Metra will open a new station in Chicago at 35th St. along the Rock Island line on April 3, just in time for the Chicago White Sox home opener at nearby U.S. Cellular Field.

Rock Island trains will begin stopping at the station, which is on 35th just east of the Dan Ryan Expwy., on Sunday, April 3. The first White Sox game will be held the following Thursday, April 7.

But the station isn’t just for White Sox fans. It also gives another mass transit alternative to students at the adjoining Illinois Institute of Technology, as well as to local workers and neighborhood residents. And it offers a convenient link to the nearby CTA Red and Green lines.

The Metra Board of Directors voted to name the new stop after Lovana S. “Lou” Jones, a state lawmaker who represented the area for nearly 20 years. She died in 2006. The station will be formally dedicated in early May.

The station was funded with $4.9 million in federal money secured by U.S. Rep. Bobby L. Rush (D-Chicago), a longtime supporter of the project, and an additional $6.8 million from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

The fully accessible station features heated ramps, stairways, eight-car platforms, heated platform shelters, bicycle racks, benches, Metra’s audio and visual information system, lighting and landscaping. It is the first new Metra station since 2006.

On weekdays, 26 inbound trains and 21 outbound trains will stop at the station. It will be served by all weekend trains.

Metra will increase its service on game days to accommodate White Sox fans. For weekday afternoon games, an extra outbound train will leave the station after the final out. For weekday evening games, Train 531 (departing LaSalle St. at 11:15 p.m.) will have more cars, and an extra outbound all-stop train will operate about 30 minutes after the last out. For weekend games, an inbound extra train will arrive at the station about an hour before the first pitch, and an outbound extra will operate about 30 minutes after the final out.

The Rock Island schedule is being adjusted to accommodate the new station, but there are also other modifications to the schedule to improve on-time performance, to make the schedule more consistent and to reflect actual operating conditions. Rock Island riders are urged to view the new schedule at www.metrarail.com.
**Man, the gates**

I started a new job in Wood Dale in early January. I typically travel south on Wood Dale Road at about 6 p.m. weekdays. I have grown to become frustrated with the signal gates at the intersection of Irving Park Road and Wood Dale Road. The gates remain down far too long! The station seems far enough east of the intersection that there is no reason for the gates to be down the entire time that the train approaches the station, while boarding/deboarding then proceeding east or west. This is ridiculous. The gates could be timed differently to still be safe, yet let traffic flow and minimize wasted fuel consumption.

Dick

**Passing the pass**

I have a monthly ticket that I have been buying for years now. I had the day off and my wife wanted to go downtown so I let her use my ticket since I was not going to use it. When it came time for the conductor to check tickets he said she couldn’t use it because it was for a man and if she tries to use it again he would take it from her. What’s the big deal? I paid for a monthly spot on the train. If you are going to make such a big deal over male or female then you need to put passenger pictures and names on tickets. Why should I be forced to pay for a ticket when my monthly isn’t being used on that day?

All would be fine if I was in a relationship with another man I guess so I’m going to call this discrimination! But seriously, that rule is stupid. A ticket equals a spot. End of story.

A Rider

**Electronic dreams**

Are there any future plans for an electronic ticketing system on the suburban lines similar to that employed on the CTA system?
Get outta the way

To the person getting out of the Acura who took umbrage at being honked at on the morning of March 7 at the Route 59 train station: when your ride blocks the through lane instead of pulling over to let you out, those of us who have to park our cars to catch the train are going to honk. Save the smart comments and ask your ride to be considerate of the rest of us.

Greg

Look on the bright side: there’s nothing like a little road rage to get the heart pumping in the morning, is there?

She’s not laughing

To the woman in the third car standing up, waiting to get off at Union Station on Wednesday, March 2, at 7:56 a.m., who thought it was funny to hit me while I was sitting down with her purse: IT’S NOT FUNNY. I am highly aware it is the “last stop” on the train. You DO NOT have to hit me and tell me that! A gentle tap would have sufficed. Maybe I am meditating or thinking with my eyes closed! Just be lucky you didn’t hit someone who might have hit you back or cursed a blue streak at you. You should think before you act next time!

(Almost) a Disgruntled Passenger

Almost?

Paper explosion

I’m a commuter student, and I take the Milwaukee District North Line trains between Union Station and Lake Cook. On this particular day (Wednesday, Feb. 16) I took the 4:40 train out of Union. As I took something out of my backpack, the train hit a bump and my papers and trading cards went flying. Luckily, all the people around me helped me gather things up. They left no stone unturned. I ultimately collected everything, but I had missed my stop. Luckily, one of my fellow passengers offered me a ride back to the Lake Cook stop. If it wasn’t for the kindness of my fellow passengers, I would have had a lot of trouble. So, I want to thank everyone who helped me.

Jake

That must have been some hump. Sorry about that, and thanks to all for helping.

Crowding the aisles

I ride the 4:10 p.m. Rock Island train to 80th Avenue. There are a lot of people who exit at the 80th Avenue station. And there are a number of people who start to stand to exit at the 80th Avenue station TWO stops before!! This is very annoying because they block the aisle and people getting off at either Oak Forest or Tinley Park-Oak Park Avenue have a hard time making it through to get off at their stops.

Hannah

Aisle-blocking has been a rider gripe since the early days of On the Bi-Level. We understand the phenomenon: it’s a combination of herd mentality and a desire to step off the train ahead of all those slow pokes and get to your car quickly so you don’t have to wait behind another line of slow pokes to exit the parking lot and get where you need to get to a few minutes faster than the slow pokes. We have over the years asked riders to wait before blocking the aisles, and we now do so again: Please don’t stand to get off the train until approaching your stop, so those getting off the train before you can actually, you know, get off the train before you.

Can we all get along?

Let me first say that “Sound Off” is great entertainment! I look forward to reading On the Bi-Level every month. What has happened to common courtesy? The anger in some of these letters leads me to ask what is going on? Do you get off on being rude? Are you really road rage drivers who also ride the train? Obviously, if someone is bringing a crock pot on the train, the food in that pot is probably a blessing to someone else. It’s sad that we live in a society where people rarely speak and look for ways to be hurtful. Things could have been handled differently. You could have just asked her to kindly remove the crock pot from the seat. I’m sure you spent most of your day telling people what a maniac you were on the train as did she. A few suggestions for rush hour commuters: Take some deep breaths, pray or meditate before you board the train and be patient. We are living in tough times but we don’t have to be awful Americans.

Jake

“Sound Off” offers our riders a place to vent, which undoubtedly explains all the venting you see here. As we said in the very first “Sound Off”: “Does something that happens on your train get your goat? Tell us. We expose goat-getters.” That said, we’re not sure the crock pot letter writer, or most anyone else, for that matter, would disagree with your call to be more civil. There’s no indication that she was not. However, you must admit there is something a bit incongruous about encountering a crock pot on a rush-hour train. Disbelief, and not civility, is perhaps a natural first reaction.

ATC

E-MAIL US AT ONTHEBILEVEL@METRARR.COM
UP North bridge work to resume
Two-track operation to be maintained; no scheduling change required

Metra will resume work in April on a major project to replace 22 aging bridges along the Union Pacific North Line on the north side of Chicago, as well as to build a completely new Ravenswood Station.

Unlike last summer, when Metra tried to operate inbound and outbound UP North trains on a single track in the construction zone, the new plan calls for maintaining the existing two-track operation. That means the current UP North schedule will not be changed.

However, the new approach will cost up to $42.2 million more, bringing the total cost of the project to $215 million. That’s because keeping two tracks open will require a new track to be built closer to the western edge of the right of way, which in turn will require extensive and expensive retaining wall work to support the new track. It was Metra’s desire to save money on the retaining wall work that prompted us to attempt the single-track plan last year.

The 22 bridges are more than 100 years old and can no longer be economically repaired and maintained. The new bridges will offer increased safety and will last for more than 100 years.

Their replacement will be done in two phases of 11 bridges each. The first phase, which will cost $112 million and take until November 2015, will cover bridges over Balmoral, Foster, Winnemac, Lawrence, Leland, Wilson, Sunnyside, Montrose, Berteau, Irving Park and Grace.

Construction of the new Ravenswood Station, the only stop in the construction zone and the busiest stop on the UP North line, will also be done in the first phase.

Bridges between Addison and Webster will be done in the second phase, which will cost $103 million and will finish in November 2019.

The new Ravenswood Station, to be rebuilt in its current location, will offer longer, covered platforms, warming shelters, improved lighting, landscaping, a ticket office, vendor space, ramps and stairs. It will be compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Construction updates and alerts will be sent to all riders who have signed up to receive them under the “My Metra” feature at Metra’s website, www.metrarail.com.

This is an artist’s rendering of the new Ravenswood Station.

Pace launches Heritage Corridor survey

Pace is currently working with communities in southwest Cook and Will Counties to explore the possibility of providing supplemental service to Metra’s Heritage Corridor rail service.

Workday commuters traveling from the Heritage Corridor to downtown Chicago by car, bus and rail are encouraged to take part in this survey because the results will be used to determine if supplementary bus service is feasible along the corridor.

Please visit PaceBus.com/survey beginning April 4 to have a say in whether this potential service will be implemented.

The survey should not take more than 10 minutes to complete. Your responses will then be sent directly to Pace. As Pace is committed to ensuring your privacy, all personal information will be kept confidential.

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