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Consultant Jeff Klompus demonstrates how Metro employees use the TAP validator during testing of the UFS system. The equipment will help track travel patterns, recording the time, location and which bus or rail line an employee boarded.



The screen on the TAP validator signals, "Go," when an employee ID badge touches the circular target.

Time to Start TAPPING – Employees Asked to Test TAP Machines

- A 'culture change' from flashing badges to tapping them

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(June 28, 2006) Admit it. You've been ignoring the TAP machines when you enter a Metro Rail station or board a Metro Bus. Maybe you haven't even noticed them.

Well, it's time to start TAPPING. All Metro employees and others who are currently eligible for Metro transit benefits are being asked to participate in a pilot test of the "smart card" system before it is expanded to include customers.

TAP – Transit Access Pass – is the branded regional smart card that will be used with Metro's new Universal Fare System (UFS).

Beginning now, Metro ID badge holders should get in the habit of tapping their ID badge on the blue target positioned at the top of the validators, ticket vending machines or fare boxes whenever they enter a station or board a bus.

Metro Bus operators will be instructed to ask all Metro ID badge holders to tap their badges on the onboard validator, rather than just showing them to the operator for a visual inspection. The automated validation is intended to help relieve operators from having to be fare enforcers.

Human Resources is currently working to convert dependent and retiree ID badges to be "TAP-enabled." Some 30,000 new badges will be distributed to dependents and retirees this fall with instructions about tapping the badges on a validator.

3,200 validators total

Every Metro Rail station and every Metro Bus is now equipped with the TAP validators, a total of 3,200 machines in all. The new UFS equipment will record each TAP and will note whether the transaction was by an employee, a dependent or other eligible person.

TAP project manager Jane Matsumoto is asking Metro ID badge holders to assist in making sure the validator machines are working properly and that the data is being accurately recorded by the central computer system.

Employees should report to Matsumoto any TAP validator that fails to recognize their ID badge or a machine that seems to take too long to note a transaction, flashes an error message or beeps to indicate a failed tap.

"This will give us an opportunity to start a transition from paper transit passes to smart cards," she says, noting that the demonstration will be expanded later this year to include about 7,000 institutional, business and annual passholders.

In addition to collecting electronic fares, the TAP machines will provide data that – when the program is in revenue service – will give Metro valuable information about its ridership.

'Identify all rider categories'

"The equipment will be able to identify all rider categories," says Matsumoto, "whether they are students, seniors, employees, regular adult riders or a zone rider – all the fare categories we have."

Other types of Metro passes will be phased into the UFS system over the next several years. "In order to ensure we are ready and the equipment is working for the public, our Metro employees are critical to assessing the reliability of the system," says Matsumoto.

Eventually, the TAP program also will be expanded to include buses operated by a dozen local municipal transit agencies that are Metro's partners in the smart card system. All TAP transactions will feed into a regional customer service center that is expected to open in late 2007 and will be located somewhere in downtown LA.

In the meantime, Metro employees, dependents, retirees and others should get accustomed to tapping their badges.

“Beginning now, we’re trying to change our culture,” says Matsumoto.
“We have to change our practice from just flashing our badges to tapping them.”

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