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Press Release

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[MTA Headquarters](#)

IMMEDIATE

Train Tickets? There Could Be an App for That!

MTA Railroads Seeking Company to Help Create Digital Ticketing

The digital revolution has reduced Long Island Rail Road and Metro-North Railroad customers' reliance on paper timetables. And now it may do the same for paper tickets.

LIRR and Metro-North customers might soon be able to choose a new, more convenient way to buy train fares: instant digital tickets via smartphone or tablet. For those who choose to use them, it would mean an end to traveling to stations early to spend time buying tickets, or waiting for tickets to arrive in the mail.

The two railroads are seeking proposals from companies that want to help make digital ticketing a reality. The railroads are asking companies to develop an app that will let customers buy tickets right on their mobile devices and display their tickets on screen for visual inspection by conductors and/or barcode verification. As an alternative, customers would be able to print tickets at home.

It all means an easier ride for everyone.

"A large and growing segment of our customers already have their smartphones or tablets out with them as they ride," said Metro-North President Howard Permut. "So ticketing via smartphone will help our customers avoid having to put down what they're doing and rummage through a wallet or purse. That means convenience for customers and time savings for our conductors. This has the potential to become the preferred way for customers to purchase tickets."

LIRR President Helena E. Williams said: "Mobile ticketing will offer customers the convenience of print-at-home ticketing as well as onboard payment using credit and debit cards. It also will provide many efficiencies for our operation, including reducing onboard cash sales and fare disputes. The LIRR's successful mobile ticketing pilot last summer for the PGA TOUR at Bethpage showed customers are eager for mobile ticketing."

The request for proposals results from successful pilot programs undertaken at each railroad.

Last August, 5,894 golf fans taking the train to The Barclays PGA Tour event bought round trip train tickets online from a company participating in the pilot. Once making the purchase, customers received their train tickets via email to print at home or download to their smartphone. LIRR staff validated the tickets via handheld barcode reader.

A follow up survey of 368 digital ticket holders declared that the ticketing was a big winner. The survey found that 99% of respondents were "very satisfied" with their overall online ticketing experience, with 81% giving the process a top grade of 5 and 18% giving it a grade of 4 on a scale of 1 to 5. The survey asked, "Would you purchase future train tickets online?" One hundred percent of the participants answered "Yes!"

Beginning last July, Metro-North began a smartphone ticketing pilot in which railroad employees acted as customers. During the pilot, railroad employees downloaded a free app to their personal iPhone, Android or Blackberry. The app let the testers buy any type of ticket (one-way, round trip, 10-trip, monthly), with any origin and destination using their credit or debit cards.

The time- and date-stamped electronic ticket appeared on the purchaser's phone screen as a secure image that conductors validated visually. The electronic ticket also appeared a bar code that conductors verified by scanning with special hand-held devices.

The request for proposals was issued on January 22. Responses are due by March 15. The MTA expects to award a contract by July 2013. The winning firm would begin a pilot program customers could try by the spring of 2014, and full rollout would begin by the early fall of 2014.