For example, if it's snowing, we can put a message on the line that everyone will hear before a Customer Service Center representative picks up saying, "Buses are running 10 minutes behind schedule." During busy times, that's all people are looking for and will hang up. This will free up customer service folks to work on paratransit bookings and more in depth route planning.

  We can also make recordings for common information such as fares and special service information. This type of information can be played by pressing 1, 2, etc. With these

recordings, many people can be served by a recording rather than a live operator, thereby leaving customer service representatives more available for ride booking

- There is also discussion about making one Metro number available for all calls, i.e. 266-4466. Then people (for example) would press 1 for fixed-route info, press 2 for paratransit, 3 for Lost & Found, etc.

  This would allow us to better route and track calls. Both fixed-route and paratransit calls would go to the same customer service group, but we'd be able to gather data on paratransit vs. fixed-route calls.

- We are also researching the ability to record calls to the customer service center for quality assurance purposes. For example if there were an escalated conversation between a customer service representative and a customer, the customer service supervisor could listen to the recorded conversation and determine what actually happened.

  This is also an important feature for employee safety. Caller ID will also be available for all of our lines.

- The phone system is now going to be supported by the City of Madison IT department rather than a third party vendor. If there are service issues, we'll have our city personnel available to immediately research and correct the problem, 24 x 7. Bringing in a third party vendor for repairs on nights and weekends is not quite as easy and does lend itself to longer periods of downtime.

- Better data collection. With this new system, we'll get a much better look at phone data allowing us to better research hold times, call patterns, customer service production as well as quality of service. We can make adjustments much more readily and adjust staffing accordingly. We can also better ensure that our hold times are ADA compliant.

- There is also the long-term capability, if something were to happen at the customer service location, that laptops could be sent to any location (including customer service staff homes) and Customer Service Center calls could be conducted remotely.

These are just some of the capabilities and improvements we see happening to our customer service unit as a result of this system. Once it's implemented, using additional features and capabilities will be an ongoing process to best utilize customer service staff and create ease of use for customers.