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September 5, 2019

Honorable Toni Preckwinkle  
President Cook County Board of Commissioners  
and Members of the Cook County Board  
118 North Clark Street Room 537  
Chicago, Illinois 60602

RE: Board Item: 19-5211  
Department of Transportation and Highways  
Report: Fair Transit for South Cook County Pilot

Dear Madam President and Cook County Commissioners:

The Department of Transportation and Highways respectfully submits the report regarding the Fair Transit for South Cook County Pilot.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at (312) 603-1601 or my e-mail address [John.Yonan@cookcountyil.gov](mailto:John.Yonan@cookcountyil.gov).

Very truly yours,

John Yonan, P.E., Superintendent  
Department of Transportation and Highways  
Cook County, Illinois

cc: Lanetta Haynes Turner, Chief of Staff  
Ted Berger, Deputy Chief of Staff  
John Roberson, Special Assistant for Governmental and Legislative Affairs  
Commissioner Deborah Sims  
Commissioner Luis Arroyo, Jr.  
Commissioner John P. Daley  
Matthew DeLeon, Secretary of the Board  
Martha Martinez, Chief Administrative Office

# South Cook Fare Share Pilot

## Introduction

The South Cook Mobility Study was undertaken by the Cook County Department of Transportation and Highways to determine how to put the region’s existing transit assets to more effective use. The SCMS produced a head-to-head evaluation of eight proposed public transportation scenarios using the Federal Transit Administration’s (FTA) Simplified Trips on Project Software (STOPS) model as refined by the Regional Transportation Authority and Cook County’s consultant. The proposed pilot will test whether the most promising SCMS scenarios can significantly increase transit ridership and improve the seamlessness of connections between the three transit providers. The Study builds upon previous CCDOTH efforts to bring increased connectivity and mobility to residents of south Cook County while reducing disparities in access to employment.

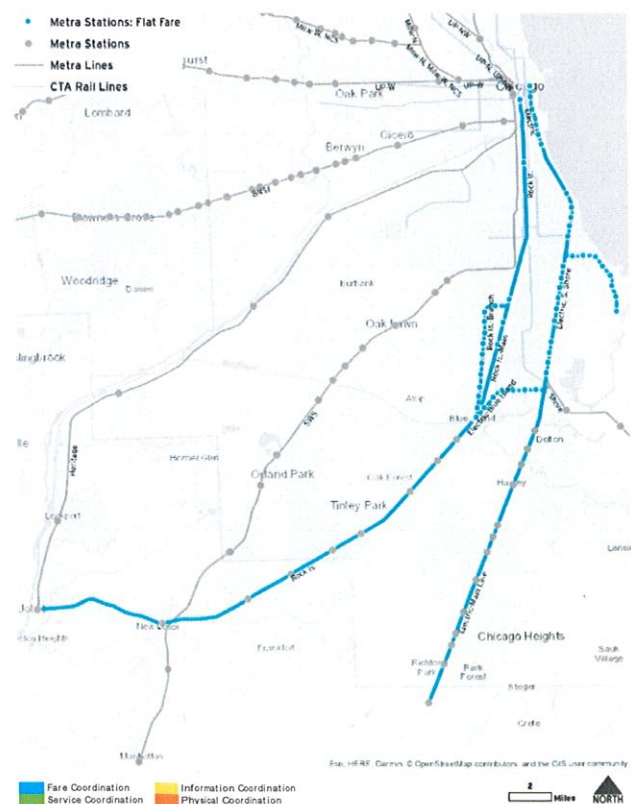
## Objective

To provide better public transportation service and maximize asset utilization in south Cook by implementing changes to fare policy, modest service improvements, and improved coordination between Metra, CTA and Pace.

## Pilot Program Proposal

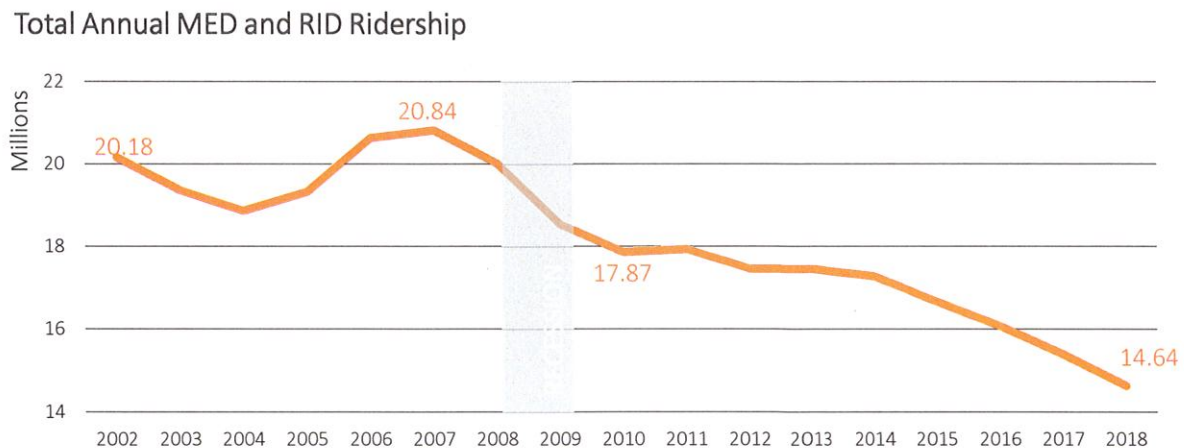
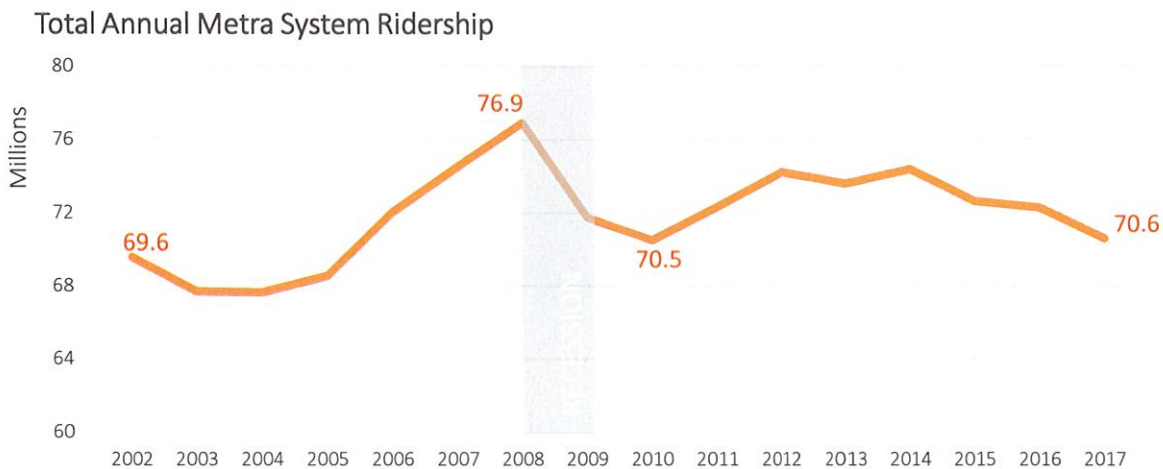
Given positive results from the South Cook Mobility Study, the programmatic components proposed for this pilot are as follows:

- A reduction in fares on the Cook County segments of the Metra Electric District and Rock Island District lines from current zone-based fares to a flat fare of \$2.50 within the City of Chicago, and a tiered distance-based fare zone structure beginning outside the city limits to the County line.
- Free transfers within a two-hour period between Metra, Pace and CTA for Ventra card holders with the total fare for the combined trip equal to the cost of the highest segment traveled and a waiver from the fare recovery ratio for free transfers associated with the pilot.
- Modest service increase of an additional 22 trains per weekday on the ME main and branch lines.



## Potential Ridership and Revenue Increase

The MED and RID provide vital public transit services connecting communities in south Cook County to in downtown Chicago and beyond. In 2017 the MED and RID served nearly 15.4 million trips to residents and visitors of south suburban Cook County and the City of Chicago. Together they carry nearly 70% of commuter rail riders in South Cook and accounted for nearly 20% of commuter rail trips in the Metra-service area. However, this represents a nearly thirty-percent decline in MED ridership since 2002, with steady declines since the Great Recession despite high job growth in Chicago's Central Business District. Metra systemwide ridership is down eight million annual rides from a 2008 peak of 86.8 million rides, with ridership decline on the MED and RID making up more than half of those losses.



Preliminary modeling for the South Cook Mobility Study using the FTA STOPS model suggests that the pilot would increase both ridership and net revenue, reversing the current trend toward falling ridership and revenue losses on Metra's South Suburban routes. Our analysis included assessment of multiple fare and transfer scenarios between Metra, CTA, and Pace. The study suggests that a project combining fare parity between Metra and CTA within the City of Chicago, discounted fares in the rest of Cook County, and free transfers for riders of any of the three service boards as being high-performing and most feasible in the near term. A refined scenario, in which we included modest service improvements that would add 22 trains per weekday on the MED was also developed to demonstrate the benefit that



additional service, akin to that proposed in Metra's Systemwide Cost Benefit Analysis of Major Capital Improvements, could provide. It is this hybrid scenario of discounted fares and free transfers on MED and RID, plus a modest increase in service on the MED that is being proposed for this pilot.

## Potential Challenges

This project is expected to have minimal impact on systemwide operation and maintenance cost. However, the success of the pilot project is contingent on the coordination of stakeholders and capital investments to permit modest service increases, and the mitigation of potential legal, implementation, or Title VI issues.

## Varying Implementation Time Horizons

Metra released a cost benefit analysis of 38 projects within the seven-county region in January 2019. One of these is for a modest service increase of an additional 22 trains per weekday on the Metra Electric line which would provide 30-minute, off-peak service on the mainline and is estimated to take less than five years and \$28 million (2016\$) to implement. Combining this service improvement with the proposed changes in fare structure would deliver additional benefits to residents of south Cook County but will require more lead time to implement than the fare integration envisioned for this pilot.

## Interagency Coordination

Parties involved in this project include Cook County's Department of Transportation and Highways, the three service boards (Metra, Pace, and CTA), the Regional Transportation Authority, and Cubic Transportation Systems, the vendor for the Ventra system. Coordination issues include, but are not limited to:

- Fare revenue sharing agreements with CTA, Metra, and Pace;
- Mechanism by which CCDOTH would support necessary changes to Cubic's software to implement the pilot through the Ventra fare collection system;
- Risk mitigation strategies and associated interagency agreements, such as a maximum revenue loss amount that the State of Illinois and/or CCDOTH is willing to cover if pilot fails to generate additional ridership and revenue; and
- Roles of each agency in implementing communication strategies with the public about how the seamless interagency fare works.

## Equity

Under Title VI, projects should not result in disparate impacts. Given the demographic differences in south Cook County, it is important to consider potential inequalities. Some potential inequalities to be addressed in a Title VI analysis include, but are not limited to:

- The changes from this pilot program will only benefit transit riders who use the Ventra App and card. Some of the Title VI analysis used for the Ventra fare card (e.g. the burden of its \$5.00 cost) or the Ventra app may be applicable. This potential impact could be mitigated by programs to help people register for Ventra and navigate the app.

- As a pilot project, the reduced fares will be limited to a specific geography. It will be necessary to include justification for why this corridor is the preferred candidate for the pilot project over other regions/corridors. At the end of the pilot, the impacts will be evaluated to determine if the pilot can be expanded to include the greater region.

## Technology

A change order to the contract between CTA and Cubic Transportation Systems may be needed to link transfers within a 2-hour period and process revenue sharing for linked trips. It will be necessary to coordinate with CTA, Metra, Pace, and Cubic to identify the degree to which previous work or unactivated functionality may already exist that could benefit the pilot.

Additionally, Metra may need new hardware that allows the agency to collect fares directly through the Ventra card or the Ventra app. Metra and Cubic will need to coordinate to identify the appropriate solution for fare collection on the Metra Electric District.