



BUS LANES GET A MAKEOVER

The Rapid riders will have access to First Responders

By Michael Zuidema

The Rapid bus system in Grand Rapids, Mich. has had its share of heated debates over the past several years, with detractors bemoaning its lack of use and proponents promising major economic benefits with expansion.

In the spring of 2013, The Rapid started construction on the Silver Line's 33 new stations that run up and down a rejuvenated Division Avenue that's rife with construction projects currently in progress and winds through downtown Grand Rapids and the city's "Medical Mile" district. The 9.6-mile, \$40 million project included street and sidewalk improvements.

When the project is 100 percent completed, 10 brand-new buses will have dedicated lanes and signal preference when they are approaching a green light. Additionally, each bus stop will have real-time arrival displays, bike racks, seating and handicap accessibility.

DIRECT ACCESS

But, one thing The Rapid made certain to include was a way for riders to have direct access with first responders. That's where Code Blue Corporation of Holland, Mich. was able to step in by providing an emergency communication solution at each bus stop.

With the assistance of Midstate Security of Wyoming, Mich., The Rapid selected the CB 1-e, a 9-foot tall pedestal Help Point from Code Blue known for its

rugged durability and high visibility that was then shortened to a custom height to meet the specific requirements of each bus stop. Included with all of the units was a sophisticated IA4100 analog emergency speakerphone with a custom button and faceplate clearly instructing riders that their calls will be routed to 911. Managing the entire system is Code Blue's award-winning ToolVox, an efficient, easy-to-use management platform that remotely provisions and monitors the status of the emergency units.

Having worked on similar projects for a number of public transportation locations—including the Charlotte Area Transit System in North Carolina, the Nashville Metro Transit Authority and the Mass Bay Transit Authority in Boston—Code Blue embraces the need to provide a way for authorities to respond to emergency situations.

"It is vital that riders feel safe by having a direct line of communication with first responders," said David Cook, COO at Code Blue.

Additionally, The Rapid had surveillance cameras installed at each stop, along with five cameras on board each bus for additional safety and security precautions.

All of these measures ensure that riders are never far from help if an incident occurs.

It's one reason why The Rapid was named the 2013 "Outstanding Mid-Size Transportation System" by the American Public Transportation Association (APTA).

"Individuals, families and the entire community all benefit from public trans-

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portation and it will be even more important in peoples' lives in the years to come," wrote Michael P. Melaniphy, president and CEO of APTA, in a guest column for Mlive.com. "I am so impressed with The Rapid and was privileged last month to see for myself how it is not only serving the people of your region, but is serving as a model of excellence for other public transit systems to emulate."

This may end up being a key component considering how popular the Silver Line has been in its nascence. Service started on Aug. 25, and drew an average of 2,500 riders per day during its first week, according to The Rapid.

"The Silver Line has been in the works for more than 10 years. Throughout that time, we've stayed focused on keeping the project moving forward and it was a great day to see it finally in operation," said Peter Varga, CEO of The Rapid. "We've had a strong opening and are excited to see the growth over the coming months and years."

It has been billed as Michigan's first bus rapid transit line and is expected to shave 40 percent off commute times, which leaders hope will spark economic investment and improve upon the record 12.5 million riders the line saw in 2013. One frequently cited model is Cleveland's public transportation system, which has stimulated an estimated \$6 million in development since 2008. Similar successes with routes in Phoenix and in Eugene, Ore. have leaders at The Rapid excited.

"One of the points of this project is economic development," said Conrad Venema, strategic planning manager at The Rapid. "We've seen in other areas, where cities have leveraged these kinds of projects, that they've been able to turn property values around significantly."



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