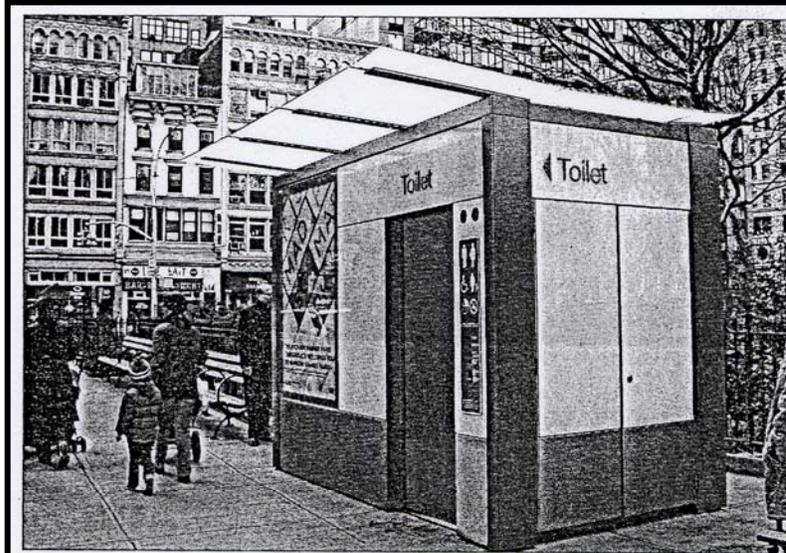


USA Today(4A) - Monday, June 2, 2008

“The latest in public toilets: Automated comfort stations”

By Andrew Seaman



Self-sanitizing facility: An automated public toilet is located in Madison Square Park in New York City. Seth Solomonow of the city's Department of Transportation says the system is safe and clean.

The latest in public toilets: Automated comfort stations

By Andrew Seaman
USA TODAY

For the person on the go who needs to go, cities are placing self-cleaning, automated public toilets in high-pedestrian-traffic areas.

Los Angeles, San Francisco, Boston, New York, Pittsburgh, Atlanta and San Antonio are some of the cities that have automated public toilets (APTs), according to Mary Ann Racin, founder of thebathroomdiaries.com, a website that rates more than 12,000 public restrooms worldwide.

Most APTs, Racin said, have been installed in the past five years.

Atlanta was the most recent to add them, in March, paying \$300,000 for each of the five units and signing a two-year maintenance agreement for \$1.5 million, according to Joe Basista, commissioner for the city's Department of Public Works.

With the push of a button — and the drop of a quarter, depending on the city — the automated door opens, and a sanitized toilet awaits. After the user is finished, the system cleans the toilet and is ready for the next user, says Jaclyn Valrose, a spokeswoman for Cemusa, a street furniture company.

Robert Brubaker, program manager for the American Restroom Association, says cities find APTs attractive for a few reasons. “Besides looking nice and handling rough treatment well, APTs come with a fixed yearly service contract, which gives cities a known budget line item,” Brubaker said.

For some municipal governments, APTs have lost their charm. Seattle has moved away from its program. On May 19, the Seattle City Council decided to end its contract for five APTs that were installed in March 2004. A report prepared by the City Council said the APTs became havens for drug use, drug deals and prostitution, Council President Richard Conlin said.

Elsewhere:

► **Washington, D.C.**, has one APT at the Huntington Metrorail station, said Cathy Asato, spokeswoman for the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority. She said cost, not crime, was the reason for not expanding.

► **New York City** has contracted with Cemusa to install bus shelters, newsstands, bike parking structures and APTs around the city. According to Valrose, the facilities are supported by advertisers such as

Chanel and Tiffany & Co., which pay anywhere from \$1,650 to \$21,000 to have their advertisements displayed on bus shelters and newsstands for four weeks. Typically, Valrose said, there are no ads on the APTs themselves.

Seth Solomonow, press secretary for the New York City Department of Transportation, says the city isn't concerned about the APTs becoming magnets for crime.

“We've built responsible, preventive steps into the system to keep them safe and clean,” he said.

Those features include a connection to 911 service and a rear evacuation door for emergency personnel, Valrose said.

The first APT was installed at 23rd Street near Madison Square Park in January. The city has announced plans for four more in the next six months.

► **San Francisco** became the first city to install an APT program in 1995, according to Francois Nion, executive vice president of JCDecaux North America, the company that supplies San Francisco with its APTs. Like New York City, San Francisco has a deal with a company to provide street furniture, including APTs, at no cost to the city, Nion said.

For the person on the go who needs to go, cities are placing self-cleaning, automated public toilets in high-pedestrian-traffic areas.

Los Angeles, San Francisco, Boston, New York, Pittsburgh, Atlanta and San Antonio are some of the cities that have automated public toilets (APTs), according to Mary Ann Racin, founder of thebathroomdiaries.com, a website that rates more than 12,000 public restrooms worldwide.

Most APTs, Racin said, have been installed in the past five years.

Atlanta was the most recent to add them, in March, paying \$300,000 for each of the five units and signing a two-year maintenance agreement for \$1.5 million, according to Joe Basista, commissioner for the city's Department of Public Works.

With the push of a button, and the drop of a quarter depending on the city, the automated door opens, and a sanitized toilet awaits. After the user is finished, the system cleans the toilet and is ready for the next user, says Jaclyn Valrose, a spokesperson for Cemusa, a street furniture company.

Robert Brubaker, program manager for the American Restroom Association, says cities find APTs attractive for a few reasons.

"Besides looking nice and handling rough treatment well, APTs come with a fixed yearly service contract which gives cities a known budget line item," Brubaker said.

Not all municipal governments are enamored with APTs. Seattle has moved away from its program.

On May 19, the Seattle City Council decided to end its contract for five APTs that were installed in March 2004.

A report prepared by the City Council said the APTs became a haven for drug use, drug deals and prostitution, Council President Richard Conlin said.

Elsewhere:

•**Washington, D.C.**, has one APT at the Huntington Metrorail station, said Cathy Asato, spokesperson for the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority. She said cost, not crime, was the reason for not expanding.

•**New York City** has contracted with Cemusa to install bus shelters, newsstands, bike parking structures and APTs around the city. According to Valrose, the facilities are supported by advertisers such as Chanel and Tiffany & Co. which pay anywhere from \$1,650 to \$21,000 to have their advertisements displayed on bus shelters and newsstands for four weeks. Typically, Valrose said, there are no ads on the APTs themselves.

Seth Solomonow, press secretary for the New York City Department of Transportation, says the city isn't concerned about the APTs becoming magnets for crime.

"We've built responsible, preventive steps into the system to keep them safe and clean," he said.

Those features include a connection to local 911 service and a rear evacuation door for emergency personnel, Valrose said.

The first APT was installed at 23rd Street by Madison Square Park in January. The city has announced plans for four more in the next six months.

•**San Francisco** became the first city to install an APT program in 1995, according to Francois Nion, executive vice president of JCDecaux North America, the company that supplies San Francisco with its APTs. Like New York City, San Francisco has a deal with a company to provide street furniture, including APTs, at no cost to the city, Nion said.

