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New way to get MRT tickets

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MANILA, Philippines – Seeking to address the problem of long queues at Metro Rail Transit (MRT) ticket booths, the Department of Transportation and Communications Friday launched an alternative cellular phone technology-based ticketing system that they claimed could reduce commuter traffic in its terminals.

However, the developers of the system conceded that the shorter lines could give way to longer processes depending on what kind of cellular phone MRT commuters would be using, apart from costing more than a regular train trip.

At a press briefing Friday in Quezon City, Metrostar Express operations director Ronilo Hermes Bacolod said the "Juan Card" is still an experiment in providing an alternative to daily commuters of the MRT line 3. He added that at peak hours (5:30 a.m. to 7:30 a.m. and 7:30 p.m. to 9 p.m.), the number of commuters at the MRT reach 28,000 an hour when all 20 trains are deployed.

"It is a matter of choice. The fare for the MRT Text Ride would be 3 percent higher, but a commuter does not have to wait in line anymore to purchase a ticket," Bacolod said. The experiment would be implemented until all mass transportation systems are integrated under a common ticketing system.

The operations director said the additional 3 percent on the fare would go to the system developer, while another P2.50 will be charged by the three telecommunications companies for each text message sent to load a pre-paid card. The rest of the revenues would go to the government.

The ticket queues, he maintained, would be transferred from the terminals to the malls where booths for the sale of MRT Juan Card E-Wallets – the prepaid cards – would be set up for the convenience of commuters.

Anabelle Margaroli, president of Omniprime, which developed the system, claimed the EXIO machines would be able to read and process bar codes in 1.8 seconds. She said the system recognizes all telecommunications technology through which a commuter would send a text message to activate the Juan Card.

The EXIO machine is equipped with a high-speed digital signal processor, a camera and a printer designed by German company Gavitec for marketing applications.

A commuter would have to send a text message before riding to get a bar code for the EXIO Machine, after which the fare would be deducted from the E-Wallet.

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