

Metra seeks support for major project

The Metra Board of Directors last month highlighted the need for a \$1 billion project that aims to untangle a knot of railroad tracks on the South Side of Chicago that causes significant delays for Metra, Amtrak and several freight railroads.

The project, known as the 75th Street Corridor Improvement Project (CIP), is a major

component of the Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency (CREATE) Program, a public-private effort to increase the efficiency of the region's passenger and freight rail infrastructure and enhance the quality of life for Chicago area residents. Members of CREATE include the U.S. Department of Transportation, the State

of Illinois, City of Chicago, Metra, Amtrak, and the nation's freight railroads.

In a resolution that it approved last month, the Metra Board affirmed its support for the 75th St. CIP and urged officers, legislators and agencies of the state and federal government to work to promote and fund the CREATE project. The resolution

noted the project will support "greatly increased efficiency in Metra's commuter rail operations, Amtrak's intercity services and freight movement through the Chicago rail hub."

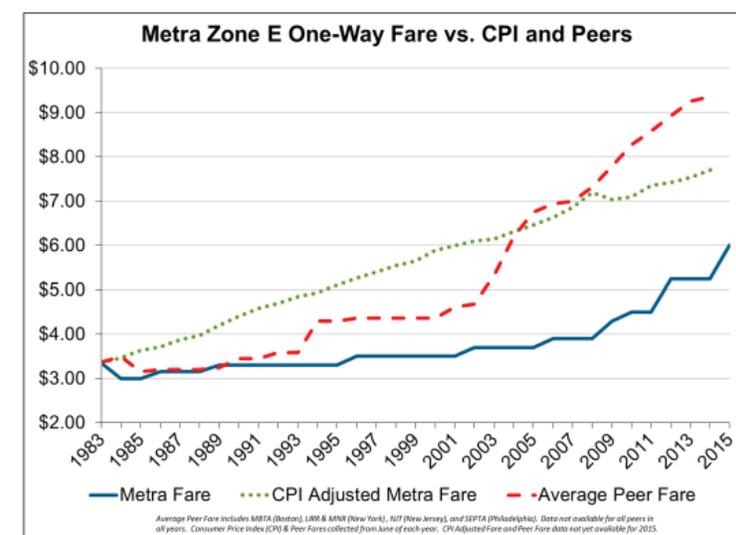
"Now that we are essentially finished with the Englewood Flyover – another CREATE project – we need to turn our attention
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Fares increase and policies change Feb. 1

As a reminder to all customers, Metra will be raising fares and making some changes to fare policies, including restoring the discount on 10-ride tickets, effective Feb. 1.

The Metra Board of Directors approved the fare increase as a necessary measure to meet rising costs after Metra staff identified several areas to cut expenses. Even with the fare increase, Metra fares since the agency was formed have not kept pace with inflation nor with the fares of other major U.S. commuter railroads.

The price of full-fare, one-way tickets will increase between 10.8 and 18.2 percent, depending on the zone. Full-fare 10-ride tickets will change from a reduction of 0.3 percent to an increase of 6.4 percent. Full-fare monthly passes will increase



between 10.9 percent and 18.6 percent. The price of reduced-fare, one-way tickets will increase between 11.1 and 22.3 percent, depending on the zone. Reduced-fare 10-ride tickets will increase between 0 and 10

percent. Reduced-fare monthly passes will increase between 11.1 percent and 22.2 percent.

Metra also will restore a discount on 10-ride tickets that was eliminated in 2013. The 10-ride ticket will now be priced

at the cost of nine one-way fares, instead of the current 10 one-way fares. Ten-ride tickets will no longer be refundable.

Other policy changes include:

- The grace period on monthly tickets will be restored, so that they will be valid on the first business day of the following month until noon.

- One-way tickets will be good for 90 days, instead of the current 14. They still will not be refundable.

- The extra charge for buying a ticket on the train will increase to \$5 from \$3 (The surcharge is not applied if no ticket agent is available at the boarding station.)

- Weekend passes will increase to \$8 from \$7.

Full information about the fare increase, including new fare tables, can be found at www.metrarail.com.



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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Operation North Pole

Operation North Pole once again transformed a Metra Union Pacific Northwest Line train into a journey of Christmas joy last month. The all-volunteer charity organization annually hosts the Christmas event for children with life-threatening illnesses and their families, taking them on a train ride and a visit with Santa Claus in his workshop. In this photo, volunteers Rachel Koenig (left) and Kelly Lewis (right) pose with young Nathanael Hill on the train.

Operation North Pole also sponsors blood drives with Life Source all year and encourages everyone to consider donating blood to help children and others in need.



Project

(Continued from Page 1)

to the 75th St. Corridor Improvement Project," said Metra Chairman Martin Oberman. "By fixing this tangle of railroad tracks, we can reduce delays to Metra trains and freight trains and help ensure Chicago retains its position as the nation's railroad capital."

Several different freight rail lines, including Norfolk Southern, CSX, Belt Railroad and Union Pacific, converge in an area just north of 75th Street roughly between Kedzie and the Dan Ryan Expressway. There are three rail-rail crossings in the project area that are significant choke points for Metra trains and/or freight trains. The project proposes to unclog those choke points with a combination of realigned tracks, new tracks and

new bridges.

The project will be particularly beneficial for 30 trains each weekday on Metra's SouthWest Service Line, which traverse the area on freight tracks on their way between Chicago Union Station and the Will County community of Manhattan. Those trains must pass through two of the rail-rail crossings – known as Belt Junction and Forest Hill Junction – and often see significant delays due to freight interference. Untangling Belt Junction, the most congested rail choke point in Chicago, and Forest Hill Junction therefore will greatly benefit SWS riders.

Two other components of the plan will address other choke points for SWS trains. The project would add a second track to a nearly 2-mile section of the SWS that now has only one, sometimes forcing inbound and outbound trains to wait for each other.

And it would build a bridge connection between the SWS and Rock Island Line near 75th Street so SWS trains could get downtown via the Rock. That accomplishes two things: First, SWS trains no longer would conflict with freight trains between 75th Street and downtown. Second, SWS trains would terminate at LaSalle Street Station instead of Union Station, which would free up capacity at Union Station.

"Many Metra commuters don't know that we share tracks with a significant amount of freight traffic," Oberman said. "The good news is that freight traffic brings jobs and economic vitality to the region, but the challenge is delays when this traffic clogs up the system. This investment is expected to go a long way in reducing commuter delays while maintaining the important freight movement in and out of the Chicago area."

Metra unveils plan to prevent crowding at Union Station

Metra, Amtrak and BNSF Railway have crafted a plan to help avoid overcrowding on the South Concourse of Union Station if there is a service disruption. Access to the concourse will be restricted during disruptions and passengers will be allowed to enter it from just one staging area. Full details of the plan, including explanatory maps, are on Metra's website at www.metrarail.com. Click on "Union Station Overcrowding Plan" under "Good To Know" on the right side of the main page. Metra would like to thank customers in advance for their cooperation. Your safety is our priority.

SOUND OFF

No complaints here

Instead of complaints, I would like to submit my thanks to one of my fellow commuters on the Rock Island Line. They turned in my purse and wallet. Everything was intact. Not a penny was taken. It is a great reminder that there are still kind and honest people.

Thank you
Nicole

OK, thanks for getting the New Year off to a good start with some heartfelt gratitude!

Or here, either

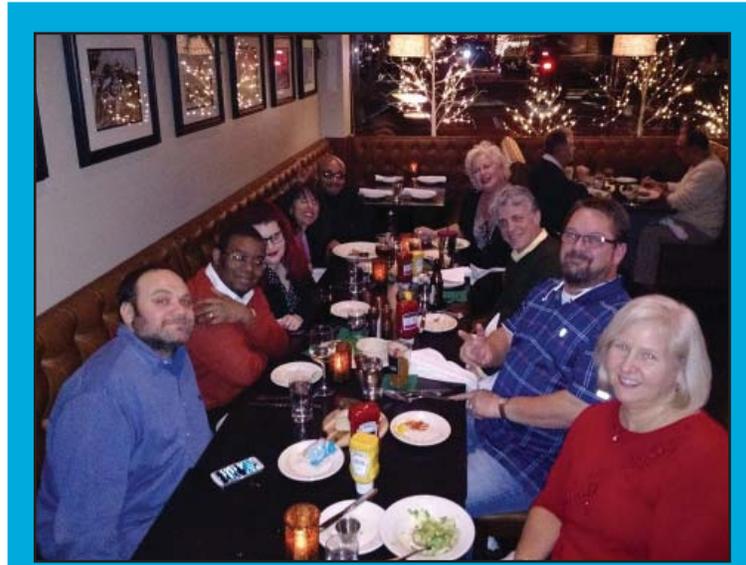
I would like to send a thank you note to Dixie. I was emotional, mourning a recent death in my family, and started crying on the train as we pulled into Ogilvie. We don't know each other, but you gave me comfort anyway, letting me know that I was not alone. Thank you so much! You were definitely a guardian angel sent to me that day. I wish I had been able to explain how much it meant to me at that time, but I was so emotional. So I hope you read this and know just how much you helped me. I know it was a selfless act but good karma will be with you always. To the other two ladies in the washroom who also asked if I was OK, thank you to both of you.

Pam

Great, even more praise for our fellow riders. You have our sympathy as well.

Give everyone a break

When reading the December issue of "Sound Off" I realized that it bothers me to see people complain about the typing sounds on laptops, coughs, food choices, and drinks of other riders. I think that riders with a



Train friends celebrate the holidays

UP North Train 341, the 5:03 p.m. departure from Chicago, is a popular train with many who live along Chicago's North Shore. For those who live in Wilmette, it offers express service with only one intermediary stop at Ravenswood, and it's the first post-5 p.m. departure for those who travel to the end of the line in Kenosha. Highland Park residents also enjoy the train because it provides a 36-minute commute.

Over the years, a diverse group of commuters, in age as well as occupations, have forged a lasting friendship on the 341. According to regular rider Jennifer C. Oatess, "We all hold different jobs, come from different backgrounds, have different interests, and live in different cities, but the one thing that we have in common is that we are always, like clockwork, on that train."

Together this group of about a dozen people has celebrated new jobs, birthdays, and holidays in the cab car complete with copious amounts of baked goods and the occasional adult beverage. This year the group decided to meet up for a holiday dinner on Dec. 11 at a restaurant near the Wilmette station. Oatess said that the restaurant staff was taken aback by the fact that this large group had met on the train, saying that most people just keep to themselves.

Metra knows that many of our riders have formed enduring friendships with their fellow riders. We would love to share your story in *On the Bi-level*. Write us at onthebilevel@metrarr.com and we may share it in an upcoming issue.

"sensitive stomach" or an aversion to "workaholics" should perhaps find a different way to commute. This is Chicago; we are all going to get sick this winter, we are all going to be

hungry, and we are all going to have to work too hard to meet a deadline at some point. Let's cut our fellow riders a break, remember that we are all in this together, and enjoy the weird

things that make our commute interesting and memorable.

Melissa

That's great advice, and it fits with our "feel good" start to the year. Thanks.

However...

I've noticed that only one brand of ear-bud headphones projects sound amazingly well in the outward direction. This should be an obvious no-no in the Quiet Car, but it keeps ruining the good natured isolationist spirit of the Quiet Car. Here's to increased awareness. Cheers!

Mark

We couldn't get away without any complaints – after all, this is "Sound Off." The rule about headphones, whatever the brand, is that you should be the only one who can hear them.

And then there's this

This morning when I boarded the Rock Island Line in Midlothian headed to Chicago, there were barely any open seats. But what really annoyed me was a passenger hogging an entire seat with her bag. I asked her three times to move her bag so I could sit down but she didn't budge. It turned out that she was sound asleep with shades over her eyes. While I can understand trying to get some extra sleep during the morning commute (I do so myself), I think she should have put her bag on her lap or underneath the seat if she planned on sleeping.

Patrick

And the war against seat-hogging goes on. Here's another reminder to everyone to be considerate of others and just use one seat, especially if you're going catch some Zs. Thanks for your cooperation.

Winter Travel Notes



Riders donate toys and coats

Metra riders again demonstrated their amazing generosity last month by contributing to toy and coat drives that were held in downtown Metra stations. The Toys for Tots drive, held in conjunction with the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve Toys for Tots Foundation, collected about 4,000 toys and about \$2,700. The number of coats collected from riders in our part of the NBC5/Telemundo/Salvation Army drive was not available at press time, but collection boxes were overflowing at most locations. Riders also generously contributed food to the Greater Chicago Food Depository Drive. Many thanks to all who helped.

Metra to broadcast safety presentation

Metra will conduct a first-of-its-kind live Operation Lifesaver broadcast on its YouTube channel Jan. 15 at 10 a.m. The train safety broadcast will be available to anyone, anywhere with an internet connection. "Safety is our number one priority and we want to get this message out to as many people as possible," said Metra Executive Director/CEO Don Orseno. Tinley Park High School will host the event and Illinois Secretary of State Jesse White will be on hand to talk about the importance of driving safely around railroad tracks. Viewers are encouraged to tune in to the presentation by going to www.YouTube.com/Metra.

Metra safety presenter honored



Tom Donegan

Metra's Manager of Emergency Preparedness Tom Donegan received an Achievement of Excellence Award at the Illinois Operation Lifesaver Enforcement Committee's awards luncheon on Dec. 10. Donegan was honored for his work as a rail safety advocate and educator. Since 2008, Donegan has conducted 457 railroad safety classes to more than 9,400 police, firefighters and first responders to enable them to stay safe while responding to incidents on or near railroad tracks and equipment. Donegan also gives an average of 150 Operation Lifesaver presentations to schools and community groups each year.



Dedicated worker retires after 46 years

Terry Harris (third from left) is congratulated on his last day of work as the Track 19 yardmaster at Chicago Union Station (CUS) by Chief Transportation Officer Marty Ryan (from left), CUS Assistant Superintendent Rich Oppenheim and Deputy Executive Director Pete Zwolfer. He retired Dec. 12 after 46 years on the Milwaukee Road and Metra. Twenty-two of those years were spent as the yardmaster on Track 19, where he served as a crucial link between train crews operating in the field and other departments and routinely arranged modifications to crew and equipment assignments to preserve the timely operation of our trains. Harris was a dedicated employee who will be greatly missed by his colleagues.

Safety contest deadline approaches

The deadline for the 9th annual Metra Safety Poster and Essay contest is rapidly approaching. Students in grades K-12 from the six-county region Metra serves are invited to create a poster or essay using this year's theme, "Unplug for Safety: Look, Listen, and Live." Students could win an iPad or cash prizes! The deadline for entries is Jan. 31. Contest rules and information are available at www.metra-contest.com. You can reach us with any questions at metracontest@metrarr.com.

Get this newsletter electronically

Did you know you could get a digital edition of *On the Bi-Level* delivered to you every month? Just create or log into your "My Metra" account and in the section headlined, "Additional Email Notification Preferences" check the box that says, "On the Bi-Level Commuter Newsletter." You'll get all the content of the printed version – and sometimes more – in color!

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If you have a complaint, compliment, service issue or any other issue, we want to hear from you. You can call a Passenger Service Representative at (312) 322-6777 (8 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays) or send email to metrarail_feedback@metrarr.com.