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## Quinn wants to take the wheel of senior free-ride train

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Transit leaders had mixed but mainly positive reactions to Gov. Pat Quinn getting into the driver's seat on the issue of restricting free rides for seniors to low-income individuals.

Quinn said Thursday that he would support reducing free senior rides only if the CTA, Pace and Metra agreed to a moratorium on fare hikes for one to two years. Legislation now being crafted in the General Assembly is expected to include a ban on fare hikes for two years.

The three agencies are in a budget crisis mode that would be alleviated by the up to \$37 million in additional revenues anticipated if seniors making more than \$22,000 a year reverted to a half-price fare program used before.

Pace is contemplating increasing fares for paratransit, its service for disabled riders, while the CTA and Metra are considering fare hikes on regular service.

Metra spokesman Judy Pardonnet said the rail agency was agreeable to taking proposed increases in weekend passes, one-way fares and fines for people buying tickets on trains off the table for 2010 and 2011. Metra stands to gain about \$6 million by limiting free rides, she noted.

CTA Chairman Terry Peterson also supported Quinn's caveat. Speaking before a budget hearing, he noted it wasn't the CTA's desire to raise fares or reduce services but it had to have a balanced budget. If there was a way the legislature could provide relief so the agency wouldn't have to raise fares, the CTA would be agreeable to that, he said.

For Pace, "there's lots of moving parts going on with this bill now," marketing manager Doug Sullivan said. "Pace can't commit to a specific moratorium on a fare increase given that we don't know what the final proposal will be."

He added that the agency's main concern is to secure funding for paratransit.

The CTA would still have to consider service reductions and is negotiating with its unions on cost-cutting, Vice President of Communications Noelle Gaffney said.

*Daily Herald Staff Writer Joseph Ryan contributed to this report.*