



Stations to accept credit cards

Metra riders can start giving us credit in 2010 – credit cards, that is. Metra will begin accepting credit cards at its downtown stations this month and at all other staffed stations and the 14 busiest Metra Electric stations in February.

Metra already accepts Visa, MasterCard, American Express and Discover cards on its website, www.metrarail.com, for monthly passes and 10-ride ticket

purchases. The option has been popular with riders since it debuted with the new Metra website on Sept. 9. Metra encourages riders to use the website to order tickets in order to eliminate waiting at the stations.

Passengers will be able to buy most kinds of tickets with a credit card at our stations.

The acceptance of credit cards on the Metra system will be phased in on the following schedule:

Jan. 11: LaSalle Street Station, Millennium Station and Van Buren

Station.

Jan. 18: Chicago Union Station and Ogilvie Transportation Center.

Feb. 8: At all 76 outlying Metra stations where an

agent is on duty and from new vending machines at the 14 busiest Metra Electric District stations. (Those credit card vending machines will be in addition to the cash-based machines that are already in place along the line.)

Please see the accompanying list of stations where credit cards will be accepted from agents or new credit-card vending machines starting this year.

Stations with agents:

UP North

Davis St./Evanston
Central St./Evanston
Wilmette
Kenilworth
Winnetka
Hubbard Woods
Glencoe
Highland Park
Lake Forest
Lake Bluff
Waukegan

Milwaukee North

Morton Grove
Glenview
Northbrook
Lake Cook Rd.
Deerfield
Libertyville
Grayslake
Round Lake
Fox Lake

UP Northwest

Park Ridge
Des Plaines

Mount Prospect
Arlington Heights
Arlington Park
Palatine
Barrington
Cary
Crystal Lake
Harvard

Milwaukee West

Franklin Park
Bensenville
Itasca
Roselle
Schaumburg
Hanover Park
Bartlett
Elgin

UP West

Oak Park
Elmhurst
Villa Park
Lombard
Glen Ellyn
College Avenue
Wheaton
Geneva

BNSF

99th St.
103rd St.
111th St.

SouthWest Service
153rd (Orland Park)

Metra Electric
55th/56th/57th

Metra Electric stations with new machines:
51st/53rd St./Hyde Park
55th/56th/57th St.
115th St./Kensington
Ivanhoe
147th St./Sibley Blvd.
Harvey
Calumet
Homewood
Flossmoor
211th St./Lincoln Hwy.
Matteson
Richton Park
University Park
93rd St./South Chicago

Rock Island

Blue Island/Vermont St.
Midlothian
Oak Forest
Oak Park Ave./Tinley Park
80th Ave./Tinley Park
Mokena
New Lenox
Joliet
91st St.
95th St.



SOUNDING BOARD

Got a question? We've got an answer

Sidewalks sidetracked

When will the sidewalk construction outside the Union Station Madison Street entrance be finished? What was the goal for this construction, other than being a barrier to commuters?

Jeff

That wasn't a Metra project, but we're happy to tell you anyway that the work should be done by now. The project was carried out by the owners of the Riverside Plaza buildings, who are obligated to provide a watertight covering over Union Station tracks. The job included work on the expansion joints that run along the sidewalks on Madison, Monroe and Adams between Canal St. and the

Chicago River, and it took a bit longer than normal because the work crossed multiple tracks and so had to be done in stages. (We couldn't close all the tracks at once, obviously.)

We're working on it

Your new website is not functional for mobile devices. When will this be fixed? It is making my use of Metra significantly decline due to this.

George

We know, we're working on it. We now expect the mobile site to be ready in the first quarter of 2010.

Heating issue

The train car I have been sitting in this week has had no heat.

The conductor only said "I guess it doesn't work." The car I was sitting in was the second set of doors from the front, second half of the train car. Just letting you know so someone can look into it and fix it.

Steven

We figured out which car you meant and fixed the heaters.

Crowded BNSF

What is it that you all don't get about the crowded trains from Naperville to Union Station? Is it really necessary to pick up Aurora, Rt. 59 and Naperville at the same time? I stand more than I sit. There are so many people that complain about this, surely you could work this out.

Marlene

We get that the trains are crowded. But we don't have any extra rolling stock to add trains to the route, which is what we'd need to do to bypass the stations you mentioned. (Another train would have to pick riders up at those stations.) The state has been without a capital bond program for more than five years, which means we've been without money to buy more rolling stock. Now we have to play catch up.

One thing we are doing that will help BNSF crowding is that we are upgrading the UP West line so that it can operate much more like the BNSF line. When that's done in a couple years, we believe many west suburban riders who now use the BNSF will migrate to the UP West, freeing up space on the BNSF.

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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METRA PASSENGERS

Providing the safest, most secure travel environment is Metra's highest priority. Passengers can help keep Metra safe and secure by reporting unattended packages and suspicious activity. **Never assume someone else will make the call.**

**IF YOU SEE SOMETHING,
SAY SOMETHING**

**Metra Passengers Call
Metra Police 312-322-2800**

**Union Pacific Passengers Call
UP Police 888-877-7267**

**Burlington Northern Passengers Call
BN Police 800-832-5452**



Let's count on each other for a safe ride

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

Wrongly accusatory

To a UP North rider whose name I didn’t get. ...I asked you if you’d found an iPod Shuffle on the platform. You said no, but I thought the headphones in the outer pocket of your bag looked like mine, and I asked you to take them out so I could see they were not mine.

You obliged, but I felt lousy after the encounter. (They were clearly not mine, and I practically accused you of stealing – my bad.)

I’ve since found my shuffle and headphones. They never made it to the platform and clearly neither you nor any other UP North rider picked them up. Really sorry about that,

Ravenswood (Re)Shuffler

We hope your innocent suspect sees your apology. Thanks for sending it.

Faith restored

My faith in humanity was restored by the kind couple who found my lost Blackberry and saw it safely into the hands of a conductor. All back safe and sound now. For all the loutish behavior people write in about (and there’s plenty), there are still good eggs out there!

Tom

We’ve always said it’s the bad eggs, or rotten apples, or black sheep, whatever, that spoil things for everyone. We love all our good eggs.

Show a little patience

I take the 6 p.m. BNSF train to Brookfield every evening. I stand in the vestibule, out of everyone’s way, listening to my iPod, and I watch many people



He didn’t do it.

each evening. I also get an opportunity to watch the train conductors operate the lift for those in wheelchairs, or using walkers and/or need assistance getting up the stairs onto the train. I also have the luxury of observing some very mean people, who must be oblivious to the fact that the lift is being used to assist someone. They literally step over and walk past the train conductor, in a hurry to get to “their” seat. Not only is this very rude and inconsiderate to the train conductor, but it’s also extremely rude and inconsiderate to the passenger utilizing the lift. Ladies and gentlemen, you do this every evening and you know who you are! Stop it! Seriously, people, you need to remember that you are fortunate to be able to walk unassisted. Be thankful for that and start being a little nicer to others!

Dawn

A good reminder for everyone in a rush.

Good manners count

I’ve been a regular Metra rider for over 20 years and normally sit in the upper level. As I make

my way past others sitting in the upper level to enter or exit a car I will always say “pardon me” or “excuse me.” It surprises me how many people do not do this. Do people generally not know proper manners? Are they embarrassed? Scared? Proud? It is important to treat others with respect and try to be polite. I teach my children to do the same and if there is an instance where one is not sure how to react to a situation, always err on the side of presenting good manners.

Looking for an Excuse Me

We’ve said it before: good manners can’t be legislated. But bad ones can be publicized!

No sympathy here

A big BOO HOO to Princess Kate, the pregnant passenger who was very upset that no one offered their seat to her. My my, since when was pregnancy such an enormous disability issue? You seemed to be able to muster the strength to walk two full car lengths to take note of the seating situation; and you sound a little irate that nobody literally jumped up to rescue you by offering their

seat. Sorry, toots, this was a situation you chose to be in ... there are people out there who can’t have kids, such as me, and I’m NOT going to give you my seat. Tough out the discomfort for nine months. Some people will never experience it.

Liz

This is for Kate and all other pregnant women who whine about not being offered seats on public transportation. They somehow feel they are more entitled to a seat that anyone else, and every seated passenger should feel guilty for not jumping up and falling all over each other giving up their seat. Yes, if would be courteous if someone offered their seat, but it’s certainly not mandatory. How are we supposed to know you are pregnant and don’t just have a large stomach? Perhaps you should either walk through the car with a sign, make an announcement when you enter a car or simply walk up to someone and tell them to get up. Also, the handicapped seats are designated for “customers with disabilities.” As far as I know, being pregnant is NOT a disability or a handicap. It’s also very possible the seated passengers might have a disability that is not obvious.

If the roles were reversed and you saw a woman you *thought* was pregnant, how likely would you be to offer a seat?

Adrienne

We got a few letters in response to Kate. All of them were from women. All of them were entirely unsympathetic to her plight. But we don’t think Kate was wrong to expect a little courtesy. We all should expect it, and give it, too.

Winter Travel Notes

New fare structure starts Feb. 1

Metra's new fare structure begins Feb. 1 - but most riders won't be affected because the majority use 10-ride tickets and monthly passes, and those fares won't change. One-way fares are increasing about 6 percent, an average of about 30 cents a ticket. Weekend fares are increasing to \$7 from \$5, the first increase in the existence of the weekend fare program, which began in May 1991. To encourage riders to buy tickets at stations and over the Internet, *Metra is increasing the penalty for on-board purchases to \$3 from \$2.* That penalty is not assessed on passengers who board at unmanned stations. Metra also has adopted a variety of cost-containment measures that saved about \$4 million in administrative costs, including leaving about 150 positions unfilled, freezing management salaries and asking non-union employees to pay more for their health insurance.

Metra is ready for winter

Metra's winter weather plan is put into action whenever the area is expected to have a significant snowfall. The plan puts extra workers in the field to clear station platforms and nearby areas and to keep critical switches clear of snow and ice. It also calls for maintaining constant and timely communication with our riders, which is done

through e-mail alerts, our website, stations and train announcements, TV and radio reports and direct communication with station and train personnel. We remind our riders that if a storm hits before the evening rush hour and your office releases you early, simply board the first train to your destination. We cannot advance the rush hour because trains are being serviced and crews are off duty. Please remember to allow extra time to get to your station and use extra caution on roads, parking lots, sidewalks and platforms

French Market celebrates grand opening

The long-awaited Chicago French Market, the cornerstone of the MetraMarket development at the Ogilvie Transportation Center, celebrated its grand opening on Dec. 4. Among those who attended the event were Mayor Richard M. Daley, Metra Chairman Carole Doris and other board members, Metra Executive Director Philip Pagano, Ald. Brendan Reilly (42nd), U.S. Equities CEO Bob Wislow and members of the Bensidoun family, the French family that is running the market. Metra worked with U.S. Equities, the Bensidouns and the city of Chicago to develop the space, which had previously been an underused storage/parking facility. The public/private partnership is expected to generate \$48 million to \$40 million in profits for Metra over the next 25 years. Photos of the event are at www.metrarail.com.

Jill Talabay
MBA online



"The online courses were great...and I was very busy at that time: I was planning a wedding, my husband and I were buying our first house, and we were still able to travel. I could check the postings and respond right away. It was very convenient."

Groups forming now
for winter 2010.

NLU
I got it here.