

Beijing Lets People with High ‘Social Credit Score’ Board Subway First



Lintao Zhang/Getty Images
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China’s totalitarian “social credit system,” which rates the quality of an individual’s citizenship based on everything from their financial credit rating to how fervently they embrace Communist Party dogma, will now determine who gets to board subway trains first.

“Bad” citizens are required to wait in line and endure extra security hassles while “good” citizens are given priority boarding. China’s state-run *Global Times* described the social credit boarding system as a “smart measure” to make commuting more efficient. It will be tested at “several stations” on the Beijing subway line for an unspecified period of time, according to municipal officials. One subway station, in the Fuchengmen district of Beijing, has been conducting an early trial of social credit boarding since 2019, while subways in the city of Guangzhou implemented a “fast pass” system in 2018.

The Chinese government sees no legitimate concerns about the latest mutation of the social credit system, other than persistent general fears about data security: With this system, passengers carrying small bags are likely to enter the subway station directly without going through security checks. Currently, anyone who enters the Beijing subway has to pass a security check.

The credit system reflects whether passengers have exhibited uncivilized behavior on the subway such as eating or carrying prohibited items, or have done so on other public transportation systems, media reports said. Chinese analysts said that this is a good example of China’s application of the national social credit system,

which is believed to be vital to raise the social management level. But some others said that this system, which is based on passengers' credit records, brings the risk of data leaks.

The "fast entry" system requires passengers to apply for a "quick pass" with a smartphone app, assuming they have "good credit records and have used the subway more than ten times" without racking up any demerits for "uncivilized behavior." Quick pass holders must then submit to a facial recognition scan when they board a train. The oppressive Chinese state has all sorts of uses in mind for its vast and growing database of facial biometric data, including keeping a close eye on the movements of ethnic minorities.

"The app will help commuters and ease long lines to enter some subway stations. It is not an abuse of big data or the social credit system. At a time when China has yet to establish a perfect social credit system, pilot projects are encouraged," the *Global Times* pontificated. According to the *Global Times* and various Chinese politicians and advisers it consulted, the "perfect" social credit system will have more data about every Chinese citizen, which means even more surveillance and data harvesting will be needed.

Once the system has been fed more information, the next evolution of the "quick pass" for mass transit could be a "white list of passengers who would be exempt from inspections or random checks, along with a disciplinary system for dishonest behavior."

The social credit system has previously been used to deny "bad citizens" with access to air and rail travel altogether, in addition to various other punishments, including reduced job opportunities. Chinese citizens have no control over the social credit system, no way of knowing how it reaches its judgments of good or bad citizenship, and no reliable means of appealing its decisions. By March 2019, after its first year of operation, the social credit system had blocked the sale of 17.5 million airline tickets and 5.5 million train tickets. Many of the blocked travelers reported they had no idea their social credit score was "bad" until they attempted to buy a plane or train ticket.

Priority boarding for "good citizens" is adding insult to the injury of all these outright travel bans, but will also be a constant reminder to subjects of the Chinese Communist Party that they must try very hard every day, in every imaginable way, to please a system whose rules they do not understand and whose verdicts they

cannot appeal.

China's social credit system has been applied to foreigners, who are paying big money to consulting firms to learn how they can avoid getting a bad social credit score. China is pushing hard to take a leading role in developing a potential "vaccine passport" system that would be endorsed by global health officials and employed to regulate all international travel.

(Consider the amount of information "Big Tech" is accumulating on each of us, and how that could be used in the future???)