

# Wired BART should please passengers

■ Transit system monitoring pilot project allowing Wi-Fi access

By Janis Mara  
STAFF WRITER

**BERKELEY** — Gustavo Pesce, of San Francisco, has been reading e-mail and surfing the Net on BART for six months as part of a pilot project he thinks is a success.

"I've used it hundreds of times," said Pesce, who whips out his laptop and answers work e-mails on BART five mornings a week.

BART's plan to offer high-speed Internet access in its cars and stations by the end of 2011 should be a hit with riders, if other transit agencies' experiences are an indication.

"Of all the things the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority has done over the last several years, this is by far and away our most well-received project," said Kris Erickson, the agency's deputy chief of staff.

A pilot program started in January 2008 at the fifth busiest transit system in the United States garnered rave reviews.

"For months, we would get dozens of e-mails every single day from people on the train thanking us," Erickson said.

Erickson said the agency plans to have at least two Wi-Fi-enabled coaches on each of its commuter rail system's lines by the end of spring.

BART plans to outfit its 104 miles of track and 43 stations by the end of 2011, according to Sacramento County-based Wi-Fi Rail Inc., the company that will provide BART's system. Wi-Fi Rail will pay the entire installation cost and funnel some of the revenue to BART.

In an online survey of 6,500 riders conducted by BART from Jan. 27 to Feb. 3, thousands of customers mentioned Wi-Fi.

BART started its pilot program nearly two years ago, offering Wi-Fi access at underground San Francisco stations and a short portion of track in Hayward. Though service has been free to the 16,000 BART riders who have logged on so far, Wi-Fi Rail will start charging once it equips the Transbay Tube, all San Francisco's subway stations and downtown Oakland.

Riders will pay about \$30 a month, \$9 a day, \$6 for two

hours and \$300 for a year's subscription, according to Wi-Fi Rail. Those who are willing to surf for 3½ minutes at a time and watch ads first can log in for free.

By installing Wi-Fi access, BART is jumping aboard a national bandwagon. The Chattanooga Area Regional Transportation Authority in Tennessee offers Wi-Fi on buses in its metropolitan fleet. The Utah Transit Authority provides free Wi-Fi access on its several hundred express buses and 42-car commuter rail system. Some

cars on Texas' Trinity Railway Express are wired, and Amtrak's Capitol Corridor commuter train in the Bay Area is seeking funding for such service.

"It's popular and it just goes to show you public transportation is different from it was not too many decades ago," said Virginia Miller of the American Public Transportation Association. "It's not your grandfather's public transit."

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