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Contact:

Helen Ortiz_Gilstrap/Marc Littman
Metro Media Relations
213.922.2843/922.2700
www.metro.net/pressroom

Mayor TAPs Into 21st Century with Launch of New Reusable Transit Fare Card

Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa was joined today by Metro and county officials and the public for a sneak preview of TAP — the new tool Metro has developed to make paying for travel easier.

TAP, or Transit Access Pass, is the revolutionary new electronic fare payment system that will eventually unify all of Los Angeles County's transit operators through a single, reusable payment card. The goal is for transit patrons to pay for rides on Metro Rail and buses and local municipal buses with a single, rechargeable card. The region's Metrolink commuter rail riders can transfer to connecting Metro and local municipal operators using the same TAP card.

By late January, the more than 400 retail outlets and Metro Customer Service Centers, Foothill Transit Stores and the LADOT Transit Store that sell weekly and monthly Metro paper passes will sell only electronic TAP cards. While all regular passengers will be required to make the switch to TAP in January, recipients of senior, disabled and student discounted passes will be eased into it by June, 2009. Cash fares will continue to be accepted on both bus and rail.

"TAP is revolutionary because it's more than just a fare payment card," said Los Angeles Mayor and Metro Board Chair Antonio Villaraigosa. "It's a system that will make transit easier and better for our riders through a long list of benefits."

Among the benefits:

— Both money and passes can be added to TAP cards via the Internet, as well as at ticket vending machines in all Metro Rail stations, so that customers can avoid standing in line at pass sales outlets. TAP cards also can be auto loaded each month, if customers set up the service by calling 1.866.TAPTOGO or on line at www.TAPTOGO.net.

— TAP offers "balance protection," so losing a card doesn't mean losing all of the money or a pass that is on the card. Since TAP cards can be registered, whatever the value of the card the moment it is reported missing is the value the card holder will get back on the replacement card. Because this is an electronic card, stolen or lost cards can be quickly disabled. This reduces fraud in a way not possible with paper passes.

— TAP technology makes it possible for Metro to partner with companies to reward riders with special discounts, incentives and tickets to entertainment and sporting venues throughout Los Angeles. Among the first to participate in such a partnership is L.A. LIVE, the brand new entertainment center in downtown Los Angeles, which is sponsoring a sweepstakes in conjunction with the TAP launch, using a special, commemorative co-branded TAP card available only at select downtown pass outlets.

"L.A. LIVE is proud of the partnership we have developed with Metro, showing people that downtown is a destination where transportation works," said Lisa Herzlich, Senior Vice President & Managing Director of L.A. LIVE.

Other TAP benefits include:

— TAP riders can receive benefits directly from Metro with future loyalty programs, such as "frequent riders" status — a program to recognize customers who are dependent on public transit for their daily commutes.

— TAP can be used to collect ridership data so that transit service can better accommodate changing travel patterns.

— TAP will soon allow seamless travel throughout the region on Metro, municipal operators and local transit service systems, since riders will only need one type of payment for all systems.

— TAP is "green" because the same pass can be used month after month, unlike paper passes that are discarded after weekly or monthly expiration.

Phasing in of TAP cards coincides with implementation of a gating system for Metro Rail. The agency currently relies on a proof of payment system and fare inspectors to ensure that patrons pay their way. Metro estimates that TAP, coupled with the gating system, will help it recoup most of the nearly \$5 million lost yearly to fare evasion. New fare gates will free up fare inspection personnel so that there can be more focus on keeping customers and the system safe as they travel on Metro Rail.

The 18-month program to design and install the fare gates in Metro Rail stations will launch next summer, with the opening of the Gold Line Eastside Extension at the two underground Mariachi Plaza and Soto stations. Installation on the Metro Red Line will follow, along with the Metro Green Line and stratetic Blue and Gold Line stations.

Roughly 250,000 TAP cards are currently in circulation, according to Jane Matsumoto, Metro's Deputy Executive Officer responsible for the Regional Universal Fare System and TAP.

"TAP will bring Metro into the 21st century," Matsumoto said. "It's similar to the high-tech fare collection systems used by Washington D.C., New York, San Francisco, Chicago and other large transit properties. Unlike those properties, in Los Angeles we're implementing a regional system that links together transit agencies, both small and large. We're confident that once we make the transition to TAP, our customers will enjoy the many benefits."

TAP is part of an \$89 million upgrade of Metro's obsolete bus fare boxes and Metro Rail ticket vending machines.

For more information on TAP, go to metro.net.

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Editors Note: "Metro" should be used when referring to this agency.

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