

STOPtalk



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How MTD Responds to Snowfall



Over 90 bus shelters across the community are shoveled by hand.



5-8 truckloads of salt are spread around the community. Or 7,500-12,000 pounds.



Maintenance Staff switch to a 12-hours on, 12-hours off work schedule.

The Weather Outside May Soon Be Frightful

As any seasoned Midwesterner knows, the months of December through March are ripe for forecasts featuring snow, freezing rain, and a general slushy mess. Winter weather is a challenge for everyone, whether you are in your personal car, travelling by foot, or riding MTD.

If you are driving or carpooling, please take the time to thoroughly clean and scrape your windows. Increased visibility improves the safety of everyone sharing the road with you. The more you see, the more time you give yourself to respond. In [New Jersey](#), it's the law!

With fewer daylight hours, it's important to make yourself visible when walking at night. Consider purchasing a light colored jacket or winter wear accessories that are reflective. Property owners can help keep pedestrians safe by shoveling their sidewalks. Snow piled on the sides of the road narrows the path for motor vehicles. When pedestrians are forced to use the streets to travel, it poses a challenge to traffic and most importantly, their safety. The cities of [Urbana](#) and [Champaign](#) have snow removal ordinances. Please do your part!

Maintaining quality service in extreme weather conditions is a top priority at MTD. A heavy snowfall requires all hands on deck to assist the cities in plowing the streets, clearing out over 90 bus shelters around the community, and surveying the condition of the non-arterial roads. In rare instances, the start of the service day may be delayed and routes truncated to alleviate the dangers of hazardous road conditions. The heavy snow storm we had in February 2011 resulted in over a foot of snow and winds of 50 mph that created unmanageable snow drifts. Schools were cancelled and businesses closed, but MTD braved the elements to take people where they needed to go. While most transit systems in the path of the storm didn't operate, we provided 21,125 rides the day after the storm, February 2. There were however, some alterations to early morning service that were alleviated throughout the day.

What can you do to stay up to date? Sign up for [MyRide](#) email and text alerts to be notified of any changes to the routes you ride. It only takes a few minutes to set up a personalized notification profile. Use [STOPwatch](#) so you can track your bus and stay inside longer! Our drivers put safety first and schedule adherence second. Poor road conditions will reduce our operating speeds and inevitably put a route behind schedule. STOPwatch provides real-time departures for any location based on the route's GPS location at the time of the data request. You can also check our website frequently for updates.

Share your experiences with us all winter long on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#)! We'd love to hear feedback on our services.

Give feedback through our website.

theINSIDELANE

Visit the CUMTD Blog here.



Control Center Goes Modern

If you keep up with MTD on our social networks, you may have seen pictures of various construction stages as we update our control center. This large room, adjacent to our server room which houses our data storage and STOPwatch technologies, is the nucleus of our operations.

At all times of MTD service, there is at least one dispatcher in the control center. During peak times there are two, sometimes three. Dispatchers confirm that all technologies, including STOPwatch, are functional and that radio communications are available with all drivers. They need to discern if data is reporting correctly and that all drivers are on route. Dispatchers monitor schedule adherence for all routes to determine if a turn bus needs to be brought in to restore on-time service. Then there are the unforeseen issues. A bus may have a fluid leak and need to be taken off the street. An emergency may require a sudden reroute. The list of responsibilities and possibilities goes on.

Tom Conrad, Lead Dispatcher, says he never stops moving. "I'm always busy and time goes fast. Every morning I wake up and I know, I got to get to work."

At peak service times, there are 93 buses on the street. In a single day, Conrad estimates that there are over 500 "requests to talk" (RTT) calls from operators who require assistance. "I have to constantly move and always be thinking of ways I can do more."

The reconstruction will provide more resources to the dispatchers. Cameras installed at MTD's administration building and maintenance facilities will enable more security on site. Visibility on the street will also be improved with cameras at [Illinois Terminal](#) and at major stop locations like the Transit Plaza and the Illini Union. These additional "eyes" will allow dispatchers to stay ahead of the curve as well as heighten safety and security for employees and passengers.

Robb Patton, Director of Service Delivery, is certain live camera feeds will improve services. "Bad weather like snow (e.g. blizzard of February 1-2, 2011) is always an issue; major street closures that affect almost all routes like the Illinois Marathon and the Homecoming Parade; unforeseen emergencies like the Green Street Fire this year; class changes, especially during finals, present huge rushes. The ability to watch capacity build gives our dispatchers time to respond to it."

Having the opportunity to proactively respond will result in fewer disruptions for passengers and allow emergency responders or event coordinators to go about their business.

"I love coming to work," Conrad says. "MTD is a job, but I feel like I'm needed. I'm helping the community. What I don't like is when I'm too busy and then I can't help everybody."

Karl Gnadt, Director of Market Development, is confident the new design will allow dispatchers to do more. "There will be screens on the wall and in front of the dispatcher so they can decide what they prefer to view and where."

Views include a live map of buses in service, list of operators and the blocks they are driving, route data, transfer requests for passengers, text communications to and from operators, as well as camera views from MTD facilities and major bus stops.

The Urbana-Champaign Big Broadband project, referred to as [UC2B](#), is integral to transmitting the camera feeds. The stressful task of monitoring a bus system that

regularly provides over 50,000 rides a day will be taken to the next level as dispatchers view actions in live time.

[Learn more about the remodel.](#)



Lean Clean Green Machines

In 1978, the Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District had a 24 bus fleet. At peak service times, 17 of those old GMCs were on the street.

Today, MTD has 114 vehicles. There are 102 buses and 12 paratransit vans. During peak times, there are 93 MTD vehicles on the street. We've grown continuously over the 40 years of our public service. With a record 10.5 million rides in FY2011, MTD is forecasting another record ridership year with 11 million rides.

Needless to say this growth is welcomed, but requires planning. Thanks to federal, state, and local funds, 13 new 40-foot hybrid buses will be added to our fleet in 2012 (numbered 1162 through 1174). Ten of our older buses, dating back to 1996 and 1997, will be retired. These buses have exceeded the industry standard of 12 years by serving our District for 14 and 15 years. Three of the '96 and '97 series will remain in service - buses 9721, 9658, and 9665.

When a new bus arrives, it receives over four days' worth of treatments. The CAD/AVL (computer aided dispatch/automatic vehicle location) equipment alone takes three days. This includes driver to dispatch communications, STOPwatch data, as well as tracking for analytics.

New cameras and CAD/AVL equipment were installed on older buses in 2010. Now that these buses are being retired, all the equipment is being repurposed onto the new buses and saved for replacement.

As this [Flickr set](#) shows, almost all corners of the bus house some kind of equipment. Several outside companies from across the country are contracted to provide it, as well as a couple local companies. [Apollo Video Technology](#) is responsible for the camera equipment and [INIT](#) (Innovation in Traffic Systems) designs the systems responsible for STOPwatch as well as the tracking and reporting. [IRIS](#) produces the infrared intelligent sensors for the automatic passenger counters and [GFI Genfare](#) manufactures our fareboxes. Local companies Silver Machine Shop and [Ilini Plastics](#) provide the Maps & Schedules Book holders, stands for the mobile data terminals, camera brackets, frames for the trash bins, and the bins themselves.

A new vehicle also requires a lot of paperwork. The vehicle needs to be insured and issued license plates and registration. Once all the "Ts" have been crossed, and the "is" dotted, each vehicle goes through a safety lane test and inspection.

From there, the bus will spend about three days with the training department. The trainees will treat the bus like any other, but the bus has an opportunity to get out on the street. If any possible bugs surface, no passengers will be affected. Next, the new bus will graduate to "trippers." These are small service runs that last only three to four hours. This allows for other unforeseen issues to arise and be corrected. Finally, after about a week of use, a new bus will graduate to regular service.

Maintenance Director, Dave Moore, has always used this method in his 34 years at MTD when inducting new buses into the fleet. "It's not a good idea to make any kind of fleet change all at one time," he explains. "Because then, if something goes wrong, it'll just snowball."

Moore projects the newest additions will be fully street

ready by mid-January. MTD's hybrid fleet is up to 45 buses! In 2009 we acquired five, 30-foot hybrid buses and four 60-foot hybrid buses. In 2011, we added 23, 40-foot hybrids. Each bus size reports different fuel savings. The 40-foot buses, which make up the majority of our fleet, average a 24 percent fuel reduction!

[Read more.](#)



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