



MTA Press Releases

Press Release

January 28, 2008

Metro-North

IMMEDIATE

MTA Metro-North Railroad Develops Technology to Improve Customer Service

Metro-North Railroad is introducing a technological innovation that will improve customer service and operating efficiency - hand-held electronic ticket machines for on-board sales. Using wireless, real-time credit authorization, conductors will - for the first time - be able to accept credit and debit cards as well as cash.

The devices will be phased in beginning on April 1. These hand-held ticket machines begin 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 and whether the trip is peak or off-peak. Then the two sheets are snapped apart with one part going to the customer as a receipt and the other going in the conductor's pocket for later tallying.

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.

Today, the Metro-North committee of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's board of directors approved a one-year, not-to-exceed \$420,000 contract with Verizon Wireless to enable the system.

The devices' cellular capability also allow them to receive text messages from the Operations Control Center about train operations including service updates and disruptions.

"Although all trains will continue to maintain radio contact with the Rail Traffic Controllers, text messaging 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.

The hand held device's ability to store sales data also will simplify things 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, which was developed in house by Metro-North's Information Technology Department, was tested last year by 30 conductors. It got excellent reviews from customers and employees and performed without error. Training of the railroad's 800 conductors is underway.

On April 1, about 500 conductors will begin using the hand held ticket selling device. For the first two months only about 50 will have credit/debit capabilities with the remainder in service by mid-year. By mid-year, all 750 conductors will have the devices and they will all be enabled with credit/debit capabilities.

The start-up cost for the hand helds, including the devices, software, new receipt stock and training is \$3.6 million, which is included in the railroad's 2007 and 2008 operating budgets.

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