

Port Authority asks riders how they like the changes

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By Jon Schmitz, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Quarter Pounder for your thoughts?

Port Authority is asking its riders to take part in a customer satisfaction survey online or by phone, with the enticement of a fast-food coupon and a chance to win an annual pass, worth \$880.

The authority has placed fliers on buses and rail cars advertising the survey, which comes amid a wave of service changes that have affected nearly all riders and prompted some complaints about overcrowding, longer trip times and route eliminations.

The survey asks riders where they live, how often they use transit, what routes they use and their usual destinations. It also asks a variety of questions to determine customer satisfaction, including questions about the courtesy of drivers, reliability of service and cleanliness of vehicles.

Wendy Stern, assistant general manager of planning and development, said the survey will be part of a continuing effort to monitor how service changes are affecting riders.

"We have implemented about 80 percent of the changes ... it really has affected almost every rider on our system to one degree or another. We really need a lot of data to evaluate how the changes are working and what adjustments we might make," she said.

Future surveys also will help the agency develop strategies for attracting new riders, she said.

The survey is being conducted by Campos Inc., a Pittsburgh research organization, and will cost the authority about \$18,000, Ms. Stern said.

People can take the survey by text-messaging the word "rider" to 77007. They will get a reply asking for an e-mail address. A second text message provides a pass code to the survey at www.yourvoicecounts-pa.com. The exchange of text messages takes about a minute.

Participants also can go to the website and register there for a pass code, which will be e-mailed in two to three days. The survey also can be taken by calling 1-888-869-6119.

Participants who are willing to provide their names and addresses will be mailed a coupon for a free McDonald's extra value meal (with the purchase of another meal) and be registered for the annual pass drawing.

The coupons are being donated by the restaurant company, Ms. Stern said.

According to the website, respondents' names and addresses are not connected in any way with their survey responses.

Ms. Stern said the authority has not decided whether it will make the findings public. The survey will continue until the agency gets a sufficient number of responses, estimated to take about a month.

Port Authority is not the only transportation agency inviting its customers to sound off.

The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation has posted a five-minute survey at its year-old 511pa.com website, which provides real-time traffic and weather information.

"We are proud of the progress we have made in providing travelers with more information, and we look forward to hearing suggestions from our customers to make the system even better," said PennDOT Secretary Allen Biehler.

PennDOT plans to update the service, which also allows travelers to get information by dialing 511, later this year.

The service currently covers 1,759 miles of interstate highways in Pennsylvania, including the Pennsylvania Turnpike, and other major roads in Harrisburg, Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. It soon will add 630 miles of state roads to the reporting

network and begin a Twitter feed.

Jon Schmitz: jschmitz@post-gazette.com or 412-263-1868. Visit "The Roundabout," the Post-Gazette's transportation blog, at post-gazette.com.

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