

July 22 2015 Three organizations\* concerned with affordability and service to communities attended the Metra commuter rail board about completing the intent of 2011 legislation for a seamless transfer system that would allow anyone, not just those who can afford or who use advanced media/app platforms, to easily get to jobs and destinations that require trips via more than one system. Linda Thisted, CECD Vice President and chair of its Affordable Housing Advocacy Committee, prepared and read this testimony, with c. 10 representatives of the three organizations present (who raised their phones and cards when smart phone inadequacy was brought up. For more information on the issue, background, and responses visit [hpkcoalition.org/metratransferability.htm](http://hpkcoalition.org/metratransferability.htm) or [hydepark.org/affordablehousing/Metratransferability.htm](http://hydepark.org/affordablehousing/Metratransferability.htm). The three organizations are Coalition for Equitable Community Development, Hyde Park-Kenwood Community Conference, and Coalition for a Lakeside Community Development Agreement.

Testimony at the July 22, 2015 Metra Board meeting

Good morning. My name is Linda Thisted and I am here this morning representing three organizations -- the Coalition for Equitable Community Development, the Hyde Park-Kenwood Community Conference, and the Coalition for a Lakeside CBA. What brings our groups together is that we all live on the south lakefront and near Metra Electric stations.

I am here to talk about Metra's inadequate response to the Universal Fare Card legislation. This legislation, passed in 2011, required that the three transit agencies adopt a fare medium that could be used across the agencies by January 1, 2015. CTA and Pace have adopted the Ventra card for transit access and transfers between the agencies. Metra has not and has stated that it has no intention of doing so.

You can use your Ventra card's optional debit feature (hold up Ventra card) to buy a paper ticket (hold up my 10 ride Metra ticket) from a Metra ticket agent or machine. But that was NOT the INTENT of this legislation. The intent was for a "seamless transfer system". Our south lakefront state representatives, House Majority Leader Barbara Flynn Currie and Christian Mitchell have voiced their concerns about this situation in a letter, dated May 5<sup>th</sup>, to Mr. Orseno and Chairman Oberman. Leader Currie was one of the co-sponsors of the 2011 legislation.

It is nice that you are developing a smart phone app to act as a virtual Ventra card. But that is not a substitute for the real deal. Only 19% of seniors and fewer than half of households making less than \$30,000 own smart phones. (Turn to my audience and ask them to hold up their phones. I hold up my iPhone 5). And even my smart phone, the iPhone 5, won't be smart enough to use the Metra app

in phase 2. The smart phone will need to have “near field communications” -- NFC -- in order to use the app. My iPhone does not have this. A smart phone “solution” is contrary to the intent of the legislation because it discriminates against seniors and low income people.

A number of us have been advocating around various transit issues with Metra since 2008. Over the years we have met with many Metra people who are no longer at this table – including Bill Tupper, Phil Pagano, Carol Doris, Alex Clifford, and Mr. Clifford’s consultant. This spring, in our most recent round of meetings we’ve been told that the new management is different than the old one. But from our vantage point and using Metra’s current response to this legislation as an example, it seems like business as usual to us.

We do want to work together with Metra. We are asking you to work with us to accomplish the objectives outlined in the letter from Representatives Curry and Mitchell. We will commit to advocate for funding for the research on how Metra could truly adopt the Ventra card, **IF** Metra will commit to making a good faith effort in looking for creative solutions to do so.

We realize that there are hurdles – especially for Metra stations that have open boarding. But other transit systems, like Caltrain in the Bay Area, have dealt with open boarding issues. And I am old enough to remember that the Metra Electric used to have turnstiles.

Now is the time to do this research, since the Lakeside Development, to be located on the old U.S. Steel Works site, is now on the horizon. Lakeside will eventually add more than 14,000 families to the area, near the 87<sup>th</sup> street Metra Electric station.

Let’s work together to explore how to get the Ventra card to work for ALL PEOPLE who use Metra – not just those who own smart phones with near field communications. Thank you.