



Anniversary Issue 1984-2014

# 30 years of Metra

On June 8, 1984, a new entity created to oversee all of Chicago's various commuter rail operations held its first meeting in downtown Chicago.

Like a newborn baby whose parents can't settle on a name, the new entity went by the generic "Commuter Rail Service Board" for about a year. It wasn't until July 12, 1985 that the board adopted the name "Metra" for its operations in northeast Illinois.

Lowell Anderson, a board member who worked with staff to come up with the name, said they wanted a name "that not only tells what we do, but also where we do it. The consolidation of 'metropolitan' and 'rail' fills the bill perfectly."

But if June 8, 1984 is our birthday, our roots go back a lot further. You could say they go back more than 100 years, when several freight railroads operated commuter – or as it was often known, suburban – service in Chicago.

Or you could look to the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the transportation system was failing across the region, with the CTA, suburban bus companies and freight railroads experiencing big financial losses.

Or you could go back to 1974,



**The first North Central Service train rolls down the tracks on August 18, 1996.**

when voters in the six-county Chicago area created the Regional Transportation Authority to keep the system running. Its mission was to coordinate and assist public transportation and to serve as the conduit for state and federal subsidies needed to keep the system operational.

The RTA did not at first directly operate commuter rail service but paid the railroads to do so under purchase-of-service agreements. It also began to reverse decades of disinvestment in the overall commuter rail system, primarily by buying new

locomotives and cars.

But when the Rock Island and then the Milwaukee Road railroads declared bankruptcy in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the rules changed. The RTA took over the commuter operations and eventually bought the tracks of those railroads. It created a commuter rail division, the Northeast Illinois Railroad Corporation, to operate those lines in 1982.

But that wasn't the end of the story. The RTA was reorganized by Springfield in 1983, and something called the Commuter

Rail Service Board was created to oversee all commuter rail operations. That board would not only operate the Rock Island and Milwaukee lines with its NIRC subsidiary, but also assumed responsibility for overseeing the purchase-of-service agreements with the Burlington Northern (now the BNSF Line), Chicago and North Western (now the three UP lines), Illinois Central Gulf (now the Metra Electric and Heritage Corridor) and Norfolk and Western (now the SouthWest Service). The board had complete authority over fares, service levels, system performance and capital improvements.

At the same time, a suburban bus division was created. (Happy Birthday to Pace, too!) The RTA remained as the parent organization for the CTA, Metra and Pace, which are known as the three service boards.

The name Metra was adopted to bring a unified identity to the region's patchwork of commuter rail services. "When we sell 'Metra' to potential new riders, they'll know we mean an entire rail service for the whole metropolitan area," said Jeffrey Ladd, Metra's first board chairman.

Turn the page for highlights of Metra's first 30 years.

# Highlights from the first 30 years of Metra history

**June 8, 1984:** The Commuter Rail Service Board, newly created by the Illinois Legislature, meets for the first time.

**July 12, 1985:** The Commuter Rail Service Board adopts the word "Metra" as a service mark.

**August 1, 1985:** The first locomotive painted with Metra's blue and orange colors makes its debut. It is named after Kane County.

**Winter 1985:** First issue of "On the Bi-Level" published. (We've reproduced its first masthead on the cover.)

**May 1, 1987:** Metra buys the Illinois Central Gulf's electric commuter line between Chicago and University Park, with the two branch lines to Blue Island and South Chicago for \$28 million. The line is renamed the "Metra/Electric." But the formal ceremonies featured a train pulled by a diesel engine, because it was painted in Metra colors and therefore better for marketing. The ICG's Joliet to Chicago route, part of the deal, is renamed the Heritage Corridor.

**Sept. 3, 1987:** Metra completes the acquisition of the two Milwaukee Lines. (The RTA started operating the two lines in 1982, and Metra took over in 1984. But the tracks were still owned by the successor to the bankrupt Milwaukee Road.)

**July 11, 1989:** Metra drops the words "Metropolitan Rail" from its logo.

**July 16, 1989:** Service begins at the new Route 59 station on the BNSF Line. That station is now by far Metra's busiest.



"Kane County," the first engine painted in Metra blue and orange, is unveiled on August 1, 1985.

**April 12, 1990:** The board votes to buy 30 new F40PHM-2 locomotives manufactured by the Electro-Motive Division of GM for \$1.99 million each.



**June 15, 1990:** Metra bans smoking on all trains.

**Aug. 9, 1991:** Metra announces major \$73 million reconstruction of the Chicago & North Western terminal at Canal and Madison.

**Oct. 24, 1991:** Amtrak shows off the \$32 million renovation of

Union Station.

**Jan. 17, 1992:** The board votes to buy 173 new wheelchair accessible coaches from Morrison Knudsen. (The order was completed by Amerail, and those cars are currently being rehabbed in-house by Metra.)

**April 1992:** Metra completes the \$75 million renovation of the Rock Island line's LaSalle St. Station.

**May 28, 1993:** Metra announces that it will assume control of the commuter operations on the Norfolk Southern tracks and rename the line the SouthWest Service.

**December 1994:** The SouthWest Service is extended from 153rd St. to 179th St.

**April 1995:** Union Pacific Railroad completes purchase of the Chicago & North Western and assumes control of C&NW's three commuter lines in Chicago.

**November 1995:** Metra's website, [www.metrarail.com](http://www.metrarail.com), is activated. ("Neat graphics!" boasts *On the Bi-Level*.)

**Jan. 15, 1996:** The new Lake-Cook Road Station opens on the Milwaukee North Line.

**August 18, 1996:** Metra launches the North Central Service, the first new commuter route in Chicago in more than 70 years.

**Oct. 15, 1997:** A year after completing a major \$141 million rehab of the Chicago & North Western terminal in downtown, the facility is renamed the Ogilvie Transportation Center after the former Illinois governor.

**April 3, 1998:** Metra announces that every train will now have at least one car that is accessible to people with disabilities.

**April 2, 1999:** Metra adds a train in each direction to the

Heritage Corridor.

**June 7, 1999:** The number of weekday Metra trains rises to 703, its current level.

**Dec. 13, 2000:** The board approves a \$400 million order to buy 300 cars from Nippon Sharyo, the largest procurement of rail cars in Metra history.

**Jan. 12, 2001:** The board approves a \$79.4 million order for 27 new MP36-3S locomotives from Motive Power Industries.

**Oct. 11, 2002:** The board approves a \$74 million order for 26 new Highliner cars for the Metra Electric Line.

**Jan. 30, 2003:** Metra announces plans for the STAR Line. Two weeks later, it announces plans for the SouthEast Service Line. Both lines remain on Metra's planning books, slowed primarily due to funding issues.



The first Highliner car for the Metra Electric Line leaves the Nippon Sharyo factory in Rochelle, Ill., in September 2012.

**Dec. 5, 2004:** Metra shows off a rehabbed Millennium Station.

**June 1, 2005:** Metra allows riders to bring bicycles on trains for the first time.

**Jan. 23, 2006:** Metra opens an extension of the UP West line to La Fox and Geneva. A week later, Metra opens four new stations and expands service on the North Central Service line. On the same day, it expands service on the SouthWest Service Line and opens an extension to Manhattan.

**December 2008:** Metra provides 86.8 million passenger trips in 2008, the highest ever. It remains Metra's record year.

**Sept. 9, 2009:** Metra unveils a new website and for the first time offers riders the ability to buy tickets online.

**Dec. 3, 2009:** MetraMarket opens at Ogilvie.

**August 2010:** The board approves a \$585 million order to buy 160 new Highliner cars for the Metra Electric Line from Nippon Sharyo. Nippon Sharyo builds a factory in Rochelle, Ill.,

to build the cars. (About half of them have been delivered so far.)

**May 6, 2011:** Metra opens the new "Lou" Jones/35th St. Station on the Rock Island Line near U.S. Cellular Field.



**June 3, 2011:** Metra launches Quiet Cars on all lines after a test on the Rock Island Line.

**June 28, 2012:** Metra unveils its Rail Time Train Tracker

**Dec. 27, 2012:** Metra announces it is placing AEDs on all trains.

## Then and now

**In 1983,** commuter railroads provided 56.4 million passenger trips.  
**In 2013,** Metra provided 82.3 million.

**In 1983,** there were 3,481 trains a week.  
**In 2014,** there are 3,984.

**In 1983,** passenger revenue was just over \$124 million.  
**In 2013,** it was \$311.6 million.

**In 1983,** the average trip distance was 20.74 miles.  
**In 2013,** it was 22.4 miles.

**In 1983,** the average fare was \$2.20.  
**In 2013,** it was \$3.90.

**In 1984,** the average price for a gallon of gas was \$1.24.  
**In 2013,** it was \$3.91.

**In 1987,** there were 52,602 parking spaces at stations.  
**In 2014,** there are 90,259.

**In 2005,** 7,730 bikes were brought on trains.  
**In 2013,** 278,661 bikes got a ride.

# SOUND OFF

*We invited riders last month to share their memories of riding Metra. Here are some of their responses:*

## Lots of memories

I have been riding Metra before it was Metra – for 34 years!

My best memories of riding have not been commuting to work. In fact, I have held various job positions in that time period.

No, my favorite times riding have been with my boys, now both grown.

When they were small, we would ride sometimes on the weekends or on vacation weekdays on the inbound train. We would visit the museum campus, Navy Pier or the Christmas windows on State St. or take a trolley tour. They would be so tired out on the way home, they would fall asleep on the upper deck. Or we would sit in a four-seater down below, where they would love to sit and look out the window. We rode the Santa train a couple times, too. My kids would never cross the track if a train was coming because of that safety train. These are very fond and precious memories to me.

Thank you Metra!  
GraceAnn

*The thanks go to you for being such a loyal customer. We're lucky to have you!*

## Lots of passes

I noticed Metra is celebrating it's 30th anniversary this year. I wanted to offer my small contribution. This is my 10th year riding Metra and during that time, I've enjoyed collecting the monthly tickets and uploading scans of them to my website in a gallery for all to see:

<http://c82.net/metratickets/>

Since I started doing this, I've had generous contributions from other long-time riders, former riders, and even from Metra itself. Thanks to everyone, I've acquired 289 tickets so far in beautiful condition dating back to 1989 and even one from 1973 – before Metra was established. With duplicates from coworkers, I have over 500 tickets for various zones in the total collection. I make sure to only upload scans after each month's ticket has expired to avoid any counterfeiting.

I've thoroughly enjoyed watching how the designs have evolved over the years and look forward to seeing more. I'm always looking for more older tickets too. So if anyone at Metra would like to contribute, I'd be happy to work out a deal.

Nick

*Nick's collection is very impressive, and we encourage everyone to go to his website to check it out.*

## Batter up

I have been riding, off and on, for almost as long as Metra has been around. At first I rode from Des Plaines to downtown. By the next time, I had moved to Mundelein, which initially had no station. I was often a regular on the Milwaukee North, then North Central. I usually became part of a group of regulars. Though the names changed frequently, we often had parties at local restaurants. And one time we had a softball game: regulars on one train vs. regulars on another. Don't remember who won, but we had a good time.

Peter

*Thanks for sharing your memories and being such a loyal rider. We love stories about people meeting and socializing because they shared a commute.*

## Good old days

I started riding UP North Line in August 2000. This was prior to the 9/11 disaster and all the resulting hardships: bad economy, terrible job market, obscene gas prices, etc.

I have many good memories from the "early days." One in particular is a fun send-off to a regular who was relocating and wouldn't be riding with us any longer. We brought cards, gifts, and ingredients to make margari-

tas on the night train home. We had two sets of seats flipped, and approximately eight of us passed glasses, dipping them into a large bowl of salt, and filling them with margarita mix. We had a great time.

Another fun memory is of a conductor's last day in November 2004. He had worked for the railroad for almost 40 years. Each of his regular riders brought him a unique gift; one rider gave him her 20-year collection of train tickets; a stack of approximately 250.

Both his morning train and evening train were decorated with streamers, balloons, and a large poster full of snapshots and captions from his work life, taken during his last year on the job. In the evening, people brought baskets of snacks and champagne. His wife showed up to film his last ride into Waukegan from Chicago, and take pictures of him with each of his regular rider friends. At the Lake Forest stop, two regulars' wives showed up to present the conductor with even more gifts.

It would be only too great if things turned around and riding to work and home again could be half as fun as it used to be!

Lisa

*We agree, and we hope the next 30 years can be fun for all.*

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