



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

Earlier alerts

Thanks for publishing the "Sounding Board" each month. It's informative and entertaining. My question is why can't passengers 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 running 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 Station restrooms.

Contradictory rules?

There's a statement in the December Quiet Cars article that says "Electronic devices must be silenced." But then verbiage 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 earphones 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 contradictory 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 loud 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 passengers there. It was upgraded as part of an expansion of the SWS line, and Oak Lawn helped pay for station improvements. Passengers 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 leaders – 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 announced 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, sometimes 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

