# THE DAILY PULSE

*by Jagdeep Dayal*

PAYMENTS • BANKING • LENDING

**WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2026** COVERAGE WINDOW: SEPTEMBER 16–23, 2026

### THIS WEEK IN BRIEF

Stablecoin rails advanced into cards and national trust charters, agentic AI hits mainstream with launch of Meta's Muse, and auto-credit access hit a decade high even as new-vehicle sticker prices topped $50,000.

PAYMENTS & STABLECOINS

## [Mastercard, Google push past passwords]

*Payments Dive · Sep 21*

Mastercard and Google Pay are partnering to extend biometric payment authentication—facial recognition or fingerprint via smartphone—so users can check out without one-time passwords, starting in India with a rollout planned by year-end, Payments Dive reported. Mastercard's Ravi Datla said the companies aim to "make everyday payments faster and more intuitive" by "leveraging biometric capabilities already available on smartphones." The article notes U.S. and European consumers remain more reluctant to adopt biometrics because of privacy and data-security concerns.

> **WHY IT MATTERS**
>
> Biometric checkout attacks the friction and fraud of passwords and OTPs, and the networks are racing to own the authentication layer as card-not-present and agentic commerce grow. Adoption curves in markets like India and Singapore often preview where U.S. issuers and wallets head next, though privacy concerns could slow down adoption.

---

PAYMENTS & STABLECOINS

## [Mastercard and SoFi Bring Stablecoin Settlement to Cards as Step One of Broader Rollout]

*PYMNTS · Sep 22*

SoFi Bank is migrating its $25 billion card program to stablecoin settlement using SoFiUSD, a bank-issued, dollar-backed stablecoin that clears over Mastercard's network, PYMNTS reported. SoFi CEO Anthony Noto said the arrangement gives businesses "faster access to their money via the speed of blockchain, with the safeguards of a bank," and the companies plan to extend stablecoin settlement to cross-border payments and remittances. Mastercard CFO Ling Hai framed stablecoin infrastructure as a growth opportunity for the network.

> **WHY IT MATTERS**
>
> A bank-issued stablecoin settling card transactions signals stablecoins moving from crypto niche onto mainstream card rails, with faster settlement and new economics for issuers. It also positions SoFi to build

> broader and stronger banking relationships with merchants, because of the promise of instant settlement in the merchant's account, when a customer makes a purchase.

---

**PAYMENTS & STABLECOINS**

## [Meta's Muse Tops ChatGPT as AI Agents Head for Checkout]

*PYMNTS · Sep 21*

Meta's Muse personal AI agent reached No. 1 on Apple's App Store just 10 days after launch, surpassing ChatGPT, as agentic tools move from answering questions to completing purchases, PYMNTS reported. The article notes that "an agent takes the task and finishes it," with Muse able to book travel, send emails or negotiate bills, and its transactions powered by Stripe's Link wallet across more than 1 million businesses. PYMNTS testing found the experience still rough—Muse took over five minutes to return toilet-paper options—and cited that only 23% of U.S. consumers trust generative AI with payments even as 72% use AI assistants.

> **WHY IT MATTERS**
>
> Agentic checkout could reshape who controls the purchase moment, shifting it from merchant sites and wallets to AI intermediaries. The trust gap—just 23% comfortable letting AI pay—signals adoption will hinge on authentication, liability and merchant acceptance, not capability alone. Amazon responded by blocking Muse on their site citing privacy concerns, while Shopify embraced the new technology.

---

**PAYMENTS & STABLECOINS**

## [Meta Adds PayPal to Muse AI Assistant for Global Checkout]

*PYMNTS · Sep 22*

PayPal is integrating its payment functionality into Meta's Muse AI assistant, giving Muse a second checkout option alongside Stripe's Link, PYMNTS reported. A PayPal executive said the company is "excited to partner with Meta to enable PayPal customers to seamlessly shop and check out using their Muse personal AI agents across PayPal merchants worldwide." Muse launched Sept. 8 and reached No. 1 on Apple's App Store within 10 days, and PayPal has pursued similar agentic-commerce tie-ups with Google and Mastercard over the past year.

> **WHY IT MATTERS**
>
> Adding PayPal broadens Muse's acceptance footprint and reflects payment providers racing to become the default rail inside AI agents before consumer habits harden. For issuers and wallets, embedding in agent checkout is becoming a competitive necessity as the purchase decision migrates into AI interfaces.

---

**BANKING & REGULATION**

## [Fed's Jefferson provides update on discount window modernization]

*ABA Banking Journal · Sep 22*

Fed Vice Chair Philip Jefferson detailed efforts to modernize the discount window—simplified forms, faster enrollment, automated pledged-loan lists, and the Discount Window Direct portal that now handles over 60% of loan requests—plus deeper coordination with the Federal Home Loan Banks, ABA Banking Journal reported. Jefferson said the discount window "serves as a shock absorber during periods of market stress by reducing the risk of forced sales of Treasury securities."

**WHY IT MATTERS**

The 2023 regional-bank failures exposed how stigma and operational friction kept banks from tapping emergency liquidity; modernization can give banks quick access to liquidity and potentially reduce fire sales under duress.

---

**BANKING & REGULATION**

## OCC conditionally approves 3 national trust charters

*Banking Dive · Sep 21*

The OCC conditionally approved three national trust charters—Bastion Platforms Trust Co., Agora National Trust Bank, and Catena Trust Bank—each tied to next-generation infrastructure, Banking Dive reported. Bastion white-labels stablecoins and manages reserve custody, Agora issues the AUSD stablecoin, and Catena is building financial rails for AI agents. The approvals carry $6 million to $10 million minimum tier-1 capital requirements and a mandate to hold 180 days of operating expenses in liquid assets for their first three years.

**WHY IT MATTERS**

Granting national charters to stablecoin and AI-payments firms pulls emerging technologies inside the federal supervisory perimeter—a template for how novel infrastructure gets bank-regulated. It also sharpens competition for incumbents by legitimizing well-capitalized non-bank challengers.

---

**LENDING & CREDIT**

## Auto credit access hits 10-year high in August as new vehicle prices top $50K

*Auto Finance News · Sep 22*

Auto-loan credit access reached a 10-year high in August even as average new-vehicle prices topped $50,000, growth the report attributes to longer loan terms and expanded subprime lending, Auto Finance News reported. As the piece puts it, “affordability pressures are boosting subprime lending, as more credit-challenged consumers need to finance vehicles.”

**WHY IT MATTERS**

Looser credit amid record prices keeps volumes up but stacks risk—longer terms and more subprime borrowers raise negative-equity and delinquency exposure if the labor market softens. With the Fed just hiking, higher funding costs could squeeze lender margins into 2027.

---

**WHAT TO WATCH**

**Court exempts federal credit unions from Illinois interchange law**

*ABA Banking Journal · Sep 22*

*Stay ahead of what’s moving markets, regulation, and the business of banking.*