



JULY 21, 1999

TO: BOARD OF DIRECTORS  
FROM:   
FRANK CARDENAS  
EXECUTIVE OFFICER, ADMINISTRATION  
SUBJECT: CUSTOMER COMPLAINT SYSTEM

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### ISSUE

MTA's Customer Relations and Information & Technology Services departments are planning to upgrade the software used to process customer complaints from the current DOS-based program to a Windows-based program. This report is submitted in response to questions raised by the Operations Committee concerning the feasibility of purchasing "off-the-shelf" software to perform the required tasks at a lower cost.

### BACKGROUND

MTA's Customer Relations Department receives, investigates and responds to approximately 1200 to 1500 complaints per month. Complaints are received via telephone, letters, e-mail and walk-ins. Receipt and logging of complaints is only the first step; timely resolution depends on fast, accurate reconciliation of complaint reports with current operational information.

Customer Relations' current complaint handling software, called the Customer Complaint System (CCS), was developed as custom programmed software in 1985. Its basic functions have been time-tested and proven to serve the agency's needs. It is, however, a DOS-based program and as such no longer offers the ability to interface with more advanced hardware and software systems being installed at MTA's Operating divisions.

Alternatives for upgrading the existing system are to: 1) Re-program the current CCS software from a DOS-based platform to a Windows-based platform; 2) Replace it by purchasing "off-the-shelf" software without modification; 3) Replace it with a "modified" version of off-the-shelf software; 4) Replace it with entirely new custom programmed software.

As shown on the attached chart, several "off-the-shelf" software packages have been considered. Programs intended to serve as contact managers such as GoldMine and Act! were deemed unsuitable by their manufacturers for MTA's needs in the research, investigation and wide-area distribution of customer complaints. Of the other software packages explored, none were able to

perform the required MTA-specific customer complaint tasks without modification by the software publisher or authorized service provider. In some cases, the products also require purchase of an annual maintenance contract to provide upgrades or implement changes. Estimated costs for such systems including purchase, modification and maintenance contract ranged from \$111,500 to \$153,400.

Several established vendors of custom programmed software were also considered. Generally, these are consulting companies which publish their own proprietary customer contact software systems, tailoring the basic system to the specific needs of their clients after the client pays for a comprehensive evaluation of the existing procedure/system. The estimated cost for these solutions started at \$100,000 and involved entering into an ongoing annual service/maintenance relationship with the vendor.

The estimated cost for ITS to re-program the current CCS system from DOS to Windows is \$64,000. The current system has been proven to serve MTA's needs. In addition, ITS already has an intimate knowledge of associated MTA systems (Computer Aided Design System (CADS), Transit Operating/Trends System (TOTS), Transit Radio System (TRS)) and can effectively integrate them with the re-programmed CCS to manage distribution of complaint information over MTA's wide area network to the outlying operating divisions. Therefore this option offers the most cost-effective and dependable means of meeting the needs of MTA and its customers.

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Attachment