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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 re-
quired but strongly encouraged.) We reserve the right to edit letter for length and grammar.

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Earlier alerts

Thanks for publishing the “Sounding Board” each month. It’s informative and entertaining. My question is why can’t pas-
sengers get e-mail alerts of train delays ahead of time? I take the Milwaukee District North train scheduled to depart Union Station at 5:50 p.m. It’s common to get email alerts at 5:55, 6:00 or later. By that point I know the train is late into the station because I’m standing there waiting on the platform. If only I’d know the train was going to be late into the station, I wouldn’t have [fill in the blank: blown out a lung sprinting to the train, ignored a phone call from my boss as I was running out the door, decided to “hold it” until I got on the train, etc.]. They must know when a train is run-
ning late so why can’t we get the info sooner?

Helaine

We make every effort to alert you as soon as possible when a train is late. But sometimes we
don’t know it in advance. For instance, sometimes a train has mechanical problems just as it’s
about to leave. In such a case, we wouldn’t be able to tell you in time to save your lungs, answer
your boss or use the Union Sta-
tion restrooms.

Contradictory rules?

There’s a statement in the December Quiet Cars article that says “Electronic devices must be silenced.” But then verbage goes on to say, “Earphones must only be audible to the person whose ears they are plugged into.”

This is contradictory. And, a huge problem. If electronic devices are silenced, why are ear-
phones and what they’re attached to exempt? Just today, I listened to loud, noisy music from a guy sitting 4 seats away!

Also, in your response to Jon about “a seat shortage” you say there are no cars to add and
Metra would love to buy more cars but doesn’t have the money. Why then has Metra been busy knocking down perfectly good train stations over the years and replacing them with new stations? I catch the train from Metra’s Oak Lawn Station. The previous station was in good shape. Why hasn’t Metra pumped this money into its infrastructure to buy the additional cars it needs, upgrade switches that CONSTANTLY malfunction, equipment malfunctions, etc.? I’m very willing to bet, very confident too, that had Metra taken a survey from it’s riders, the folks who pay its bills, station upgrades would have been bottom of the list.

Jack

We don’t think it’s contradic-
tory to say electronic devices
must be silenced and then also
say earphones can only be used if
no one else can hear them. If only
one person – the wearer – can
hear them, then they are silent to
everyone else. And if they are not –
if they are, as you say, audible
four places away – then they too
load for the quiet car.

As to your point about station
upgrades, we would respectfully
disagree. For one, we have to
invest in all parts of our system.
For another, we are not going
around knocking down “perfectly
good” stations. The former Oak
Lawn station was too small for
the growing number of пassen-
gers there. It was upgraded as
part of an expansion of the SWS
line, and Oak Lawn helped pay
for station improvements. Passen-
gers want to get to and from
their destination, yes, but they
also want a place to wait out
of the cold and rain. And many
towns and their elected lead-
ers – Oak Lawn included – want
nice Metra stations to help spur
development. We get letters every
day from riders asking for their
stations to be improved. We’d get
a lot more if we suddenly an-
nounced that we were going to
stop investing in our stations.

Frozen switches

Why is it that Metra can’t ever
seem to get a handle on freezing
switches in Chicago’s winter?

Peter

We try, we really do. But
despite our best efforts, there are
still sometimes problems, mostly
caused by frost and ice and other
moisture getting into the switches
and disrupting the electrical
contacts that allow the switches
to work. To combat that moisture,
we use switch heaters on virtually
every switch. However, some-
times the heaters need just a bit
more time to evaporate the frost
or ice. Sometimes a switch will be
working fine, and then a train will
pass over it and ice will fall from
the train into the switch. And
sometimes – usually after the first
cold snap of the year – the rails
will contract due to the cold just
enough to disrupt the contacts
and they will have to be adjusted.
We also have personnel standing
by near major interlockers – 24
hours a day when necessary – to
fix problems when they occur.

Crossword solution

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Crossword solution

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