

Integrate, Simplify, and OMNYvate:
On Track for Better MTA Fare Payment

A REPORT BY PCAC
FALL 2023



PCAC

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ADVISORY COMMITTEE TO THE MTA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The MTA's commuter railroads currently have complex and confusing ticket systems for everyone involved—riders and workers included. But the rollout of OMNY—fittingly named One Metro New York—to the Long Island Rail Road and Metro-North provides the MTA with an opportunity to rethink how it approaches ticketing on the commuter rails. With new and emerging travel patterns as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic, lower post-pandemic ridership and changes to commuters' work schedules, ticketing should be more seamless and flexible for current riders, and also to encourage new riders.

The MTA has a golden opportunity to rethink how fares and tickets work on the commuter railroads as we await OMNY expansion throughout the region. With a target date of OMNY on Metro-North and the Long Island Rail Road now set for 2025, now is the time to rethink ticketing and fare policies that make sense regionally and unify the MTA network. Not only should the effort to introduce OMNY to the commuter rails be redoubled, it should also be coupled with policies that make the most of the opportunity.

OMNY's rollout to the commuter railroads will be transformative for the MTA's mission to connect the region. It can advance integration between the LIRR, Metro-North and NYC Transit, along with adjacent transit systems like Nassau's NICE bus, Westchester's Bee-Line, Suffolk County Transit (SCT), PATH, NYC Ferry, JFK AirTrain, the Roosevelt Island Tram, bike share programs and others — some of which have already started OMNY rollout.

By using OMNY as a means to update ticketing to reflect an MTA commuter rail network more closely connected than ever before, we can help make the best case for riding transit. The following recommendations detail ways that the MTA can use OMNY to streamline and simplify the fare system for riders both before and after it is rolled out to the LIRR and Metro-North.

THE OMNY ON-RAMP::

How the MTA can simplify fare payment leading up to OMNY rollout

To make it easier for riders to know how much they should– and will– pay for their trip, whether on one railroad or two, the MTA should invest in steps to communicate and coordinate ticket pricing.

Rationalizing Inter-Railroad Fares

PHASE 1: Communication

- Simplify Cross Honoring Policies between Railroads.
- Continue to Incorporate Live Scheduling Information from Partner Agencies into TrainTime and the New myMTA App.
- Use a Clearly Communicated Pricing Formula for Tickets on Both Railroads.

PHASE 2: Coordination

- Identify a Core Set of Ticket Types with Easy-to-Understand Conditions.
- Unify both Railroads' AM Peak Hours.
- Identify Zones on the Railroads where Fares are Similar, and Bring Prices into Alignment.
- Allow for Cross-Honoring of Tickets between the LIRR and Metro-North.
- Offer an Intra-city Combo Ticket Fare.
- Expand and Enhance Fair Fares, Including to Commuter Rail.

THE OMNY ENVIRONMENT::

How OMNY implementation can consolidate the MTA's fare systems and improve user-friendliness

New ticketing possibilities with OMNY include the opportunity to integrate LIRR, Metro-North, and NYC Transit fares, making the entire region more connected. Better integrating the MTA region will help encourage riders to take advantage of all the ways to ride the MTA has to offer.

- Connect OMNY with TrainTime and the New myMTA App to Expand Transfer Options between MTA Modes Prior to Full Rollout.
- Create a Weekly CityTicket with Available Transfers to Subways and Buses.
- Adopt a Common Price-per-Mile and Unified Fare Zone System.
- Automatically Show and Charge Riders the Best Fare Available to them.

OMNY'S POTENTIAL::

How OMNY can be used to improve the MTA's fare collection

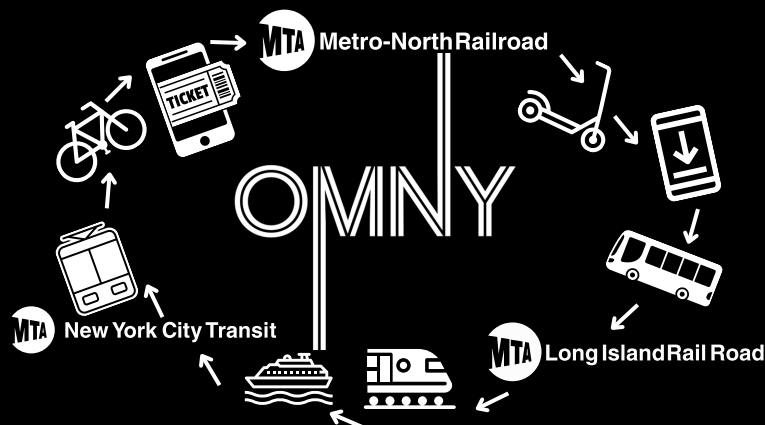
Simplifying the fare structure goes hand-in-hand with improving fare collection. New options and opportunities that will come with the rollout of OMNY can be looked at vis a vis the recommendations from the report issued by the Blue Ribbon Panel on Payment Evasion once discussions and communications with stakeholders have identified appropriate paths forward.

Possibilities include:

- Communicate and Work with Riders and the MTA Employees Directly Responsible for Collecting and Selling Tickets.
- Modernize and Improve Both Railroads' Ticket Collection, with Input from Stakeholders.

New Yorkers are lucky to have the best transit network in the nation— despite the fact that the region's subways, buses, commuter rail, and other transit modes operate separately from one another. That's why OMNY's upcoming rollout to the LIRR and Metro-North is so critical to a more unified future for transit: one where a rider can travel across modes without having to think about how to buy their ticket, get the best price, or whether their transfer is covered. Using OMNY to make travel easier and more seamless has already been wildly successful on subways and buses, and it's time to bring that to the rest of the region. OMNY has the potential to completely transform the way riders travel through the region and better unify our entire transit network— but first, the MTA needs a roadmap to ensure its full potential comes to life.

Soon, it will finally be OMNY time!



INTRODUCTION

Every day, commuter rail riders on the LIRR and Metro North take a pop quiz whenever their tickets are checked: is this ticket the right one, and if not, how much do they owe the conductor? Did they pay too much? Regular commuters, weekend riders, tourists – and even ticket collectors themselves – can agree that the way tickets on the railroads are sold and collected doesn't make much sense. Decades of pilot programs, inconsistent availability across vending locations, and incomplete information makes buying a ticket a frustrating and confusing process that requires riders to choose from dozens of options, combinations of ticket types, and discounts. Riders eligible for discounts can wind up overpaying for a trip, and riders who underpay must pay a “step up” charge to a conductor.

The MTA has a golden opportunity to rethink how fares and tickets work on the commuter railroads as we await OMNY expansion throughout the region. With a target date of OMNY on Metro-North and the Long Island Rail Road now set for 2025, now is the time to rethink ticketing and fare policies that make sense regionally and unify the MTA network. Not only should the effort to introduce OMNY to the commuter rails be redoubled, it should also be coupled with policies that make the most of the opportunity.

Arguably, any changes to commuter railroad fare policies that can improve the system overall may require trade-offs that could advantage individual groups of riders over others in the short term. The goal, however, is to ensure that changes and the overall effects are balanced. Over time, the LIRR and Metro-North have amended their current fare structures with a number of pilot programs and introduced targeted discounts for riders traveling in certain areas or to certain stations, which may have required other riders to pay more to make up for the difference.¹

The introduction of OMNY to the commuter railroads offers the MTA the opportunity to reimagine how customers can pay for their commute more easily, and to revisit how fares on the commuter rails are structured. Now is the time to look closely at a more regional approach that encourages seamless travel across railroads, and the entire MTA system.

¹ While the technical term is “tariff,” for the purposes of this report, the colloquial term “fare” is used to describe the cost of payment for transportation.

Too Many Choices

The fine print regarding ticket conditions on both railroads when printed directly from the MTA website amounts to ten pages of text – nearly impossible for any conductor or ticket collector to remember in detail while doing the many tasks of operating a train like operating the doors, ensuring passengers get on and off safely, answering questions, and making announcements. This means ticket checks may be inconsistent depending on the train, crowding, and time of day.

Over the last 20 years, New York has invested tens of billions of dollars in modernizing its commuter railroads while many of their ticketing practices date back to the era of private ownership. Whether riders get their tickets from an app, a vending machine, or a ticket attendant, they often have over a dozen choices when it comes to the types of tickets they can buy– in addition to confusing price modifiers based on the time of day, onboard step-up pricing, direction of travel, station combinations, or small-print caveats or conditions not known at the time of sale. While conductors are tasked with performing their tasks to keep trains moving safely in a timely manner, they're also hard-pressed to be able to memorize all ticket conditions at all times in a crowded and sometimes hostile environment. This can cause conflict between railroad employees and riders to the point that violence against conductors and customer service agents is unfortunately too common.

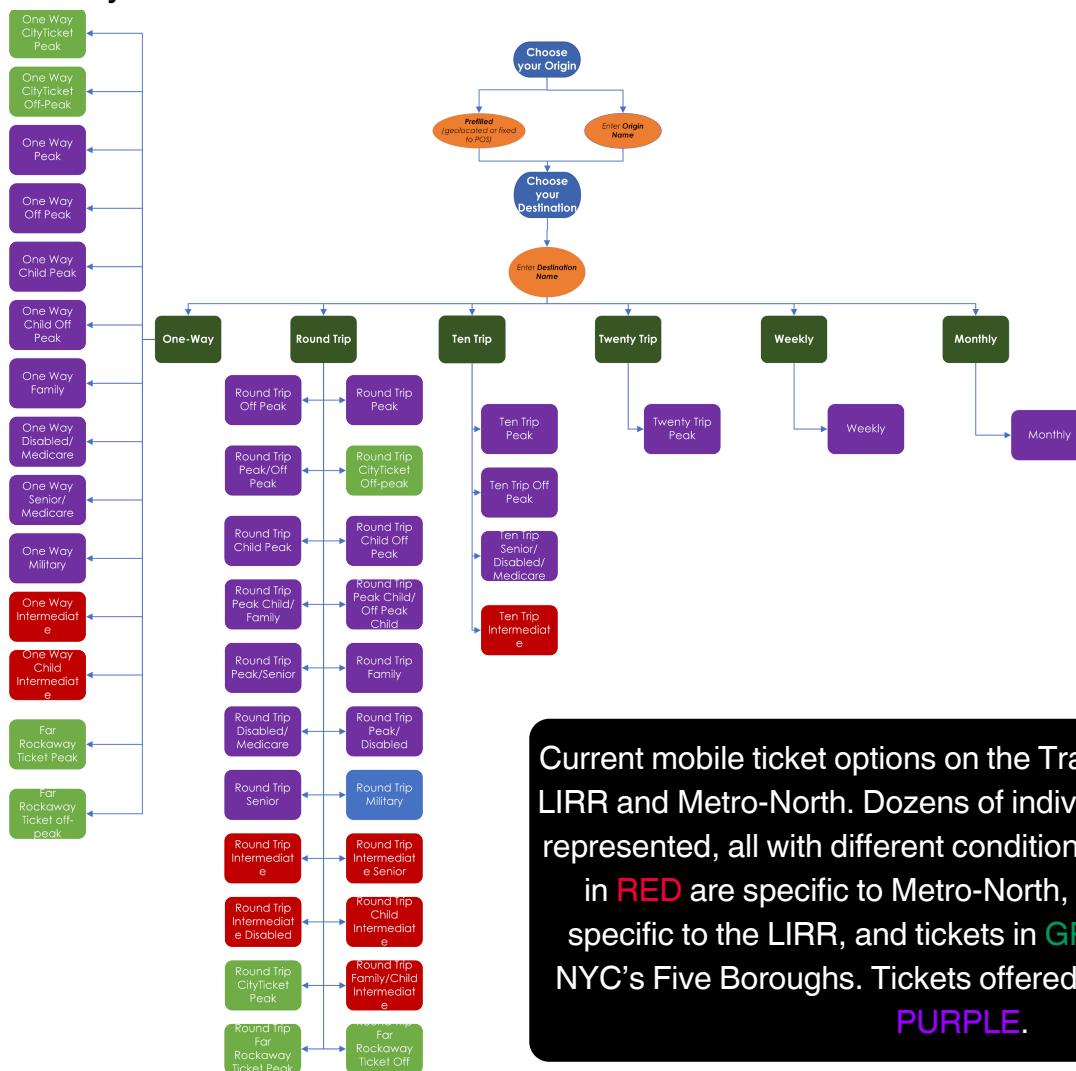
The report of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Payment Evasion (or the “Blue Ribbon Report”) noted that in cases where auditors deliberately boarded a commuter train with the wrong ticket type, conductors either didn’t notice the ticket was invalid or charged auditors the incorrect step-up fare 26.7% of the time on the LIRR and 9.1% of the time on Metro-North (page 89). In effect, there is no fare system when it is nearly impossible to enforce impartially. Passengers can also abuse train facilities and mobile tickets either by hiding from conductors in the bathrooms or activating their tickets just before their ticket is checked, both of which are strategies which slow fare collection down and can lead to confrontations. As recommendations from the Blue Ribbon Report are being studied and implemented to reduce evasion, OMNY implementation will help lessen the difficulty for conductors to collect all fares since they can be both checked and scanned automatically.

In late August of 2023, fares on MTA buses, subways and trains increased for the first time since 2019, with most ticket prices increasing by approximately 4%. Monthly

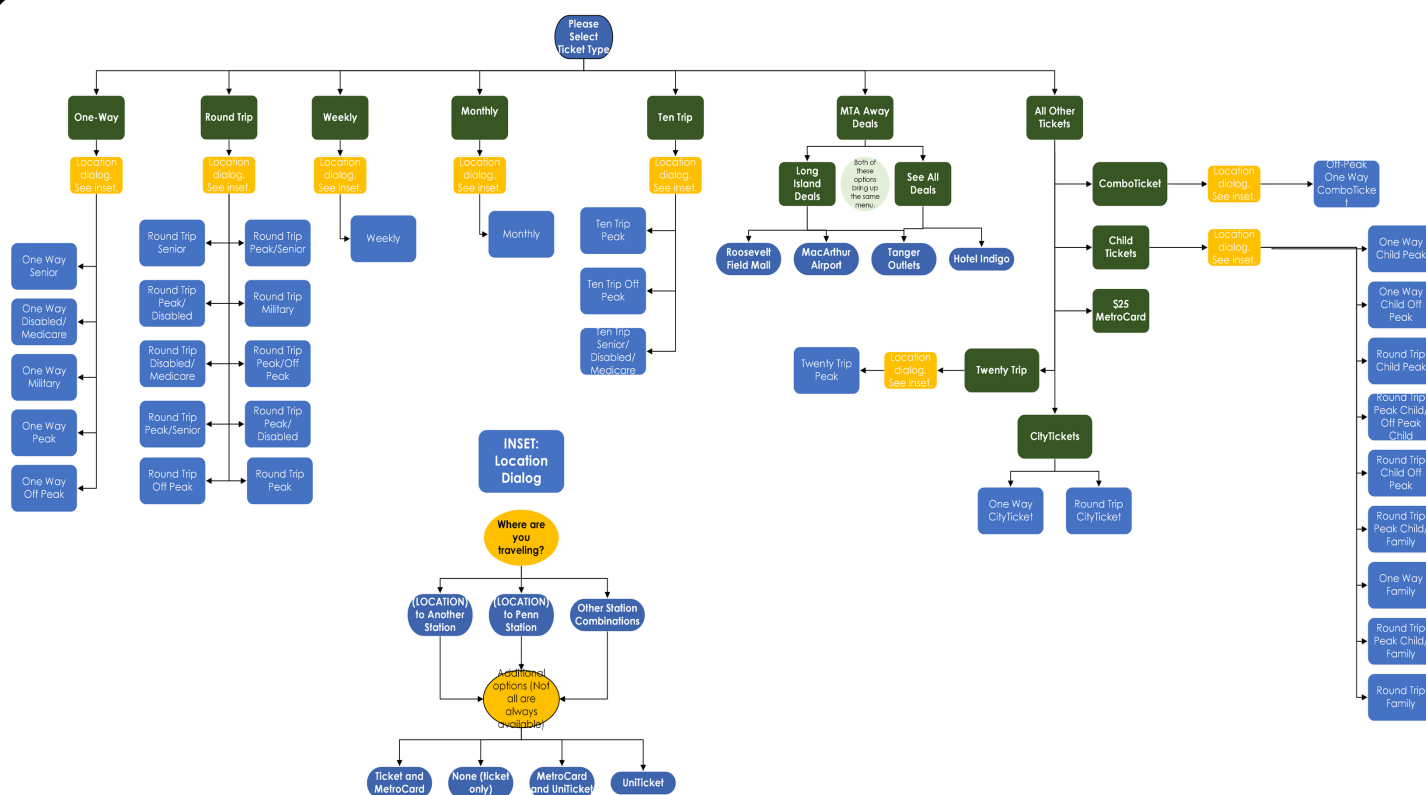
² <https://new.mta.info/document/111531>

tickets will remain cheaper than they were prior to the pandemic thanks to a 10% discount implemented in March 2022. The \$500 price cap on monthly tickets will be retained, as will the 15% off-peak 10-trip price discount. For the railroads, a one way off-peak ticket will be discounted 26% over one way peak fares, unifying the off-peak discount between both railroads: an important step towards increased seamlessness. To achieve this, off-peak tickets on the LIRR will go up 6-7% but only 2-3% on Metro North. Overall, the railroads are preserving incentives for buying tickets in bulk, as well as discounts for monthly and weekly commuter passes.

Additionally, CityTicket was expanded on both railroads with a peak ticket option to accompany the off-peak ticket currently being offered: it is the first time that city railroad riders will have access to discounted fares 24/7. However, this expansion meant that Atlantic Ticket, with its weekly option that allowed for transfers to subways and buses, was taken out of the ticket portfolio— thus, there are no longer any railroad ticket options remaining that include access to NYC Transit buses and subways.



Current mobile ticket options on the TrainTime mobile app for LIRR and Metro-North. Dozens of individual ticket options are represented, all with different conditions for eligibility. Tickets in **RED** are specific to Metro-North, tickets in **BLUE** are specific to the LIRR, and tickets in **GREEN** are specific to NYC's Five Boroughs. Tickets offered by both railroads are **PURPLE**.



A sample diagram of current LIRR ticket options as they appear on Ticket Vending Machines (TVMs). This represents the options available on sale at machines at Atlantic Terminal and Valley Stream. Many tickets are offered behind several menus.

Moving Toward Seamlessness: A More Regional Network

Commuter rail ridership has steadily crept back up to around 70% of pre-COVID levels, concurrent with the opening of Grand Central Madison, the completion of the Third Track project, an increase in return to the office, and improving on-time performance. While physically connected, the two railroads couldn't be further apart in terms of cross-honoring tickets, fare zone prices, peak hour travel conditions, or coordination with discount programs and free transfers to other transit providers. All the while, both have similar branding, rolling stock, and cosmetically identical tickets.

By updating the fare system to reflect a commuter rail network more closely integrated than ever before, we can help make the best case for riding transit by making transfers as simple and seamless as possible for riders, workers, and the MTA. OMNY is the key to being able to enact and implement the fare policy recommendations contained in this report – and while several can be brought online in advance of the OMNY rollout, planning and preparation must get underway immediately to allow for the comprehensive, user-friendly, and more seamless transportation network of the future.

In the context of this report, “seamlessness” refers to the relative ease or difficulty riders have in paying their fares and transferring between modes of transport. Transit networks that are more seamless seek to minimize the amount of effort and cost riders pay when transferring between transportation modes, maximize the amount of relevant pricing and routing information delivered to the end user, and try to make fare payment as simple to understand and straightforward as possible overall.

With OMNY, a more seamless transit and fare payment system is within reach for the MTA. Already, the MTA has taken advantage of its mobile apps (including a new app currently in beta testing) for both fare and service information; made changes to hasten the agency-wide transition to OMNY; introduced the Combo Ticket on mobile and physical points of sale to encourage through-riding; and has physically expanded the capacity and reach of the Metro-North and LIRR systems. Penn Station Access will further integrate New York’s commuter railroads, bringing Metro-North to the East Bronx and Penn Station.

With the planned 2025 introduction of OMNY on the commuter rails, it is important to explore ways the new technology can make ticketing more seamless, and to initiate planning for the future of ticketing and fare policy now.

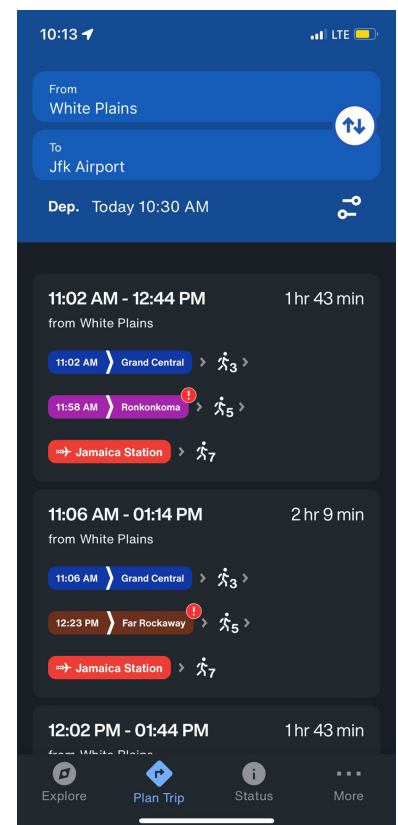
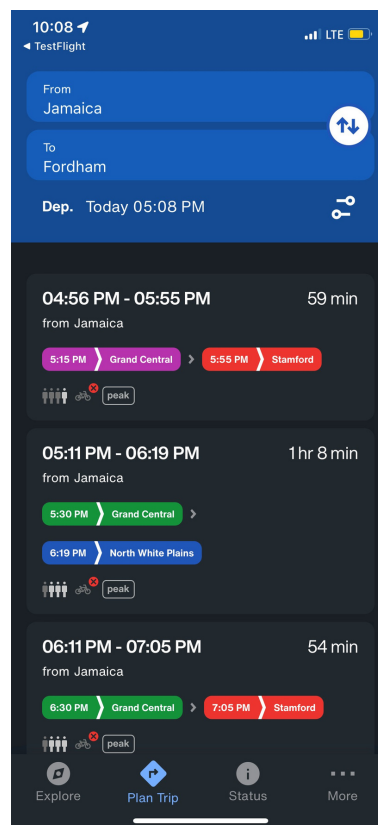
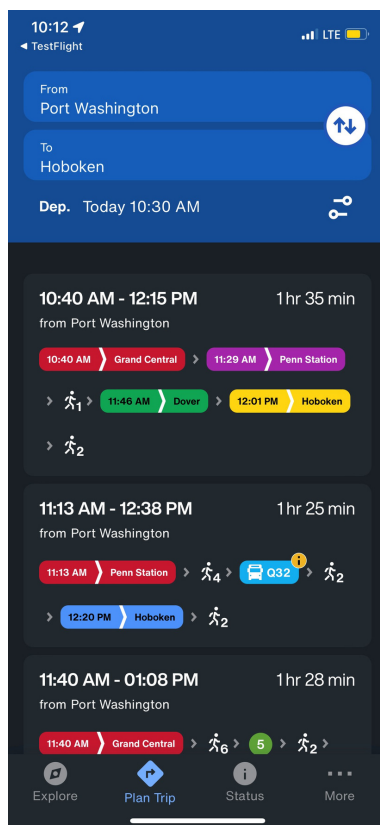


For the first time, riders can transfer between the LIRR and Metro-North under one roof at Grand Central—and soon, at Penn Station with Penn Access.

The MTA's current progress towards seamlessness includes:

- The MTA Apps (TrainTime and MyMTA in beta testing)
 - The MTA is beta testing a new all-in-one MyMTA app to supersede its TrainTime app. It will allow users to purchase tickets, plan a trip, save favorite routes and check schedules for subways, buses, Long Island Rail Road, Metro-North Railroad, PATH and AirTrain.
 - Other features will include live bus tracking; real-time on-board crowding for railroads; live route tracking; Citi Bike information, as PCAC recommended in its [Bike and Pedestrian Access recommendations](#); and more.

Trip planning suggestions between New York City Transit, LIRR, Metro-North, PATH, and AirTrain on the MyMTA app in beta testing:



- The existing TrainTime app itself has greatly improved the user experience thanks to an overhaul merging the formerly separate LIRR and Metro-North eTix and trip planning apps. TrainTime also introduced live train loading and train car information.
 - It also allows the sale of most– though not all– types of tickets and discounts, and point-to-point destination and ticket planning between both railroads.

- Off-Board Validation at Yankee Stadium, Citi Field, and UBS Arena
 - Existing gating systems currently employed for events at Citi Field, Yankee Stadium, and the recently-opened UBS Arena have allowed the railroads to verify that riders have activated their tickets before they board the train. This allows conductors onboard to fully focus on the safe operation of the train and providing customer service, while capturing fares of scores of riders in a more orderly environment.
 - Introducing more advanced technology to let riders validate their tickets off-board can make paying the fare faster and more seamless, allowing for faster passenger flow and a simpler user experience. Customers could simply board a train and have their tickets validated by contactless technology, with fewer opportunities to avoid paying the fare.



Off-board ticket collection at Elmont-UBS Arena LIRR station

- Combo Ticket
 - Coinciding with the opening of Grand Central Madison is the first formal through ticketing option between the MTA's commuter railroads for a flat surcharge of \$8 plus the current off-peak one-way fare.
 - This opens opportunities for through-commuting between the LIRR and Metro-North and for the MTA to learn more about when, where, and how through-commuters use both railroads.
 - Ensuring that city riders of both railroads pay a fare that is equal to or less than the cost of two CityTickets should be next in the fare's evolution, with the introduction of an intra-city Combo Ticket valid between any two stations in the five boroughs.

Issues with Current Regional Railroad Ticketing Systems

Through-ticketing— when riders can buy one ticket valid on two or more railroads for a journey— is an important step towards a more seamless MTA transit network. Currently, it exists in a limited scope through the Combo Ticket, with much room for improvement.

In the Northeast, commuter railroads have limited through-ticketing, where they cross-honor fares or allow for transfers between bus and rail operators but not with neighboring commuter railroads or other mass transit options. In the MTA region, this can be seen with bus networks like NICE and Bee-Line accepting MetroCard payments and the sale of joint bus and commuter rail UniTickets at ticket vending machines on the LIRR and Metro-North.

This cross-honoring system is not always seamless. Metro-North's West of Hudson lines are operated by NJTransit crews, issue tickets via NJTransit vending machines, and run with a mix of MTA and NJTransit equipment. Despite being branded as a Metro-North service, West- of- Hudson lines aren't shown on the MTA TrainTime app, on East- of- Hudson ticketing machines owned by the MTA and are described in an incomplete fashion on the MTA website. As such, the two lines occupy a gray area between Metro-North and NJTransit.

West-of-Hudson lines pose a particular challenge as the MTA looks towards the future of fare integration because of its existing fare arrangements with NJTransit. The State of Connecticut and Metro-North have figured out how to serve commuters across state lines using a ticketing system that is offered on MTA apps, while still presenting revenue sharing challenges on the New Haven line that lead to a lack of cross honoring on the Harlem and Hudson lines for one-way and round-trip tickets.

Within the scope of the MTA, the LIRR and Metro-North already publicly share information through the TrainTime app, allowing for the purchase of separate tickets and viewing schedules for and between either railroad. The limited through-ticketing provided by the Combo Ticket, which can be purchased on the TrainTime app, is an imperfect but substantial step in the right direction. The MTA's existing ticketing platforms can be helpful in implementing a more user-friendly fare system in the interim before the rollout of OMNY. The level of multi-faceted engagement available on the new myMTA app currently in BETA testing remains to be seen.

A common practice on both the LIRR and Metro-North is the cross-honoring of fares between parallel subway and commuter rail routes in the event of a disruption to either line. Currently, transfer passengers simply flash their MetroCard or railroad ticket to the conductor or station agent during a ticket check or at fare control. This results in uncollected fares and allows for additional opportunities to evade fare payment. Making fares more seamless at transfer points to buses, subways, or other railroads would make transfers less difficult and more appealing, especially in situations where service disruptions or repairs require riders to change commuting habits.

The Bigger Picture: The Northeast Corridor Region

The Northeast Corridor Commission published a federally-mandated through-ticketing study in 2017 which showed multiple initiatives to update fare media being undertaken with similar — though distinct— characteristics.

The report diagnosed several shortcomings of railroad ticketing on a regional scale. Currently, information sharing between transit operators on Amtrak's Northeast Corridor is lacking.³ There is no common source for information: trip planning and fare calculation must be done on entirely separate apps and websites for each agency that operates transit along the line, including but not limited to the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, Connecticut Department of Transportation, NJ Transit, SEPTA, and Maryland DOT, adding stress and confusion to the transit rider experience.

Riders surveyed in focus groups by the Commission expressed support for the idea of through-ticketing, with many stating they didn't really know where to start with the current arrangement where information and ticket availability are limited, and where one agency's service ends and another's begins. They also expressed willingness to use transit for more trips if through-ticketing between transit agencies was an option. Still, it's important that through-tickets be available on both phone apps and with paper tickets to ensure all riders have access to purchasing them.

One model of shared ticketing policy, and the one given the most attention in the Commission's report, is called the direct sales model, where riders can input their origins and destinations into the same system and receive one ticket good for the whole journey that will be cross-honored by all agencies operating transportation

³Commuter rail agencies operating over parts of the Northeast Corridor are VRE, MARC, SEPTA, NJTransit, LIRR, Metro-North, CTDOT, and MBTA.

along that route. The TrainTime app as it exists today can be considered a limited expression of this model, sharing information between the two commuter railroads and allowing for joint trip planning and fare calculation, with a unified MTA trip-planning app in testing.

Still, outside of the Combo Ticket, separate tickets are necessary for through-travel between the LIRR and Metro-North, particularly posing an issue for riders traveling within the city who would need to purchase two separate City Tickets to get the best fare for trips between the railroads. The upside of the TrainTime app means that tickets for each railroad can at least be bought and stored in the same place at once.

State and regional level transit agencies surveyed by the Northeast Corridor Commission are open to the idea of through-ticketing, but harbor reservations over transfer scheduling and timing, potential loss of revenue, the costs of designing and implementing a through ticketing model, and sunk costs into existing fare technology that come with increased coordination.⁴

Best Practices

The priority of transit agencies like the MTA should be to appeal to, and ultimately retain, long-term satisfied riders, who can be attracted and supported through a more user-friendly fare system.⁵

After the outbreak of COVID in the United States, multiple transit agencies took advantage of the installation of contactless payment technology to reform their fare structure, combined with “deep level” discounts like single-day unlimited passes. These had a positive effect on ridership, in addition to retaining riders who had adapted to a hybrid work-from-home model.⁶ Transitions towards flat fare systems or simplifying how tickets are sold can drive ridership, as shown by several other transit systems. With ridership on all MTA transit modes still trailing behind pre-pandemic levels, a more user-friendly fare system could help boost ridership. An analysis of Stockholm’s transition to a flat fare system showed that riders respond well to fare simplification efforts—in this case, all of Stockholm County became one “zone” with one fare. Integrating the zones spurred more intra-network travel regionwide.

In New York, the transition to the OMNY tap system was already underway, though COVID delayed its system-wide deployment.

⁴https://nec-commission.com/app/uploads/2019/01/NEC-Through-Ticketing-Study_v05.00.pdf

⁵<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0967070X2100055X>

⁶Fare Policies, Structures and Technologies: Update By Daniel Fleishman, Transit Cooperative Research Program

RECOMMENDATIONS

OMNY's rollout to the commuter railroads will be transformative for the MTA's mission to connect the region. It can advance integration between the LIRR, Metro-North and NYC Transit, along with adjacent transit systems like Nassau's NICE bus, Westchester's Bee-Line, Suffolk County Transit (SCT), PATH, NYC Ferry, JFK AirTrain, the Roosevelt Island Tram, bike share programs and others—some of which have already started OMNY rollout. The MTA should accompany its commitment to expand OMNY to the commuter railroads in the coming years with a strategy that takes advantage of its features to increase seamlessness between its transportation systems. As such, these recommendations fit into two categories:

1

The “OMNY On-ramp.”

In advance of the OMNY rollout, planning and preparation to streamline ticketing options and make fare payment easier before the contactless card's debut on railroads, with implementation on a rolling basis to initiate both change and transition to OMNY; and

2

The “OMNY Environment.”

Once OMNY is widely available on the commuter rails and to all riders, implementation of On-ramp recommendations to advance seamless user-friendly fare payment.



THE OMNY ON-RAMP::

How the MTA can simplify fare payment leading up to OMNY rollout

Rationalizing Inter-Railroad Fares

With the completion of Penn Access, trains from the LIRR and Metro-North will run into both Grand Central Terminal and Penn Station. In advance of conclusion of that long-awaited project, both railroads should approach ticketing with usability in mind to expand the potential of bringing the two railroads closer together.

Currently, the LIRR and Metro-North have distinct distance-based fares grouped into fare zones; this is further complicated by West-of-Hudson service which shares operations with NJTransit. Tickets sold between the railroads are not interchangeable. There are literally dozens of different ticket types available on the railroads depending on origin and destination zones; time-of day and direction; passenger-eligible discounts; special fares based on rider categorization; etc. There is also no way to compare price-per-mile figures across the railroads.

To make it easier for riders to know how much they should pay – and will pay – for their trip, whether on one railroad or two, the MTA should invest in steps to **communicate, coordinate, and consolidate** ticket pricing.

Phase 1: Communication

Simplify Cross Honoring Policies Between Railroads

On Metro-North, single-ride, round trip, and 10-trip tickets for the Harlem and Hudson line are not valid on the New Haven line, and vice versa. However, monthly and weekly tickets *are* valid between all three lines within New York. Cross-honoring of all fares between Metro-North's East-of-Hudson lines should be offered in New York. This disparity between lines isn't present on the LIRR, where all tickets are valid for all branches and lines.

THE OMNY ON-RAMP:

How the MTA can simplify fare payment leading up to OMNY rollout

Continue to Incorporate Live Scheduling Information from Partner Agencies into TrainTime and the new myMTA app

The existing MTA TrainTime app allows for ticketing on both railroads and live feeds of train and schedule information. These feeds can and should also be supplemented with live schedule and train information from other transit partners. Historically, information sharing between the West-of-Hudson Metro-North lines and the rest of the MTA network has been incomplete—both on the TrainTime app and the official MTA website. Schedules, tickets, and information for those lines should be integrated directly into future MTA web pages, apps, and branding.

The newly developed MTA app in beta testing includes route and destination planning for all MTA modes. This includes LIRR, Metro-North, and New York City Transit scheduling, trip planning, and transfer information. While it's currently still undergoing testing and improvements, it allows users to plan trips that cover other transit agencies including PATH and NJTransit. This feature should be maintained and expanded to cover all regional transit agencies, including Amtrak, CTDOT, NICE, SCT, Bee-Line, and TOR. The MTA should also negotiate ways to offer other connecting transportation providers' tickets (or ticketing information) through their own apps and points of sale, and offer the same for other railroads.

Use a Clearly Communicated Pricing Formula for Tickets on Both Railroads

Ticket options should be as consistent as possible between railroads, while reflecting the unique commuting patterns of their riders. This would make it easier to calculate trip costs between railroads. Tickets valid for the LIRR and Metro-North's Harlem and Hudson, West-of-Hudson, and New Haven Lines should be visually distinct to communicate their validity to conductors and riders.

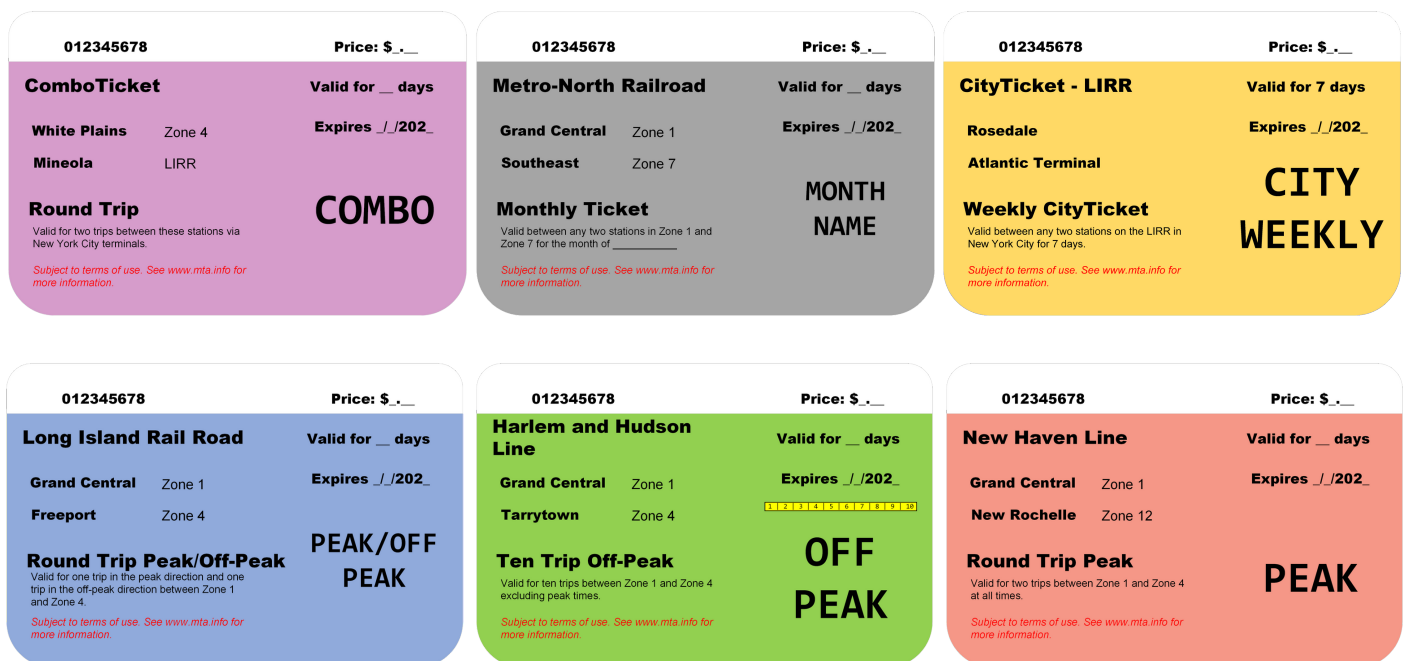
- The MTA should consider renaming or renumbering its fare zones to better communicate how ticket prices are calculated. For example: the LIRR has eight fare zones, but they're numbered 1, 3, 4, 7, 9, 10, 12, and 14. Riders would better

THE OMNY ON-RAMP::

How the MTA can simplify fare payment leading up to OMNY rollout

understand the fare zones if they were instead numbered 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and so forth. All ticket types should be available on the TrainTime app, Ticket Vending Machines, and staffed ticket booths.

- Ticket types that offer discounts (e.g., off-peak or ten-trip) should clearly communicate the percent value of the offer. Weekly and monthly tickets should communicate the “break-even” points at which they offer a better deal than pay-per-ride or ten-trip tickets.
- Combo Ticket and the enhanced CityTicket should be visually distinct and marketed specifically to through-commuters and intra-city travelers, respectively. Feasibility and field studies should be conducted in 2024 to determine how best to bring back a weekly option to CityTicket that includes transfers to subways and buses.



Sample color-coded and visually distinct tickets so that riders can more clearly show ticket collectors which ticket they've used

THE OMNY ON-RAMP::

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Phase 2: Coordination

Identify a Core Set of Ticket Types with Easy-to-Understand Conditions

Rather than offering new discounts and deals as separate pilot programs, leading to over two dozen different types of single-ride and round-trip combinations, the railroads should focus on integrating special discounts, including the existing senior and disabled fares, into a core set of tickets. For example, these could include:

- **Single ride**
 - Children between the ages of 5-11 may travel for \$1 with an adult during off-peak hours, and for half price during peak hours.
- **Round trip**
- **10-trip**
 - To replace the 20-trip ticket and provide additional options to hybrid commuters, the 15% discount should also be extended to peak 10-trip tickets.
- **Weekly**
- **Monthly**
- **CityTicket**
- **CityTicket Weekly**
- **Combo Ticket**
- **Combo Ticket Weekly**

Half-price fare discounts should apply to all of the above tickets for the following categories, and available at all times:

- **Senior**
- **Disabled/ADA**
- **Youth aged 12 to 17** (currently excluded from the \$1 family add-on)
- **Fair Fares**, which should also be expanded to LIRR and Metro-North within New York City

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How the MTA can simplify fare payment leading up to OMNY rollout

Unify both Railroads' AM Peak Hours

Currently, peak fares are charged on non-holiday weekday mornings outbound on from New York City on Metro-North from 6-9 AM, and inbound from 6-10 AM, while peak fares are only charged on non-holiday weekday mornings on the LIRR from 6-10 AM inbound to New York City. This differs from the PM peak, which is consistent from 4-8 PM on both railroads. Both railroads should share the same definitions of “peak” and “off-peak” times to increase clarity and consistency between the two, and discounted tickets like senior, disabled, and family tickets should be valid during the AM peak.

When are peak fares charged?

Time	LIRR	Metro-North
AM Outbound	Off-Peak	Peak from 6AM-9AM
AM Inbound	Peak from 6AM-10AM	Peak from 6AM-10AM
PM Outbound	Peak from 4PM-8PM	Peak from 4PM-8PM
PM Inbound	Off-Peak	Off-Peak

Identify Zones on the Railroads where Fares are Similar, and Bring Prices into Alignment.

Certain LIRR and Metro-North trips that are about the same distance have differing prices. The MTA should work to align fares between the LIRR, and Harlem/Hudson and New Haven lines in the fare zones where prices are already similar. For example, one-way peak tickets sold to/from zone 4 of the LIRR and zone 3 on Metro-North cost \$13 and \$12 to get to Grand Central, respectively. These two zones are the first outside the five boroughs and cover the most commuter-dense suburbs. Future changes should consider bringing prices like these into alignment, which will better position the two railroads and their fare options as one common system.

THE OMNY ON-RAMP:

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Allow for Cross-Honoring of Tickets between the LIRR and Metro-North

Once fare prices for similar distances across railroads are brought into alignment, cross-honoring of tickets between the LIRR and Metro-North could become a possibility.

Offer an Intra-city Combo Ticket Fare

The existing Combo Ticket's off-peak fare plus a flat \$8 transfer surcharge costs more than purchasing two separate CityTickets. A lower flat rate for an intra-city Combo Ticket would reduce the cost of travel across railroads and encourage greater railroad usage within city limits.

Expand and Enhance Fair Fares, Including to Commuter Rail

Fair Fares, the existing half-fare program for subway and bus riders at 120% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), should be expanded to 200% of the FPR. Fair Fares should be expanded to the commuter railroads within New York City with half-fare CityTickets available to eligible users for travel in the five boroughs. Additional funds to pay for the program expansion should come from either New York City, as with the rest of the Fair Fares program, or as a separate funding line from New York State.

THE OMNY ENVIRONMENT:

How OMNY implementation can consolidate the MTA's fare systems and improve user-friendliness

New Ticketing Possibilities with OMNY: Use OMNY to integrate LIRR, Metro-North, and NYC Transit Fares

Ticket machines at major stations and terminals should allow for ticket purchases and trip planning between Long Island and Metro-North stations, along with the purchase of joint tickets that offer subway and bus fares. The MTA TrainTime and upgraded myMTA apps should be expanded to include a transit fare option, in addition to the ability to purchase through-travel on LIRR and Metro-North. The introduction of OMNY will introduce allow for online ticket purchases that should allow for system-wide travel, while also ushering in new Ticket Vending Machines (TVMs) at commuter rail stations. These machines should remedy the shortcomings of the current TVMs' confusing interface and limited support for trip planning.

Connect OMNY with TrainTime and the New myMTA App to Expand Transfer Options between MTA Modes Prior to Full Rollout

An expanded weekly CityTicket, including transfers between the LIRR, Metro-North, and NYC Transit– similar to the existing Atlantic Ticket weekly option – should be offered during the transition period, even before a full OMNY rollout. A back-end connection could link the TrainTime or myMTA purchase with OMNY to provide a seamless system for riders.

Create a Weekly CityTicket with Available Transfers to Subways/Buses

The MTA's fare changes, approved by a Board vote in July 2023, included merging Atlantic Ticket with the broader CityTicket, which will now also be offered during peak hours at a premium cost of \$7. Undeniably, this change expands railroad discounts to all city stations 24/7 and helps shrink the number of ticket types offered to riders. However, the updated CityTicket lacks the option to purchase a weekly MetroCard, with transfers to subways and buses, that the Atlantic Ticket offered and that thousands relied on.

Given the overwhelming support for the weekly option pre-pandemic and its return

⁷ Atlantic Ticket was priced at \$5 for one-way LIRR trips between Atlantic Terminal and some Southeast Queens and Brooklyn stations. There was also a \$60 weekly option that included a weekly unlimited MetroCard.

THE OMNY ENVIRONMENT:

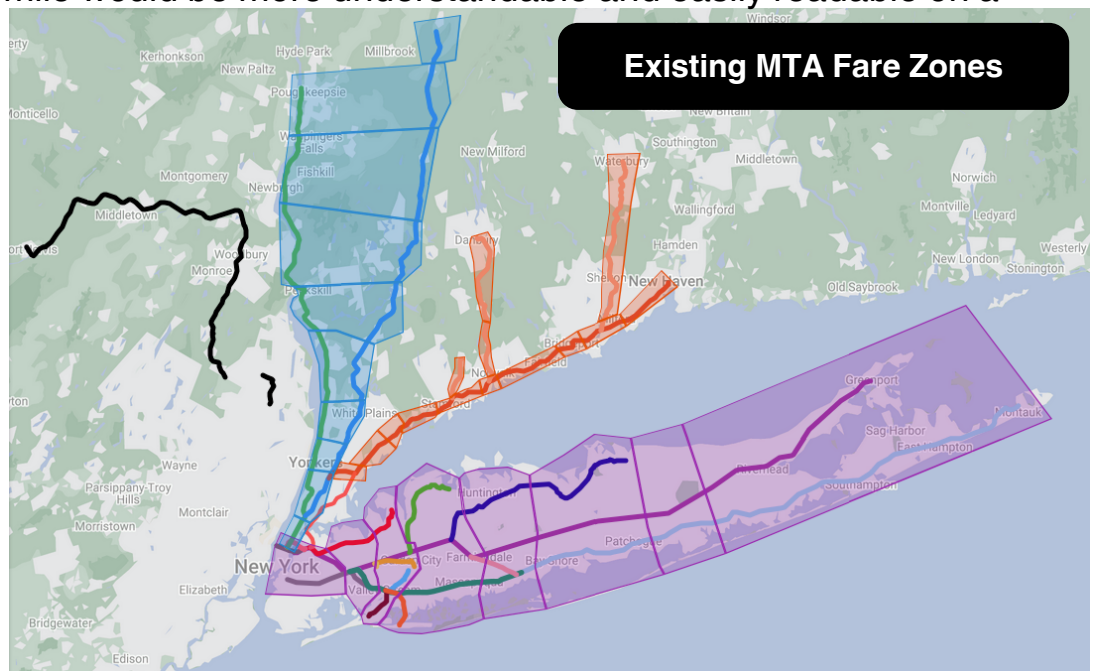
How OMNY implementation can consolidate the MTA's fare systems and improve user-friendliness

uptick post-pandemic – despite not being offered via the TrainTime or eTix app – the MTA should conduct feasibility and field studies in 2024 to analyze the potential of a weekly CityTicket with the option to purchase free transfers to subways and buses: PCAC's Freedom Ticket concept. This concept has already proven attractive to riders on the LIRR where it was initially offered, and the success of CityTicket indicates a market waiting to be tapped.

Adopt a Common Price-per-Mile and Unified Fare Zone System

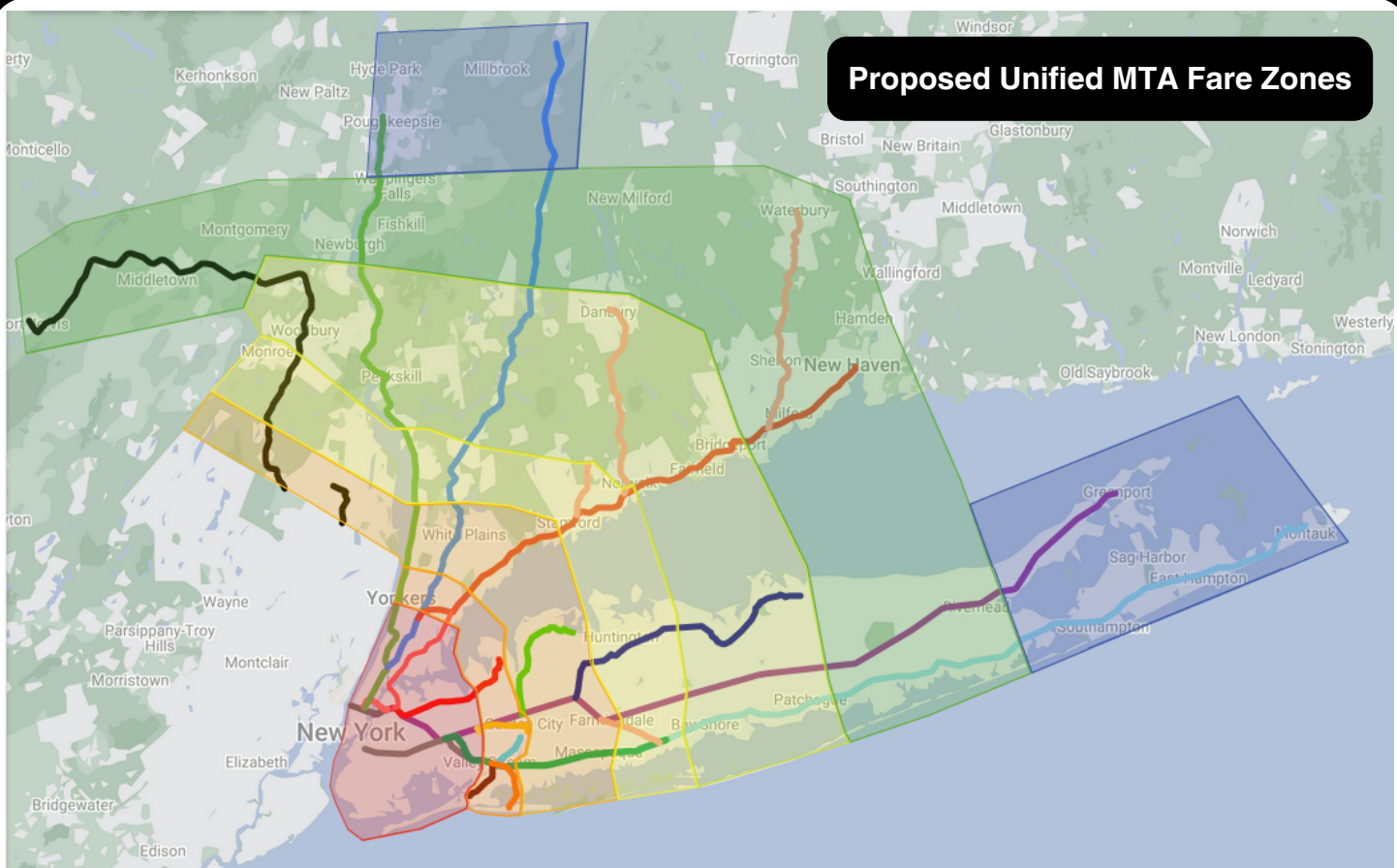
Ideally, the LIRR and Metro-North would adopt a common price-per-mile metric, abolishing the differences between the two railroads' tickets. A common price-per-mile would inform the creation of a unified fare zone system, in which riders in the Hudson Valley and on Long Island would be grouped into common fare zones. Instead of the current structure where the LIRR, Harlem/Hudson, and New Haven lines all offer different prices for traveling similar distances, a common price-per-mile would allow for increased flexibility and ease for riders who are through-riding. It would also reduce the necessary amount of information for riders calculating the price of a ticket; rather than communicating fare logic through multiple, complicated tables, a common price per mile would be more understandable and easily readable on a map.

The existing fare zones for MTA's commuter railroads are divided between the LIRR (PURPLE), the New Haven line (RED) and Harlem and Hudson lines (BLUE) of Metro-North. Ticketing for West-of-Hudson lines (BLACK) are sold through NJTransit points of sale.



THE OMNY ENVIRONMENT:

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Proposed Unified MTA Fare Zones

This is a conceptual depiction of what unified fare zones across Metro-North and the LIRR could look like in the future. Communicating fare information would be simplified, and tickets could be used on and across all various lines and trips.

Automatically Show and Charge Riders the Best Fare Available to them

OMNY integration with the TrainTime and new myMTA app should automatically apply discounts like CityTicket conditions and senior or disabled fares (if applicable), even if the rider hasn't specifically purchased such a ticket, by allowing riders to create a profile in the app to validate their senior or disabled qualification. Currently, many intra-city riders overpay for trips by purchasing a regular off-peak ticket because the option is available to them towards the top of the list of purchase options, instead of a CityTicket, which may be on another screen on a TVM. Riders should automatically be shown the best deal available to them when selecting a station pair, both on the TrainTime/myMTA app and on new OMNY machines.

OMNY'S POTENTIAL:

How OMNY can be used to improve the MTA's fare collection

Simplifying the fare structure goes hand in hand with improving fare collection. New options and opportunities that will come with the rollout of OMNY can be looked at vis a vis the recommendations from the report issued by the Blue Ribbon Panel on Payment Evasion once discussions and communications with stakeholders have identified appropriate paths forward.

Communicate and Work with Riders and the MTA Employees Directly Responsible for Collecting and Selling Tickets

The lived experience — and customer service aspects — of railroad ticketing must be the first and foremost priorities. A ticketing system which cannot be properly enforced is no system at all. Outreach should be conducted to find the most equitable and effective solutions for the future of fare payment, which should include the opening of a rider forum and an employee forum for discussing fare policy, fare evasion, and generally the experience of commuter rail fare policies at present. The collection of qualitative data from focus groups as this initiative progresses should inform its rollout. In addition to their feedback, they can also serve as resources to test these proposals before they are implemented or to make an argument to implement them.

Modernize and Improve Both Railroads' Ticket Collection, with Input from Stakeholders

Both railroads should work together and with labor, riders, advocates, experts, and other key stakeholders to identify ways to modernize and improve the railroads' ticket collection operations once OMNY is rolled out to the LIRR and Metro-North. OMNY will allow the MTA to greatly improve inter-service cooperation, enhance user friendliness, and permit conductors to focus on their primary missions of safety and train operations.

The railroads have already successfully implemented fare gating at events such as Mets and Yankees games. A contactless system like OMNY and the prospect of its integration with mobile phone apps would allow for more effective enforcement of off-board ticket activation.

OMNY'S POTENTIAL:

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Technical solutions made possible with contactless fare media allow for off-board validation of tickets, automatic ticket verification and payment, and a user-friendly interface for riders. The MTA should evaluate these options – in addition to streamlining the fare structure itself – as ways to simplify fare collection. OMNY's rollout must be paired with an intensive communication strategy between rider, employee, and agency stakeholders to ensure that OMNY will help simplify and improve the rider and worker experience.