



ON THE BI-LEVEL

Commuter Newsletter, October 2010



Message from the Metra chairman

Dear Metra Rider,

Events of the past several months provoked by the actions of our former executive director have presented the Metra Board of Directors and staff with numerous challenges. As we move forward I believe it is important to keep you, our valued customers, apprised of our ongoing efforts to implement organizational change and reforms to increase accountability and transparency at Metra.

Be assured that the Metra Board of Directors is seizing the opportunity, with new leadership, and reexamining our vision as we create a new Metra.

In this regard, I would like to comment relative to our ongoing efforts to reform this agency and implement the best practices being utilized in the public and private sectors to increase accountability and prevent fraud.

On May 26, we established an Office of the Inspector General for Metra by ordinance and tasked the respected law enforcement firm of Hillard Heintze, led by former U.S. Secret Service Special-Agent-in-Charge Arnette Heintze, to serve on an interim basis. Mr. Heintze's team already has received and followed up on 77 calls, leads and allegations. The team also completed a report providing strategic recommendations on the establishment of a permanent, strong, independent and sustainable OIG function at Metra. Establishing an OIG program "from the ground up" is not a simple task. However, we are committed to continuing our discussions with legislators and other concerned private and public stakeholders in utilizing key building blocks of best-practice based OIG programs in order to create this very important function at Metra.

On June 11, we engaged the accounting and financial risk management experts at Blackman Kallick to perform a risk assessment and control analysis and to provide our Board of Directors with the best practices for oversight of senior management at an organization like Metra.

So far, Blackman Kallick has performed a preliminary internal control and risk assessment, and has identified specific processes that require further testing and reform. Currently, many of the practices that have been the subject of scrutiny – executive compensation increases, 401(k) contributions, vacation payouts, etc. – have been suspended. Before resuming, we will have additional ordinances, policies and procedures in place. Based on the recommendations of Metra's Executive

Committee and Financial Reporting and Review Committee, the board on Sept. 17 passed ordinances establishing a policy for board approval of waivers from the non-contract employee handbook, amending 401(k) plan rules, and establishing a nepotism policy and a whistleblower policy.

On June 21, after interviewing several firms, we engaged Slavin Management consultants to undertake a national search for a permanent executive director. This is an opportunity to build a new management team. My personal hope is to have a permanent executive director as soon as possible. Recruitment ads have been placed nationally, and interest is high. We will be considering candidates from both inside and outside Metra.

The new executive director will further our reform efforts.

As further indication of our commitment to transparency, in the past 3½ months we have received more than 130 requests for information through the Freedom of Information Act, and produced more than 13,000 pages of documents in response.

We continue to enhance our website, www.metrarail.com, to include board meeting dates, agendas, board minutes and ordinances. Employment and contract opportunities are also on line.

Despite all that has transpired since the end of April, we have continued to focus on our commuters and on safely transporting 300,000 of them each day throughout the region. We pride ourselves on the nearly 96 percent on-time performance of our system. We recently saw our highest daily activity on June 11, when we transported nearly 429,000 Blackhawks fans to and from Chicago – without incident. We have addressed a variety of commuter concerns regarding a major, unprecedented plan to rebuild 22 aging bridges on our Union Pacific North Line. And we have battled to keep our budget in balance despite the challenges imposed by the souring economy and resulting drop in the regional transportation sales tax, the major source of our operating funding.

These facts are a credit to the men and women of Metra who keep our trains and our customers moving.

We welcome the continued discussion and debate with legislators and other concerned private and public stakeholders, and ask everyone engaged in that debate to recognize this board's efforts to take responsibility, tackle the issues we identify and keep the public informed.

Sincerely,
Carole R. Doris, Chairman



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 (Shhh!) BOARD

Got a question? We've got an answer

Thinking quietly

Metra, please reconsider designating "quiet cars." We need this. Courtesy has gone out the window, and the few who still practice it deserve a place to enjoy the silence on their long, daily commutes.

Jennifer

We got a few letters after the Tribune ran a story about how we weren't following New Jersey in its plans to implement quiet cars on some of its trains as a pilot project. Seven letters, actually, even though someone commenting on the Tribune's website listed OTBL's e-mail address and urged people to contact us.

Here's the deal: We're not necessarily opposed to quiet cars per se, but we're not really sure how much they're needed. And we have some concerns about how to implement it. Now before you start typing a furious letter to OTBL, let us explain. Everyone, including us, can cite examples of that horrible, oh-please-shut-up phone call we were forced to overhear. But does it happen every day? Maybe, maybe not. Maybe it's more noticeable because our trains are generally pretty quiet already. (No one, and that includes the Tribune, is telling the CTA to

adopt quiet cars. Why is that?)

And let's say we do adopt them. How should we do it? Should it be the first car on the train? The last car? The middle car? (There are some who would even say the whole train.) What if



you're a regular with a group of friends and all of the sudden your car becomes the quiet car? Are you going to send an angry blast to your friendly OTBL editor?

And who's going to enforce

it? New Jersey says it's relying on peer pressure. OK. Will that really work? After all, we already have rules against people hogging seats or putting their feet up on the seats, and we still get letters every month from people griping about violators. How well is peer pressure, and even conductor policing, working to fight those annoyances? Are our conductors, who have other things to do, now going to be called to mediate noise disputes?

So here's what we'll do. We'll consider a trial program for quiet cars. Before we do, we want to hear from you. (Use onthebilevel@metrarr.com) Try to be thoughtful, How often is this a problem, truthfully? Tell us whether you think it would work, and what cars should be considered. Should it be the ADA car, or non-ADA car? Do we need it on non-rush hour trains? How should it be enforced? Would it work on some of really crowded BNSF trains? And we want to hear from anyone who thinks it's a bad idea, if there is anyone like that out there.

And please don't send us e-mail comparing phone calls to smoking. Smoking indoors and on an enclosed train is illegal and unhealthy. Talking is neither. At least it didn't used to be.

It's a sign

I ride the BNSF from Downers Grove. I've noticed that between the Main Street and Fairview stations there is a signpost with three small white signs with black characters. The top sign is a W, the center sign has the letters QZ and the bottom sign is the number 2. There are other similar combinations of signs along the route to Chicago. What is the purpose of these signs?

Rita

They are guides for the engineers to either sound his whistle (W) or not sound it because of a quiet zone (QZ), with the number indicating how many grade crossings are covered by the sign.

Advisory advice

The service advisory e-mail notification option is almost a great idea. Unfortunately, it's probably unusable for most people in its current form. It would be really great if you could sign up for notifications only within

that time frame (or two time-frames, so people choose their outbound and inbound times). I'd sign up for notifications from 7-8 a.m. and 4-5:30 p.m., but that is about it.

Kevin

We are aware of the need for something like that, and we are going to do it...but it might be awhile, probably next year, for reasons that have to do with how much money we have available for enhancements.

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

Sound Off sound off

I’ve always enjoyed the Sound Off section of OTBL, especially the humorous and sarcastic tone of the editor in his or her replies... But something has happened and the tone of the replies has changed. Instead of being witty and entertaining they are safe and boring. I no longer have a desire to read the posts. I’m sure the change in tone was meant to make the section more respectful, but all it’s done is made it unreadable. Please bring back the fun.

Signed, fan of old school
Sound Off

Brad

Jeez, you’re killing us here. We’re certainly not trying to be boring - it just happened. We will try to be more exciting and disrespectful in the future.

We’ll start with your letter – who asked you anyway? Why don’t you mind your own business?

Pick your own rules

To the loser who felt like telling me that drop-offs were prohibited on the side of the tracks where I was saying good-bye to my wife: Get a life! I can read, and I know that the sign says pick-up/drop-off is strictly prohibited. I was a cop for 22 years, and I know better than anybody that a rule that is not enforced is not really a rule. I certainly don’t need some know-nothing mundane telling me what I shouldn’t be doing. If you notice, there are a LOT of people who ignore that sign, so too bad I happened to irritate you on that day. There are much more important things for the Aurora Police to be doing than writing stupid tickets for stupid laws.



If you choose not to decide, you still have made a choice.

As an ex-cop, I wouldn’t have to worry about a fine, and if I talked to the officer for a minute, I bet I could get them to tag YOU with a little “disturbing the peace.” Remember that the next time you try to impress someone. Also remember, you never know who you’re talking to – there is another law out there called the law of the jungle.

Conrad

Wow, seriously? Someone asks you to follow a rule and you manage to come up so many reasons why you shouldn’t? It’s a silly rule so I don’t have to follow it. It’s a not really a rule so I don’t have to follow it. Everyone else breaks the rule so I don’t have to follow it. Aurora Police (who are responsible for enforcement there, not Metra) have better things to do so I don’t have to follow it. I’m an ex-cop so I don’t have to follow it. And then to top it all off, you threaten to have them charged or subjected to physical harm? Where were you a cop, Selfishville?

Pant remover

Since your conductors have no issues with riders taking their

shoes off and putting their feet up on the seats in front of them, I can only assume that they’ll be cool with me dropping my pants around my ankles and sitting in my boxers.

I figure if other people are going to treat the train like their living rooms, I may as well too.

Pantsless Pete

Sure, go right ahead. Take off your pants, swirl them around in the air, run ‘em up the flagpole and see if anyone salutes. Just remember this, however: Conrad over there might charge you with “disturbing the peace.”

Seat hoppers, part 157

What bothers me during rush hour are people who occupy seats with their mounds of crap from knitting supplies to laptops. Or those who sit with their legs crossed, blocking aisles or seats and then look at YOU crazy when asked to move. Listen people... This is a public train NOT your living room. If you have a problem with people sitting next to you – DRIVE. Unless you’ve bought two tickets you don’t get to occupy more than one seat. Why should people have

to ask you to move every single day when you know the train is crowded with people going to work just like you? And to those people who seem too scared or timid to ask these people to move their stuff – you get what you deserve – to stand!

Rosalind

Now that’s exciting and disrespectful! Actually, that’s what we’ve always said: if you see a hogger, ask him to move his stuff.

Make up your mind

There is an old cartoon showing a man in Hell facing two doors marked Damned If You Do and Damned If You Don’t. The man is pondering which one to choose while a demon prods him with a pitchfork saying, “C’mon. Choose one or the other.” I am reminded of this cartoon when several times a week as I get stuck behind a passenger walking into the car from the vestibule. He/she scans the left-side upper desk, scans the right-side upper deck, scans the seats in the lower level, all the while blocking us “regulars” from taking a seat (any seat). I want to scream, “C’mon, Choose one or the other.” Both the upper and lower seats arrive at Union Station at the same time.”

Larry

Here’s what you should do: shove ‘em outta the way. That’ll teach them. ...Whoa, wait, maybe we’re taking this exciting and disrespectful thing a bit too far. Please be patient with your fellow riders. Many of them have not ridden the train before and could be unfamiliar with our trains. Kindly take them aside and explain the various options. Then shove ‘em toward one. (No, not really! We are still joking!)

Fall Travel Notes

Is there an app for that?

We at Metra get that question frequently from users of iPhones and other devices that use apps. They want to know if there's a Metra schedule app. The answer is no, not an official one. But our mobile website serves the same purpose. Anyone attempting to reach our regular website with a phone or other portable web-enabled device is automatically directed to the mobile site, which offers essential schedule, fare and system information in a streamlined, easy-to-view format. Don't forget to log into www.metrarail.com for your on-the-go info.

Metra service helps with home sales

Suburban communities served by Metra trains saw a greater increase in home sales in the first half of 2010 than the entire suburban portion of the seven-county area, according to a study conducted by the RE/MAX Northern Illinois real estate network. Home sales in Metra-served communities were 47 percent higher, compared to the 37 percent increase recorded by the entire suburban market. However, both Metra-served communities and the entire suburban market experienced similar declines in home prices. Communities served by the UP West Line fared the best when both sales activity and price are considered. Home sales rose 57 percent to 447 homes, the median sales price rose 9 percent to \$326,000 and the average sales price rose 3 percent to \$370,293.



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Special Events

- Oct. 8-9 • **Village Fall Frolic**
- Oct. 9-10 • **Four Kingdoms Renaissance & Pirate Fest**
- Oct. 10 • **Apple & Fall Harvest Festival**
- Oct. 23-24 • **Rock and Gem Show**
- Oct. 23-24 • **Great Train Expo**
- Oct. 23 • **Witches Walk Costume Contest & Parade**
- Nov. 5-7 • **Antique Spectacular**
- Nov. 12-14 & 19-21 • **Treasure Island Play**
- Nov. 14 • **Doll, Toy and Bear Show and Sale**
- Nov. 19-28 • **Quad City Arts Festival of Trees**
- Nov. 20 • **Festival of Trees Balloon Parade**

View a complete calendar of events and our online Visitors Guide at www.visitquadcities.com

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