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Monday, August 31, 2020

San Diego – Got caught without a transit fare? The San Diego Metropolitan Transit System (MTS) has new, easier ways to clear fare evasion citations. Beginning tomorrow, the agency will begin a Fare Enforcement Diversion pilot program that reduces fines and allows fare violators new options for clearing citations. Passengers are still required to have a valid fare while riding, but any citations MTS issues on or after September 1 will qualify under the new program guidelines.

“Our goal is to be flexible in our fare enforcement efforts so that riders have an opportunity to purchase a fare or to correct their fine without a criminal process,” said Nathan Fletcher, MTS Board Chair and San Diego County Supervisor for District 4. “Bringing the citation payment process in-house to MTS rather than straight to the courts will help our passengers avoid burdensome court fees. But more importantly, it will allow MTS staff to educate passengers on what payment options are available.”

The Fare Enforcement Diversion Program will offer reduced fines, a community service option in lieu of payment, and a new appeal window.

Reduced fines/more payment locations: Citations will be reduced to \$25. A person will have 120 days to pay the fine to MTS in-person at the Transit Store or by mail.

Community service option: An option of providing three hours of community service in lieu of payment will also be included in the new policy. Community service can be done through the Jacobs & Cushman San Diego Food Bank, and Homeless Court Program Provider (e.g. Father Joe’s Villages). MTS is currently working to add more community service locations during the pilot period.

Limited appeal window: Passengers will also have the option of appealing the fare violation within 15 days of the citation if they can demonstrate they have been wrongly ticketed, (ex: no fare due to a malfunctioning ticket vending machine).

Civil Process: During the pilot, only citations that are not paid within 120 will proceed to criminal courts where substantial fees may be added to the fines (\$177.50 or more).

In pre-COVID-19 times, approximately 33% of the MTS annual budget (\$100 million) relied on fare revenue. Fare revenue is a critical component to maintaining high levels of service for San Diego residents, workers and students. MTS always requires that riders purchase a fare before riding. People on board MTS Trolleys or buses without a fare will be given an opportunity to deboard and purchase a fare, which are:

- Adult/Youth One-way Fare - \$2.50
- Senior/Disabled/Medicare One-way Fare - \$1.25
- Adult Day Pass - \$6.00
- Senior/Disabled/Medicare/Youth Day Pass - \$3.00

MTS continues to operate about 95 bus routes and three Trolley lines. Frequencies and spans have been restored to near-pre-COVID-19 levels. Updated schedules can be accessed on the MTS website. MTS asks that that people wear face coverings at all times and practice physical distancing when possible.

Photo: An MTS Security Officer issues a free face covering to a passenger at the Old Town Transit Center

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