

## Quiet Car Coming to PATCO

By Kathleen Duffy

For NewsWorks

Rachel DeMarco boards the PATCO train set for New Jersey at 15-16<sup>th</sup> and Locust Streets in Philadelphia. The city resident sits close to the window with her headphones comfortably resting in her ears, readying herself for the train to fill as it rushes through the expected stops.

Beginning March 1, wearing headphones to block out noise will not be necessary on weekdays while riding on the last car of each train. Based on the suggestions of riders, PATCO will be initiating a three-month Quiet Car Pilot program.

“It seems as though the largest part of our traveling public who would want a quiet car are commuting back and forth to work,” says John Matheussen, CEO of the Delaware River Port Authority and President of PATCO.

According to a statement released by PATCO, quiet car rules will include no cell phone calls, keeping electronic devices set to vibrate or mute, and listening to music set to a low volume through earphones.

“People should be aware that it’s a quiet car, and they should use their best judgment,” says Matheussen.

PATCO hopes that the quiet car initiative will give riders a place to work without many distractions or to simply wind down after a hectic day at work.

“Whether it’s to take a nap or to get out of the hum-drum of the day,” he says.

SEPTA tested a similar Quiet Car system from Jan. to March 2009 with the full program in effect since April 6 of that year.

“The quiet ride program started in response to customer complaints about cell phone calls, music from headsets, and loud conversations,” says SEPTA press officer Kristin Geiger. “We receive feedback all the time. It is working.”

“It’s more of a courtesy and people generally respect it,” she says.

DeMarco has experienced the quiet car system on SEPTA and says that conditions in the car can get crowded.

“You find yourself shoulder to shoulder,” she says.

After the three-month period is complete, PATCO will determine if the quiet car system should carry on or be changed, according to general manager John Rink in a statement.

“Once the three-month test period is over, PATCO will conduct another survey to determine if the program was successful and should be continued or modified,” he says,

in reference to the online customer service survey that showed rider interest for a quiet car.

Standing inside the heated area of the platform at Woodcrest Station on a windy afternoon, frequent rider Robert Deshields, a resident of South Philadelphia, voiced his approval for the program.

Although he believes that the quiet car will be difficult to enter due to high demand, he will still take advantage of the car—a service being offered for no extra charge past the price to ride.

“If it’s free, it’s for me,” he laughed.

According to Matheussen, during rush hour, train links are six cars long, which makes one out of the six cars designated for quiet behavior.

He believes that the car will not be overly crowded, but reiterates that it is a pilot program.

“You find out whether or not it’s an accepted program,” he says. “If it is, does it work to the full efficiency that it could?”

Other questions to be answered, he says, include, “Is this the right combination? Is the last car the best car to do it on? Will permanent signs be needed?”

“We’ll evaluate all of those things during the pilot program,” he says, adding that customer’s needs will come first.

DeMarco takes PATCO primarily to visit her family living in South Jersey. In the past, she has “unfortunately” forgotten to bring her trusty headphones along.

“Honestly, I put these in and don’t pay attention to anything,” she says, pointing at the ear buds.

“I prefer not to hear the noise.”