

Metrolink Proposes Fare Increase and Change in Transfer Policy

As you might expect, since we first announced potential changes to our transfer policy and a proposed fare increase, we've received quite a few comments and questions from our passengers. To help answer your questions and give you more background on why we're proposing these changes now, we've developed this special issue of *Metrolink Matters*. We will keep you informed at every step of the way as new policies or fares may be approved and as implementation approaches.

Metrolink's Current Economic Challenges

We are all too familiar with the significant impact the current economic crisis is having on individuals and businesses. Many of us are grappling with the very real need to "do more with less" and plan for an uncertain future. The national economic crisis and California's budget deficit are having a significant impact on the budgets of our five county transportation commission member agencies that provide the majority of our operating funds beyond fare revenues. So just as our friends and neighbors have had to adjust their budgets and financial strategies, Metrolink and our member agencies are dealing with some of the same financial circumstances.

Metrolink must also budget for the annual increases in the costs of operating commuter train service including significant increases in the rates charged to Metrolink by the transit operators participating in the EZ Transit Pass® program in Los Angeles County. During the upcoming year, we also need to migrate our ticketing policies and technology to accommodate the ongoing implementation of the Transit Access Pass (TAP) smart card fare payment system in Los Angeles County and the installation of new fare gates at METRO rail stations. Faced with a new economic reality, Metrolink and its member agencies will not be able to continue to subsidize the entire cost of transfers in Los Angeles County.

Despite the bleak budget situation, all news is not bad; the proposed fiscal year 2009-2010 Metrolink budget includes some good news. Despite the fact that next year's proposed budget is smaller than the current year, we will be utilizing expanded facilities as we start to accept 117 new rail cars and operate a new maintenance yard to store, clean and maintain them; implement enhanced passenger communications to keep you better informed on real-time train delays; and install a series of enhanced safety measures including inward-facing video cameras and vital building steps towards state-of-the-art automatic train-stopping technology.



The Proposed Changes

There are several changes being proposed by staff to the Metrolink Board of Directors for consideration at the April 24, 2009 Board meeting. While the proposed changes, if approved, would go into effect at different times during the upcoming fiscal year, we are sharing all of the information with you now since we need to obtain final approval of our budget by each of our five member agencies before the new fiscal year begins on July 1, 2009. While the exact dates for some of these potential changes are not confirmed, especially those linked to new technology, the budget needs to anticipate that they all might occur in our new budget year.

The proposed changes fall into two areas – a proposed fare increase and proposed changes to Metrolink's transfer policy. The Metrolink Board will be considering:

An average annual system wide average fare increase ranging from 3.5% to 5.5%. If approved by the Board, the new fares would go into effect on July 1, 2009.

In 2004, Metrolink's Board of Directors approved a plan to restructure our fare policy over a 10-year period beginning July 1, 2005. Under the restructuring plan, all ticket prices are now based on a measurement of the driving distance between stations. In March 2007, the Board approved a 3.5% system wide average fare increase effective July 1, 2007 and voted to implement the same 3.5% system wide average fare increase on July 1, 2008 and July 1, 2009. The Board also noted that any increases above the 3.5% system wide average would require a public outreach process prior to Board consideration.

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Proposed changes to the way in which Metrolink passengers access connecting transit, which could be implemented in Los Angeles County by March 2010. These would include a new rider “co-payment” and transition to a TAP smart card.

Since Metrolink’s inception in 1992, Metrolink tickets have included a transfer to connecting transit to nearly all of the transit lines that connect to our stations. Participating transit operators have visually inspected your Metrolink ticket and billed Metrolink for the Metrolink passengers they carried. Metrolink is one of only three commuter rail services in the country that have offered free transfers. Due to budget factors, Metrolink can no longer afford to provide these connections free of charge, but we will continue to subsidize between 60% and 70% of the costs to minimize the impacts to our loyal monthly pass and ten-trip ticket riders.

Before proposing a change in our policy, Metrolink reviewed and rejected several other options, including the potential for customers to pay the entire transfer fare cost for their connection. As a result of the connecting transit fare policy and technology changes with the implementation of the TAP smart card fare payment system in Los Angeles County and the installation of fare gates at METRO rail stations, a rider “co-payment” and the following technology related changes are proposed by Metrolink staff to our Board of Directors for implementation:

- ▶ For customers transferring to METRO bus and rail services in Los Angeles County, Metrolink monthly pass and 10-Trip ticket holders would be required to use a registered TAP smart card and pay a portion (between 30% and 40%) of their connecting transfer costs through the TAP smart card program. Your Metrolink ticket will have a special printed coupon code to be used to purchase your connecting transit passes at this special discount rate through the TAP service center either online at www.taptogo.net or by phone. This would also apply to all other connecting transit operators in Los Angeles County as they join the TAP program.
- ▶ Metrolink one-way and round trip tickets would no longer include the transfer privilege for connections with EZ Transit Pass or TAP-enabled operators in Los Angeles County. Customers using one-way and round trip tickets would be required to pay the regular fare to use connecting transit services.

All Metrolink tickets would continue to be valid for non-EZ Transit Pass transfers to connecting transit services that have not joined the TAP program and to those outside of Los Angeles County (OCTA, Omnitrans, RTA, etc.). Free transfers with your valid Metrolink ticket will continue until an operator joins the TAP program or there is any significant increase in the rate charged to Metrolink, at which point a co-payment could be required.

Metrolink is a regional system spanning six counties, interacting with dozens of connecting transit systems. We must consider the ticketing policies and technology of all the operators and cannot redesign the entire ticketing program for a single county. Metrolink’s new policy will allow for the accommodation of changes in other counties. Each of the connecting transit operators in the six counties Metrolink serves has their own way of collecting revenue from ticket sales. TAP is being implemented in Los Angeles County only. If more counties adopted TAP or a similar system, Metrolink would have to make a fiscally responsible decision on whether to adopt the electronic ticketing option. This decision would require the consideration of all connecting transit throughout the region.



Tap photos courtesy of Metro.

A Primer on TAP

TAP stands for Transit Access Pass. TAP is a new, environmentally friendly, convenient way to pay your fare on participating transit in Los Angeles County. It’s a durable plastic card with an electronic chip inside that you use again and again. TAP cards are replacing participating transit paper passes and stamps. For connecting buses, once the bus is equipped with a TAP reader, you’ll know that the service is now in the TAP program.

Metro is changing from proof-of-payment inspection of tickets to a gated system in which all riders will need to use the TAP card to open a fare gate. The gating system installed at Metro Rail will not accept the Metrolink tickets. For Metro Rail Lines, once the fare gates are activated, you’ll need a TAP smart card to get through the fare gates.

As the TAP implementation and fare gating implementation approach, we will undertake an outreach program to explain exactly how the new policy and TAP card program will work for all passengers.

Public Comment

Members of the public who wish to comment on the proposed changes from the proposed fare establishment and restructurings in connecting transit transfer policy can do so in several ways:

- ▶ Send an e-mail to metrolinkfares@scrra.net
- ▶ Fax comments to (213) 452-0421 (addressed to Metrolink Fares)
- ▶ Mail comments to Metrolink Fares, 700 South Flower St., 26th Floor, Los Angeles, CA 90017
- ▶ Attend the public hearing

All comments will be compiled and presented to the Board on Friday, April 24th at 10:00 a.m. at the Metrolink Board of Directors public hearing and meeting held in the Southern California Association of Governments, San Bernardino Conference Room located at 818 W. 7th Street, 12th Floor, Los Angeles, California. In addition, the public will be given an opportunity to address the Board in person at the same public hearing.

On that date, or on any date rescheduled by the Board, the Metrolink Board of Directors will consider all comments in conjunction with their consideration of the establishment, modification, structuring or restructuring or approval of fares and transfer policies and will determine what action to take for the purpose of meeting Metrolink’s operating expenses, its purchase or lease of supplies, equipment and materials, the need to meet financial reserves and requirements and to obtain funds for capital projects necessary to maintain service within existing service areas or obtain funds to the extent authorized for transfers for interconnectivity of the system.

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