

## Los Angeles Buses Moving to Smart Card Fares

Brian Heaton | July 3, 2012



Travelers now have a smarter way to pay for bus fares in Los Angeles.

The Los Angeles Department of Transportation has installed a [smart-card](#) system on its Downtown Area Short Hop (DASH) mini-bus service and Commuter Express routes. The upgrade will allow riders to use their Transit Access Pass (TAP) card to pay for their travel, instead of cash.

Owners of a TAP card can load it with a cash balance and use it on a variety of transportation systems in the Los Angeles region. Users place their cards on a reader, and the electronic chip inside the TAP card interacts with the system to deduct the appropriate amount.

In the future, patrons will also be able to load prepaid discounted fare passes to their TAP cards. When they board the bus, the system will recognize the pass instead of accessing the cash balance stored in the TAP cardholder's account.

Kari Derderian, a supervising transportation planner with the Los Angeles Department of Transportation, said the new system will ensure that fare collection is more accurate and will improve on-time performance for bus services. In addition, bus drivers will have much less to keep track of as riders enter the bus.

Currently when a patron gets on a bus, the driver has to keep a tally of everyone boarding and make sure they have the correct fare for the particular zone they are traveling to. The TAP card system will automate those tasks.

“Tapping requires zero interaction, and all that data gets collected and is sent to our system automatically with a daily download of reports,” Derderian said. “Previously information was collected from the bus manually. It eliminates the human component in data collection to some extent.”

All 310 of the Transportation Department’s Commuter Express and DASH service buses are equipped with the card readers and driver control units. According to a statement from Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, 80 percent of the \$3.1 million cost of the TAP software and equipment came via a grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation’s Federal Transit Administration.

Although the equipment is installed, Derderian said work continues to get the project fully online. Riding on public transportation around the whole Los Angeles area with just a TAP card will require more compatibility with other regional transportation providers. The region’s EZ transit pass — a monthly paper ticket that 23 of the area’s municipal transportation operators accept — is not yet on the TAP system.

Although the equipment is installed, Derderian said work continues to get the project fully online. Riding on public transportation around the whole Los Angeles area with just a TAP card will require more compatibility with other regional transportation providers. The region’s EZ transit pass — a monthly paper ticket that 23 of the area’s municipal transportation operators accept — is not yet on the TAP system.

For those L.A. bus riders not sold on a smart-card system, fear not. Cash still will be accepted. The department also is trying to be flexible as the technology is perfected.

“If you are boarding one of our buses and the system isn’t working at that moment in time, we have a policy to allow the patron to board,” Derderian said, adding that the policy may differ for other transit providers in the region.