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MBTA introduces “pay your fare, it’s only fair”

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The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority began its “pay your fare, it’s only fair” initiative on all above-ground Green Line stations this weekend. PHOTO BY BRITTANY CHANG/DAILY FREE PRESS STAFF

The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority introduced a recorded message this weekend on the Green Line to remind passengers to pay the prescribed fare, according to MBTA spokesperson Jason Johnson.

With the message “pay your fare, it’s only fare,” the audio reminds riders to pay at the front of the train cars as opposed to sneaking on to the back of the cars.

Johnson said the new initiative is “a friendly reminder to customers who board trolleys through middle and rear doors, asking them to proceed to the fare box next to the train operator.”

Johnson said fare collection on the Green Line has been a challenge in both collecting fares and moving service along efficiently.

“When people don’t pay, the T loses money, or if they get caught, it can cause a delay because drivers have to wait for every boarding passenger to pay,” Johnson said. “Fare collection has always been a challenge on the Green Line because of the desire to collect fare, but at the same time, move service along at a steady pace.”

Johnson said one effort to diminish the problem is to assign officials to high-volume stations during peak travel periods.

Johnson brought up how in 2012, on the D Line, the MBTA began “fare blitzes,” or days when MBTA personnel would ask passengers at above-ground stations to prove they have enough fare to ride the T, according to an April 2012 release.

“Green Line personnel partners with Transit Police for fare evasion stings,” Johnson said. “Over the last three years, we have conducted more than 60 fare blitzes.”

Johnson said a similar problem with fare collection was found on the commuter rail system, and in response, more personnel were assigned to the trains to ensure every rider had paid in full.

A “Front Door Only” policy was also instituted to promote fare collection in 2012, according to the release, so that during weekends, holidays and off-peak hours, passengers can only board through the front door, where fares are collected.

Johnson said the MBTA is constantly working to enforce fares.

“Systems are being improved on many of the MBTA transport systems,” Johnson said. “We found people on the commuter rail were avoiding paying by avoiding conductors, so the commuter rail was assigned more conductors to both improve the on-board experience and to ensure that everyone who boards the train pays their fare.”

Stacy Thompson, deputy director of LivableStreets, wrote in an email that the MBTA needs to make payment easier for riders.

“We, of course, believe that it’s important for people to pay their fares,” Thompson wrote. “Perhaps a better question to ask is, ‘Why aren’t people paying their fares in the first place?’ All-door payment options or off-board payment would make it easier and more efficient for people to pay their fares and help reduce the frustration people feel when they are all lined up at the front of the train trying to board and pay all at once.”

Boston residents were annoyed with the new message, which is repeated at every stop along the Green Line.

Kimberly Wang, 47, of Back Bay, said the recording will likely not change much.

“The message seems generally ineffective. I think people tend to tune out announcements most of the time,” she said. “I know that the T is losing money, but it will be hard to completely eliminate freeloading altogether on above-ground stations.”

Justin Bright, 25, of Chinatown, said sneaking onto trains has become more difficult, but a message will not stop everyone.

“I’ll admit to having taken a free ride in the past, but it’s harder than ever now,” he said. “The front doors usually open first anyway when I’m riding, but I always make sure to tap my card even when they don’t. This message won’t stop people that really want to get on. It might make them feel guilty, at most.”

Barbara Soohoo, 36, of Chinatown, welcomed the reminder and said she hopes it will encourage more riders to pay their share.

“As someone who pays their fare every time, I hope people start to obey the law,” she said. “It’s disrespectful to the drivers, and it can slow down the ride and inconvenience everyone when they have to ask you to pay.”

Jeri Weaver, 27, of the North End, said he has little sympathy for the debt-ridden train line.

“The reminder is definitely annoying and repetitive, and I doubt it will decrease the amount of people that don’t pay,” he said. “After Late-Night Service ending, then the raise in fare, it’s hard to feel bad for the T when people get free rides.”