

Israel Railways to offer wireless Internet

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Israel Railways now offers wireless Internet in one of its stations and plans to extend the service to the other stations and eventually to the train cars.

Wireless service at the Central Tel Aviv station went online last week, and officials are in the process of researching other countries' models for how to extend the service to the trains themselves, Israel Railways spokesman Benny Na'or told United Press International in a telephone interview.

"We're in the process of improving the (train) experience for our riders," Na'or said.

The government-owned company has been plagued by complaints of bad experiences -- to say the least -- in the past year, for everything from chronic lateness, to overcrowding, to breakdowns, to collisions with cars, to several passenger deaths.

The wireless service will be available to anyone with a laptop or palm computer and a wireless card, for a fee. When users log on they will be instructed to choose a 24-hour access pass for \$9 plus tax or a monthlong access pass for \$22 plus tax.

Na'or said the prices are still being checked and could change.

The prices are extravagant by Israeli standards. Home internet users connected to the fastest available service pay about \$18 a month.

Israel Railways is charging half that for a few minutes' worth of access while riders at one station wait for their trains -- maybe half an hour if they miss their train and have to wait for the next.

A technology columnist for the Hebrew news site Ynet called the billing decision another missed opportunity for Israel Railways and suggested the station charge for access by the minute instead.

Na'or said about 100,000 people ride the trains every day and that a large portion of these riders are commuters.

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