



ON THE BI-LEVEL

Commuter Newsletter, June 2009



We interrupt this commute...

Most of the time your daily commute on Metra goes off without hitch. You make it to work on time and you get home to enjoy time with your family. But what about the times when something goes wrong, service is disrupted and you're delayed? What are Metra and other agencies involved in an incident that disrupts our service doing while you wait on the train or in the station?

Those were some of the questions asked by UP North riders after a suicide stopped all trains in late April. One passenger had a good suggestion: "Maybe you could run a special edition of On the Bi-Level to explain emergency policies Metra has in place to handle such conditions."

So here goes...

In the event of an incident that disrupts our service whether it's a pedestrian fatality, bad weather, a hazardous material spill or an active police or fire scene adjacent to our tracks, Metra and our region's emergency responders go through a series of steps to maximize safety for our passengers and anyone near the scene. Our next goal is to reestablish service as soon as possible.

When an incident involving one of our trains occurs, the train's engineer first notifies the dispatcher responsible for that particular rail line. The dispatcher then typically stops all trains in the area of the incident to ensure the safety of the train crew and the emergency

responders. Next, the dispatcher notifies police and Metra managers of the incident. Local police and fire personnel are dispatched to the scene followed by Metra managers, Metra police and, in the case of an incident on one of our purchase-of-service carriers (BNSF and UP), personnel from that carrier.

The crew's job

On the scene, the train crew is responsible for communicating with passengers and should attempt to provide updates through onboard announcements every 15 minutes. The conductor also communicates with the engineer and crew, first responders, train dispatchers and Metra managers. Metra managers work with first responders with the goal of resuming service as soon as possible. Managers on the scene also provide information to our GPS Center so that up-to-date station and platform announcements are made and customer service staff at our downtown terminals can assist passengers.

Metra not in charge

When a service disruption involves injuries, fatalities or damage to property, the local police and fire departments are in charge of investigation and control the scene. They – not Metra – determine when train traffic in the area can resume. Metra and its contract carriers work with the police and fire agencies during incidents to

determine the fastest way to resume service safely without impeding the investigation or creating additional hazards.

Why not bus?

In many such cases, passengers ask why Metra cannot immediately dispatch buses to provide alternate transportation, or at least allow people to get off the trains and find their own transportation. Metra's first concern is safety. We will not evacuate passengers if we do not have a safe way for you to exit the train and a safe place for those evacuated to await alternate transportation.

Second, Metra does not own or operate a bus fleet. While we do have contracts with bus companies, buses are not standing by 24-7. We can often get trains moving before buses are able to arrive – especially during rush hour. Also, when service on an entire train line is disrupted, tens of thousands of riders are potentially affected. Frankly, in such cases, there are simply not enough buses available in the entire region to provide effective alternate transportation.

Other factors

The duration of an incident can impact much more than the trains immediately affected. All railroads are subject to federal hours-of-service provisions that dictate how long crews can be on duty and how long they must rest before beginning their next shift. In some cases, a crew will exceed these

hours or will exceed their hours if their normal shift required a return trip. We can also encounter equipment shortages if trains are trapped on one side of an incident. Although we try to address these issues in ways that minimize disruptions, we are sometimes forced to dispatch replacement crews, wait for equipment to arrive or even annul a train, and this can create additional delays.

Incidents are fluid

If every incident were the same, our emergency planning would always go off without a hitch and service disruptions would be minimal. But crises are fluid situations; therefore, any given event can add a new wrinkle to our best laid plans and information can change rapidly. That's why we continue to work with the region's freight railroads and emergency responders to educate and improve communication, and why we continue to educate our crews so that they can better respond to the situation and our passengers' needs.

So remember that while Metra works hard to maintain one of the highest on-time performance records in the industry, our first priority is the safety of our passengers and crews. We understand that any delays are frustrating and that lack of information can make it more so. But when an incident that disrupts service occurs, Metra is utilizing all available resources to restore service and provide accurate information.



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 letters for length and grammar.

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SOUNDING BOARD

Got a question, we've got an answer

Weekend NCS trains

I can't tell you how convenient it is to have a Metra station almost literally a stone's throw away from my house considering I commute downtown every weekday for work. The one thing I can't understand, however, is why there is no weekend service on the North Central line. Has any serious thought been given to offering such service to your loyal customers in northwest Cook and Lake counties? As you so proudly pointed out in the April issue of OTBL, NCS is one of the fastest growing lines. While I don't presume to know the details of your current financial situation and strategic planning models, my instinct is that you are losing out on extensive patronage by not extending this service at least to Saturdays.

John

We operate the NCS line on tracks owned by Canadian National. Unfortunately, our agreement with them does not allow us to use the tracks on weekends, when they want the way open for their freight trains.

Spelling problem

Would someone PUH-LEEEEEZE correct the spelling on the track announcement sign???

I take the 4:54 Metra Electric to Blue Island, and I thought it was a one-time typo! MESEUM CAMPUS... oh, c'MON!! That is absolutely insane! Since when is an illiterate given charge of an announcement sign? And no one else notices this? It's been over a week at least – maybe more, because I just noticed it myself recently.

I think the biggest shock is because it's still there, obviously

with no one else having brought it to the attention of the LITERATE portion of Metra's employees.

Fixed! It was a typo, but we should have noticed it sooner. We deserve your slap on the wrist.

Electric bathrooms

In the newsletter just printed, the board is talking about buying new train cars for the Metra Electric line. Instead of putting bathrooms in these cars, can we have more seats?

Sherwin

No. Metra Electric riders have complained for years that their line is the only one in the Metra system without bathrooms. We promised we'd put them in when we bought new cars. We're not about to go back on that promise.

Military policy

I had the privilege of sitting among six Marines on my trip home. What a shock when the conductor asked them for tickets. They said they were told they wouldn't need one. The conductor said that since they were in uniform the tickets would be half price, but because they did not buy their ticket at the station there is an additional \$2 fee each. I immediately handed my 10-ride to the conductor and told him to punch my ticket instead. The gentleman next to me also handed over his 10-ride ticket and told him to punch his for them too. As he handed us our tickets back he said those are the rules and he can not bend them. I was also told that if a service member is not in uniform, even with a valid military ID, he/she would not be given the discount.

Marines are not allowed to travel in uniform unless they are on military business. I would think that any service member home on leave would not want to be in uniform to go to a ball game or to take in the sites of the city. Do Metra employees need to be in uniform in order to get riding privileges?

Seniors ride for free. It's time Metra did the same for our military. BTW – the conductor punched six times. So much for the half-price discount.

Linda
UP West

First, thank you for stepping in and offering your ticket. That was generous of you.

Second, the conductor could have handled things better (like not punching your ticket six times).

Third, it sounds like the Marines got some bad info from someone. It is indeed Metra's policy to allow service members traveling in uniform and presenting an active military identification card to ride for half-price, not free. We're trying to balance our debt to our military with our financial obligation to the rest of our riders.

And BTW, Metra employees don't get free rides on Metra.

Highlands question

To this day I've always been puzzled as to why the Hinsdale Hospital/47th St. stop has always been referred to as Highlands.

Ronald

We asked the Hinsdale Historical Society, and the best theory they found is that an early Hinsdale resident, John Reed, named his home "Highlands" and the name soon caught on for the neighborhood and then the train station.

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

OTBL book?

I was glad to see I could find the current copy of On the Bi-Level on the website. I enjoy reading the Sounding Board and the Sound Off sections of the newsletter. And now that I have moved out of state, I can still be able to read these sections. So, I had an idea. Why not take all of those pieces that people have written in and publish them in a book? It is great entertainment just reading a few per month. I bet a whole compilation of those you have received over the years would be a great seller.

Geoff

Maybe. But it could also be repetitive and boring. Just compare this letter:

To the passenger on Train 618 Metra Pacific Northwest Line, possibly getting on in Mount Prospect:

Your music (if you can call music what sounds like cement-cutting saw) is very loud. Either the listening device is not working properly or your hearing has been badly damaged and you need to set the loudness very loud. I am sure you enjoy a comfortable ride on Metra – I would too if it was not for that screeching noise that comes out of your audio apparatus.

A Rider

To this letter:

Even though people who listen to radios use ear plugs, they sometimes play their devices so loud that we can hear them all over the car. Music players have a right to play their music, but we passengers who want peace and quiet also have rights.

A Rider

The first letter came in last month, while the second is from the Fall 1985 issue of On the Bi-Level, the third such newsletter ever printed and the first to feature passenger gripes. Things never change.

Our answer then still applies now (if you replace “cassette” with “iPod”): “Please remember your fellow riders when tuning in that favorite radio station or cassette.”

Nice and neat

I take the Northwest line out of the Racetrack – I can take any train out of the four that get there between 7:11 a.m. and 7:56 a.m. and be at work by nine. Even though the 7:29 a.m.

is a local (the only local of the four) I prefer it because of the crew. I’m from a generation that uses the word “nice” to really mean something good, kind and positive – the crews on the other three trains are really great but the 7:29 guys are truly “nice” in the best possible way.

Actually from reading the “Sound Off” letters the Northwest line seems to be generally well behaved in comparison with some of the other lines, we seem to have fewer lapses in manners. Either that or we’re just totally oblivious to everything around us.

Julie
UP Northwest

What do you think, riders of the UP Northwest? Are you nice or oblivious? (We know those aren’t the only choices.)

Seathogs, Part 143

In your last issue you said seathoggers “don’t care” and “they’re just hoping they can get away with it.” They are getting away with it because you (Metra) are allowing them to “get away with it.” By “allowing” them to “get away with it” you (Metra) are encouraging them. This also includes passengers who take over an entire seat with their “fast food” packages, drinks, etc. And usually they will leave their “mess” behind when they leave the train.

Ronnie
Milwaukee North

Did you know?

The people who designed our timetables way back when picked colors for the timetables based on each line’s history. They even made up names for each color. (The North Central Service wasn’t around back then.)

Union Pacific North Line: The old C&NW (now owned by UP) used green and yellow. So those colors were natural for its timetables. “Flambeau Green” is named for the Flambeau 400 train to Wisconsin.

Union Pacific Northwest Line: “Viking Yellow” is named for the Viking train to Minnesota.

Union Pacific West: With green and yellow already used, they opted for “Kate Shelley Rose,” named for a teenage girl from Iowa who saved a train from disaster in 1881.

Milwaukee District North: “Hiawatha Orange” is named for the Milwaukee Road’s famed Hiawatha trains.

Milwaukee District West: “Arrow Yellow” is named for the Arrow train to Nebraska.

BNSF Railway: “Kelly Green” or “Cascade Green” is named for the color used by the BN.

Heritage Corridor: “Alton Maroon” is named for the color used by the Alton Railroad.

SouthWest Service: “Banner Blue” is named for the Wabash Railroad’s Banner Blue train.

Rock Island District: “Rocket Red” is named for the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad’s Rocket trains.

Metra Electric: “Panama Orange” is named for the Illinois Central Railroad’s Panama Limited passenger train.

We assume you (Ronnie) mean that we (Metra) are “allowing” them (seathoggers) to “get away with it” because our conductors are lax about asking them (seathoggers) to stop being rude. No doubt our conductors could do more, but they do have more important duties. And we (Metra) are hardly “encouraging” them (seathoggers). Hardly an OTBL issue goes by without a letter about the issue. Heck, we (Metra) have even devoted cover stories to the problem (“Weeding out seathogs,” March 2005). And really, this is a problem that in the vast majority of cases can be solved by you (Ronnie, or any other rider) politely but firmly asking them (seathoggers) to move it (their crap). They (seathoggers) are rudely putting the onus on you (Ronnie or any other rider) to take the initiative, but they (seathoggers) will usually comply, albeit grudgingly, when asked.

Spring travel notes

Huggins, Schaffer elected to new positions

The Metra Board has installed two of its members into new positions, electing Director Larry A. Huggins as vice chairman and Director Jack Schaffer as treasurer.

The unanimous votes came at the board's May 1 meeting.

Mr. Huggins, a member of the board since 1997, replaces Director Elonzo Hill, who died in February. Mr. Huggins was appointed to the Metra Board in 1997 by the city of Chicago and was elected treasurer of the board in August 2006. He is president and chief executive officer of Riteway Construction Services Incorporated and is a leader in development, management and general contracting for commercial, municipal and residential properties.

Mr. Schaffer, who was appointed to the board in 2006 by the chairmen of the Kane, Lake, Will and McHenry county boards and is now the McHenry County appointee, was elected to replace Mr. Huggins as treasurer. He is the owner of Liberty Outdoor Advertising and Liberty Self Storage, both located in Crystal Lake.

Summer family fares to start June 15

Metra will extend its popular "Family Fares" program to include weekdays, starting Monday, June 15, through Friday, September 4.

Normally available only on weekends and holidays, Metra's

"Family Fares" allow up to three children under age 12 to ride free with a fare-paying adult.

Families can realize further additional savings with Metra's \$5 Weekend Pass for unlimited Saturday/Sunday rides or 10-Ride tickets saving 15 percent off one-way tickets, which can be used in conjunction with Family Fares.

Riders can take advantage of a special three-day \$5 unlimited-ride ticket on Friday, July 3, Saturday, July 4 and Sunday, July 5. This special fare includes free transportation for up to three children under 12, per one fare-paying adult.

Metra wins worker safety award

Metra has won the E.H. Harriman Memorial bronze medal for employee safety during 2008. The Harriman Award, named after Edward H. Harriman, a pioneer in railroading, is given to the top three railroads in each class with the fewest Federal Railroad Administration reportable injuries.

The honor marks the 11th time since Metra's formation in 1984 that it has been recognized for its record of employee safety.

Metra's record earned the 2008 bronze medal in "Group B" classification (railroads with more than 4 million but less than 15 million employee-hours).

"I will apply what I learned in the MBA program to help our employees benefit from their benefits."

Javier Hernandez
MBA, HR specialist

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