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Press Release

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IMMEDIATE

MTA Metro-North Railroad Introduces Hand Held Ticket Machines For Use On Board Trains to Improve Customer Service

After a successful pilot program last year, Metro-North Railroad is introducing ticket machines to all its conductors to modernize and simplify on-board ticket issuing. This technological innovation will improve customer service as well as the railroad's operating efficiency.

Using wireless connection, the devices will be able to receive text messages from Rail Traffic Controllers, which will give train crews up-to-the-minute information during service disruptions. This will enable train crews to keep customers better informed when delays occur.

"These text messages will provide more information faster to more trains, which will improve the crews' ability to inform customers when service is disrupted for whatever reason," said Metro-North President Peter A. Cannito. "Text messaging will supplement, not replace, radio contact with the Rail Traffic Controllers that all trains maintain."

The devices are being phased in beginning this month. So far, 200, about a third of all train conductors, have been equipped with these hand-held ticket machines and separate receipt printers. This approach is a first in the passenger railroad industry and was developed by Metro-North's own Information Technology Department. The software has been copyrighted and several railroads have expressed interest in purchasing the program.

The new machines are replacing the old "duplex" ticket blanks currently used for on-board ticket sales. Duplexes require a conductor to use a hole puncher to mark the boarding station and destination, the fare zone, whether the trip is peak or off-peak, and the ticket type - adult, senior, etc. Then the two sheets are pulled apart with one part going to the customer as a receipt and the other going in the conductor's pocket for manual tallying later.

Using the new device, a conductor will select from a menu the departure and arrival stations. The device then calculates the fare and issues a receipt using a wireless printer.

Another benefit of the hand held device is its ability to store ticket sales data that will simplify record keeping for conductors as well as produce a database of actual zone-to-zone ticket sales by ticket type, time and train number.

Conductors will be able to download daily sales information and save time by eliminating manual record keeping, eliminating mathematical errors and eliminating data entry. This also will improve revenue accounting and auditing capabilities.

The software and hand held devices were tested last year by about 30 conductors. The system got excellent reviews from customers and employees and performed well. Conductor training is ongoing.

The railroad also is working with banks to implement - for the first time - consumer-protected, secure credit and debit card purchases on board trains.

The start-up cost for the hand holds, including the devices, software, new receipt stock and training is \$3.6 million, including a one-year, \$420,000 contract to Verizon Wireless to enable the system.

The railroad has purchased 1,000 handheld devices from Intermec of Everett, Washington and 1,000 printers, which use perforated, pre-numbered rolls of paper, from Zebra of Vernon Hills, Illinois.