

Metra

ON THE BI-LEVEL

Commuter Newsletter, April 2010



Get info on-the-go

Metra has unveiled a mobile website that is streamlined to be compatible with iPhones, Blackberries and any other portable web-enabled devices.

The mobile site offers the most popular features of our regular site in a format that is easy to view on a portable device. Anyone using such a device to go to Metra's website at www.metrarail.com will automatically be routed to the alternative mobile site, although they will have the option of going to the regular site if they so choose.

Mobile surfers can use our station-to-station schedule and fare finder or view a full train schedule for a particular line. They also can view advisories and alerts and contact Metra.

Riders who have signed up for a "My Metra" account at the regular website can also edit their e-mail preferences and "My Next Trains" feature, manage their recurring orders and repeat the last ticket order that they have completed.

Metra opted not to create mobile apps for the various phones on the market because we would have needed separate apps for each one. Instead, we created a mobile site that is compatible with all phones.



Meet Metra's best friends

Man's best friend is also Metra's best friend.

As part of its participation in Transit Watch, a nationwide public awareness campaign, Metra is using posters of its bomb-detecting dogs to encourage passengers and employees to help us maintain a safe transit environment.

The Department of Homeland Security gave Metra funding last year to continue and expand efforts to keep the public informed and involved in emergency preparedness activities. The public outreach poster program will continue through 2010.

The new "If You See Something - Say Something" poster campaign is designed to capture the attention of customers and remind them to contact Metra Police at 312-322-2800 when they

observe unusual behavior or unattended items.

The first portion of the campaign for 2010 highlights the Metra K-9 Explosive Detection Teams, which have been active for several years. The K-9s and their handlers were paired into teams and participated in extensive training at Lackland Air Force Base in Texas.

Following the successful completion of the training, the teams returned and continue to train daily in their work environment. They are certified annually and must meet rigid Transportation Security Administration standards and guidelines.

Rita, Cita, Ggriffin, Kim, Faro and Igor are some of Metra's best-known K-9s due to their presence in Metra's downtown

terminals. Ggriffin and Igor are named after victims of the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. The extra first letter in their names indicates that in each case, two victims shared that name.

Metra also is keeping customers informed through its website, station signage, and verbal announcements and electronic message boards on trains and station platforms.

Everyone should always be alert for any activities that appear unusual, out of the ordinary or suspicious. Riders should be aware that before terrorists act, they may use a variety of activities to find out more about their target, to test its security procedures and to plan their attack.

Remember: *If you see something, say something.*



On the Bi-Level

Published by Metra's Media Relations Department. Send letters, questions or feedback to On the Bi-Level, Metra, 547 W. Jackson, Chicago IL, 60661-5717. Or e-mail onthebilevel@metrarr.com.

We can't guarantee all letters will be printed or answered. Please keep letters to less than 200 words and include your first name, hometown and what line you ride. (Names are not required but strongly encouraged.) We reserve the right to edit letter for length and grammar.

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SOUNDING BOARD

Got a question? We've got an answer

Going to the dogs

It seems like many people enjoy the pictures on the train of the Metra security dogs. Any chance you can print them on the monthly tickets?

Jan

Right now we're committed to using that space for the winners of our annual Safety Poster contest. But those posters are on our website, and see Page 1 for more on our lovable dogs.

Let's go fly a kite

I ride the Metra Electric and have just tried to use one of the new format printed schedules that fold out to the size of a road map. I take it you're somewhat familiar with the windy streets downtown? Have you ever tried to read one of these while walking? I'm curious what the thought process was, if any.

Al

We're sorry you don't like the new format, but the general response to it has been positive. The benefits are that the font size is bigger, the entire day's

sked is on one page and the new format is cheaper to produce than the old one. On all the other lines, we're able to fit the "To Chicago" and "From Chicago" on one page, which also makes viewing easier. We can't do that on the Electric because there are too many trains, a problem that riders of other lines probably wish they had.

Let's make a deal

My money is tight. How can I cut the cost of buying a monthly ticket from zone C to downtown Chicago? How about making a ticket Monday through Friday only, no weekend rides, and what would the cost of this ticket be for the month?

Leon

We've been asked that before, because many people only use their monthly pass on weekdays. Our response has been that the monthly pass is already significantly discounted. For instance, a one-way fare for Zone C is \$3.50. So it would cost \$7 a day round trip, multiplied by about 22 weekdays a month, or \$154. But a Zone C monthly is \$90.45.

We can't afford to make it much cheaper than that.

A scheduled gap

On all of the UP lines, there is a two hour gap in trains in each direction, every weekday. Inbound, the gap is around midday, and outbound it's around 8:30 to 10:30 in the morning. Why?

Garry

We insert that window into our schedules between rush periods to perform routine track maintenance.

Union Station work

Can someone please have a chat with the person who continues to route two morning incoming trains into Union Station on the same platform?

Patti

We have received a lot of complaints about platform assignments at Union Station over the last few months. All were the result of temporary changes necessary because of the city's Jackson St. viaduct project. The good news is that track assignments are back to normal now.

BNSF riders, we need your cooperation

Attention BNSF riders: We need your cooperation.

You want our trains to leave Union Station on time. We want our trains to leave Union Station on time. But we've had a problem lately that makes it hard for us to do that. Here's how you can help:

Many times at departure time there still is a line of people hoping to get on the train. We could wait until that line disappears, of course, but then the train would never leave, on time or at all, because late-arrivers would keep showing up. At a certain

point – a point determined by our printed schedule – our crews have to decide to close the doors. If you're in line and you see the doors closing, that is a sign for you to wait for the next train. It's not a sign for you to sharpen your elbows, lower your shoulders and push your way on board.

We hope our riders understand that we're not trying to be mean. We just can't wait forever. It's not fair to the people already on that train and it's not fair to people on other trains that could also be affected by the first train's

tardy departure. And it's not safe for riders to try to press their way onto a train as the doors are closing.

If you're trying to board a train at the last moment, remember: the last car of the train is going to be the most crowded. You might have better luck getting on if you aim for the middle cars. But if you hear the announcement that the doors are closing and you're on the wrong side of those closing doors, you're too late. Wait for the next one, please pretty please. Thanks.

SOUND OFF

“...the snarky, snotty observations by Metra’s customers about fellow commuters ... offer some of the best free entertainment around.” - SouthtownStar, March 13, 2009

Leveling with you

Just wanted to give you feedback on the 25th Anniversary issue of *On the Bi-Level*. What a most entertaining read! Thank you so much for printing the chronological Sound Offs. I had a blast reading them and thinking about how no matter what year it is the complaints are the same. LOL! How funny! I could use this e-mail to write about what annoys me on a daily basis but instead I will use it to say “Thank you” for everything you do to make my commute a joy. It’s not a car in traffic and that is awesome!

Shari

Thanks to all the many well-wishers who wrote to us about that special issue. It was a lot of fun to put together and we hope everyone enjoyed it as much as Shari did. It’s you, our loyal riders and loyal readers, who make this newsletter what it is. As we said last month, we truly can’t make this stuff up. And so, as we begin our next 25 years, here is a case in point:

Unwanted pluckiness

Pluck your unibrow on the train? In PUBLIC? Who does this? I have seen this on my morning commute among the beauty shop queens. Now I think I can understand touching up your lipstick or blush, but I draw the line to plucking your eyebrows. Gross! Ewww! It is so rude to the people around you. Do you really think it is OK to pluck your brow and toss them everywhere in the area you sit? Where others will sit? That is so unsanitary. You have to hear people like me say it is gross and you look at us like we are crazy?



I have just one word for you... WAX! Congratulations, you have officially joined the elite group of toenail clippers.

Patricia

Wow, we knew our ride was smooth, but we didn’t think it was smooth enough to perform such a delicate task. What’s next, tattooing?

What’s the big deal?

Why is clipping one’s nails considered unhygienic? How is it any different from your constant shedding skin and hair, or people breathing, sneezing, coughing? Is it because you can see the nails but not the other things? Seriously, it’s all the same.

Carol

Carol, we’d like to introduce you to Patricia (above). We think you two might be able to have an interesting conversation.

Put it on hold, please

So what’s with people these days and where did they learn what it means to be considerate of others? Today, March 16th, I’m on the Southwest Train No. 826. It’s bad enough that we were

delayed almost 20 minutes for the usual freight train interference, but then this woman has to decide to get on her cell phone to do a conference call, on SPEAKERPHONE and obviously on the fullest volume. If you know you have a conference call, you should go into work earlier to do it or if not, at least not do it on your cell phone speakerphone, better yet, get some earphones. Even with the looks of others and me getting up and saying “How rude” and going to stand in the vestibule, you would think she’d get the hint, but no. Give me a break and go learn some consideration!

Diane

Perhaps she wanted everyone else on the train to contribute their input to her meeting?

Be responsible

I catch the Metra Electric Line service and park at the lot located in Olympia Fields. Upon entering my vehicle last month, I noticed that it had been sideswiped by another Metra customer who obviously had parked in a hurry to catch his/her train. Needless to say the customer failed to

leave a note admitting to any fault, thus sticking me with the responsibility for paying for the damage. At some point in time I’m sure nearly all of us have had days when we’ve had to rush for the train. However, PLEASE BE RESPECTFUL OF OTHER PEOPLE’S PROPERTY and be mindful to park giving enough space in between cars to avoid situations such as this.

Raven

We’re sorry that happened. You’re right, the guilty party should have been more responsible. Maybe they were rushing to get on a conference call or to get their brows waxed.

Response to Rick

Rick wanted background music so that we other passengers wouldn’t listen in on his phone conversations (Sounding Board, February). Better idea – how about Rick using the vestibule so that we aren’t forced to listen to him on the phone?

Randy

We knew Rick’s suggestion would be about as popular as a unibrow. We heard from lots of people who, to be blunt, didn’t really think his idea had a whole lot of merit.

Message for Sally

Could I leave the following note to my wife in the Sound Off section?

Sally,

You are the most beautiful wife a man could ever ask for.

Love always,
Stickers

OK, but only because we’re suckers for romance here at OTBL.

Spring Travel Notes

MetraMarket wins redevelopment award

The Chicago French Market at MetraMarket was named redevelopment of the year at the 22nd Annual Chicago Commercial Real Estate Awards dinner last month. The event was a benefit for the Great Chicago Food Depository and raised more than \$870,000 to fight hunger. The French Market is the cornerstone of the MetraMarket development, which is located on the ground floor of the Ogilvie Transportation Center. It includes 29 individual vendors, including four new ones: Zullo's, featuring the food of southern Italy; Gramp's Gourmet Foods; which specializes in pickles; Olives4You, featuring western Mediterranean specialties; and Pappardelle's Pasta, featuring artisan pasta.

Metra awarded \$133 million for bridge project

Metra has been awarded \$133 million in federal stimulus money to separate its Rock Island line from a set of freight tracks on the south side of Chicago, eliminating a major rail bottleneck and easing the way for Amtrak's proposed high-speed rail service. A bridge, or flyover, will be constructed to carry the north-south Rock Island tracks over the east-west Norfolk Southern/Amtrak tracks near 63rd Street

and State in the Chicago community of Englewood. The Englewood Flyover will eliminate conflicts between the 68 Metra trains, 46 freight trains and 14 Amtrak trains that now pass through the intersection each day. The project, which is expected to be completed by 2012, is part of the Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency program, or CREATE, a multi-agency effort to ease rail congestion in Chicago.

Metra ridership dips in 2009

Metra ridership declined to 82.3 million passenger trips in 2009, a 5.2 percent drop from the record-breaking 86.8 million trips in 2008. It was still the third-highest yearly ridership total since Metra began in 1983. The decline is primarily due the economic recession and the dramatic drop in gas prices compared to the record-high prices in 2008. Ridership dropped 4.9 percent on the BNSF, 7.6 percent on the Metra Electric, 3.2 percent on the Heritage Corridor, 8.1 percent on the Milwaukee North, 3.9 percent on the Milwaukee West, 7.8 percent on the Rock Island, 2.5 percent on the SouthWest Service, 5.2 percent on the UP Northwest and 7.5 percent on the UP West. Ridership increased 0.5 percent on the North Central Service and 0.6 percent on the UP North.

"My grandmother got her teaching degree from NLU in the 1920s. I know she would be proud to hear that I did too. And so did my sisters. My niece. And my husband, Tim. We all got our degrees from NLU."

— Kathleen Flowers

B.A. in Applied Behavioral Sciences (ABS)

M.A.T. in Elementary Education

NLU

I got it here.

