

The New York Times

The City

It May Glitter but . . .

To One Rider, the Gold Metrocard Is Basically Base

By VANESSA GENEVA MELTER

FOR more than a month I have had the unsettling feeling that the Metropolitan Transit Authority has been trying to brainwash innocent commuters via not-so-subliminal messages. It is the cheery yet authoritative voice of Metro Goddess from the hidden speakers in buses chirping: "No exact change? No token? Buy a Metrocard Gold, the fastest way to pay your fare."

Obviously, the M.T.A. has succeeded, because why else would I be lying awake bug-eyed at night worrying about the next day's transportation schedule? Uh-oh. I have only \$1.50 left on my card. If I go home from work by bus, I can go back to the city for the evening to see Tom, all for one fare, providing I can get ready and be at Astoria Boulevard by 7:17 P.M.

If I don't decide to do this, then I should definitely save that Metrocard Gold for the following day because I just don't want to deal with the lines for the next few days.

My friend Sally is right, I really do need a shrink. I have obsessive-compulsive disorder like that woman on "Oprah" the other week who regularly bathes herself in Lysol to avoid contamination. I wake up the next morning in a zombie state. Walking toward the M60 bus stop, at Sojourner rover pace, I scrounge through my backpack for \$1.50 in loose change.

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Now with the smart time-and-date-stamped Metro Card Transfer that lets me hop from bus to bus when I insist on using the old-fashioned token, I can't even sneak an expired transfer to the bus driver.

Before July 4, whenever I slept over in the city, I'd take the M104 from West 57th Street to Columbia University, where I work and study, get a transfer and try passing it over to the bus driver on my way home on the M60, that wonderful bus that has a little airplane logo on the front because it ends up at La Guardia Airport. I did this a few times, until I got caught and decided the embarrassment was not worth the \$1.50 I

system. There have to be some loopholes.

As convenient as the Metrocard Gold appears to be, it is hard for paycheck-to-paycheck folks like myself to cough up \$40 for the convenience of not visiting a token booth for a month. What if I lose it or it gets damaged? It could take years to get reimbursed, if ever.

Now the beloved token may go the way of the Checker Cab. I've always loved the token because it is a form of currency in the city. There have been times, when I've been a couple dollars short, at a deli, in a restaurant, in a cab when I've remedied the financially embarrassing situation by offering a token. The cashier always obliges. (Try tipping a waiter with a Metrocard Gold, I dare you.)

Who doesn't need a token in this town? Even the lucky ones who can walk to work will sooner or later have to resort to mass transit.

I was heading downtown on the M104 on July 3 when my bus became a question-and-answer session on the Metrocard Gold.

An off-duty bus driver was sitting in the front talking with a passenger and boasting about the freedom of the new card.

"These are a thing of the past," he said with a laugh, waving a bushel of orange transfers, which I enjoy using as soggy bookmarks.

I made a mental note to keep mine for nostalgia's sake. I also have kept a token from 1995, the silvery bull's-eye one, and a blue Metrocard. Just in case I live to be 100 years old and this flimsy card might turn out to be worth something. By then the Metrocard could be valid on Mars as well. Or perhaps on Mars, we'll have the Metrocard Red.



Frankie Gonzalez

was saving.

It's not that I'm a cheap person or a turnstile-jumper. I just hold a grudge. There have been times when I've waited around for the M60 for up to an hour. When the waiting time is longer than the ride itself, I feel the service the M.T.A. provides isn't worth the \$1.50 straphangers have to shell out. (In other words, they owe me.) When I get this frustrated, I usually call the friendly people at the M.T.A. Customer Assistance line to report my gripe.

I'm counting on a few good, savvy New Yorkers to beat this high-tech

Sunday, July 27, 1997