

ON THE BI-LEVEL

Metra

Metra's Monthly Commuter Newsletter

June 2016

What's that strange car on the tracks?

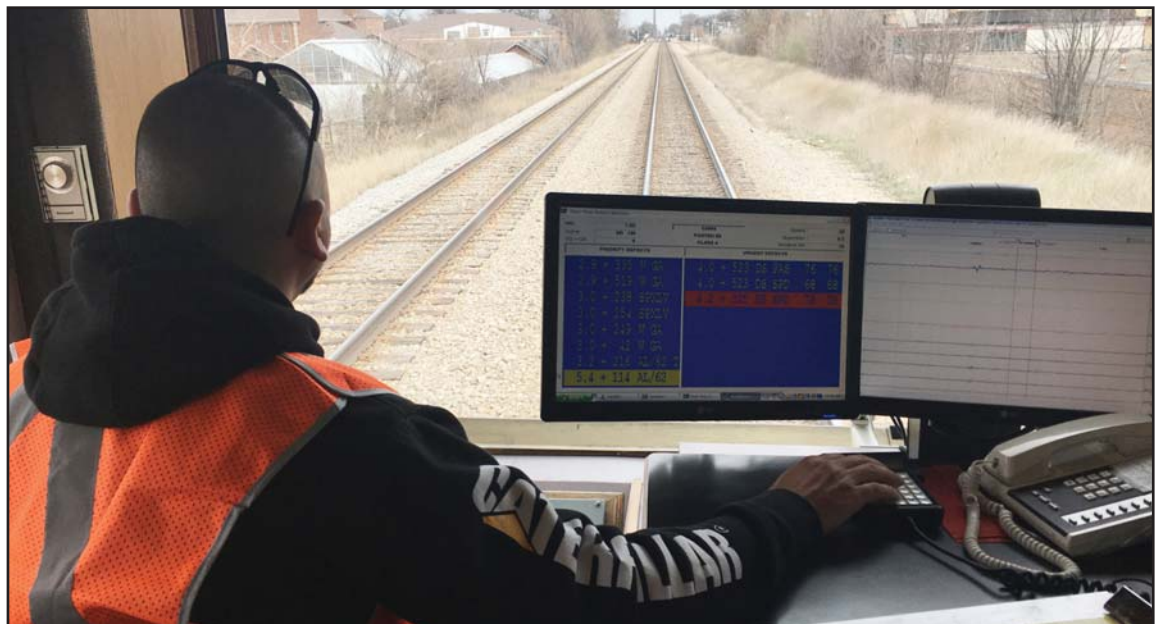
Geometry car helps keep ride smooth and safe

Three men sit in the front of the rail car, back-lit silhouettes facing a large window, the rails spread before them like ribbons as the train rumbles forward. Computer screens display a continuous log of information as a calm automated male voice calls out each important detail of the track configuration. The words “switch,” “road crossing,” “bridge” and “milepost” are all recited in this automated monotone as the train heads out from Chicago Union Station west along Metra's Milwaukee District lines.

But then the voice calls out the word: “Defect. Defect.”

As the details appear on the computer screen, Metra track inspector Manny Rangel uses a computer mouse to highlight the data while Project Roadmaster Jose Jauregui and Milwaukee District Roadmaster Arturo Lopez compare the data to the design profile for this section of track.

If the issue requires immediate repair, Lopez contacts the dispatchers along the route to initiate an order for trains to reduce speed over that section of track until the repairs can



Metra Track Inspector Manny Rangel (above) logs track conditions as he rides in the Canadian Pacific track geometry car along the Milwaukee North Line in late March. (Photo by Meg Thomas-Reile/Metra)



The CP Geometry train (left) sits next to Metra locomotive 426 as it waits to begin its trip south from Fox Lake. (Photo by Edward A. Oom/CP)

be made. He then dispatches the track employees to the site to make repairs. In most cases, repairs are made and track speed is restored within hours.

Depending upon the degree of variation from the track

design and the type of defect, the track issues are classified “urgent” or “priority” defects. A priority defect means that the track isn't meeting Metra's own design standards but does not violate federal safety require-

ments. Priority defects do not require immediate repair but are put on a watch list that is used to inform planning for future track maintenance projects. A defect categorized as urgent, however, (Continued on Page 2)



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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Metra deploys observation team

Metra has doubled its team of employees tasked with observing and reporting on conductor and ticket agent performance, onboard and station amenities and customer interactions.

Members of the team ride anonymously and are tasked with checking the condition of the railcars for cleanliness and temperature control and determining if equipment such as the public address system is functioning properly. The team also observes conductors to learn if they are taking the appropriate measures to collect fares, performing other onboard duties and properly enforcing train rules. While not onboard Metra trains, the observation team checks the condition of stations and parking lots, as well as the quality of platform announcements and ADA signage. In addition, the team will

also be asked to report examples of superior customer service.

"Our primary goal here is to identify and correct issues before they become a bigger problem," said Metra Executive Director/CEO Don Orseno.

Metra routinely monitors and investigates specific complaints about fare collection practices, conductor and ticket agent performance, onboard and station amenities and customer interactions on all its rail lines. However, for the last six months, Metra has deployed a three-person undercover team to help evaluate train operations and amenities.

Starting last month, the team was expanded from three to six employees. The expanded team will be deployed about 10 times per week with the goal of having 40 train observation reports per month. Team members are

trained about a conductor's onboard responsibilities and performance expectations and are provided a checklist to evaluate.

Monitoring fare collection practices will be a high priority for the train observation team. Metra customers are required to present a ticket or pass to conductors onboard trains or risk a fine for unlawful theft of service. Conductors are also required to pass through each train car to verify tickets and collect fares.

The train observation team will also be charged with observing and reporting on train conductors who go above and beyond the agency's current requirements for customer service. Those found to be exceeding performance expectations will be acknowledged for their efforts and their performance will be shared among their peers.

Car

(Continued from Page 1)

does require that a speed reduction be placed on that section of track until repairs can be made.

All of this is the routine of a trip on a track geometry car. Twice a year, Metra rents the Canadian Pacific geometry car to inspect every mile of Metra-owned tracks. Our partners in the Chicago region, BNSF Railway and Union Pacific, as well as the region's freight railroads also use track geometry equipment to inspect track conditions several times a year.

Geometry cars use lasers and video to precisely measure the track alignment, cant or cross level (the difference in elevation between the two rails), curvature, rail gauge, warp and the rail profile. Some railroads also use trucks equipped with similar technology to ride the rails and

provide measurements, but track geometry trains more accurately duplicate real-world conditions because the weight of the train itself subjects the track to the same lateral force the track is subjected to when a commuter or freight train passes over it.

In addition to geometry cars, Metra employs track inspectors who visually inspect every section of our railroads several times each week. Their familiarity with the segments of railroad under their watch makes them Metra's first line of defense in identifying changing track conditions.

"Track inspectors are out there on a daily basis making sure that our railroad is in safe condition," said Metra Chief Engineering Officer Bruce Marcheschi. "But the geometry car provides an extra level of information. It can identify immediate concerns but I would argue that its greatest value is the data it provides that helps us in

our long-range planning. In fact, a rail replacement project currently underway on the Milwaukee North Line is a direct result of information gathered by the geometry train."

Geometry cars are not the only specialized equipment that Metra uses to monitor track conditions. Another vehicle also travels the Metra system on a twice-yearly basis using ultrasonic equipment to detect defects within the rail itself. These defects cannot be seen by the naked eye and detecting them allows us to replace rail sections before breaks occur. Like other railroads, Metra will also contract the services of a rail grinding train to extend the useful life of the rail.

"Each of these specialized services help Metra safely maintain the track speed, smooth ride and levels of service to which our riders are accustomed," Marcheschi said.

SOUND OFF

Mobile 10-ride tickets

I tend to purchase 10-ride tickets, and in the past did so via paper tickets. Periodically, I would take the train with a friend or need to provide a punch for someone I knew; this was easy to do when you'd just tell the conductor to punch twice. However, I've recently switched to mobile 10-ride tickets on the Ventra App (which I love, btw). While it's easy to activate one ticket (shown as "in-use"), is it possible to activate a second electronic ticket to provide for a passenger with you? I'm sure I can't be the first person who has this question and it wasn't covered on the webpage about using mobile tickets. In addition to providing an answer to riders across the lines, it would be great if you'd update the website to account for this! (hint, hint).

Liz

We're glad you like the app. If you are travelling with someone else and you each want to use one of your 10 rides, just activate two tickets and be prepared to show each of the active tickets to your conductor. We've updated our website to address this question. And soon we'll be updating the app to make it easier for you to display a multi-rider ticket.

Aisle just wait, please

Thank you announcements about blocking the aisles when not waiting to exit the train. I've recently began riding the Flossmoor Zone train. The passengers block the aisle during the afternoon outbound train at the Hazel Crest station; however, these passengers get off at the Homewood station. The passengers trying to exit at Calumet have to squeeze past no less than 10-20 people every day. A couple of women almost came to blows

over this! As this behavior was new to me, I almost missed my stop because I thought everyone in line was exiting at Calumet and most of them were exiting at Homewood. I asked the conductor why he didn't make the passengers comply and was told they heard the announcement just like I did. There is a difference in hearing an announcement, listening to it and complying with it. Please start a campaign like "if you see something, say something". Maybe something like "Stay out of the aisle so others may exit safely." Not as catchy but all those people standing is a safety issue. So I saw something and I'm saying something – now please do something!

Tired of the Hassle

This is a chronic issue that we try to address with announcements. As you've noticed, the announcements are not always effective. But this topic is one we will be covering in a soon-to-be unveiled courtesy campaign.

Doing something

I always read in "On the Bi-Level" that people always complained about the SEAT-HOGGERS who either reserve the seat for someone else or just put stuff there. But I never seen anyone actually complain to the SEAT-HOGGER or to the CONDUCTOR in the train. I notice that mostly people just make their face and continue walk to the next car or next seat. But a week or two week ago, I saw a guy actually try to complain to a SEAT-HOGGER who was reserving a seat. I notice that while he was talking to this passenger, other passengers looked to this guy as if it was his fault that he was asking or complaining the other passenger's backpack on the seat. After that, the guy

complained to the conductor and the conductor did talk to the passenger regarding seat reservation. So my advice to all passenger who just complain or write in "On the Bi-Level" about this, but never actually take action: Please stop complaining unless you take action first by complaining to the SEAT-HOGGER and conductor.

AJP

That's what we always advise: just politely ask people to move their things so you can sit. Most people will respond positively, and for those cases when they don't, ask the conductor for assistance.

Watch my back

If you have a bag (containing a PC or whatever) on your lap during your train ride, PLEASE don't push it into the seat back in front of you (that goes for knees too). If you are a fidgety person, then perhaps set your bag on the floor. Each time you are shifting that bag around on your lap, it's like kicking the person in that seat in the back. If the person in the seat in front of you turns around after you shift your bag, this is a sign that you are kicking their seat with your frequent moving around of your bag. There seems to be a blatant rudeness with commuting but if each of us makes an effort it doesn't have to be quite so ill-mannered. Your consideration of your co-commuters is appreciated.

Sore back

We're not sure this is due to a blatant rudeness or just another case of us being too caught up in our day-to-day tasks and our own space that we don't consider the impact of our actions on others and their space. It's a good reminder for all of us to think about.



Customer Engagement

Back in September 2013, a Northwestern University law school student from Miami was trying to figure out how to get to Winnetka from Clybourn when she asked for directions from a guy wearing a Northwestern jersey. She figured he was going her way. Turns out he was, in more ways than one. Their ride to the suburbs together sparked a long-distance romance – while she was in law school in Chicago, he was in business school in New York. Last month, five days before she graduated, they returned to Clybourn, where Joshua Schwartz proposed to Jordan Greenstein. She said yes. "So thank you so much for introducing us," Greenstein said. The pleasure is ours. Best of luck to the happy couple.

Summer Travel Notes

Special ticket, contests for Lollapalooza

Metra will offer an unlimited ride, 4-day train pass to this year's Lollapalooza music festival (July 28-31). The \$20 pass will be available for purchase July 6 at all Metra ticket windows, including all downtown and outlying stations, and through the Ventra App. And for those who were unable to get tickets to the sold-out event, Metra also is holding a contest to win two 4-day tickets to Lollapalooza. To enter the drawing, potential festivalgoers are asked to 1) submit a photo on Instagram showing a trip they took on Metra or a destination that can be reached riding Metra by using the hashtag #Metrapalooza and 2) follow Metra on Instagram. The winner will be selected by Metra based on the quality of the photo. In addition, potential festivalgoers should keep an eye out for a new image on Metra's Twitter feed and Facebook page for a chance to enter to win a 1-day ticket to Lollapalooza for Saturday, July 31. To enter for the 1-day ticket drawing, Twitter users must retweet the image and follow @Metra. On Metra's Facebook page, followers must like both Metra's page and the image to be entered into a drawing. Metra will randomly select one winner from Twitter and one from Facebook. All three contests end July 15. Official rules are available at metr rail.com.

Riverside ticket office to close June 13

Due to declining on-site ticket sales at its Riverside Station, Metra announced that BNSF Railway will no longer staff the station with a

ticket agent as of the close of business June 13. Ticket sales have declined at many Metra stations as passengers have switched to online and mobile purchasing. Although the ticket office is closing, passengers will continue to have access to the station facility at Riverside, where more than 500 people currently board each weekday. After June 13, customers who use the Riverside Station will be able to purchase a paper ticket onboard from a conductor at no extra cost. In addition, customers can buy tickets from an agent or vending machine at all downtown stations, at metr rail.com and via the Ventra App.

Metra applies for PTC grant

Metra has applied for a federal grant to help the railroad fund a \$3.7 million disaster recovery system for its Positive Train Control (PTC) safety system. PTC is a federally mandated computerized system that prevents certain types of train-to-train collisions, helps avoid derailments and other accidents caused by excessive speed and increases safety for workers. The disaster recovery system would activate automatically if the primary back-office server system fails due to a power failure, natural disaster, routine maintenance or an unforeseen event. Without it, any failure to the primary system controlling Metra's PTC would severely disrupt rail operations for passenger and freight railroads, forcing trains to operate at greatly reduced speeds throughout the Chicago region.

Metra offers special Ravinia ticket

Concerts will begin and end on a high note for music buffs who take advantage of Metra's seasonal rail service to and from Ravinia Park this summer. Those planning to attend any of the concerts at 2016 Ravinia Festival can board the Union Pacific North from downtown, or can access a station along the line to reach the park. A special \$8 round-trip pass has been expanded this year to not only include all trains departing from OTC, but Kenosha and Waukegan, and all station stops in between, to and from Ravinia Park after 1:30 p.m. The pass can be purchased on the train or from a ticket agent.

Kids ride free through Labor Day

Up to three children age 11 and under can ride free with an adult this summer through Labor Day as part of Metra's expanded "Family Fares" program. "A trip on Metra is a great opportunity to spend time together as a family without having to worry about traffic and parking," said Metra Executive Director/CEO Don Orseno. "Plus, on weekends, Metra's \$8 weekend pass is a great deal for travel."



THE ROUTE
WITHOUT
THE POUT

KIDS RIDE FREE*

Up to 2 kids ride free (ages 2-12) on select Midwest routes to Milwaukee and Grand Rapids through August 31st



Book now at Amtrak.com or call 1.800.USA.RAIL

Contact Metra

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 go to the "Contact Us" link at metr rail.com.

Metra Social Channels

