



Guest Columnist

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Video surveillance increases security and decreases liability

The American Public Transportation Authority (APTA) estimates that more than 14 million people use public transportation each weekday. State and local transit authorities around the country are investing in technologies that ensure smooth operation of these highly traveled systems while minimizing disruptions in service and protecting people, property and assets.

Video surveillance is an example of a technology that is capturing the attention of transit authorities because of its effectiveness in helping to proactively address potential security threats, promote optimal response in emergency situations and mitigate the risk of liability claims through more comprehensive incident investigation.

Although transit authorities faced some initial resistance to video surveillance from labor unions and others, the positive benefits of the technology have had a significant impact on operational efficiency, employee safety and rider experience.

THE EMERGENCE OF VIDEO SURVEILLANCE IN TRANSIT

In the early 1990's, the Federal Transportation Administration (FTA) introduced the Advanced Public Transportation Systems (APTS) program to encourage the development and deployment of innovative technolo-

gies and strategies that would improve public transportation. APTS made funding available to state and local governments for deployment of state-of-the-art transit technologies including geographic information systems, automated passenger counting technologies and on-board video surveillance equipment. The FTA allocated funds to the program in an effort to encourage transit authorities around the country to discover new methods of integrating technologies that provide a safer, more reliable and more efficient mass transit system.

Thanks to the funding provided by APTS, transit authorities quickly realized the benefits of linking GPS-based location technologies with audio/visual announcement systems to provide more accurate arrival and departure information. Automated passenger counting systems

were installed to track peak ridership times, allowing for more efficient allocation of resources during the busiest times of day. All of these technologies

ed. However, video surveillance could provide a more comprehensive view into transit operations than any other technology.

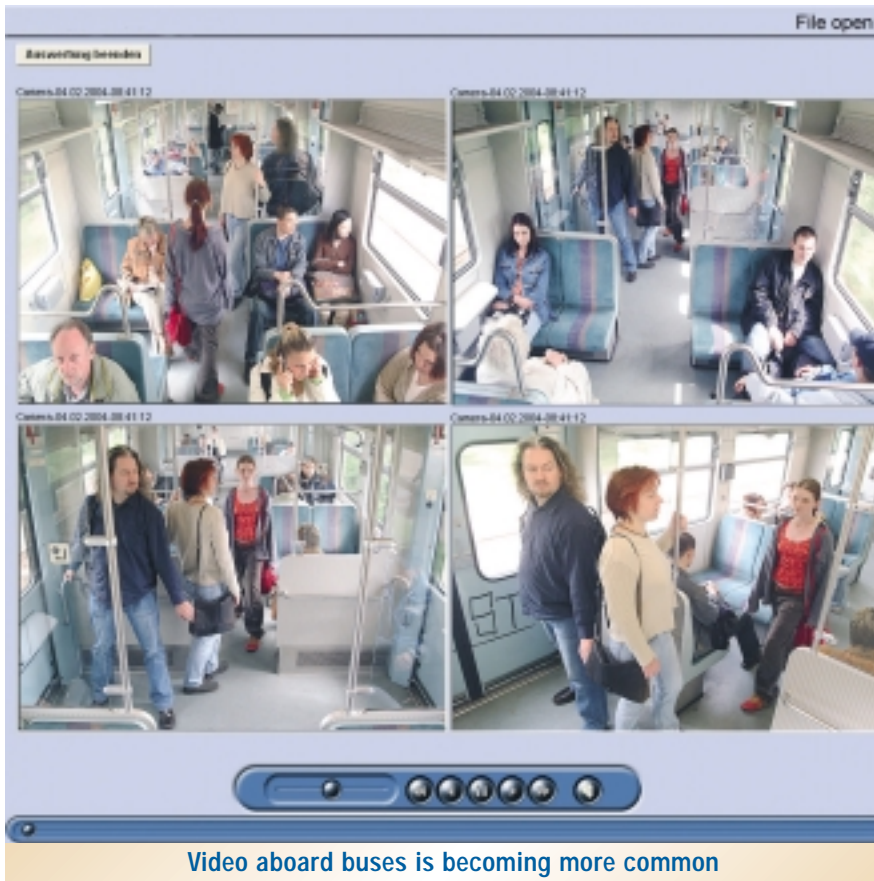
MANAGING LIABILITY: A VALUABLE PROPOSITION

Transit authority management quickly realized the potential benefits of video surveillance technology for liability and risk mitigation. The visibility provided by on-board cameras gave transit authority management the actionable intelligence required to ensure proper operation of the vehicles and confirmation that policies and procedures were being followed. In addition, management now had an unbiased "witness" to capture any incidents that occurred in or around the vehicle. This evidence aided in administrative investigations and helped

protect the transit authority from false claims of liability.

Funding made available by the APTS program covered a large portion of the costs associated with the installation of video surveillance cameras and digital video recorders (DVRs), which meant that both large metropolitan areas and smaller rural transit systems could gain access to the technology. Integration of video surveillance systems with other APTS-funded solutions, such as GPS-location technology and wireless networking equipment, was also typically specified in transit RFPs.

Following the events of September 11, transit security became a top priority among state and local government officials. Transit authority directors were immediately called upon to develop security policies and procedures to reduce significantly the risks presented by a rapidly expanding and diverse set of threats. Transit security managers were charged with allocating limited resources and technologies to support the effective execution of these security policies. As a result, mobile video surveillance technology rose to the top



were welcomed by passengers, operators and management alike for the improvements in efficiency, reliability and passenger experience they provided.

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of the agenda for many transit authorities because it provided security personnel with a means to respond more effectively in emergency situations.

KEEPING THE OPERATORS SAFE

After 9/11, national security became the primary topic of conversation among the media, government officials and society in general. Everyone was focused on protecting the country from another large-scale attack. But, among transit operators, personal security had been and continued to be a top-of-mind issue. Transit worker unions continued to pressure employers to implement new, more effective safety measures to protect operators from robberies and other violent crimes.

In 2005, a Cornell University survey of 792 transit authority workers in New York City found that 74 percent of the respondents had been threatened with physical violence by a customer, while 13 percent of bus drivers surveyed had been the victim of physical assault. Transit operators welcomed security cameras in their vehicles and workers quickly realized that the cameras were the next best things to having a transit authority officer riding on their vehicle. Criminals were less likely to commit assaults, robberies or vandalism if they knew their actions were being recorded.

MAKE IT SAFE AND THEY WILL RIDE

According to APTA, ridership of public transportation systems in the U.S. dropped dramatically in the early 1980s. It seemed that people preferred the flexibility and privacy afforded by commuting in their cars. Funding for public transit was dramatically cut in the 1980s, leaving many transit systems in poor condition. In addition, public transportation had been stigmatized as unreliable and unsafe for the average commuter.

As fuel prices began to rise and society became more aware of the impact that our energy consumption was having on the environment, commuters once again began to view public transit as an interesting alternative. In the early 1990s the federal government began allocating more funds to public transit improvement. According to an FTA report, "public funding for transit increased at an annual rate of 1.3 percent in real dollars from 1990 to 1997. This growth was substantially greater than that seen during the 1980s." Combined with federal tax deductions and incentives provided to riders of public transportation, the public was ready to "get back on the bus."

However, transit authorities still needed to change the perception of public transit as a dangerous environment. When cameras began appearing on buses and mass transit vehicles, the general public responded favorably. They saw the technology in a similar light as the transit employees; as a next-generation security

solution that would ensure a safer experience. Those who would never have considered public transportation for fear of falling victim to crime began to view buses as a safe and viable method of transportation.

THE FUTURE OF VIDEO TECHNOLOGY ON MOBILE TRANSIT

Combined with emerging technologies, including wireless networks, GPS-based tracking systems and intelligent video analytics, the role of surveillance technology in the transit environment is likely to continue to expand.

Wireless broadband mesh networks will allow real-time streaming of video footage from inside transit vehicles, providing first responders with the actionable intelligence they need to respond effectively to any emergency situation. Location-based services combined with images from inside transit vehicles will alert riders to the fullness of approaching buses so they can determine whether to squeeze in or wait for the next one. Engineers will gain new insights into how passengers interact with the vehicle environment allowing for new designs that will make better use of the space.

Most importantly, video surveillance technology will continue to provide transit authorities with the actionable intelligence that they need — the right information, delivered to the right people at the right time — to protect our transit system infrastructure. ■

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