

**CLIFF NOTES****Looking ahead to 2012**

What does 2012 have in store for Metra riders?

One of the more exciting changes ahead will be the debut of our new train-tracker system. When this system goes operational by

the middle of the year, passengers will be able to go to our website and learn the actual time any

train will arrive at any station.

Of course, we hope that time will correspond to the published schedule, but there are occasions when trains are delayed, and this system will give our riders real-time information to help them plan accordingly.

Imagine waiting on one of our platforms and being able to use your smartphone to go to our website, check with our train tracker and learn exactly when to expect the next train. We know CTA riders find its bus and train tracking system

*(Continued on Page 4)*



**Alex Clifford**  
Metra CEO

**Metra to raise fares Feb. 1**

The Metra Board of Directors last month approved the agency's 2012 budget, which includes fare increases across all ticket types and a variety of other changes to Metra's fare policies.

Starting on Feb. 1, 2012, one-way tickets will increase an average of 15.7 percent across all fare zones, while 10-ride tickets will go up an average of 30 percent and monthly passes will increase an average of 29.4 percent. Reduced fare one-way tickets will increase an average of 10.3 percent, reduced fare 10-ride tickets will increase an average of 18.9 percent and reduced fare monthly passes will go up an average of 10.8 percent. Taken together, the overall average increase is 25.1 percent. The new fare chart is available at [www.metrarail.com](http://www.metrarail.com).

In addition, Metra temporarily changed the expiration dates of one-way and 10-ride tickets in

**In addition to the fare increase, several fare policies also will change starting Feb. 1. Those include:**

- One-way tickets will only be valid for 14 days, instead of a year, and they will no longer be refundable.
- The 10-ride ticket discount will be reduced so riders will get 10 rides for the price of nine, rather than 10 for the price of eight.
- Ten-ride tickets will remain valid for a year, but will only be refundable within three months of the date of purchase. For refunds on a partially used ticket, the cost of a one-way ticket from the specific zone-pair combination will be deducted for each ride taken. After the 9th ride is used, the ticket will not be refundable. Refunds are subject to a \$5 handling fee per transaction.
- Monthly passes will be valid through the end of the month (instead of noon on the first day of the following month) and refunds will be subject to a \$5 fee per transaction.
- The Metra subsidy for the Link-Up and PlusBus tickets will be eliminated and riders will have to pay the full costs of those passes. The new price of the tickets is being worked out with the CTA and Pace.
- Young adult fares on weekends and holidays will be eliminated.

an effort to deter the stockpiling of those tickets before the fare increase begins next year. One-way and 10-ride tickets purchased from Nov. 12 though

Jan. 31, 2012, will be valid for travel only through Feb. 29, 2012. There is no price increase for those tickets during this *(Continued on Page 4)*



## 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](mailto: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.

### Board of Directors

Larry A. Huggins  
Vice Chairman  
Chicago

Jack Schaffer  
Treasurer  
McHenry County

Arlene J. Mulder  
Secretary  
Suburban Cook County

Paul C. Darley  
Director  
DuPage County

Don A. De Graff  
Director  
Suburban Cook County

James C. LaBelle  
Director  
Lake County

Mike McCoy  
Director  
Kane County

Brad S. O'Halloran  
Director  
Suburban Cook County

Jack E. Partelow  
Director  
Will County

Willis E. Pennington Jr.  
Director  
Cook County

William A. Widmer III  
Director  
Suburban Cook County

### Chief Executive Officer

Alex Clifford

## SOUNDING BOARD

Got a question? We've got an answer

### Passing around

Are MD West Line monthly passes accepted on other lines (UP West and/or UP Northwest)? The recent freight derailment caused me to wonder.

JM

*Yes. But if you are not traveling from the same zone, you would have to pay the conductor for the extra zone or zones.*

### Vending machines

I noticed a while back that some stations (namely the 55th Street Station on the Metra Electric line) have automatic machines where you can buy individual, and possibly even monthly and 10-ride tickets. Lately, I've noticed that the lines at the Union Station ticket windows seem to be getting very long, with few windows being open for service. This is true even on days not near the beginning or end of the month, when most people are presumably purchasing single-ride tickets.

With a clear demand, and the technology to meet that demand, why don't you add some automatic Metra ticket machines to the Union Station concourse and near the ticket windows? There already are CTA ticket machines (and some other information kiosks that seem to get little use) in that area; it would seem to make sense that providing another way for passengers to purchase tickets would alleviate the long lines and improve customer service and satisfaction.

Fred

*We are installing vending machines at our downtown stations early next year. The Metra Electric line got them first because we needed a way for the riders of that line to buy tickets with credit cards. Machines were the answer because that line does not have ticket agents.*

### Catching zone jumpers

I am sure you are going to get a lot of complaints about the ticket

clampdown and checking ticket zones, I however just wanted to say thanks. As a Route 59 rider, the number of folks getting on at 59 with F instead of G tickets has always ticked me off. Keep it up and everyone should pay the fare.

HT

*Thanks. We did get some complaints from people concerned we were slowing the trains down. That was not the intention and it was fixed immediately.*

### Your attention please

Who are the announcers on your recorded messages? The male voice sounds like Bill Kurtis. Is it? Just curious.

Ellen

*No, it's not Bill Kurtis. It's Metra dispatcher Don Nelson, and Chicago radio listeners may know his voice from the several radio stations he's worked at over the years. He tells us he's flattered to be compared to Kurtis. The woman is a voice talent from outside Chicago.*

## Durbin secures money for engine improvements

Thanks to the efforts of Sen. Dick Durbin, Metra was awarded a \$2.2 million grant last month that will help us improve the quality of the air in our stations and in the region.

The money will be used to replace main engine-driven generators on about eight locomotives by introducing innovative anti-idle technology. That will cut emissions from the locomotives as well as reduce the amount of fuel used by the engines, saving Metra money.

Projects were selected through the FTA's competitive Fiscal Year 2011 Sustainability Initiative, which includes funding from two FTA programs: the Clean Fuels

Grant Program and the TIGGER III (Transit Investment in Greenhouse Gas and Energy Reduction) Grant Program. Metra received its grant through the TIGGER program.

TIGGER grants were competitively awarded based on the ability of projects to reduce energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions while providing a return on the investment.

Since 2009, the TIGGER program has invested in numerous innovative transit projects that have brought to market advanced fuel-cell and hydrogen-powered buses and allow for the development of sustainable transportation stations.

"Increasing use of cleaner, more energy efficient vehicles in public transportation throughout Illinois improves the quality of life for all residents – even those that don't rely on public transportation," Durbin said. "Today's investments will contribute to our state's long-term economic growth and help reduce our reliance on foreign oil."

Durbin also assisted Metra in securing nearly \$5.3 million in grants in October, money that will fund for similar work to reduce emissions and cut energy use on other Metra locomotives. The funding came from the federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality program.

# 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

## Snore off

Oh, no! What happened to the “Sound Off” column? It was boring! I mean I could deal with one or two “nice-nice” articles but all of them? I could handle fare increases and delays but don’t change my “Sound Off” column. I love to hear about the weird things that go on because it truly reflects what’s happening on our trains. I would so look forward to reading each issue and it was always good for a laugh.

Come on — bring back the snarky, snotty observations!

Carole

*Wow, we had no idea we were being, or even could be, too positive. Please accept our sincere apologies.*

## Enough already

I’m not gonna lie, I like to read *On The Bi-Level* for the snarky comments, but reading your November edition just made my day. Yes, the hustle and bustle grind of getting to and from work everyday isn’t fun. Whether you own up to it or not, we’ve all been rude to someone at some point. I really enjoyed the upbeat letters you published in this edition. That being said, don’t forget your bread and butter: snarky comments. I like to commiserate, “Yeah, that annoys the heck outta me too!” (And for the record, women’s perfume is no more annoying or stinky than men’s cologne!)

Lorie

*OK, OK, we get it. We’re here to gripe. Let’s get to it.*

## Roll the tape

This is for the two women who rode the 5:30 p.m. Milwaukee District North train and got off at Forest Glen. You talked in the quiet car all the way to your stop today. I have seen you on that car before talking away even after you have been told you are on the Quiet Car. You ignored the person who reminded you. I know it is not the “silent” car but for goodness sakes, please get over yourselves. You were not talking in a quiet tone. Please sit in another car in the future. You two have no



regard for others. In the old days, you would have had tape put over your mouths. I just might start carrying a roll with me.

Pat

*We know it’s tempting, but don’t do it! Perhaps you can simply imagine doing it. We’ve supplied the photo to help you visualize the peace.*

## Seat-hogging, part 221

As a long-time BNSF rider, I thought I’d seen it all, but a discouraging new trend appears to be emerging. A number of fellow commuters have discovered that sitting on the aisle side of the seat is an almost foolproof way to ensure they will have the whole seat to themselves (well, they sometimes share it with their iPads and handbags). Both men and women are the culprits here. C’mon, folks, unless you paid for a seat for your iPad, don’t make the rest of us step over you to get to the window. First in should get the window seat.

Karen

*Are you saying there is no “I” in iPad? We agree. Maybe that strategy is new but it strikes us as just another variation of the ole’ seat-hogging theme.*

## Crowding the vestibule

The Vestibule, and the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly, on the Milwaukee District North line. The good: those who stand in the vestibule and move aside for departing passengers. The bad: those who stand in the vestibule but do not move aside for departing passengers. The ugly: those who stand in the vestibule and get off at every stop and then get back on, causing the departing passengers to have to wait (while all remaining commuters have to wait for these people to get off/on at every stop, which delays the entire commute). It’s hard to believe this bad and ugly behavior exists. Ideally, everyone brings common sense to their commute, but of course, those without will continue to stand in the path of departing passengers. Can we make *On the Bi-Level* required reading?

Bill

*We thought it already was required reading....*

## They are called trash cans

Thank you for allowing today to be my gripe session. On BNSF No. 1200, which leaves Route 59 at 4:38 a.m., I watched two people in the car I ride take the plastic off their morning papers and either leave it on the floor or tuck it behind the seat. When they leave, the plastic covering stays where they dropped it. Another person tucked his paper on the side between the seat and the window after reading it. This person also drank as much of his drink and then opened the cup and shook it upside down on the floor, making sure it was completely empty. I believe there are trash containers by each vestibule... couldn’t these papers and plastic coverings be put there?

MK

*Well sure they could do that. But then what else would we find to complain about? Wait, never mind, we’re sure there will be something...*

# Winter Travel Notes

## Metra wants to hear from you

Over the past several months, Metra has reached out to its passengers to ask your opinions on a range of service and fare issues. Now, as part of the RTA's regional customer satisfaction measurement program, we're rolling out a comprehensive survey to learn about your travel patterns and gauge your satisfaction with Metra. In November, surveyors distributed printed survey questionnaires aboard select trains on all Metra lines. If you received a survey questionnaire, we hope that you have completed and returned it. If your train was not surveyed, you can now complete the survey questionnaire online by visiting [www.metrarail.com](http://www.metrarail.com). Your answers and opinions are very important to Metra so we hope that you will participate.

## Public meeting slated for Union Station plans

The Chicago Union Station Master Plan study has been in progress for about a year. A public meeting to discuss possible improvements analyzed as part of the study will be held from 4 to 7 p.m. on Thursday, Dec. 15, 2011, in Union Station's Union Gallery room, just off the Great Hall. Narrated presentations will be made at 4:30 p.m. and 6 p.m. The study has been a collaborative effort led by the city of

Chicago's Department of Transportation and other agencies associated with Chicago Union Station. The public is encouraged to attend the open house public meeting and share input.

## Metra goes to the North Pole

On Sunday, Dec. 11, Metra's UP Northwest line will take about 50 sick children from area children's hospitals, as well as their families, on a fantasy train ride to the North Pole. In conjunction with Operation North Pole, an all volunteer tax-exempt charity, a decorated train car will whisk the families from Des Plaines to Harvard and back on a magical train ride to the North Pole with Mrs. Claus. Back in Des Plaines, they will be met at the station by Santa. They will then be taken by bus to Operation North Pole's headquarters, where they will have some one-on-one time with Santa and receive gifts from their wish lists. Operation North Pole provides children who suffer life-threatening illnesses a fantasy experience during the holiday season. Most of the families participating are devastated by the financial and emotional burden of dealing with life-threatening illnesses. Metra is pleased to be working with Operation North Pole to provide a day of fun and happiness for those families. To learn more about Operation North Pole, go to [www.operationnorthpole.org](http://www.operationnorthpole.org).

# 2012

*(Continued from Page 1)*

to be very handy and we are hoping our riders will find our system to be equally useful.

We continue to encourage riders to sign up to receive emailed alerts from us about delays on our system. Just go to [www.metrarail.com](http://www.metrarail.com) and click on the "Sign Up for My Metra" box or use a QR-scanner on your smartphone to scan the code at the end of this column.

We expect to make progress this year on a universal fare

card for the Chicago region. The CTA last month approved a \$454 million contract to convert its system so that fares can be paid by tapping credit, debit and bank cards or prepaid cards on a card reader at stations and on buses. That system should serve as the basis for a universal card that could be used seamlessly on the CTA, Metra and Pace.

As we have pointed out previously, there are many technological and financial challenges to overcome if we are to meet the state-mandated deadline of 2015 to implement the card. Working with the RTA, CTA and Pace, we must find a card that works with

the CTA's and Pace's closed systems (you have to enter through a turnstile or past a bus operator) and flat fares as well as our open system (no turnstiles) and distance-based fares.

Also coming in early 2012 will be ticket vending machines at our downtown stations. These will be the same machines now in use on the busiest stations on the Metra Electric line, where they were installed because that line does not have ticket agents. We know many of you have lobbied for this as long overdue, and we are happy to be able to accommodate those requests.

With these projects and

others, we hope to improve the riding experience of our customers. We wish you a joyous, safe and on-time holiday season and New Year.

*You can follow me on Twitter @metraCEO*



# Fares

*(Continued from Page 1)*

temporary period. One-way and 10-ride tickets purchased prior to Nov. 12 will continue to be valid until one year from the purchase date. Unused tickets will be reimbursed at the refund policy in effect at the time of purchase.

Metra's 2012 budget includes

\$686.8 million for operations and a \$244.1 million capital program. The fare increase will help cover a budget deficit next year due to rising diesel fuel prices, the demands of meeting new federal regulations, higher insurance premiums and the need to no longer transfer capital-eligible funds to operations. These funds are meant for infrastructure improvements.

Metra did reduce the deficit

by \$17.5 million through a variety of steps, including locking in the price of 75 percent of its fuel needs, making administrative cuts and finding other operational efficiencies. Those actions reduced the size of the needed fare increase by 7 percentage points. However, there still is a projected budget gap of \$53.6 million that will be covered by the fare increase.

Such a substantial fare

increase was a difficult subject to tackle. We are sensitive to our customers' concerns about the impact of this increase on their already challenged personal budgets. That is why we worked so diligently to reduce the overall increase. However, Metra can no longer sustain the past practice of kicking the can down the road.

We hope you will understand and continue to be loyal customers.