On the heels of Train Tracker’s release, a scramble to create the best mobile ‘L’ app

By Tracy Swartz

CTA riders were excited when the agency released Train Tracker in March 2009, the first mobile and mobile-based listing of bus routes and arrival times based on a job opportunity.

Eriksson, who was working as a Web developer for an organization in the midst of a large transition, noted a few quirks with the system at the CTA board meeting earlier this month.

If there is an issue at a CTA stop, such as a fire or a person on the tracks, the train tracker may become temporarily unavailable. "They will take the train to start running again, but the system won’t return until it’s back on the tracks," Cieslak said.

Eriksson said he was working on the first version of TransitGenie, which he described as "shaky," in November 2009. "Because it was so popular, it got my foot in the door to doing iPhone applications," said Eriksson, who works at an iPhone development and consulting firm called Elektro.

The CTA announced its $1.35 billion plan for the downtown Loop, which would include a half-mile extension of the Blue Line, during a CTA board meeting earlier this month.

Eriksson said he began working on the idea of developing an app to monitor train stations and get data from the CTA in May 2009, after he became a computer science professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago. He has moved from Boston to live in Chicago, and his team plans to add a train tracking function to TransitGenie in the next few months.

The UIC shuttle addition is not the only improvement Eriksson and his group are set to launch soon. Within the next month, the team plans to add a train tracking function to TransitGenie based on the information the CTA has started posting on its site this month.

"It’s a natural platform to find problems," Eriksson said of the creation of TransitGenie. "All the people who are interested in solving problems, whether it’s transit or other infrastructure, are coming together to use this platform.

"There’s a lot of things to be done in the intersection of computers and transit," Eriksson said while exploring its features. "I’m just exploring it," said Eriksson, a Swedish native who lives in the South Loop.

Eriksson said he began working on the TransitTracker app in March 2009, a few months after he became a computer science professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Eriksson noted there have been a few quirks with the system at the CTA board meeting this month.

Eriksson said the addition is a stepping stone to creating commuting apps that incorporate other Chicago modes of transportation such as bikes.

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