The most effective uses of passenger information technology in community and public transit involve multiple technologies working in concert – each designed with the passenger experience in mind. In this user-friendly article and accompanying informational video, Mentor Engineering highlights its MyRide system.

It’s no secret that waiting for buses and trains affects rider satisfaction. Studies have shown that waiting – whether it is for a bus or in line to buy a coffee – is psychologically painful. This is due to the minutes already lost while waiting and not knowing how much longer the wait will continue. The good news is that the stress of waiting can be relieved, very simply, when the person waiting knows how much longer their wait is going to last.

Transit agencies, too, understand this connection.

“Studies have shown that when people are informed of how long they are expected to wait, they overestimate what this time will be like to endure,” says Chris Pettigrew, transit product manager at passenger information systems provider, Mentor Engineering. “Despite this, the sense of control gained by knowing how long that wait will be, leads to significantly greater customer satisfaction. There are even examples of situations when on-time performance actually decreased after a passenger information system was installed, however, riders perceived the service as being better because they were informed about how long their wait times were going to be.”

One of the most important decisions facing transit agencies regarding passenger information systems is not whether to implement a system, but which type of technology or combination of technology they should choose. With the large range of technologies available, agencies must give careful thought to which options would be most useful to their ridership demographic. For example, an agency in a university town with a young rider base might be wise to focus its efforts around information accessible with smart phones and cell phones – like smart phone apps or text messaging. An agency with a different demographic may be better off to focus their efforts around installing real-time wayside signs.
Also critical, in terms of which technologies are appropriate, is an agency’s budget and size. Technology choices for agencies range from the virtually free option of releasing their transit data to the public and relying on community-spirited developers to build transit apps, to pricier options of real-time text messaging services or wayside signs.

For a unique way to learn about some of the various options available, watch this animated video (or click on the graphic on p. 33). It steps through several different methods of providing transit passengers with real-time information, all shown from the viewpoint of the riders.

The passenger information system shown in this demo is Mentor MyRide™, a product developed by Mentor Engineering. As Pettigrew explains, “We developed MyRide to give agencies an affordable option that is easy to implement. Many agencies don’t have the budget or the IT and technical resources to build their own passenger information systems. With MyRide, agencies can apply their own branding to the product and have a system up and running quickly and easily. This is a real benefit for smaller or mid-size operations.”

There are several transit agencies in the midst of deploying the passenger information system featured in this video. They include YoloBus in Yolo County, California; Johnson City Transit System (JCT) in Tennessee; Greater Lafayette CityBus in Indiana and Metro Transit in Oklahoma City.