



**Regional
Transportation
Authority**

For immediate release

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CONTACT: Diane Palmer, Director of Communications, RTA
Office: 312-913-3282 Cell: 312-907-6902

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES RIDE FREE PROGRAM BEGINS OCTOBER 24

Riders must have an RTA-issued Circuit Permit to take advantage of free transit rides

Chicago – The Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) system will begin allowing free rides on fixed-route transit to riders issued a “Circuit Permit” as part of the People with Disabilities Ride Free Program enacted under Senate Bill 1920. The legislation requires free rides on fixed-route transit (regularly scheduled CTA, Metra, and Pace buses and trains) to be made available to any Illinois resident who has been enrolled as a person with a disability in the Illinois Circuit Breaker program. The People With Disabilities Ride Free Program was signed into law August 26 and officially begins on Friday, October 24. Processing applications for this enrollment-based program takes approximately four weeks. Therefore, not everyone who has applied will have their permit by October 24.

Requirements:

- The legislation required transit agencies to establish procedures to implement the People With Disabilities Ride Free Program.
- Individuals who are enrolled in the Circuit Breaker program with a disability must apply for the RTA-issued “Circuit Permit” that will allow them to ride free on fixed-route transit in the RTA service region.

Implementing the program:

- The RTA, CTA, Metra and Pace established a task force in June to implement the program.
- In preparing to issue Circuit Permits, the RTA ordered 50,000 new cards in August.
- The RTA sent out applications to 90,000 people who had an RTA Reduced Fare Permit because of a disability or who were certified to use Pace ADA paratransit service. They were invited to apply for the program so long as they were first enrolled in the Illinois Department on Aging’s Circuit Breaker program.
- The State also sent notice to people enrolled in the Circuit Breaker program.

Processing applications:

- The RTA began receiving thousands of applications during the last two weeks of September.
- At that time, full-time temporary staff were brought on to handle the extra work and today, a team of full-time RTA staff and eight full-time temporary staff members are dedicated to processing applications as well as answering phone calls regarding the program.
- It takes approximately four weeks to process an application for the People With Disabilities Ride Free Program due to eligibility verification requirements.

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PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES RIDE FREE PROGRAM BEGINS OCTOBER 24 – Page 2

- To date, the RTA has received approximately 32,500 applications and has processed approximately 22,000 of those, of which approximately 60 percent or 13,000 have been found eligible for the Circuit Permit.

Circuit Permits issued:

- So far, approximately 10,000 Circuit Permits have been mailed out as of October 22.
- Some individuals who are eligible for the Program may not receive their card by October 24 due to the four-week processing time period.

Using the Circuit Permit:

- On CTA and Pace buses, permit holders will insert the permit into the fare box or insert it in the turnstile for CTA trains. It will show them they may board free of charge.
- Metra riders will need to show their Circuit Permit to the conductor. Metra personnel may also request a second piece of government identification.

Eligibility

The People with Disabilities Ride Free program has one important qualifier: **the individual MUST be enrolled in the Illinois Circuit Breaker program as a low-income person with a disability.** Once they are enrolled, they will be eligible to apply for the People With Disabilities Ride Free program. Only Illinois residents are eligible.

For those NOT enrolled in the Circuit Breaker program:

The Illinois Circuit Breaker program provides grants to low-income senior citizens and persons with disabilities to help them reduce the impact of taxes and prescription medications on their lives. The Circuit Breaker program is administered by the Illinois Department on Aging. Income levels for eligibility range from \$22,218 to \$36,740, depending on household size. To learn more about the Circuit Breaker program, individuals can visit www.illinois.gov/transit or call 1-800-252-8966 [TTY: 1-888-206-1327]. Information is also available at senior citizen centers, the Mayor's Office on Disabilities in the City of Chicago, and Independent Living Centers.

For those already enrolled for the Circuit Breaker program and DO NOT have an RTA Reduced Fare Permit:

Circuit Breaker enrollees will need to fill out an application at the RTA's Customer Service Center at 165 N. Jefferson in Chicago or at one of the registration centers around the six-county RTA region that includes Cook, DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry and Will counties. Applicants can find an RTA registration center by visiting www.rtachicago.com/peoplewithdisabilitiesridefree or by calling 312-913-5414 [TTY: 312-913-3111].

Applicants will need a government-issued picture I.D. and a photo of themselves that is 1.5 inches square. Some centers may charge up to \$5 for taking your photo. The RTA's Customer Service Center does not charge for this service. After verifying the applicant's eligibility with the Department on Aging, the RTA will issue a "Circuit Permit" within 3-4 weeks with an expiration date of June 30, 2009. This permit will allow for free rides on fixed-route transit.

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PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES RIDE FREE PROGRAM BEGINS OCTOBER 24 – Page 3

Refunds

People who already have Reduced Fare permits may be entitled to a refund.

CTA: Beginning Friday, October 24 through Wednesday, December 31, 2008, CTA customers who are enrolled in the RTA's People with Disabilities Ride Free Program and have received their Circuit Permit from the RTA, and also have an RTA issued Reduced Fare Disabled or Paratransit Permit that they no longer plan on using, will be eligible for refunds for the remaining value on their reduced farecards. For more information on CTA refunds visit www.transitchicago.com.

Metra: Metra ticket holders can get a refund on Friday, October 24 and Monday, October 27 at any of Metra's downtown terminals. After Monday, ticket holders can get a refund using Metra's normal refund procedure. For more information on Metra refunds visit www.metrarail.com.

For additional information, please visit www.rtachicago.com/peoplewithdisabilitiesridefree or call 312-913-5414 [TTY: 312-913-3111].

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About the RTA: The RTA provides financial oversight, funding and regional planning for the three public transit operations in Northeastern Illinois: The Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) bus and train, Metra commuter rail and Pace suburban bus and paratransit. For more information, visit www.rtachicago.com and www.MovingBeyondCongestion.org.