



# Winter News Roundup

## Outlying stations to take credit cards Feb. 8

Metra will begin accepting credit cards at all 76 outlying stations with ticket agents and at the 14 busiest Metra Electric stations starting on Feb. 8. Metra already began accepting Visa, MasterCard, American Express and Discover cards at its downtown stations last month and on its website, [www.metrarail.com](http://www.metrarail.com), in September. New credit-card vending machines at the 14 busiest outlying Metra Electric District stations will be in addition to the cash-based machines that are already in place along the line. Metra Electric riders, please see the new vending machine instructions in the chart on the right.

## New fare structure starts this month

Remember, Metra's new fare structure begins this month. One-way fares increase about 6 percent, an average of about 30 cents a ticket. Weekend fares increase to \$7 from \$5, the first increase in the existence of the weekend fare program, which began in May 1991. And the penalty for on-board purchases increases to \$3 from \$2. That penalty is not assessed on passengers who board at unmanned stations.

## Milwaukee North, NCS schedules adjusted

Metra has adjusted the schedules of some trains on the Milwaukee North line and the North Central Service. On the Milwaukee North, there are minor schedule changes on trains Nos. 2140, 2620, 2622, 2623 and 2625. In addition, for all Chicago Cubs home games only, trains Nos. 2606, 2610, 2613 and 2619 will stop at the Grayland Station. On the North Central Service, train No. 105 will now stop at Western Ave. and train No. 120 will now stop at Libertyville and Lake Forest on the Milwaukee North line. The schedules posted on [www.metrarail.com](http://www.metrarail.com) have been updated to reflect the changes, and new printed timetables are available at stations.

## Coffee shop opens at MetraMarket

Espression by Lavazza is now open at MetraMarket, joining Chicago French Market and CVS/Pharmacy. Accessible from its street entrance at 121 N. Clinton as well as from the MetraMarket/Ogilvie commuter concourse, this unique concept café created by Lavazza, Italy's leading coffee company and one of the preeminent roasters in the world, is the third of its kind in America. The casually-elegant coffee shop serves its famous coffee beverages as well as a wide range of breakfast items, sandwiches, salads, pastries and gelato.

### How to Use Metra's New Credit Card Ticket Vending Machines

It's fast and easy to purchase Metra tickets with our new ticket vending machines.

#### STEP 1. SELECT

Select one-way, ten-ride, monthly or weekend pass, then select your destination.

#### STEP 2. INSERT CARD

Insert your Discover, MasterCard, American Express or Visa charge card for payment.

#### Step 3. TAKE

Take your ticket and receipt.

**One Way Ticket**—Good for one way travel between the fare zones indicated on the ticket.

**10-Ride**—Good for ten one-way trips between the fare zones indicated on the ticket.

**Monthly Pass**—Good for unlimited travel between the fare zones and month indicated on the ticket.

**Weekend Pass**—Unlimited rides on both Saturday and Sunday.

Reduced fare tickets are not available at vending machines.





## 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.

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## SOUNDING BOARD

Got a question? We've got an answer

### Zoning out

I used to ride from West Chicago to downtown and pay for a zone F ride. Now I ride from the Route 59 stop in Naperville to Union Station and pay for a Zone G ride. They are the same distance on the map. Why do I pay more?

Eric

*Because they're not the same distance – at least not the way we measure it. Our zones are set in five-mile increments based on the distance of the station from the line's downtown Chicago terminus. West Chicago is 29.8 miles from Ogilvie, just barely staying in Zone F. Route 59 is 31.6 miles from Union Station, putting it in the next zone, Zone G.*

### How 'bout some tunes?

I would like to suggest that you guys put light music in the background so people don't listen in on my phone conversations. Not to mention sometimes I don't like to listen to the conversation of the person next to me. Music would drown out the background noise and doctors say it is soothing to the brain at the end of the day. If you had to bump up the rates I wouldn't be offended as I know it probably would cost money.

Rick

*Thanks for the suggestion. But we bet the vast majority of our riders would object to having music piped onto the trains. And they'd object even more if they had to pay for it.*

### No regulation

I am very pleased with the service on the Rock Island except for one area – heating and cooling. I'm wondering why it is so difficult to regulate the heat and air conditioning on the trains. During the summer the A/C is so cold I

need a jacket to wear on the train and take it off when I get off the train. It is very cold – 55 degrees. It seems to be a waste of energy.

In the winter there are some trains that are stifling hot and some that it seems the A/C is on. Not only do you need to dress for the weather you need to dress for the train.

Mark

*We have fixed temperature settings at 72 degrees for air conditioning in the summer months and 68 degrees for heat during the fall and winter. If there is an issue with the temperature in a particular car, please don't hesitate to bring it to the attention of the conductor. They can't adjust the thermostat, but they can alert our mechanical department if the heating or A/C is malfunctioning.*

### No gripes here

I just wanted to write to say that while there was a problem with the Metra Flossmoor zone train in December (something about a wire), and we had to be let off at Hazel Crest and wait for another train, the train personnel were courteous, concerned and very helpful. The train came quickly (I think it was the next University Park train) and all 200 of us found room on it. I am new to commuting and I found this very refreshing.

Eleanor

*Thanks for your kind words and understanding. And thanks for riding Metra.*

### Electric cars coming?

I had read in a previous OTBL that the entire electric fleet is being replaced. Is there a time frame that we could see the new trains in service? Based on the first set of 26 cars and how they came into service, I would think that fourth quarter next year wouldn't be out

of line, but would be interested to know if that's right.

Frank

*We remain committed to replacing that fleet as soon as the state provides us money from the bond program to do so. However, we don't know, at this point, how soon that money will reach us. We'll provide updates as soon as we can in On the Bi-Level.*

### No college discount?

I am sure Metra is asked this question quite often but I have not seen an answer. Why do you offer a discount to high school students but does not offer discount rates to college students? It just does not seem right to me considering high school students obviously do not ride the train as much as a college student traveling to school daily would and does.

Amanda

*We offer the discount to high school students because the state has historically helped us pay for the cost of doing so. The state's reimbursement guidelines define students as K through 12. Therefore, we would not get any reimbursement if we were to extend the break to college students, and so we simply can't afford to do it. It would also be difficult to determine which college student should get the break.*

### Yes, we always try

Announcement heard this morning on UP North: "Train Number 308 is operating six to eight minutes late due to accommodating passengers." I thought Metra always tried to accommodate riders. Or maybe that means the riders were trying to be helpful to Metra?

*That's a good one. We probably meant we were accommodating more passengers than usual.*

# 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

## Pregnant pause

What was with those two responses from the obviously bitter women regarding the pregnant woman trying to find a seat? I am a man and am always willing to give mine up to anyone who needs it.

Dave

There will come a time in everyone’s life when they will need or want the general population to show them courtesy and understanding, and that shouldn’t be too much to ask.

Kristen

I would gladly give up my seat to a pregnant woman. Not because I think she’s entitled and I certainly wouldn’t view her as disabled but simply because it’s a COMMON COURTESY!

Olga

*Lots of men and women wrote to take the side of being courteous. All were astounded by the responses we printed last month from women who thought the pregnant woman was being too demanding. We knew the majority of riders out there believe in good manners.*

## Thanks and credit

I would like to send a big thank you to the woman at the Schaumburg Milwaukee West station who came to my aid on Jan. 8. I had jury duty at the Daley Center, and only had \$2.45 on me. I completely forgot that Metra doesn’t take credit cards, CTA transit cards (which would be nice) or have ATMs in their stations. Embarrassed, I announced my situation to my fellow passengers standing in the waiting room, some who had been listening to what was



**Dude, use the sidewalk, would ya?**

happening. This kind woman I hadn’t even noticed came right up to me, handed me \$3 and walked off. I think that particularly when taking public transit, we try to keep to ourselves and tune out other people. It’s a nice reminder of our humanity when we acknowledge each other and help each other out when we’re in a bind. So, woman in Schaumburg, thank you again!

Andrea

*Consider her thanked. And, incidentally, 76 outlying Metra stations where agents are on duty (including Schaumburg) will begin accepting credit cards on Feb. 8. In addition, 14 Metra Electric stations will have new machines that take credit cards. All of our downtown stations started taking credit cards last month, and our website began taking them in September.*

## Force of habit

Can someone please tell me what is wrong with the commuters who ride the UP West to Glen Ellyn? Every evening they get off the train and cross over the sidewalk so they can walk to the street down the middle of the parking lot. Cars are trying to leave the lot but they can’t because these folks are stroll-

ing along seemingly unaware of where they are. In the winter, the sidewalk is almost always kept snow and ice free, but these people prefer to get in the way of cars so they can trudge through the unplowed slush of the parking lot. Then, once they get to the street, they go out of their way to avoid the crosswalk and have to jaywalk over to the parking area instead of using the crosswalk that is provided at the end of the nice, snow free sidewalk. Is it brain damage, people?

Phil

*It’s probably just habit. If they didn’t realize that their habit is your irritant, well, they know now. We’ll probably hear from them next month.*

## Complaint handled

About a month or so ago I called customer service to complain. The customer service rep was very empathetic but I did not expect anything to come of it. My particular beef was about patrons taking up the entire seat on the train and I thought I received a rude response from the conductor after I asked him to enforce the rule that folks should simply move their things off the seat as the train fills up.

I was surprised to get a return

call from a supervisor. I did not return the call but I thank him, anyway. I was also surprised to hear an announcement on my train that (to paraphrase) patrons should try to obey the rules of etiquette and reminded everyone that not all of us are comfortable with having to confront other riders. Bottom line is, I want to say Metra handled this very well and ever since my complaint, my morning train ride has been very pleasant. You guys didn’t have to take me seriously, but you did. I don’t wish to make a mountain out of a molehill, but it truly is the little things that count.

Maureen

*Customer service isn’t a little thing. We strive to respond to all complaints (and seathogging is a chronic one) and we’re glad to hear you are satisfied.*

## Rude behavior

I catch the SouthWest Service and am appalled at the rudeness of the passengers. The train becomes more crowded the closer it gets to downtown, and at the last stop (Wrightwood) there are no seats remaining and passengers must stand in the aisle or sit on the stairway. A regular rider (a very nice gentleman) was sitting on the bottom step of the stairway to the upper tier, when a very rude young man went up to the gentlemen and said “stairs are for walking, not sitting, so move it” and the gentleman moved so the rude man could proceed up to the second tier and sit down. The rest of us passengers within earshot couldn’t believe the rudeness! Wouldn’t an “excuse me, sir” have sufficed?

Debra

*You know the answer, and it’s yes.*

# Metra fights winter with snow plan

Since we're in the thick of winter with several weeks left of potential snowy weather (sorry, but it's true), we thought it would be a good idea to brief our riders about the steps we take to deal with a major snowstorm. Our plan relies heavily on gathering information, providing good communication and mobilizing our snow-fighting resources in a timely and effective manner.

The primary driver of the plan, of course, is the weather forecast. If it calls for more than six inches of snow, then we know we're going to need a stepped-up effort. We activate a snow command center and hold a conference call with all field directors and managers from our contract carriers, Union Pacific and BNSF. We also communicate with the area's freight railroads.

Since Metra serves such a large area – it's nearly the size of Connecticut – the actions we take can vary across the region.

Sometimes it's snowing to the north with rain or sunny skies to the south. At other times, it's stormier near Lake Michigan but not stormy to the west.

Following the conference call, our forces are dispatched to be in place as the storm starts. It's critical to be there early, because we can't afford to play catch-up. It's especially important to prevent snow from building up at our yards and interlockers, which are essential to operating reliably.

Depending on the storm's duration, Metra workers may be required to work long hours without being able to go home. We may decide to reserve rooms at hotels or motels to house our crews near key areas, because we don't want them to be late due to poor driving conditions. We also arrange to feed them so they can remain in place to keep battling the snowstorm.

We may also decide to

change certain operations. For instance, we may fuel our locomotives overnight at outlying locations. Fueling is normally done as part of the midday servicing routine. But because the locomotive must be disconnected from its cars to be fueled, doing that during winter storm conditions can take longer and cause yard congestion. And that, in turn, can delay timely dispatch of evening rush-hour trains.

Our snow plan also relies heavily on accurate field information being relayed to snow command and then to our riders. Our GPS system is a big help in giving us real-time information about every train operating, and we are getting ready to upgrade that system so it is even better.

To get information to our customers, we continuously advise them to check our website, sign up for e-mail alerts and listen to local TV and radio reports. For instance, we have been

sending systemwide alerts to riders whenever wintry weather threatens to disrupt our service, telling them to allow themselves extra time and to pay close attention to their e-mail and to our website in case there are problems. We think riders appreciate getting as much advance warning as possible during snowstorms.

We also rely on capital investments we have made to fight snow. These include hot-air blowers to keep the snow and ice out of critical switches, train de-icing equipment and fixed and portable electric generators to power our signals in case ComEd has problems. They also include plenty of snow plows and snow jets, which we use to help keep our yards clear.

We can't eliminate every snow-related delay. But our planning and our investments have made the system more reliable and our customers more informed.

## New Metra website is popular with riders

Metra's new and improved website has proven to be popular with passengers since it debuted last September.

The numbers tell the story:

- The site, [www.metrarail.com](http://www.metrarail.com), is getting about 32,000 unique visitors each day.
- The site is getting about 57 million hits each month.
- The total number of page views is about 3 million a month.
- More than 8,000 10-ride tickets and monthly passes are being ordered via the website each month.
- More than 26,000 people have established a "My Metra" account.

One of the main goals with

the website overhaul was to make it easier for riders to be alerted about service changes and disruptions. First, we post service alerts prominently on our homepage so that they can be found and read quickly and easily. Second, we e-mail the information to those riders who set up a "My Metra" account and asked to be alerted when their lines were affected.

For example, on Oct. 22 there was a major service disruption on Metra's Heritage Corridor and SouthWest Service lines as a result of a freight train derailment. On that day, there were more than 51,000 unique visitors, well exceeding the 32,000-per-

day average, as Metra customers looked for the latest information about the two lines. E-mails were also sent to passengers who requested them. One result is that a significant number of people chose to take the suggested alternative, the Rock Island District, that day.

Similarly, we used the website and service alerts to notify passengers about changes in service due to the Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's holidays. Alerts were sent to every "My Metra" account holder who requested e-mail notifications. And the website saw significant activity in the days leading up to the holidays.

For instance, the Wednesday before Thanksgiving saw the highest site traffic to date, with nearly 54,000 unique visitors.

The number of "My Metra" accounts has been growing each month. We added 4,000 in December and were on pace to add even more in January. Passengers are figuring out that the e-mailed alerts and advisories are a convenient and efficient way to stay up-to-date about service changes that could affect their commute.

Metra will soon debut a mobile website that will be easier to read with iPhones, Blackberries and other portable, web-enabled devices.

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