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Apparent record number of MBTA fare evasion citations issued last month

Posted by Matt Rocheleau August 15, 2012 11:23 AM

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By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

Transit Police issued what is believed to be a record number of citations for evading MBTA fares last month.

As part of an ongoing crackdown, 483 fare evasion citations were handed out during July.

Officials said the rise in ticketing is not attributed to the T raising its fares, cutting some service and more than tripling the fine amount charged to people caught for the first time trying to ride the transit system for free – all changes that took effect on July 1.

Lieutenant Detective Richard Sullivan of the Transit Police Intelligence Unit

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Lieutenant Detective Richard Sullivan of the Transit Police Intelligence Unit, said instead that more citations are being written because of an initiative called “Operation Fare Game,” which the law enforcement agency launched in early July in response to complaints from customers that not everyone was paying to ride the cash-strapped transit system.

“A lot of people were complaining via social media,” including by sending messages through the T’s “See Say” smartphone applications and to the Twitter handles @MBTATransitPD and @mbtaGM, he said in a phone interview.

Spokesman Joe Pesaturo said that riders also asked T officials to do a better job of collecting fares at the 31 public meetings the agency held between this past winter to gain feedback on how to balance the system’s budget – a process that resulted in the fare hikes and service cuts introduced on July 1.

“We’re trying to be responsive to people’s concerns,” Sullivan added. “It just happened to coincide with the new fine structure and the new fare rates that the MBTA set.”

The cost of fare evasion is hard to calculate, but officials have said the T may be losing out on tens of millions of dollars a year because of it.

Due to an increase in the fare evasion fine, which was signed into law and implemented last month, the agency has already set a new annual record for the monetary value of issued citations.

The fine for first-time fare evasion is \$50, up from \$15. The cost of committing a second offense remains \$100. Third and subsequent offenses cost \$300, up from \$250.

About 99 percent of the 483 fare evasion citations issued last month were given to first-time offenders. Over the past two years, less than one percent of citations went to repeat fare evaders.

Citations for fare evasion have risen sharply over the past five years and T police are on pace to issue more this year than ever before, eclipsing the record set last year by about 1,300 citations.

During 2011, Transit Police issued a record 3,481 citations for fare evasion – a noncriminal offense – and collected \$17,890, or about 33 percent, of the



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\$54,245 in fines issued.

Through Aug. 10, Transit Police have issued 2,914 citations for fare evasion worth \$65,605.

Only about 18 percent of fines issued this year have been paid, but officials hope [new rules](#) that took hold along with the fine increases will force more scofflaws to pay off their citations and to do so in a timely manner.

Those who do not either pay their fine or appeal it within 30 days of receiving their citation will not be able to renew of their Massachusetts driver's license until they pay their fines. Ignored citations also incur a \$100 surcharge.

Previously, fare evaders who did not pay would only be warned about their outstanding fine after one year. If the fines remained unpaid for another three months, their state driver's license would then become ineligible for renewal until they cleared their citation bills.

“Through our selective fare enforcement efforts, we are trying to gain compliance in paying one's fare to utilize the MBTA,” Transit Police Chief Paul MacMillan said in a statement on the agency's [blog](#). “We also feel this is also an attempt at fairness. (No pun intended). Our honest fare paying customers should expect that we will enforce the law, in fact, many have applauded our efforts.”

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