



**Regional
Transportation
Authority**

For immediate release

DATE: March 3, 2008

FREE RIDES FOR SENIORS PROGRAM STARTS MARCH 17

Application process averages two to three weeks

Chicago -- The Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) along with Governor Blagojevich are making another push before the March 17 start of the Seniors Ride Free program. All seniors need an RTA Senior Reduced Fare Card to ride, and applying for the card averages two to three weeks.

"The RTA, CTA, Metra and Pace all know this program is important to the seniors of our region, and we are working together to launch this program successfully," commented Stephen Schlickman, RTA Executive Director. He added, "A lot of coordination and communication has happened to launch this program since January."

The RTA has processed over 11,200 new applications for the Senior Reduced Fare Card since the program became law in January. The agency added more phone lines and staff due to high call volumes and seniors applying at its Customer Service Center in Chicago.

"Right now senior citizens in the Chicagoland area are dealing with higher prices for everything from food to heat to taxes. And a lot of them live on fixed incomes and have no way of earning more to cover the higher costs. They've spent their lives giving to their families and their communities -- helping them get around town for free and hold on to some independence is just one small way to show our appreciation," said Governor Rod R. Blagojevich. "I want to thank the RTA for making it easy for seniors to take advantage of the new free rides program, and I want to encourage seniors throughout Chicagoland to sign up for free rides and lighten the load on their pocketbooks."

The CTA and Pace have begun informing drivers and customer service assistants, and will begin reprogramming fareboxes and turnstiles to honor free rides for seniors using the Senior Reduced Fare Card. Metra has begun issuing information cards to their on-board personnel and their ticket agents to help explain the program so that they're ready on March 17.

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Many Seniors Already Set

Seniors who already have the RTA's Senior Reduced Fare Card can continue to use that exact same card starting on March 17 when the free rides program begins. Before the free rides program began, there were approximately 239,000 seniors that already have reduced fare cards.

For Those Who Need to Register

If a senior does not have the RTA Senior Reduced Fare Card and is within three weeks of their 65th birthday or older, they can sign up at the RTA's Customer Service Center between 8:30 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday through Friday at 165 N. Jefferson in Chicago. They can also sign up at any one of the over 200 registration sites throughout the region. To find a site nearby, go to www.rtachicago.com/seniorsridefree or call the RTA's Travel Information Center at 836-7000 from any local area code and give the operator their zip code to find the closest location.

During the registration process, applicants will be required to present government issued identification to verify their age as well as a photo (approximately passport size – 1 1/2" square) will either be taken or will need to be provided by the applicant. Some registration centers may charge up to \$5 for taking your photo. The RTA's Customer Service Center does not charge for this service.

Applying for the Senior Reduced Fare Card can only be done in-person and can take between two to three weeks. There is no deadline to apply, but an RTA Reduced Fare Card is required to start riding free on March 17 and after.

For Those Who Have Pre-Registered

Registration for free transit can only be done with the RTA. Those seniors who pre-registered with the State of Illinois have or will receive a letter on how to register for the free transit. Pre-registration is not necessary.

How the Free Ride Program Will Work

For seniors to get their free ride on the CTA or Pace, they will continue to use their Senior Reduced Fare Card in the bus farebox or at the train station turnstile. On Metra, seniors need to show their Senior Reduced Fare Card to the on-board staff to receive their free ride.

CTA Refund Policy

Beginning March 17 through July 1, 2008, seniors who have an RTA Senior Reduced Fare Card will be eligible for refunds for the remaining value on their Reduced Fare Cards. Refunds need to be done in person at CTA headquarters and seniors can choose to get their refund as cash or check. Customers requesting checks will need to fill out a request form and should allow 3-4 weeks for checks to arrive.

Customers can check the remaining balance on their reduced-fare media at any of the passenger information units near the Customer Assistance kiosks in most CTA rail stations; by calling 1-888-YOUR-CTA (1-888-968-7282) Monday through Friday, 7 a.m. – 8 p.m.; or by visiting the CTA Sales Center at 567 W. Lake St., Monday through Friday 8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

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Metra Refund Policy

Metra is encouraging seniors to buy 10-ride and one- way tickets for travel between March 1 and March 17, but will issue a refund for seniors' reduced fare March monthly tickets. In addition to its normal refund procedure, Metra plans to issue refunds for the Reduced Fare monthly tickets, 10-ride and one-way tickets at their downtown ticket offices (Union Station, Ogilvie Transportation Center, and Millennium, LaSalle, and Van Buren stations) during the month of March. After April 1, the tickets will be handled through Metra's normal refund procedure. Customers can find out more information as well as the refund value of their reduced fare March monthly ticket at www.metrarail.com.

Smart Card Transition

Seniors using the RTA's Senior Reduced Fare Card to access free transit will be transitioned in the months ahead to a smart card (similar to the Chicago Card). Some of the first smart cards will begin being issued on March 17. The card will have their photograph on it and will allow them to board trains and buses faster.

About the Seniors Ride Free Program

Legislation passed last month by the Illinois General Assembly and signed by Governor Blagojevich allows senior citizens ages 65 and over who live in the RTA service region of Cook, DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry and Will counties to take free public transit rides on fixed routes operated by the CTA, Metra and Pace beginning on March 17. An estimated 900,000 senior citizens live in the northeastern Illinois region, and population trends indicate that this number is growing.

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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.