

Metropolitan Transportation Commission

Date: January 4, 2007

To: VTA Committee for Transit Accessibility

From: Jacob Avidon

Re: TransLink Program Overview

On November 3, 2006, the TransLink Program reached a noteworthy milestone in the process for deploying TransLink throughout the region: revenue ready certification to Motorola, Inc., the TransLink Contractor, for AC Transit and Golden Gate Transit and Ferry. The revenue ready certification signifies the start of systemwide operation of the TransLink fare payment system for these two transit agencies. The two agencies began introducing TransLink to their respective riders on November 17, 2006, with a “pre-launch” – essentially a limited announcement – and the system will be fully launched with a supporting marketing campaign in early 2007. The two agencies are beginning with a pre-launch to enable detection of any issues not already uncovered in the extensive system testing that preceded revenue ready certification; the system is fully operational during the pre-launch. As of January 1, 2007, nearly 3,000 AC Transit and Golden Gate Transit and Ferry riders had received TransLink cards as part of the pre-launch.

This is the first of several “revenue ready” milestones for TransLink. The system is expected to reach revenue ready certification for BART, Muni, and Caltrain in 2007; SamTrans and VTA in 2008; and all other Bay Area transit systems by the end of 2010. At full implementation, MTC forecasts that about 600,000 transit riders will use TransLink every day.

The remainder of this memo provides information about how TransLink works, its benefits, the possibility of expanding TransLink to paratransit, and the program’s status. I will be at the next Committee for Transit Accessibility meeting to answer any questions.

TransLink Overview and How TransLink Works

TransLink is the Bay Area’s new regional transit fare payment system. When fully implemented, transit riders will be able to board any bus, light rail vehicle, train or ferry in the nine-county region and pay a fare using a single reloadable TransLink smart card. The TransLink card stores value as e-cash (deducted on a pay-per-ride basis and accepted by all participating agencies) and/or a pass (allows unlimited rides for a set period of time on a specific transit agency or agencies). TransLink automatically calculates discount fares for transfers and/or eligible youth, senior, and disabled riders.

Transit riders eligible to receive RTC Discount Cards based on age and/or disability will receive combined TransLink/RTC Discount Cards through the RTC Discount Card Program. The combined cards – known as RTC TransLink Cards – offer two options for paying fares:

Transit riders can use their RTC TransLink Cards for identification purposes when paying fares with cash, a pass, or a sticker; and/or

Transit riders can use the card to store TransLink value that can be used to pay fares using the TransLink system.

The fees for RTC TransLink Cards will be the same as the current fees for RTC Discount Cards. The card application process will not change. Beginning in February or March 2007, the cards will be provided to every qualifying transit rider requesting a new, replacement, or renewal RTC Card.

Senior citizens will also have the option of acquiring Senior Citizen TransLink Cards instead of the RTC TransLink Cards. The advantage of the Senior Citizen TransLink Cards is that these cards will have a faster application process because the cards will be available at transit agency ticket offices and possibly other locations. (Note that some transit agencies might require transit riders purchasing monthly passes to have the RTC TransLink Cards.) The fee for the Senior Citizen TransLink Cards will be \$5.

The designs of the RTC TransLink Card and the Senior Citizen TransLink Card are shown below.

Picture of a RTC TransLink Card and a Senior Citizen TransLink Card.

Transit riders will have several options for loading value to TransLink cards. These options include loading value:

Online at www.translink.org;

By calling the TransLink customer service center (accessible toll-free at 1-877-878-8883);

By mail;

By visiting a transit agency ticket office or one of the participating retailers (there will eventually be 400 retailers);

Through WageWorks or Commuter Check, which are employer benefit programs;

By using a self-serve Add Value Machine located in a major transit station; or

By setting up Autoload, which automatically replenishes value according to the cardholder's preferences.

To pay a fare with TransLink, riders "tag" the TransLink card by touching it to the TransLink card reader, which deducts the correct fare. Below is a picture of a TransLink card tagging a card reader.

Picture of TransLink card held next to TransLink reader device on a bus.

Benefits for Transit Riders and Transit Agencies

For transit riders, TransLink enhances the convenience and security of paying transit fares. Customers will no longer need exact change, paper transfers, or multiple fare instruments for different transit agencies. The TransLink system provides security by enabling the replacement of a lost/stolen card with a new card and any remaining balance from the lost/stolen card. (The replacement of the card and balance require payment of a fee.)

TransLink also has several features that should assist persons with disabilities: the card does not need to be oriented in a specific way when paying a fare; Add Value Machines have audio capability for vision impaired persons; the customer service center is accessible via a TDD/TTY

line; TransLink brochures are available in accessible formats; and RTC TransLink Cardholders will receive customer materials that specifically address topics of interest to senior citizens and persons with disabilities.

For transit agencies, TransLink will speed the boarding process, reduce cash handling, reduce the operators' roles in issuing fare media, and reduce maintenance costs for fare collection equipment. TransLink will also provide transit agencies with a significant amount of data for marketing and planning purposes.

Possibility of Expanding TransLink to Paratransit

Through the development of the Interagency Paratransit Guidelines, which are a part of MTC's Transit Coordination Implementation Plan, MTC and the region's transit agencies have established a goal of implementing a regional paratransit fare payment method. In 1999 and 2000, MTC and the region's transit agencies explored the possibility of expanding TransLink to paratransit as a means for accomplishing this goal. The possible benefits of deploying TransLink on paratransit included easier inter-agency travel, having a single payment method for both fixed-route and paratransit service, and reduced cash handling.

MTC and the transit agencies ultimately decided against deploying TransLink to paratransit systems because TransLink would not have served as a means for addressing the goal of a regional paratransit fare payment method. The main reason TransLink does not meet this goal is that there are wide variations in paratransit fare collection systems within the Bay Area. For example, some paratransit systems – including Outreach in Santa Clara County – do not use on-board fare collection and TransLink is an on-board fare collection system.

The goal of a regional paratransit fare payment system remains a part of the Interagency Paratransit Guidelines. The decision for how and when to proceed with addressing this goal will be made by the region's paratransit systems.

Roles of MTC and the Transit Agencies

MTC's TransLink responsibilities include:

- Holding the TransLink Contract with Motorola, Inc. to design, build, operate, and maintain the TransLink system;
- Funding the system's implementation using a mix of federal, state, and regional funds;
- Funding a portion of the ongoing system operating costs;
- Serving as a member of the TransLink Consortium, which MTC and the transit operators formed in 2003 as a mechanism for jointly managing the system's implementation and operation; and
- Serving as the TransLink Card Issuer, which means MTC actually owns the TransLink cards.

The transit agencies' roles include:

- Funding ongoing operating costs, e.g. transaction fees;
- Serving as members of the TransLink Consortium;
- Operating and maintaining TransLink equipment; and

Marketing TransLink to their customers.

Current Program Status

The major initiatives going on right now are preparation for the full launch of TransLink to AC Transit and Golden Gate Transit and Ferry riders in early 2007 and deployment of the system on BART, Muni, and Caltrain next year. The full rollout will include an additional 40 participating retailers where transit riders can get TransLink cards and value, a marketing campaign, and a launch event involving both agencies. Current work for the BART, Muni, and Caltrain deployments includes testing software that integrates TransLink with BART's faregates, preparing for installation of TransLink equipment on Muni vehicles, and training BART, Muni and Caltrain employees.

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