



Metra has busy day as Hawks fans honor team

The victory parade and rally for the Chicago Blackhawks on June 11 turned out to be one of the busiest days in Metra history, if not the busiest.

Metra typically sees its greatest number of passengers each year on July 3, when the city of Chicago has traditionally held its Independence Day fireworks show. (That show has been canceled this year; see accompanying story.) While the number of passengers we serve on that day can vary, depending on the day of the week that July 3 falls on, the festivities can add more than 100,000 passenger trips to the 300,000 or so passenger trips we provide on an average weekday.

The busiest July 3 in the last 10 years, for instance, was in 2007, when July 3 fell on a Tuesday. On that day, Metra provided 429,000 passenger trips.

Although the final tally is not in, we believe we exceeded that number on June 11 – and we had to scramble to do so. Metra planned several inbound and outbound extra trains throughout the system to accommodate a crowd that the city predicted would be about 350,000 people. In the end, however, about 2 million people attended, according to city esti-

(Continued on Page 4)



Service changes for the holiday weekend

The regular Metra schedule will be modified or supplemented to accommodate different demands for service during the upcoming Fourth of July holiday weekend.

On Friday, July 2, Metra will operate a special “early quit” schedule for the numerous commuters who typically leave their offices earlier than usual in advance of a three-day weekend. The modified schedule includes some extra trains and some trains being moved from the rush hour to earlier in the afternoon. For the full roundup of changes, go to www.metrarail.com.

Metra’s July 3 schedule will be considerably different from prior years because the city of Chicago has canceled its traditional July 3 fireworks show. Instead, the Taste of Chicago will close at 7 p.m. and there will be no fireworks at Grant Park. In addition, Navy Pier has canceled its usual Saturday night fireworks. There will be no need, therefore, for the numerous extra trains that Metra typically operates after the fireworks show.

Given the changes this year, Metra will operate a regular Saturday schedule on July 3, with

some additional service to handle the Taste of Chicago crowds. That information is also available at www.metrarail.com.

On Sunday, July 4, Chicago will hold three separate fireworks shows along the lakefront: one at Montrose, one at Navy Pier, and one at 63rd. Metra will operate extra service that day to handle crowds from the Taste of Chicago and the Navy Pier fireworks show. Outbound extras will depart at about 6:30 p.m. for people attending the Taste, which closes at 6 p.m. More outbound extras will operate after the Navy Pier fireworks. A roundup of those extras can be found at www.metrarail.com.

For the fireworks show at 63rd, Metra Electric trains will be available after the show at 55th/56th/57th St. Station. To help manage the crowds, the stations at 59th and 63rd will be closed from 6 p.m. to midnight.

On Monday, July 5, Metra will operate a Sunday/Holiday schedule in observance of Independence Day. Regular weekday Metra service will resume July 6.



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

Better keep looking

In your May edition a letter from Charles asked for more trains to help with the increased traffic on the UP West Line since construction began on the Eisenhower/I-290. You pleaded a lack of cars.

GREAT NEWS. I have found seven cars for you – enough for an extra morning rush hour train, or to add an extra car to seven morning rush hour trains.

Those cars are on Train No. 13, departing Ogilvie at 5:53 a.m. arriving in Elburn at 7:21 a.m. Every morning Train No. 13 operates with nine cars. Seven of the nine cars are dark, and the last two are open for passenger use. Those seven unused cars can be repositioned overnight in Elburn for additional morning inbound capacity. What about that?

Donald

If only it were that simple. Train No. 13 takes those cars to Elburn and immediately turns around as Train No. 36. That train carries nearly 1,500 passengers a day – which means it is nearly at its capacity. We can't use any of them for an extra train (which would still need an extra locomotive) or to add cars to an existing train.

We really are short of cars.

SWS delays

I take the SouthWest Service train to work and the week of June 1 the train was about 20 minutes late every day arriving to Union Station. The message said it was due to freight train interference, but the freight train was going in the opposite direction on another track. Why do we have to stop for a train going in the opposite direction on another track? It would seem as if this has nothing to do with our train.

Wanda

To the east of Ashburn is a single track. So when a freight train is coming from the opposite direction, we must wait for it to clear the single track before we can go the other way on that same track.

80th Ave. update

I read your June issue and all the construction projects you named. What is happening to the Rock Island Metra station at Tinley Park/80th Ave.? I thought that project was on schedule for this summer.

We didn't include that one because that project is being done by Tinley Park. But you are correct, Tinley Park is looking at starting in late summer or early fall.

Crazy behavior

Today while awaiting for the Heritage Corridor 6:57 a.m. Summit stop I witnessed several women climbing across the freight train that was blocking the crosswalk to platform number 1.

An announcement came over the speakers that we would be boarding from platform number 1.

Obviously the stopped freight trade blocked commuters from crossing over to platform number 1. My only thought was that I would call my boss and let her know I'd be late coming into the office.

However, a group of several women decided to climb onto and in between two of the freight cars in order cross over to platform number 1. I couldn't believe what I was seeing! Any number of things could have happened to these women. I would love to have these pictures posted in *On The Bi-Level* in order for people to see the lack of judgement that people have when trying to make a train.

Seriously, is this action taken

really worth risking life and limb?

The pictures have not been altered and were taken from the rear window from within my car using my cell phone camera.

Bridget

We're not using the pictures because they wouldn't reproduce too well here, but rest assured, they do show some crazy behavior. We shudder to think what could have happened if that freight train had suddenly started moving. It should go without saying that passengers should not be doing this.

Crowded platform

I take the 412 into the Rock Island station, and it seems to me to be an awfully full train, yet every morning it comes into the station on one of the narrowest platforms. Why could such a full train not come in on one of the center tracks where the platforms are wider and would allow a quicker exit rather than the funeral march we currently have to endure on the narrower platform?

Melody

At that time of day, all our platforms are in use, so we can't switch to a different one.

Apologies all around

I want to send my most sincere apologies to the crew on the North Central Service train that runs express through Mont Clare at 8:15 am each morning. I made a horrible decision to run through the tracks when the train was just around the corner, thinking it was my train pulling in. I felt HORRIBLE afterwards just thinking what could have happened to me and what the crew would have gone through and witnessed. I will never, ever do it again.

Agnes

Apology accepted, 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

Bike etiquette

I’m writing to give my two cents as a daily Metra commuter with a bicycle. There are things bikers and non-bikers should keep in mind about bicycles on trains. For bikers, I would ask us all to read and understand Metra’s guidelines for bikes on trains (found on a train schedule or at www.metrarail.com). Never use a lock to secure your bike – get a bungee cord at a hardware or auto parts store. Stay near your bike and be available to swap position in case your bike is on top of someone else’s who needs to disembark. I can’t believe I need to say this, but I’ve seen riders who leave the train car that their bike is in. Be communicative and courteous to riders, other bikers, and the conductor (never argue with the conductor!), and don’t cut in front of fellow riders when getting on or off the train. We need to make sure the bikers’ rap doesn’t get any worse than it is.

Finally, to non-bikers, please allow us some courtesy as well – bikers are just interested in getting a little free exercise, helping the environment, saving gas money, or legitimately need the bike for lack of a car or convenient public transportation to get to work. We might be temporarily unwieldy sometimes, or be taking up a couple extra seats, but we hope sharing the train is not a big deal and we (at least I) promise to try to be as courteous as possible and ask for the same.

John

Thanks for the timely reminders, as cycling season is in full swing. We especially remind riders to familiarize themselves with the blackout dates for bikes, which include the remaining



days of the Taste of Chicago (through July 4), Lollapalooza (August 6 - 8) and the Air & Water Show (August 14 & 15).

Too little/too much info

I was riding the UP West train from Chicago to Glen Ellyn on a middle car upstairs and I left my newly purchased 10-ride with only one hole punched. I was wondering if anyone found it and turned it in or if I could get a refund or something, seeing as that those are quite an investment and I just got it. Any help would be appreciated.

Cody

Sorry, we can’t refund lost tickets. Chances are someone just picked it up for their own use.

Does it make a difference if it was definitely not capable of being picked up by someone? Because it’s actually a funny/weird story I didn’t bother to elaborate on. I had my ticket in my front pocket and took it out to put in my back pocket and I dropped it in the train toilet and there was no way I was reaching in to get it. I probably should have mentioned that. If that changes anything please let me know.

Thanks again. :)

Cody

Yeah, it kinda makes a difference. Yes, you probably should have mentioned that. And yes, that does indeed change something. If you weren’t willing to pluck it out, why would you think anyone else would pluck it out and (yuck!) turn it in?

More on stair pigeons

I am writing in response to the letter about the stair pigeons in the May 2010 issue. You must not ride the SouthWest Service train where there are always seats available towards the back of the train. But the stair pigeons don’t want to walk towards the back of the train, or lose their place at the front of the line when the train pulls into the station. Maybe your response would not have been so polite if you realized that the stair pigeons have a new use for your newsletter: they open it up and sit on it so that they don’t dirty their clothes. The worst part is that they don’t even bother to pick the paper up off the step when they stand up to leave.

Tom

And here we thought riders loved us for our wit. How’s this:

stair pigeons, find a seat. Stop blocking the steps. And if you have to sit on something, may we suggest the Sun-Times?

Unsightly, Part 3

Thank you for publishing my letter in your May issue. If you’ll recall, I’m the one who said Metra should encourage property-owners with railroad-adjacent homes to keep their property neat and tidy. Unfortunately, judging by Vicki’s response in your June issue, it seems my words have been woefully misinterpreted. Clearly, my letter was intended as a parody of the outrageous and frivolous complaints which routinely appear here. No rational person could seriously think that Metra could control the appearance of people’s private property. Come on, Vicki! Lighten up! There is some validity to my original letter, however. I mean, have you seen some of these yards? Seriously, it looks like a flea market threw up! Have some self-respect, homeowners! You’re on display every time a train passes! But of course I recognize that this is not Metra’s responsibility, no more so than encouraging passengers who insist on carrying on loud conversations to at least say something witty now and again. I wish you could, but I know you can’t.

By the way, please let Vicki know that I generally use my time on the train to read. In fact, during the six years I’ve been riding Metra, I’ve polished off dozens and dozens of novels. Currently I’m working on Flaubert’s Madame Bovary. Good stuff. Thanks, Metra, for giving me this daily opportunity to expand my literary horizons.

Joe

We’re happy to help.

Summer Travel Notes

Minor changes coming to BNSF schedule

Starting July 12, nearly two dozen weekday trains on the Metra BNSF Line will see minor schedule changes to accommodate a major construction project and/or to make the schedules more reliable.

In most cases, the trains will have slightly later or, in a few instances, slightly earlier departure times from some or all stations. Some of the changes will result in a slightly longer trip, but in other cases the run time won't change.

In addition to the weekday changes, several outbound weekend trains will depart 10 minutes later than the current schedule, which will create a more consistent schedule.

For a summary of all changes, please see www.metrarail.com.

Some of the weekday changes are being made because of the project to route Belmont Road under the BNSF tracks in Downers Grove. That project, expected to be completed in early 2013, aims to eliminate a chronic source of road congestion on a significant north-south artery in DuPage County.

Major construction starting in July will require the BNSF Line to be reduced from three tracks to two tracks near the Belmont Station. The train schedule must be adjusted because some express trains will no longer be able to pass local trains in the area, since the third, passing, track will be unavailable.

The remaining weekday changes are being made to make run times more accurately reflect actual operating conditions.

Get your Ravinia picnic at MetraMarket

Not only does Metra provide an easy way to enjoy a concert at Ravinia or Millennium Park, but Chicago French Market, within Ogilvie Transportation Center, offers up the perfect grab-and-go picnic selections for you to take on these summer outings. From Chicago French Market's 30 vendors you will be sure to find the right snack, meal, refreshment, and/or wine and cheese pairing that suits your picnic preference. Enter Chicago French Market from the suburban concourse or at 131 N. Clinton. Customized and pre-ordered picnic orders are welcome. More info at www.chicagofrenchmarket.com.

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Blackhawks rally

(Continued from Page 1)

mates.

Even if that estimate was too high, it's clear that far more people than the city expected showed up. The result was a huge demand for service that afternoon. We used all the equipment and all the personnel available to us to handle the huge crowds. We did the best we could, on extremely short notice, to provide a ride to everyone who needed a ride – Hawks fans as well as our regular commuters. We also had to handle baseball fans attending the Crosstown Classic between the Cubs and Sox, as well as music fans heading to Chicago's Blues Fest.

We essentially had to operate two outbound rush hours, one right after the other. The first was for Hawks fans in the early afternoon. We expected a crush of people after the rally, but fans started showing up at our downtown stations well before the rally was even over. We brought in trains from the yards as quickly as we could to run extra service, and communicated to our riders as best we could about the added trains.

We then had to get those trains back downtown as quickly as possible to handle our regular afternoon rush hour. We weren't able to do that with every piece of equipment, and that led to a few cancellations. But the vast majority of our regular riders were able to take their normal train home, despite the heavy demands placed on our system earlier that afternoon.

Metra would like to thank our regular riders for the patience and understanding they displayed as we attempted to accommodate the unusually large crowds.



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July Festival Schedule

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- July 3 • **Red White & Boom Fireworks Festival**
- July 5-11 • **John Deere Classic PGA Tour Event**
- July 22-25 • **Bix Beiderbecke Memorial Jazz Fest**

View a complete calendar of events and our online Visitors Guide at www.visitquadcities.com

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