

EL PAIS - MADRID

Your bus leaves here on Tuesday

More than 30 lines are being moved next week to the new station in Plaza de Castilla

By Pilar Alvarez Madrid 06/11/2009

It is an oval-shaped island in the middle of Plaza de Castilla with a surface area of 12,300 square meters. Next Tuesday thirty city and intercity bus lines that have been scattered in the area around the plaza for a year and a half will finally be moved to this spot. The enormous new at grade transport hub includes 18 bus bays and a volume of 270,000 daily passengers (23 million per year), according to estimates given by the Ministry of Transportation.

Construction on the massive project, located at the foot of the Calatrava obelisk, began in March 2008. The newly remodeled underground hub that goes three levels below the surface was opened a month prior. The below-grade facilities cost 19 million Euros, and at grade facilities an additional 17 million. Both spaces connect three Underground lines (1,9, and 10), 37 intercity bus lines that service the northern areas of the region, plus 21 city bus lines. Buses will run day and night, and the station will be open 24 hours a day.

The infrastructure includes special pathways for blind passengers as well as panels with information in braille. A canopy with a skylight that is 200 square meters in size covers the new bus dock. "Light is an important element in this building project because it gives off a feeling of security," explains chief architect Irene Valbona. The most complicated aspect of the work, according to Valbona, has been dealing with everything that was beneath the station. "We had to keep a close eye on the pipelines, the tunnel for cars, and the existing underground portion of the station," she pointed out. Dozens of workers put the finishing touches on the immense transportation hub, which will receive an official visit today from the mayor of Madrid, Alberto Ruiz-Gallardon, and the regional president, Esperanza Aguirre.

All of the at grade facilities are encircled by a bus lane where buses can turn around without affecting the rest of traffic. Five blocks with a total surface area of 1,000 square meters have been built in the center of the bus island to house businesses (mainly cafus) and that will also include an information office. The office will distribute fliers the first few days after the opening that explain the new layout of the hub and include maps of the below ground and at grade levels. There is also a new climate-controlled waiting room with information screens for passengers and a break room for bus drivers to rest.

Sixteen antique buses will be on exhibition at the hub up through Monday afternoon. This was organized by the Regional Transport Consortium and includes vehicles that have been used in Madrid since the beginning of the 20th Century. Four of the buses will tour the city with students from two local schools as well as public transport employees' and the hub workers' children. On Monday, the antique bus tour will be open to the rest of the public at 10 a.m. and will go to either the Royal Palace or the Almudena Cathedral.