

Metra

ON THE BI-LEVEL

Commuter Newsletter, May 2010



Safety system coming by 2015

Metra is expecting to complete the installation of a safety system known as Positive Train Control (PTC) before the federally mandated date of 2015.

PTC is a computerized system that can prevent train-to-train collisions; avoid derailments or other accidents caused by excessive speed; and increase safety for workers on the railroad right of way. It relies on computers, GPS devices, radios and other communications equipment to sense when a train has missed a signal or is traveling too fast, or is in danger of colliding with another train. It will then automatically override the train's engineer to slow or stop the train.

Installing a PTC system on the Chicago region's railroad network will cost about \$300 million. Metra's share of that will be about \$100 million. Metra's PTC system must be compatible with that of the freight railroads, and vice versa, since many freight railroads use Metra tracks and some Metra routes operate on tracks owned by freight railroads.

Here's how PTC works: Before a train leaves its originating terminal, all relevant information – such as permanent and temporary speed restrictions, maximum authorized speed and any construction activity that requires work zone intrusion protection – is downloaded into the train.

As the train moves, the PTC onboard computer monitors the



train's position using GPS and a geographic track database. The computer constantly calculates a warning and braking curve based on all the downloaded information. It also "pings" devices along the route to check for broken rails, proper switch alignment and signal issues.

If the train is going too fast or is in danger of hitting another train, the system takes over to slow or stop the train. For

instance, if there is a temporary speed restriction in place because workers are doing a job along the route, and the train goes faster than allowed, the PTC system will slow it down.

Congress mandated the installation of PTC after 25 people died in a 2008 collision between a freight train and a commuter train outside Los Angeles. Railroads are required to have their PTC systems operating by 2015.

Before that mandate, Metra began installing an earlier, less advanced version of PTC on the Rock Island line. That system, known as the Electronic Train Management System (ETMS), will be upgraded by 2015.

The system could eventually be used to stop trains when a school bus or tanker truck is blocking the tracks, as long as the bus or tanker is equipped with the right technology.



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

Windy City help

A suggestion for AI and other Metra Electric commuters who have trouble with the new broadsheet schedule on a windy day: If you tear it in two along the long fold, each piece catches only half as much breeze, and yet shows all the trains both coming and going on any given day. You may not even need the half with the Sunday schedule.

Roy

Thanks. That's a very practical suggestion that could work for most people.

Rules apply to all

I take the 2:55 p.m. train to Joliet every day during the week. Myself and about seven to eight other people sit in the same seats and on this train car, someone keeps smoking and leaving ashes all over the two to three seats that we occupy. And not to mention that the car smells like smoke. Being a smoker myself (I smoke outdoors and try not to offend others), I find it appalling that one of your (I'm assuming) employees thinks it's OK for themselves to be able to smoke ON THE TRAIN! Shouldn't the rules apply to EVERYONE?

Tim

Yes they should, and we think we tracked down the culprit in this case and got him to stop.

A gate issue

Would you please inform the engineer of inbound train 1248 to move up along the platform at Fairview Avenue, where the train starts inbound. Over the past few weeks, the train has been stopping closer to the gates at Fairview Avenue, where the engineer parks the train and walks up from the engine to the front car. The only

problem is that the train gets there at about 7:38 a.m. and leaves at 7:47 a.m., meanwhile the gates are down the entire time with no trains passing through. This causes large back-ups along Fairview Avenue. The gates magically move up as soon as the train departs the station (say within a matter of feet). And this is becoming a more usual occurrence.

Thomas

BNSF has told its engineers flipping at Fairview to make sure the gates go up at Fairview before changing ends. We hope that took care of the problem.

e-smoking probited

I was wondering if smoking an "e-cigarette" on the train is illegal? I thought all smoking on public transportation was illegal. There is one person on the 5:03 train from Chicago to Kenosha who almost always smoking an e-cigarette. As if the hour or more long train ride is too long for him to go without smoking a real cigarette. He hides it whenever the conductor goes by and passengers complain about the smell.

Tiffany

First we had to look up what an "E-cigarette" is - Wikipedia says it's "a battery-powered device that provides inhaled doses of nicotine by way of a vaporized solution." And no, they aren't allowed on Metra trains.

Scary dog?

I'm tempted to send in this month's *Bi-Level* to Leno's Headlines. The very nice posters are well laid out and well-written and the article is good...BUT in the center poster "I'm not the Big Bad Wolf," could the photo NOT show the dog foaming at the mouth? I have St. Bernards that drool a lot and to get a good picture, a quick

wipe with a paper towel makes them look a lot more sane.

Great issue, funny picture.

Rich

Cita takes exception to your remarks. What you perceive as drool is actually Cita's tongue hanging sideways out of her mouth, perfectly normal for a dog. The poster didn't reproduce too well when we converted it to black and white and shrunk it down for publication. It looks a lot better in the original.

Better look again

On Saturday, April 10, I purchased a weekend pass for myself and my girlfriend. We went to the Downers Grove Main St. station to catch the 9:45 p.m. train to Chicago and it never came. We then waited an hour for the 10:45 p.m. train and that was a no show as well. Why were these trains a no-show? What a waste of money. I would like a refund for \$14.

Jeff

Yikes. We'd be sorry about that, except we don't have trains scheduled at either of those times at that stop. But we do have a.m. trains at those times. It pays to double check the schedule.

More trains, please

With the Eisenhower/I-290 construction in full swing, the UP West trains have become packed. Please consider adding trains and/or extra cars! This should/could have been anticipated!

Charles

We don't have any spare cars to create more trains or add to the existing ones. Every car we own is in use during rush hour already, and we won't have enough money to buy more cars until the state comes through with capital funding.

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

They’re priceless

On March 8, I was on the Rock Island 5:10 p.m. train from Chicago to Joliet. At some point, the diamond fell out of my wedding ring. I did not notice it was missing until I got home. My husband and I went back to the train station that evening to follow my steps from the train to the parking lot. We did not find it. On Tuesday, I called Metra’s lost and found, but it had not been turned in. After getting off of the train on March 9th, I decided to look around again. Jim McCormick was working in the tower at Joliet that evening. He noticed me looking around and asked if everything was okay. I told him I lost my diamond. He immediately took action and he and Miles Fuller tracked down the car I was sitting in on Monday. Within a couple of hours, Jim and Miles found my diamond on the train. I want to thank them both for all of their help. They went above and beyond to help me get my diamond back. I cannot thank them enough, and I want Metra to know what terrific workers they have as part of the Metra team.

Judy

We’re told that dispatcher Don Nelson also helped to find the needle in the haystack. We’re proud to have such multifaceted workers. And we’re amazed they were able to find your diamond.

Oblivious surfing

It never ceases to amaze me how little common sense some commuters have. Isn’t it a shame that we’re no longer surprised when the person sitting next to us doemonitors any one of the following: Takes their shoes off



Watch where you’re surfing, dude, you’re grossing us out.

and places their tired and stinky feet on the chair next to another passenger. Starts clipping their toenails. I’ve even seen someone change all of their articles of clothing while hiding under their overcoat. Today I actually had to ask the man next to me to either stop surfing porn or move away from me. Aircards can make a commute so much more productive. I’ve used one myself for years. But seriously, PORN?

Nauseated

That is so www.icky.com/ please-don’t-do-it.

Shoo, stair pigeons

I ride the Rock Island and my stop is one of the last stops before reaching downtown. This means there is limited seating. So when I spot a seat or two upstairs, I politely ask the people sitting on the stairs to move. This is usually followed by a grunt, rolling of the eyes, or saying they will not move. I don’t understand why these stair pigeons are getting an attitude with me, when they are the ones who are causing the inconvenience. I realize this is a public train, but is there a way to

stop commuters from sitting in stairwells? Maybe you can post a sign that reads “please do not block stairwells”. I also think this is a safety issue. These same commuters also block stairwells when returning home from downtown, making it difficult for us to get off the train at our stations. I hope there is something you can do to take care of the stair pigeons once and for all. Thanks for listening.

JJ

We’d like to see our riders use the seats, if there are seats available. If you must use the stairs to sit, please be polite to those who wish to get past you.

Clean up your mess

Congratulations on your 25th anniversary, OTBL! You probably think that in 25 years you’ve heard every possible commuter complaint there is, but I assure you (to paraphrase John Paul Jones): “I have not yet begun to gripe!” I have been riding the UP Northwest Line for six years now, and it occurs to me that we commuters have to put up with a terrible eyesore each and every day,

and I don’t mean having to look at our fellow riders. I’m talking about the houses which are adjacent to the railroad tracks. Quite simply, people are NOT keeping their lawns and property neat enough to my liking. Why should we be forced to look at people’s delapidated kiddie pools, crumbling lawn furniture, and neglected tool sheds each and every day? Perhaps Metra can start some sort of public awareness campaign. “Your Back Yard Is Not a Garbage Dump!” or something like that.

Joe

We can’t do much about that problem, except suggest you stare at those wonderful fellow passengers instead.

Voluntary behavior

Carol asked how clipping one’s nails in public is any different from shedding skin and hair, breathing, sneezing and coughing (Sound Off, April). Is she seriously trying to compare things that people have no control over (like breathing) to consciously cutting her fingernails - an act that most sane people believe should be conducted in private, if only to be polite to those around you?

Leslee

Yes, we believe she is.

Um, thanks, we think

Of all the slimy, pathetic, self-serving, pseudojournalistic corporate rags that waste our forests, our attention, and precious space in our landfills, *On the Bi-Level* is far and away the best. Keep it up.

Mike

Who are you calling slimy?

Spring Travel Notes

Bikes on Trains program expanded

Metra is expanding its popular Bikes on Trains program to give cyclists more options. Starting May 1, Metra is increasing the maximum number of bikes allowed per diesel train car from three to five, as long as there is room in the car. The higher limit will be implemented during a one-year trial period and will be made permanent if Metra judges the trial a success. Metra also agreed to a one-year pilot program to allow cyclists to bring their bikes on three lines during one day of the Taste of Chicago, when bikes normally are banned. The Milwaukee North, Union Pacific West and Rock Island lines will allow bikes during the non-rush hours of Monday, June 28. Metra also is reviewing its schedules to identify one line where a pilot program could be implemented to allow bikes on a very early morning peak train and a late evening peak train. The two-bike limit for Metra Electric cars remains in place, simply because there is no room for more on Metra Electric cars.

New features to debut on Metra website

Metra is introducing new features on its website, www.metrarail.com, to aid companies that want to do business with Metra and to provide information about the status of the agency's construction

projects. The business feature, scheduled to debut this month, allows companies to sign up for a "My Metra for Business" account, which will enable them to download bid documents directly from the Metra website, track the progress of bids and receive automatic e-mail updates for addendums to the documents. The second new feature is a page designed to provide updates about construction projects that are underway throughout the Metra system, including station rehabilitations, platform work, bridge renovations and grade crossing repairs. The page will describe each project, outline the schedule for work including the start and anticipated end date, and detail the impact on riders and operations, if any.

Take the Riverbus from Ogilvie, Union Station

From the businessperson traveling to and from work to the family enjoying a day on the Magnificent Mile, the Wendella Riverbus provides a fast and enjoyable way to travel from Ogilvie and Union Station to Michigan Avenue. Affordable ten-ride and monthly tickets are offered at \$16 and \$42, respectively; one-way tickets are only \$2. Weekday trips start at 6:30 a.m. and take only nine minutes from the dock below Madison Street to 400 N. Michigan Avenue. For more information, go online to www.wendellaboats.com.

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