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Transit Agencies Gear Up to Test “Smart Card”

Regional fare card allows seamless transfers without cash

Puget Sound, Wash. – Transit users in the Puget Sound region will be asked to help shape the future of regional transportation this fall. Seven local public transportation agencies will conduct a test of a new “smart card” electronic fare system that will allow riders to seamlessly travel throughout the region from system to system.

The smart card is a plastic card containing an embedded microchip processor that can keep track of fare transactions. The card uses contact-less technology so a user only needs to bring it within a few inches of a reader for it to work. Smart card users can purchase passes on their card or store funds in an electronic purse (“e-purse”) for use in traveling across systems that have different fares. The card will automatically deduct fares from an e-purse or signal that a rider has a valid pass, thus speeding up the fare payment process.

“This is one way that we can improve the transportation experience for the rider,” said Joni Earl, CEO of Sound Transit, whose ST Express regional buses on select routes and Sounder commuter trains at select stations will be part of the smart card test.

Other agencies participating in the smart card test include Community Transit, Everett Transit, Kitsap Transit, King County Metro Transit, Pierce Transit and the Washington State Ferries.

The seven transportation agencies today will begin recruiting riders on targeted routes to take part in a comprehensive test of the smart card system designed to pinpoint potential operational problems. The agencies will be looking for as many as 6,000 riders to participate in the live test, which will last six weeks, from Nov. 9 through Dec. 22. Afterward, test participants will be asked for their feedback on the project to help the agencies fine-tune the final smart card system.

“We’re relying on volunteers from all across the region to help us create the best system possible,” said Kevin Desmond, General Manager of King County Metro Transit. “This is a



complex project bringing together multiple fare types from seven different systems, which is why we want to see where the glitches are before rolling out the smart card system on a broader scale.”

Smart card systems are currently in operation elsewhere in the U.S. and around the world, but with multiple agencies and so many fare products the Puget Sound project is one of the more complex systems. Several currently operating smart card systems include: Washington, D.C. (SmarTrip); San Francisco Bay Area (TransLink); Ventura County, CA (Go Ventura); London (Oyster); and Hong Kong (Octopus).

In the Puget Sound region, the smart card will be known as ORCA (One Regional Card for All). This name and logo honors one of our region’s natural treasures and engenders local pride.

The smart card project grew out of regional coordination on fare policies that local transit agencies have been participating in for more than a decade. In 1999, the agencies worked together to create the PugetPass, which can be used on five transit systems and commuter rail. The smart card is the next step forward in regional fare coordination.

Applications for the smart card test can be found aboard buses and ferries on the designated test routes, or riders may apply online at www.orcatest.com. Applications can also be picked up at transit agency customer service offices or by calling any participating agency directly.

The projected smart card test routes are:

Community Transit Routes 100, 101, 114, 115 and 116

Everett Transit Route 9

King County Metro Transit Routes 101, 140, 150, 169, 177 and 194

Kitsap Transit Routes 15, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 29, 90

Kitsap Transit Foot Ferry and Cross-Sound Ferry

Pierce Transit Routes 1, 11, 13

Sound Transit ST Express Routes 510, 511, 513, 560, 564, 565, 590, 591, 594

Souder Commuter Rail at the Kent, King Street and Tacoma Dome stations

Washington State Ferries Seattle-Bremerton Route

Volunteer test participants will be asked to “tag” their cards to smart card reader devices as they ride on designated buses, and at ferry and train stations. The test vehicles will also take cash, tickets and passes to accommodate all passengers. Because not every bus, train or ferry will be part of the smart card test, test participants will need to be prepared to use cash or passes on vehicles without smart card equipment.

After the test period, data from all seven agencies will be analyzed to determine what concerns need to be addressed before the full system is rolled out in early 2008.

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