Our view: Bus late?

On a nasty day, or any day for that matter, People Mover bus riders with Internet access no longer have to run to the bus stop early for fear of missing their rides. People Mover last week launched a Web program that can tell you the estimated time a bus will arrive at any given stop. It uses global positioning and automated vehicle location. Before you head for the stop, you log on to BusTracker.muni.org, and pick your route and your stop. The computer says what time the bus is scheduled to arrive, and what time it will really arrive.

Route 9 rider Jenifer Arnold, who works at AWWU on Arctic Boulevard, says the service is invaluable and accurate. "I'm surprised at how real-time the data is." There's about a minute lag, she says.

She discovered the bus tracker Web site when it was still being tested, in mid-winter. When it's icy, snowy, cold and dark, she waits inside until the real arrival time. If it's too late, she calls her husband for a ride.

BusTracker hasn't steered her wrong yet, Arnold said. She relies on it so much that when the test site went down, she e-mailed to ask for it back.

It covers all 1,300 stops for the 16 routes. Eventually, you'll be able to call by phone for the information, too, People Mover officials say.

People Mover got a federal grant to pay for the system. The $411,000 grant also covers other technology.

Convenience is the name of the game for public transit. People Mover ultimately needs to offer more frequent and quicker service to attract more riders. But that takes an increase to its annual budget, and lately the city has been cutting, not adding services.

Meantime, the BusTracker is a helpful step.

BOTTOM LINE: People Mover riders get some high-tech help.