Apple patent focuses on tools for commuters

December 6 2014, by Nancy Owano

Should you take the arthritic trolley today or the local bus with over a dozen stops? Where do you change? When does the bus stop running? Once on the N line, does it pass close enough to the shop? If you waited for the express bus, would you get there sooner or later? Commuters have questions and smartphone-derived data are always welcomed.

On Thursday the US Patent & Trademark Office published a patent application from Apple; the content shows that Apple has commuters on its mind, according to Patently Apple, with a mass-transit application that carries a substantial amount of detail. Namely, Apple filed a U.S.

patent application titled "User Interface Tools for Commute Assistant." The patent suggests that public transit mapping tools done in Apple style may be in the works, based on a patent application. The patent said that "A countless number of cities and regions around the world have public and/or private transit systems that provide passenger transport services between locations in the cities and regions, and in some cases, other cities and regions. Such transit systems use any number of different modes of transit such as buses, shuttles, trains, metros, subways, airplanes, helicopters, boats, etc. The majority of the transit systems operate on set schedules that specify pickup and arrival times at stops along the different routes offered by the transit systems. Software developers today have created applications that allow users to view these schedules while the users are mobile and on the move. Many of the applications also provide a map that shows the paths traveled by the transit system's different routes along."

What Apple is proposing involves an application for commuters with features for viewing routes and schedules for the routes. Patently Apple said one of the features that could be coming to this commute app is that it will be integrated with Siri. The software could give directions for traveling either within a city or between cities and regions, said The Verge on Friday. Adi Robertson translated the patent "embodiment" language into English. "The interface would allow people to select between a variety of routes to a destination, see estimated arrival times, give information about the status of individual stations or stops, and automatically update directions during travel." Robertson said that "Users could also check a specific stop and see all the routes that passed through it, regardless of time, mode of transport, and destination." Dave Smith, senior technology editor for Business Insider, said even when you turn off your phone, the Apple app would keep updating silently in the background. "It will also send you notifications, for instance, if a bus/train is running late."

Apple Insider said that the future of Apple's commuter support tool is unknown, though customers have been calling for such a feature to be included in Apple Maps for some time. Robertson thought that "Apple has come up with a reasonably comprehensive transportation interface that it thinks is important enough to protect with a patent, and we might be drawing closer to real public transit options that don't require going to a third-party app." Apple Insider noted that "Airplanes, helicopters and even boats are also mentioned in the patent language, suggesting Apple is planning to create a one-stop-shop for users' commuting needs." Patently Apple called the application "massive" and "chock-full" of details, with its 45 patent figures addressing various interfaces.

The application was first filed in November of last year. May-Li Khoe, Joseph Hagedorn and Marcel van OS are listed as the inventors of the patent application.