

**CLIFF NOTES****Take another look at our evolving site**

For those of you who haven't taken a spin around Metra's website lately, we'd like you to have another look.

It's been more than two years since the redesigned *www.metrarail.com* was unveiled on 9/9/09. Since then we've been



Alex Clifford
Metra CEO

adding features here and there, some of them to increase the site's usefulness and others to increase accountability and transpar-

ency at Metra. Our goal is to make it as easy as possible for our riders to find the information they need.

With the redesign, of course, we made it possible for the first

time for you to buy tickets over the Internet. We also added the ability for you to sign up to receive alerts about service issues on your line or throughout the Metra system. (We are still pushing riders to sign up for alerts; go to the website or scan the QR code at the end of this column to find our sign-up page.) We also display those alerts prominently on the homepage.

And, of course, we provided plenty of information about fares, policies, stations, accessibility, leadership and just about anything else that a new or veteran rider would need.

Since then, however, we've been constantly tinkering with the site to make it even better. For instance, one change

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**Make way for Mrs. Claus**

Mrs. Claus escorts some of the 50 sick children from Chicago area children's hospitals who took a fantasy train ride to the North Pole – actually the UP Northwest from Des Plaines to Harvard. The trip, which culminated with a visit with Santa himself, was organized by Operation North Pole, an all-volunteer, tax-exempt charity that provides a fantasy experience during the holiday season to children who suffer life-threatening illnesses.

Metra's fare increase begins Feb. 1. The cost of all ticket types, including one-way fares, 10-ride tickets and monthly passes, will increase. The increases also apply to reduced fares. The new fare structure can be viewed at www.metrarail.com under "Good to Know." Also, remember that one-way and 10-ride tickets purchased at the current rate from Nov. 12 through Jan. 31, 2012, will be valid for travel only through Feb. 29, 2012.

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 cost of Link-Up tickets is set at \$45, pending board approval.
- The cost of PlusBus tickets is set at \$30, pending board approval.
- Young adult fares on weekends and holidays will be eliminated.



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

Turnstilish

I notice a lot of notices about passengers who didn't pay because the conductor didn't reach them. I don't understand why Metra can't bypass this by having passengers pay before they get on the train like at the CTA stations?

Lindsay

The difference is that the CTA has a closed system. All its stations were built so that you cannot enter them without going through a turnstile. Our stations are completely open, at ground level, and to enclose them retroactively would be incredibly expensive. We would have to completely surround them with fences or walls of some sort so that you could only get on the platforms through turnstiles. (The only line where it would be easier would be the Metra Electric, which once had turnstiles.)

In addition, our fares are based on the distance traveled. We need to account for where a passenger boarded as well as where that passenger got off.

Having said that, we are working with the RTA, CTA and Pace on a universal fare card that riders will be able to use on all systems. There are a lot of details to work out but the new card will probably allow for some way to scan them when you are getting on and off a train. We aim to have that worked out by 2015.

Wish upon a STAR

Are there any plans for a north-south route linking the western suburbs, possibly Schaumburg or Palatine with Joliet?

Nicholas

We have long-range plans to do that with a route we've called the STAR line. You can read more about it at metraconnects.com or metrarail.com. One of the things

we want to do this year is craft a strategic plan to identify and prioritize our capital needs. Unfortunately, due to funding shortfalls that we expect to have even under optimistic estimates, those priorities for now likely will be maintaining our system in a state of good repair and not expansion projects like the STAR line.

Your ad goes here

Talking to many passengers, we ALL feel Metra is missing out on advertising in and on the trains to keep fares low! There is so much space to utilize to advertise on and we wouldn't mind seeing it in/on the trains to keep fares low! WHY didn't Metra investigate this area before raising rates?

Brian

We constantly try to raise as much revenue from ads (and other sources) as possible and we will continue to do so. We can't cover our large deficit with ads but we can offset it as much as possible. We sell ads for our trains and have been testing interior train wraps. We also offer an exterior wrap. We accept ads on our website, our timetables and even this newsletter. And we recently hired a firm to evaluate sponsors for the Rock Island Line, LaSalle St. Station and uniforms. Anyone interested in advertising should look at the notice on Page 4.

MDW recovery

On Nov. 4, I happened to be on the first outbound Milwaukee West train able to continue past Bartlett. As we slowly went past the accident site I was able to see the derailed cars. Something I will not soon forget. I was in awe that the track was open. To all the crews I say thank you. A truly herculean effort to make the repairs that quickly.

Robert

On behalf of the entire Metra team, thank you very much. We would also praise the great work of the emergency responders from Elgin and Bartlett and other communities, as well as the cooperation we received from CN.

Picking nits

I have noticed a grammar error on your Quiet Car poster ("Need some quiet time? Try a Quiet Car"). In the second sentence of the second paragraph, you have: "On trains with 5 cars or less...". This should read: "...5 cars or fewer...". Cars are "count nouns" (i.e. a noun that can be counted individually), as opposed to "mass nouns". Additionally, there are two errors in the second paragraph on your "Be fair, pay the fair" poster: "...to do a better job in collecting...", and, "...asking for your help in making...". A person can't help "in" something, but can help "with" something, so these should read, "...to do a better job with collecting...", and, "...asking for your help with making...". Thank you again for your initiatives, as well as your "On the Bi-Level" to keep us aware of them. Please pay attention, though, to how you deliver your messages so that you maintain the credibility you deserve!

Jason

Thanks for your help in keeping us on our toes. We promise to limit our mistakes to three or less.

Not so bad

Congratulations to whomever is writing the answers, they are tactful, to the point and sometimes quite amusing. I enjoy reading them.

Thomas

Sometimes? Thanks, but apparently we need to work on our grammar skills (see above).

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

Alert! Alert!

Please alert fellow ignorant riders that it is very rude to sit next to a person quietly reading and then proceed to yammer on your phone, talk to the person next to you, or loudly slurp your coffee.

Yes, all of these have happened to me and I have actually excused myself to get up and stand or find another seat rather than put up with their rudeness.

Melissa

We’ve been alerting people about rude behavior for more than 25 years now. As Cecil Adams says in The Straight Dope, it’s taking longer than we thought.

Seat-hogging part 222

I’d like to offer another perspective to Karen’s concern about aisle-seat-sitters. Although some might use this as a seat-hogging tactic, I can tell you that I choose the aisle for other reasons. On countless previous occasions I have been trapped at a window seat by an aisle-seat sleeper who is difficult to wake up, or someone who is hesitant to step into a crowded aisle (allowing me to get out at my stop), or a grouch who is visibly disgruntled for having to put away their newspaper, iPad, laptop, breakfast, makeup, etc., when I choose to get up. I will ALWAYS willingly avail the window seat to anyone who wants it. Doing so also allows me the ability to get up and out whenever I may have to step into the vestibule of the Quiet Car to take a phone call.

Steve

For BNSF rider Karen – and “Sound Off” – taking an aisle seat is not “just another variation



of the ole’ seat-hogging theme.” Passengers often seek aisle seats for the same reasons they seek them on planes, e.g., more room for elbows and crossed legs. Being able to choose an aisle (or window) seat is one reward for boarding early.

Jeffrey

We heard from a handful of riders who also prefer the aisle seat for similar reasons. As long as they willingly move for someone wanting to sit down in the window seat, and don’t block the window seat with their belongings, the Court of Seat Sitting hereby declares the practice acceptable. But don’t do it just to have two seats.

For the birds

I thought I’d seen it all. To the filthy man in the gray baseball cap that says “CHIEF” over skull & crossbones on the Metra Electric out of Millennium Station: to sit there and chew sunflower seeds like a cow is one thing (sickening to watch). But do we have to watch you spit the casings into a paper cup like you were chewing tobacco? I sat upstairs ABOVE you get-

ting a bird’s-eye view of the disgusting contents of your cup, not to mention seeing you spit not once, not twice, but like 40 times during the ride. The train is packed moron, get it together ‘Mr. Manners!’ Cannot believe you wouldn’t be self-conscious of what all others around you are thinking of you. You just exited at Ashland Avenue. (Here’s a hint: I’m the one that yelled out, “Don’t forget to take your SPIT CUP with you, sicko!”) Take it home to your family; they HAVE to deal with you. We shouldn’t have to. Seriously... who raised you?

Leanne

Leanne conveniently attached a photo “for those at Metra who have already eaten.” We are using a different one that’s not so icky.

Get a room

I cannot even believe that as an adult I am writing about PDA: Public Display of Affection. This was the term we used in high school when couples were displaying too much love to one another between classes. I am a regular on the BNSF. My friends

and I cringe whenever we see a certain couple coming. They sit in a four-seater, put their feet on the seat (once when told by a conductor not to do so, the man took off his shoe and then put his dirty sock on the seat – gross), and the worst part of it all is that they openly display affection to one another by necking, kissing, and putting hands where they should not go in public. At first, we all assumed they were having an affair, but now we actually think they are married (they get off at the middle stop and get in the same car). I think it is wonderful that at their age they have such a robust marriage, but I would prefer them keeping it in the bedroom. I don’t enjoy being totally uncomfortable on my train ride home.

Danielle

You could look on the bright side and think about the free show they are providing...

Smelly thoughts

Why do people put on so much cologne and perfume that the rest of us gag and our eyes water all the way to downtown? Last week a pregnant woman threw up from the perfume smell, and a guy had an asthma attack. This morning two women sat in front of me tossing their hair around and reeking of two different kinds of perfume. The woman next to me had to cover her face with her scarf. I wished I could do the same. Oh, and thanks for the hair that wafted back on the perfume smog cloud and landed on my coffee cup.

Curtis

In case of emergency, you are authorized to use this newsletter as a fan.

Winter Travel Notes

2012 Metra Board meeting dates set

The Metra Board of Directors meets once a month on the second or third Friday of the month. All meetings begin at 9 a.m. and are held at Metra headquarters at 547 W. Jackson near Union Station. Individuals wishing to address the board at a meeting need to complete a public comment form at a table in the Board Room at the beginning of the meeting. Remarks should be confined to topics or activities that fall within the statutory authority of Metra. The 2012 meeting dates are Jan. 20, Feb. 17, March 16, April 13, May 11, June 15, July 13, August 17, Sept. 14, Oct. 12, Nov. 16 and Dec. 14. The agenda for each meeting is posted on our website as soon as it becomes available, and meeting minutes are posted as soon as the board approves them.

We're the tops in Google searches

For the second straight year, Metra ranked number one on the list of the most popular Google search terms by Chicagoans. Google's Zeitgeist 2011 report detailed the most popular search terms on its Internet search engine globally and locally. While many of the top searches in the U.S. were focused on pop culture and technology (Rebecca Black, iPhone 5, etc.), residents of the Windy City were fo-

cused on transit and the news, with Metra and the CTA's Bus Tracker taking the number one and two spots and the Chicago Tribune coming in at number three. The rest of Chicago's top ten Google searches were in descending order: Chicago Public Library, Chicago breaking news, Chicago Park District, ABC 7 Chicago, Illinois Lottery, Northwestern Memorial Hospital and CTA Trip Planner.

New restaurant slated for MetraMarket

Metra commuters and residents of the West Loop will soon be able to relax and unwind from the day when a new sit-down restaurant opens for business in MetraMarket at the Ogilvie Transportation Center. U.S. Equities, the developer of MetraMarket, announced in early December that O'Vie Bar & Grill will lease nearly 13,000 square feet at the northeast corner of Randolph and Canal streets. The restaurant, which is scheduled to open in spring 2012, will feature a deli, sports bar and private dining. MetraMarket opened its doors in 2008 and features a CVS/Pharmacy and Chicago French Market—the city's first year-round, European-inspired fresh food market. In addition to O'Vie Bar and Grill, a smaller pizza restaurant, Stazione Napoli, is due to open at the station early next year.

Web

(Continued from Page 1)

we made was to create and prominently display a "Contact Us" link on our homepage with various ways to get in touch with Metra for various reasons. The page lists phone numbers for several Metra departments and offices, including the Lost and Found offices for all downtown stations. And it provides a way to contact us via email with general

dom of Information Act request with us. We also provide the email addresses of several Metra workers who could directly respond to inquiries about different subjects. And it contains links to important documents, Metra history, Metra facts and our new organizational chart. It also has links to reports from various consultants that were hired to analyze and improve Metra policies and procedures.

Also on the site, you can find the most recent monthly rider-

those interested in working at Metra. All our job vacancies are posted online, and someone looking to work here can submit a job interest form to us.

If you're a contractor who wants to do business with Metra, we have a section that lists all the invitations for bid and requests for proposals currently being advertised by Metra. It also lists recent procurement awards.

Businesses also can create "My Metra for Business" accounts to enable them to download bids and proposals and receive notifications about any changes. Finally, businesses can register as a Metra vendor so they are included in our vendor database and can be notified when we have an invitation for bid or request for proposal that concerns them.

Those of you who view our site on your smartphone know that we also have a mobile website that streamlines the informa-

tion that is most useful to those on the go. We tried to make it as easy as possible to get schedule information and service alerts. As I told you last month, we will soon be adding a "train tracker" feature that will tell you exactly when the next train will arrive at your station.

We'll continue to change and adapt our website to make it better and better. We hope you will make full use of it to improve your travel experience and learn all you can about Metra.

You can now follow me on Twitter @MetraCEO.



questions.

In a similar vein, we've created a page called "Obtaining records from Metra." That page lists various ways to file a Free-

ship statistics as well as the most recent monthly on-time performance reports, which break down the data by individual line.

Another new feature aids

Interested in advertising in On the Bi-Level?

E-mail onthebilevel@metrarr.com.

Interested in advertising in Metra timetables, trains, stations, website or mail?

E-mail marketing@metrarr.com