Mobile ticketing coming to Metra

App will turn your smartphone into a ticket vending machine

A major change in the way you can pay your Metra fares is coming later this year, when Metra unveils an app that will allow riders to buy and display Metra tickets on their smartphones using a credit or debit card.

And because the regional fare payment app is being developed in conjunction with the CTA and Pace, it also will allow riders to use a Ventra account to pay for Metra fares for the first time. That means Ventra – as well as credit and debit cards – can be used to travel on all three of Chicago’s transit providers.

“The best way to think about this new app is that it will turn your smartphone into a vending machine for Metra tickets,” said Metra Executive Director/CEO Don Orseno. “That means you can buy your ticket anytime, anywhere – no more waiting in line at the station, and no more fumbling for cash to buy it on the train.”

The app will actually include a variety of features that will be introduced in phases. But the mobile ticketing component will be of most interest to Metra riders, and it’s part of the first phase. Testing of the app has already begun, and soon we’ll be posting information on our website about how you can volunteer to help us with the testing. If all goes well, the official debut of the app will take place in late spring/early summer.

It will be simple to use. First, you’ll download the free app. It will be available for Apple and Android smartphones and tablets. Then, you’ll simply follow the prompts to buy a one-way ticket, a 10-ride ticket or a monthly pass with a credit or debit card or Ventra account (which must be set up separately through Ventra). Once you buy a ticket, you’ll store it on your phone until it’s time to use it. You will also be given the option to create an account to store your information to make purchasing future tickets quicker.

The app will also allow the purchase of all reduced fare tickets and weekend passes.

To use your mobile ticket, simply “activate” the ticket when you’re boarding a train. When conductors come by to collect tickets, you’ll show them the ticket on your phone. A quick tap on the display, and they will be able to tell if it’s a valid ticket.

Where does your station rank for ridership?

Route 59 on the BNSF Line remains the busiest Metra station by far, and the 99th St./Beverly Hills stop on the Rock Island Line is once again almost exactly average, according to Metra’s first complete count since 2006 of the riders at each station.

The “on/off count,” conducted last spring, attempted to answer a basic question: how many people use each station? Of course, we have a general idea about the answer, but since we have no turnstiles at our stations, we can’t know the exact number unless we physically count riders as they get on and off the trains.

Getting a good count for each station is important. If we know where and when passengers use each station, we can better understand how our system is being used and how potential service adjustments may affect riders.

Since we only counted on one day at each location and daily use of a station can vary, we know the actual number of riders at each station could be slightly more or less. But the count is still a good approximation. And it’s just fun to see where each station lands on the list.

Before we say more, one caveat: the 2006 count was conducted in the fall, while the 2014 count was conducted in the spring. Since ridership is typically about 5 percent heavier in the fall, the tallies are not

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2014 Rank/Station</th>
<th>Boardings</th>
<th>2006 Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Route 59</td>
<td>5,874</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Naperville</td>
<td>4,002</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Downers Grove Main St.</td>
<td>2,473</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Ravenswood</td>
<td>2,363</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Arlington Heights</td>
<td>2,349</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Palatine</td>
<td>2,334</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Elmhurst</td>
<td>2,313</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Aurora</td>
<td>2,107</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Evanston Davis St.</td>
<td>2,070</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Lisle</td>
<td>1,993</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Tinley Park 80th Ave</td>
<td>1,932</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mobile
(Continued from Page 1)

by looking at it, just like they can with a paper ticket. We’ll provide all the details about the process when it’s ready to launch.

In addition to the Metra mobile ticketing features, the first phase of the app also will allow users to:
• Add transit value and passes to their Ventra cards.
• Check Ventra account balances.
• Manage funding sources for the Ventra card.
• View transaction history.
• Sign up for customizable account notifications and alerts for account balance, low balance and expiring passes.

Later phases to come in 2015 will provide additional Ventra account management features (e.g. card ordering, replacing a lost/stolen card), multiagency transit tracking features, and an integrated regional trip planner with service information for CTA, Metra and Pace that allows customers to navigate the region from door to door using all three transit systems.

By early 2016, the app will allow customers to download a virtual Ventra card onto their Near Field Communications-compatible mobile devices, which will allow them to access their Ventra transit accounts to pay for rides on CTA trains and buses and Pace buses directly from the Ventra app by touching the phone or device to a Ventra reader.

Count
(Continued from Page 1)
directly comparable. Our goal, however, was not to assess ridership growth but rather to determine where and when passengers use each station.

Here are some other interesting tidbits from the count:
• There were some minor changes in the rankings for the top 10 busiest stations (see chart on Page 1). Only one new station—Elmhurst on the UP West Line—cracked that list, replacing Tinley Park 80th Ave., which dropped to No. 11.
• Route 59 remained the Big Kahuna, with 5,874 boardings. The next closest was Naperville, with 4,002.
• The average Metra station outside of downtown handles 623 boardings. Three stations tied for that average with 621 boardings: the 99th St./Beverly Hills Station on the Rock Island Line, Orland Park on the SouthWest Service and Buffalo Grove on the North Central Service. The 99th St./Beverly Hills Station was closest to the average in 2006, too.
• The busiest stations on each line are:
  UP North: Ravenswood (No. 4 overall)
  Milwaukee North: Glenview (No. 22 overall)
  UP Northwest: Arlington Heights (No. 5 overall)
  Milwaukee West: Schaumburg (No. 14 overall)
  UP West: Elmhurst (No. 7 overall)
  BNSF: Route 59 (No. 1 overall)
  Heritage Corridor: Lemont (No. 110 overall)
  Rock Island: Tinley Park 80th Ave. (No. 11 overall)
  SouthWest Service: Oak Lawn (No. 31 overall)
  Metra Electric: 55th-56th-57th St. (No. 17 overall)
• Ravenswood is the busiest reverse commute station outside of downtown (defined as the number of people riding outbound trains in the morning peak period). During the morning rush period, 689 people board outbound trains there. That’s more than the total number of boardings in either direction at 161 non-downtown stations. (Clybourn is a close second, with 665 outbound riders on the UP North and Northwest lines.)
• The least busy of 236 non-downtown stations was 75th St./Grand Crossing on the Metra Electric line, with 15 total boarders.
• The least busy station in 2006, Laraway Road on the SouthWest Service Line, rose to No. 232.
• There were two new stations since 2006: The 35th St.”Lou” Jones Station on the Rock Island Line debuted as No. 159, while Grand/Cicero on the Milwaukee West (which replaced two stations, Hermosa and Cragin) was No. 193.
• For full details about the on-off count, please go to www.metrarail.com/2014count.
Let’s not be peevish

Looking at the December “Sound Off” section, I was really surprised by a lot of the comments from people, especially about the Quiet Cars. One person complaining about hair over the back of a seat, another complaining about someone typing on their computer (Really? How noisy can it be?), and another complaining about someone coughing. All of them expecting Metra to make new rules to accommodate their personal pet peeves. Come on people, get over yourselves. The job of Metra is to get us from Point A to Point B, this is public transportation! Be happy you have a Quiet Car, they didn’t have to give you one! If you don’t like being around other people, maybe you should hire a limo instead of riding public transportation. If you don’t like what someone near you is doing, why don’t you open your own mouth and say something to them? If even the Quiet Car is too loud, get some noise canceling headphones. Stop complaining like this and use the money generated to keep our fares as low as possible?

If the money goes directly into fare price relief, I can’t imagine any but a small minority of passengers would object. Thanks for your consideration.  

Brian

Good idea

As I sit on the train today reading your flyer try to justify yet more rate increases, I look around myself and see Life-source ads along the upper level footwell and on a wrap covering the whole train car. Why not have all cars covered in advertising like this and use the money generated to keep our fares as low as possible?

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Thanks for your consideration.

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Winter Travel Notes

Metra names top administrative officer

Metra has appointed John A. Milano as the agency’s Deputy Executive Director for Administration. Milano, 50, who had been Metra’s Deputy General Counsel, will serve as the top administrative officer for the Chicago area commuter rail agency under Executive Director/CEO Don Orseno. He was selected from a field of 10 candidates after a nationwide search. “John brings the perfect combination of extensive experience and solid expertise to this role,” Orseno said. “I am confident that he can help make Metra’s administration work better for its customers, employees and vendors. In addition, at a time when Metra faces a tidal wave of retirements, he represents the next generation of transportation leaders.” In his new role, Milano will be responsible for planning, developing, organizing and directing administrative activities at Metra. Milano joined Metra in 1998 and has served in various capacities under different administrations.

Onboard penalty increase postponed

Metra’s plan to increase the penalty for onboard ticket purchases has been postponed until mobile ticketing is unveiled later this year. The fee, which is assessed when riders board at stations with open ticket windows or vending machines, was scheduled to be raised to $5 from $3 on Feb. 1, when other fare increases and changes to fare policies took effect. The delay was made in response to a discussion at the January meeting of the Board of Directors. The penalty is intended to discourage riders from paying on the train in cash, and board members suggested it might be appropriate to postpone the increase until the start of mobile ticketing, which will allow riders to pay on the train (or anywhere else) using their own smartphones and a credit/debit card or Ventra account. (See Page 1.)

Metra ridership increases in 2014

Ridership on Metra climbed 1.3 percent in 2014, to 83.4 million passenger trips – the second-highest annual total in Metra’s 30-year history. “We are thrilled with the growth in ridership in 2014, and we are committed to drawing even more riders to our system by emphasizing how Metra offers fast, reliable, comfortable and safe service for the six-county Chicago area,” said Metra Executive Director/CEO Don Orseno. Nine of Metra’s 11 lines saw ridership gains in 2014. The largest percentage increase was on the North Central Service, which jumped 7.9 percent, to 1.8 million trips from 1.7 million trips, while the largest gain in passenger trips was on the Union Pacific Northwest Line, which increased by 400,000 trips, or a 3.8 percent, to 11.6 million from 11.2 million trips. The BNSF Line remains Metra’s busiest line by far, recording 16.7 million passenger trips, a 0.6 percent increase over the 16.6 million trips provided in 2013. The UP Northwest Line was the second busiest line.

The remaining lines, in order, are:
- Metra Electric Line, which had 9.4 million passenger trips in 2014, a drop of 1.5 percent from 9.6 passenger trips in 2013.
- Union Pacific North Line, which had 9.33 million passenger trips in 2014, an increase of 0.6 percent from 9.27 million trips in 2013.
- Rock Island Line, which had 8.5 million passenger trips in 2014, a drop of 0.5 percent from 8.6 million passenger trips in 2013.
- Union Pacific West Line, which had 8.4 million passenger trips in 2014, an increase of 2.1 percent from 8.3 million passenger trips in 2013.
- Milwaukee North Line, which had 7.2 million passenger trips in 2014, an increase of 2.8 percent from 7 million passenger trips in 2013.
- Milwaukee West Line, which had 6.9 million passenger trips in 2014, an increase of 1.7 percent from 6.8 million passenger trips in 2013.
- SouthWest Service, which had 2.7 million passenger trips in 2014, an increase of 2 percent from 2.6 million trips in 2013.
- North Central Service, which had 1.8 million passenger trips, up 7.9 percent from 1.7 million trips in 2013.
- Heritage Corridor, which had 729,000 passenger trips in 2014, an increase of 3.6 percent from 703,000 passenger trips in 2013.

Contact Metra

If you have a complaint, compliment, service issue or any other issue, we want to hear from you. You can call a Passenger Service Representative at (312) 322-6777 (8 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays) or send email to metrarail_feedback@metrarail.com.