

Why propose to change the fare structure?

The proposal aims to create a fare structure that customers can easily understand, that will encourage ridership, that will simplify onboard fare collection, and that meets Metra's financial and technical constraints.

How does the proposal consolidate the zones?

Under the proposal, downtown stations would be assigned to Zone 1 and outlying stations would be assigned to Zones 2 through 4 based on a combination of distance from downtown, service patterns and ridership characteristics on each line, which vary. Generally, stations within or close to Chicago would be in Zone 2, stations in an intermediate service zone would be in Zone 3, and remaining stations would be in Zone 4.

How did you decide where to propose to put the borders between zones?

The zone borders are not strictly based on mileage. Rather, we used a combination of service patterns, distance from downtown, and ridership characteristics on each line, which vary.

Specifically, why did you propose to put the border before Palatine/Downers Grove Main St./Tinley Park 80th?

Many lines have service patterns for local and express trains, and we used those patterns to guide some of the proposed new zone breaks. For instance, if you look at the BNSF Line schedule, there is a set of trains in the morning rush serving Aurora to Downers Grove Main Street and expressing in, so those stations were assigned to Zone 4, and a second set serving Fairview to Congress Park and expressing in, so those stations were assigned to Zone 3. With Union Station assigned to the downtown Zone 1, that left the remaining stations on the line to be assigned to Zone 2. Similarly, on the UP Northwest Line, there is a set of trains serving Harvard to Palatine, so that became Zone 4, and an intermediate set serving Arlington Park to Des Plaines, so that became Zone 3. On the Rock Island Line, 80th Ave. has express service and Oak Park Ave. does not. We used similar reasoning on other lines. This approach matches cost to service and helps with fare collection during busy periods, because conductors will generally only have to look for the one zone pair on all tickets on each train. On lines without such service patterns, such as the North Central Service, geography was a factor as we tried to match stations on the line to nearby stations on other lines. And some of our considerations were guided by our need to avoid disparately impacting minority and low-income communities.

Why would downtown stations be in their own zone?

This allows us to encourage non-downtown trips by charging one flat rate – we are proposing \$3.75 for a One-Way Ticket – for all trips that do not originate from or arrive at a downtown station.

How did you determine the fares for each zone?

There were a variety of factors considered:

- First, we wanted to make sure we hit our budget target. For next year, that target was our calculation of what our current system would generate next year if we left it in place without changes. In other words, we want to collect with the new system about the same amount we'd collect with the current system.
- Secondly, we wanted to keep fares at our below pre-COVID levels from all stations, because we are still trying to nurture ridership growth.
- We wanted to incorporate what we've learned about post-COVID ridership patterns. For instance, we proposed to price the Monthly Pass at 20x the one-way fare to make it appealing to someone going to the office two to three days a week.
- We wanted to keep the differences in costs between zones to a minimum while still meeting our budget needs.
- And we had to consider federal Title VI regulations, which pertain to how service and fare changes impact low income and minority populations.

With all those factors in mind, we studied scores of permutations of various costs and arrived at the one that we feel best meets all of our considerations.

What impact would this have on the Fair Transit South Cook pilot?

Riders on those lines will continue to pay the reduced fare rate at least until the end of the pilot. Fair Transit South Cook is scheduled to run until the end of January 2024. Metra and its partners are exploring ways the program can evolve following its completion. In their October Board meeting, the RTA announced their intent to create a program to offer reduced fares to low-income residents.

Why does the proposal replace the 10-Ride Ticket with a Day Pass 5-Pack that is only available in the Ventra app?

Several reasons:

- We know from our Ventra app data that most people who buy a 10-Ride Ticket use it for just two trips a day.
- The Day Pass will allow the same travel while adding an extra benefit to those who take more than two trips a day, such as anyone transferring between two Metra lines.
- Day Passes align better within our current fare collection system:
 - They reduce the possibility of missed fare collection.
 - With this change, every fare product would now be time-limited, which is something that can't be done with paper tickets.
 - Day Passes on the app can be validated with visual inspection, which helps meet our goal of simplifying onboard fare collection.
 - A bundle of paper passes presents an onboard fare collection complication that a 5-Pack of mobile passes does not: passes in the app can be programmed to expire on the day they are activated, but we would need to punch a paper day pass on the day it is used, and there would have to be some way to indicate the day it is punched (in a way that is easily visible to the conductor) so it remains valid for that day but no longer. (Single day paper passes would be sold with the day of sale indicated on the ticket, but we would not be able to do that with a pack of paper passes because we wouldn't know the days when riders intend to use each of them.)

We use the 10-Ride Ticket when traveling in a group. Would we still be able to do that with the Day Pass 5-Pack?

Yes, you would be able to activate more than one Day Pass at a time – all five of them, if you want.

Why does the proposal discontinue the \$6 and \$10 Day Passes and the \$100 "Super Saver" Monthly Pass?

The \$6 and \$10 Day Passes and the \$100 "Super Saver" Monthly Pass were introduced as promotional fares to rebuild ridership after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Why not just have one flat fare, like the CTA?

If we priced our service at a flat rate that is similar to the CTA's fare, we would not meet our budget needs. And to meet our budget needs, the flat rate would have been a major fare increase for many riders.

Why does the proposal eliminate "incremental" fares?

We are proposing to eliminate incremental fares – a surcharge paid to the conductor to cover travel beyond the zones indicated on your ticket – because one of our goals is to simplify onboard fare collection. Selling incremental fares slows down fare collection for conductors.

Does this fare structure proposal address the “fiscal cliff” that Metra is facing in 2026?

In a word, no. A little background for those who are unaware of the fiscal cliff: Before COVID happened, we were required by state law to pay for half of our operating budget with fare revenue. The other half was covered by revenue from a regional transportation sales tax and some state subsidies.

After COVID dramatically reduced our ridership and fare revenue, two things happened: First, Springfield temporarily waived the requirement that we cover half our operating costs with fares, and second, Washington provided us (and mass transit across the country) with generous subsidies to keep the lights on and trains running.

That is still the situation today. This year, fares will pay for about 25 percent of our operating costs. The rest will be covered by the transportation sales tax revenue and continued federal aid. We expect a similar situation next year and in 2025. In 2026, however, the federal aid runs out – hence the fiscal cliff.

Why did you lower the price of the monthly ticket on Zone 2?

Our data indicates that those stations generally purchased monthly tickets at a far lower rate compared to outer stations. This is an attempt to make the monthly ticket more viable for those customers, as the monthly ticket has advantages for Metra, such as incentivizing ridership and faster ticket collection.

What will do you do with the extra money from some of the increased fares?

We expect the fare revenue that the new plan would generate next year and in 2025 would still fall far short of covering half of our costs and we would still need to rely on the federal aid. A state-created body has recommended funding solutions to the General Assembly, which would need to act before that aid runs out in 2026.