

Metra

ON THE BI-LEVEL

25th Anniversary Edition, March 2010



Happy Birthday to us

Way back in the winter of 1985 – less than a year after Metra was born and just as we started using that name – officials at the Northeast Illinois Railroad Corp. launched a little newsletter for its passengers.

The goal was to promote safety and give periodic updates about happenings at Metra while also offering our riders a way to complain about problems and pass on suggestions. The quote that began the first issue summed up the purpose perfectly: “If you don’t tell it like it is, you’ll never get it like it ought to be.”

The title fit that theme, although the pun was clearer in the original punctuation: On the (Bi) Level. It said: We’re going to level with you, the riders of our bi-level coaches. (A redesign in October 2002 dropped the parentheses in favor of a hyphen.)

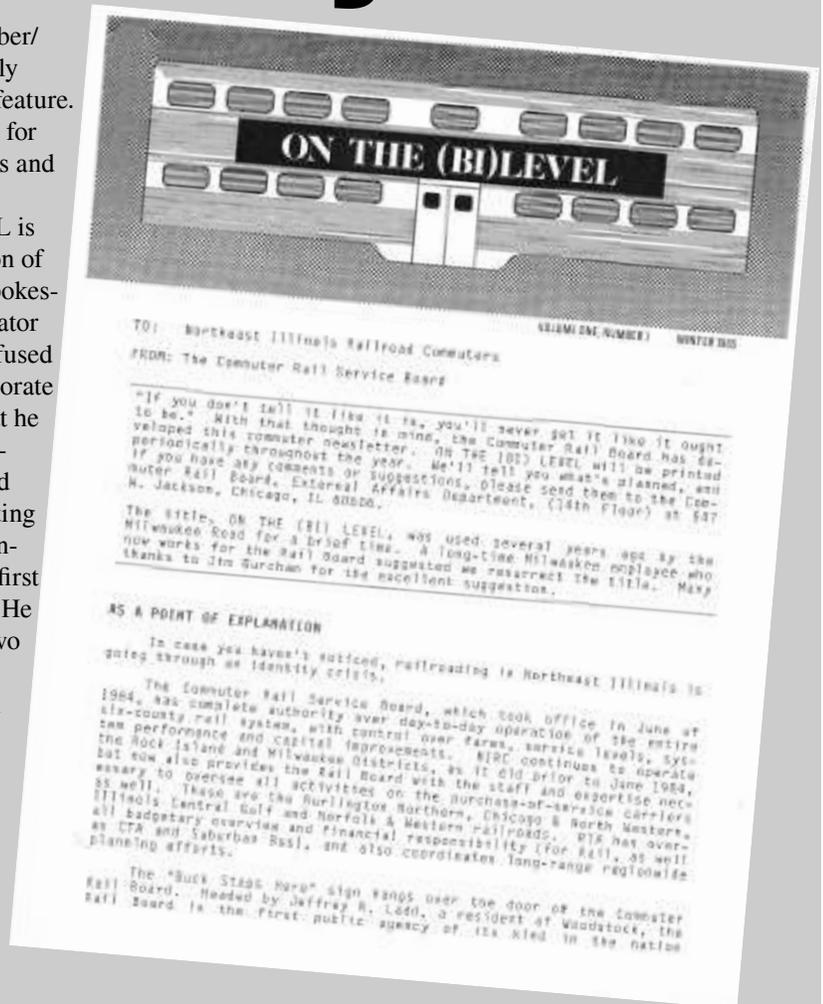
It didn’t take long for the two main features to debut. Sounding Board started in the fall of 1985, initially as the catch-all title for letters to Metra. It soon became apparent that riders wanted to vent about other riders, and a separate

Sound Off started in October/November 1989 and quickly became the most popular feature. Sounding Board remained for letters about Metra policies and operations.

No celebration of OTBL is complete without a mention of Chris Knapton, the first spokesman for Metra and the creator of OTBL. Mr. Knapton refused to do the usual stuffy corporate newsletter and insisted that he be allowed to publish complaints, so that Metra could make things better. His biting humor and unflinching honesty shows through in the first 11 years of the newsletter. He retired in 1996 and died two years later.

Join us now, as we look back at our first 25 years. We couldn’t have made it this far, and we couldn’t have made it this good, without our dedicated riders and loyal readers. It’s a cliché, but it’s true: we really can’t make this stuff up.

Keep those letters coming.



You can view this first OTBL at www.metrarail.com.

1985

“Even though the 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.”

First Sounding Board, Fall (first headphone gripe)

1986

“I thought my husband and I could share a monthly ticket?”
If we allowed our unlimited-

ride ticket to be used by an unlimited number of people, we’d be out of business.

January Sounding Board

“I don’t understand why people insist on blocking the foyer and aisles waiting for their stop. Twice I have not been able to get off the train because I couldn’t

get through the crowd.”
Spring/Summer Sounding Board

Special Message to the Feet-on-Seat Set: Don’t do it. If you persist, the train crews will tell your mother.

And those of you who prop
(continued on next page)

Metra

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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your brogans on the upper deck railings (dropping street grime on riders below) should never call us and complain about trainmen who enforce the rules.

Fall

"First it was transistor radios, now portable telephones. The man next to me talked on his portable phone for 20 minutes and most of his fellow passengers heard the conversation."

Fall Sounding Board (first cell phone gripe)

1987

Metra News: Metra gets OK to purchase Illinois Central Gulf electric lines and operate as Metra Electric.

Spring

"I thought I was on the Chicago & North Western. What the heck is Metra?"

Metra is the brand name that we stuck on the whole system of commuter trains in northeast Illinois once we hired a marketing director in 1984 whose first question was, "OK, what's the name of the product I've been hired to promote?" ...Northeast Illinois Railroad Corporation was too long to print on a train ticket, NIRC sounded nerdy and so we settled for Metra."

Spring Sounding Board

Did you know?

- That there is no average Metra commuter? You're all above average in our book.

- That the average Metra train is 4.9 cars long, but we've never seen one that looks like that?

- That despite our chidings, yokels in the upper deck still prop their Guccis on the railing and pepper the folks below with street grime? Knock it off. Someone will call you below average.

Summer



1988

Metra, Amtrak and the freight carriers have had several terrible incidents in recent months that wouldn't have happened if pedestrians stayed behind the crossing gates – as the automobiles do – until the way is obviously clear. Railroaders hate to hurt, maim or kill anyone. We hate it most when they are young people. PLEASE HELP. PASS THE WORD. STAY BEHIND THE GATES.

Spring

Malady of the Month

Symptom: Commuter experiences extreme difficulty lifting feet off floor.

Diagnosis: Orange juice, soft drink, coffee or other potable spilled on floor, leaving sticky, disgusting residue.

Cure: Dr. Diesel pleads with you to be a bit more careful. Unfortunately, mopping up after every run is a physical impossibility. Please help us.

Fall

1989

"Haven't you noticed that people who lean their heads on the windows to sleep leave greasy stuff (i.e., hair spray, gel, spritz, mousse, Vitalis, etc.) all over the glass? The slime remains there for months, and I can't even see out the window. Gross! Hasn't anyone at Metra heard of Windex?"

Winter

Malady of the Month

Symptom: Commuter looks down the aisle of a rush-hour train and finds every seat filled. Spotting what appear to be empty seats at the far end of the coach's upper level, he drags his weary bones up the stairs,

only to find...

Diagnosis: A totally monopolistic, egotistical and selfish individual has placed personal articles on three seats!

Cure: Dr. Diesel commands you to cease and desist. Keep it up, and we may consider charging you three fares!

May

"Why do you offer a student fare to kids in high school and grade school, but not to those of us in pursuit of higher education?"

It's easy. You're not a "kid." Reduced fares are provided for elementary and high school students because it is presumed they have no income. ... "Higher" education, on the other hand, presumes you have put yourself in a position to buy schooling over and above what society provides gratis. You are now an adult. Welcome to the world of paying for what you get. Metra will consider reduced fares for college students only when the oil companies begin selling them gasoline at half price.

August

This compilation of (almost) verbatim complaints, remarks and quips will apply a small dose of not-so-subtle peer pressure in an effort to resolve those areas of

chronic concern to you, the Metra rider. If you've got a gripe, present it in a witty, literate and slightly sardonic fashion and send it to us. ... Does something that happens on your train

get your goat? Tell us. We expose goat-getters.

Introduction to the first Sound Off, October/November

(continued on next page)

"Metra will consider reduced fares for college students only when the oil companies begin selling them gasoline at half price."

“If our ‘scents’ offend you, wise up and use some ‘common sense’ – don’t ride the train. I don’t know of any woman, let alone any man, who would give up something they enjoy because it offends a total stranger. Good luck on the expressway!”

December Sound Off

1990

“Oh please, give me a break. These whiners who write to you should all be condemned to riding CTA for a month.”

Metra Responds: We agree, though we never intended to present riders’ gripes as anything more than minor irritations (we realize we’re not addressing world hunger or acid rain here). “Sound Off” is a humorous (we hope!) way of confronting stress-inducing behavior in hopes of eradicating (or at least minimizing)

it. ...Nevertheless, your point is well taken, so ... we’ll try to fill next month’s “Sound Off” with a whole bunch of very short reports on “Great Things That Have Happened to Me on the Train.”

January Sound Off

Much to our surprise, we were overwhelmed with letters...

“The Burlington Northern is better than any singles dance – I met my husband on the train.”

“How’s this? I sat down next to a very pleasant young lady in July 1988 and struck up a conversation. Married the lady last September.”

“Halfway home one night, Ralph turned to Charlie and said, ‘Missed you on the train this morning – did you sleep

late?’ Charlie’s reply was, ‘Oh @%!\$%*&!! I drove today!’”

February Sound Off

“It is very rude to make loud slurping and sipping sounds while drinking hot coffee. ... These same people often buy those grossly oversized stale donuts packed in cellophane, and their crumbs cascade around them and others. Combine their eating noise with the slurping and it sounds like a German shepherd on a hambone.”

June Sound Off

Metra News: After several months discussing, debating, perusing letters and petitions and trying hard to find a compromise, the Metra Board concluded that smoking cars will have to go. ...We trust the losers will not hate us and the winners will not rub it in.

July 1990

“I couldn’t believe it when one rider on the upper level shelled a whole bag of peanuts on the way home one evening and left a pile of shells on the train floor. Where did he think he was, Wrigley Field?”

October Sound Off

“I make it my business to stand up five to ten minutes before the train pulls in. As far as I am concerned, you have no manners if you expect to get up immediately after the train stops and cut in front of me when I’ve been standing all this time.”

November Sound Off

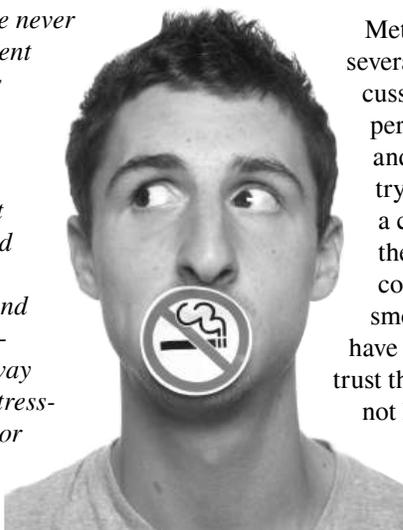
The Perfect Rider

The perfect rider doesn’t snore,
Or shell his peanuts on the floor
Or spill his coffee like a flood
That turns your shoes a shade of mud
He doesn’t smell of spicy food,
Has no B.O., is never rude.

The perfect rider’s fingernails
Are never clipped while on the rails
And when it rains he keeps his feet
Off the rail above your seat
He never stands up in the aisle
Before we reach the final mile

The perfect rider hogs no seat
With purse or package or his/her feet
Applies no makeup, wears no scent,
Nor flaps the Tribune like a tent.
Engages in no lewd palaver –
The perfect rider? A cadaver.

February 1991 reader submission to Sound Off



“As far as I am concerned, anybody who is dumb enough to block the aisles well in advance of a station so people can’t stand up to get their coats on is inconsiderate, rude and thinking of themselves only.”

December Sound Off

1991

“Not every seat-hog complaint is justified. Too many Metra riders are using this argument to hide their true colors – they’re elitist yuppies who judge people as undesirable because they don’t look like Patrick Swayze or Kim Basinger!”

June Sound Off

“There is a polite way to turn [magazine] pages and there is a

rude way to turn pages. The polite way is quietly and the rude way is to do it loudly. The loud way is torture.”

(Note: The off-the-scale pettiness of this complaint prompted a sarcastic Tribune editorial, “Metra, the way to really cry.” The editorial said, “Judging by Sound Off, Metra trains whizzing by are bubbling cauldrons of fear and loathing waiting to erupt in rolling riots.” That quote became the first one featured in the “Sound Off” introduction.)

July Sound Off

“I saw a totally unbelievable phenomenon on an escalator up to Canal Street in Union Station about a year ago. The escalator, packed with standing commuters, suddenly came to a halt. Instead of walking when it stopped, these

(continued on next page)

“There is a polite way to turn pages and there is a rude way to turn pages.”

individuals simply stood there and waited for the escalator to start moving again. These people aren't just lazy – they aren't thinking.”

August Sound Off

“Chatty people? Loud magazine flippers? A man making disgusting noises? It's time to 'fess up. You guys are making up these letters, right?”

We're bright and even a bit witty sometimes, but even we aren't creative enough to make these missives up.

September Sound Off

Metra News: Amtrak rededicates renovated Union Station.

October

“Confucius say, ‘Do not expect solitude on a train car carrying 80 people.’”

“May I suggest a car designated for garlic-munchers and perfume-bathers so the rest of us can enjoy ourselves?”

October Sound Off

1992

“It amazes me how a person who can carry full bags of food, cans and cups onto the train becomes suddenly, miraculously incapable of taking those same items off the train when they are empty. You people are slobs, and lazy ones at that.”

January Sound Off

“Smokers have no absolutely no right to jeopardize my health by their inconsiderate and childish habit...”

Metra sez: We omitted the last sentence of this letter (something about lit cigarettes and anatomy).

February Sound Off

Metra News: Infamous Loop flood washes Metra personnel out of HQ building for three weeks.

April



“Jingle Bells! Jingle Bells (a little late I realize!) For most of us, these sounds conjure up pleasant sounds of holidays past. But on the Milwaukee West Line, they're a daily nuisance. The jingling on the train comes from car keys that people (mostly women, I'm afraid) get out in advance of their stop. ...To [get their keys out] three to five minutes before their stop and then jingle and jangle the keys all the time is an irritating and inconsiderate habit.”

July Sound Off

“My letter is directed at All Public Riders who were born void of tolerance and live in a vacuum where the Earth, Sun and Moon all revolve around you and nobody else...”

“‘Sound Off’ – what a laugh. I think the appropriate title would be ‘B---ing (means complaining, fill in the blanks) Off.’”

August Sound Off

“My dear commuter friends, next time we're at the last stop, and you see me slumped down and still snoozing in my seat, would you please save me the embarrassment of a ride to the yard by tapping me (in a friendly manner, of course) on the shoulder?”

September/October Sound Off

1993

This little newsletter won't change the world, or even hope to make a dent in lifestyles. But we

can't just sit here.

January effort to get people to stop crossing live tracks at downtown terminals

“A writer in the August ‘Sound Off’ column, a self-confessed ‘incessant chatterer,’ conveyed that he/she and seven others of that species celebrate birthdays, weddings, baby showers and the like during their 20-minute commute. One shudders to imagine what this group could do with the 70-minute ride I have – perhaps enjoy a catered seven-course meal and dance a conga line afterward?”

February Sound Off

If Metra thought we could eradicate rudeness from the face of the earth, we'd stop running trains, open up charm schools and make millions.

Response to seat-hogger complaint, March Sound Off

“The recklessly open elitism of your correspondents may be a cry of helpless anger over society's trend toward equality and elimination of class privilege.”

May Sound Off

“What really amuses me is that those writers to last month's ‘Sound Off’ don't know how to ask for a seat without feeling guilty or fearful of being turned to stone. As far as I know, Lot's wife was the last person so afflicted and even she was only turned to salt.”

June Sound Off

“You are obviously encouraging the severely constipated to pick up and play with sharp instruments (like a pen, for example). The mope who wrote complaining about riders who pay for their weekly/monthly passes by check is a prime

example. ...Yes the word ‘budget’ is in my vocabulary. So is ‘BUTTHEAD.’”

October Sound Off

1994

“Are trains of certain length supposed to stop at a given point on a platform or just where the engineer feels best?”

Regular engineers holding steady assignments generally get this down to the mere inches. Relief engineers (covering vacations, illness, etc.) often need a little practice. Braking a train is nothing like braking an automobile. A steel wheel on a steel rail doesn't have much traction. Weather conditions, length of a train, extra ridership and other factors all come in to play. Most of all, engineers try to avoid SUDDEN stops. Better to overshoot a little than to have standees falling in the aisles.

January Sounding Board

“If you are going to let fools run in harm's way, so be it. ...At least stop lamenting about safety in your columns and get on to other topics.”

Metra Sez: The tone of your letter reflects exactly the exasperation rail-roaders feel when we realize that intelligence cannot be legislated. But we rise above exasperation and

have decided to be numbingly repetitious.

May Sound Off

“I am amazed that you condone the attitude expressed by the ‘Bears repeating’ person in the May issue. By what preeminent right do some people rush from the back of the train to the front so they can be first off – blocking others from getting out of their seats in an orderly fashion?”

‘It's time to 'fess up. You guys are making up these letters, right?’

Metra Sez: We don't "condone attitudes." We just print your letters and hope you all get along.

June Sound Off

(Note: Dennis Byrne column about OTBL in June 12 Sun-Times gives "Sound Off" a new intro quote: "...setting new standards of thoughtlessness, grouchiness, pettiness, elitism or self-absorption.")

As we've said on these pages before, good manners can't be legislated. But bad manners can be publicized!

September Sounding Board

Metra News: One cartwheel and one cracked skull later and you draw the attention of the many PI lawyers who ride, and that does not please our Claims Dept. Therefore skates MUST NOT BE WORN on trains.

October 1994

"I realize our legal system must flourish, but let's charge the going rate for two seats. Many passengers are standing."

October Sound Off complaint about a lawyer hogging more than one seat for a mobile office

"Listen pal, I get on the train first and ride for a long time. I need to do my work while I commute home. If you're so bothered by this, sit in another car."

December Sound Off response from lawyer who erroneously thinks he's been fingered

1995

"To draft a public rebuttal whose thesis statement is 'If you're so bothered by this, sit in another car,' is nothing short of bizarre! Your moral vacuity is fearsome to behold."

January Sound Off response to the seat-hogging lawyer

Metra News: C&NW was jokingly called the "Can't & Never Will." At Metra, we always knew they Could. We surely know they Did. So long, old friend. Hi there, Uncle Pete [Union Pacific]. Welcome to the world of left-handed railroading.

April 1995

"A reply to the person who wrote in July's 'Sound Off' regarding children commuting with parents: the last time I checked, Metra is public transportation, not self-absorbed personal transportation. ...Shame also goes to Metra for printing such a letter."

Metra Sez: If we printed only compliments and other butter-scotch, who'd read this rag?

September Sound Off

Metra News: Metra's address on the Internet is: <http://www.metrarail.com>. It's not for e-mail, it's schedules and other information only. (Neat graphics!)

November/December 1995

1996

"I read this newsletter regularly and am forced to realize - month after month - what a spoiled, whining bunch of people there are who commute on Metra."

January Sound Off

Note to the Cary customer who filled two pages commenting on the fare increase, suburban station hours, the fact that our advertising just brings more people to crowd the trains and then ended by writing "I bet you won't print this": You win.

April 1996

"I'm annoyed by commuters who don't bother to stand up as the train pulls into Chicago each

morning, yet once the doors open and the people start getting out, the commuters who've chosen to stay seated decide it's their prerogative to cut into the line of people who've been standing for five or ten minutes."

June Sound Off

"To equate prematurely standing in the aisles with waiting in line is a preposterous notion."

July Sound Off

Metra News: Metra launches North Central Service, the Chicago area's first new commuter rail line in more than 70 years.

August

"To the women who whip out makeup trunks and spend 40 minutes painting their faces and combing and brushing their split ends through the air: spare me the 'I don't have time' routine. Get up earlier and get dressed at home like everyone else."

August/September Sound Off



1998

"January's 'Sound Off' contained a letter from a rider with some suggestions for others. In order to be considerate, everyone is advised to refrain from sleeping, coughing, sneezing, putting on makeup, using computers, talking, getting in others' way, etc. ...This rider is obviously taking the wrong train. Instead of riding Metra, I suggest he/she contact a freight carrier to inquire about the times and routes of boxcars carrying department store mannequins."

February Sound Off

"Get a life! You're obviously

(continued on next page)

1997

"If a person's concentration is so poor that simple, friendly

spending too much time minding everyone else's business. ...If I have to sneeze, I have to sneeze. And you have nothing to say about it!"

March Sound Off

"Rude riders have always been in need of a conduct code, but the offering in a recent 'Sound Off' section was a little over the top. ...You sound like Captain Queeg ranting about the stolen strawberries. Face it, you're a train Nazi!"

April Sound Off

1999

"All the complainers embarrass me! It's probably because we're dealing with suburbanites, a k a whiners."

February Sound Off



"What is it about men and Kleenex? Have they never heard of them?"

April Sound Off

"At the end of a long, hard summer day, please keep your shoes or loafers on during the train ride. There is nothing more rude and obnoxious than having to breathe your foot odor and its airborne particles – no matter how clean you think your feet are!"

August/September Sound Off

Metra News: We welcome the new millennium with the utmost confidence in our Y2K readiness.

August/September 1999

"Next time, pee on the seats to 'mark your territory' and howl. I guarantee no one will attempt to sit near you."

December Sound Off

'Most outrageous letter ever'

The seat-hogger debate has been with us almost from the very beginning. But most of the time it's a one-sided argument. That's because everyone has seen a seat-hogger with their own eyes, yet no one ever admits to being one or, even worse, stands up to brazenly defend the practice. That changed in April 1998 when we printed what we later called "perhaps the most outrageous letter ever received by OTBL." Here is the letter, and some of the numerous responses that followed in May:

"I have some questions for riders who board the train and ask seated people to move their coats or bags so they can sit: Did you ever think we discourage you from sitting with us because you can walk to open seats further ahead? Even when there are no extra seats and we're asked to move belongings, why do you remain next to us when seats do become available? We work hard and would like a little room to stretch out. So keep this in mind next time when you are seat hunting."

Metra Sez: We can hardly wait for seat-hunters to answer your questions.

And did they ever:

"Do you pay for two seats? I didn't think so. Do you think we don't work hard? Do you think we are riding the train because we have nothing else to do?"

"You want to know why we stay next to you when seats become available. REVENGE. Beware of me and others like me. Not only do we linger in seats of those who like to spread out, we SEEK YOU OUT."

"You're incredibly presumptuous to think your space is more important than everyone else's!"

"If you want a seat for your belongings, buy an extra ticket."

"If I need a seat and your stuff is in it, that seat *will* become mine. We all work hard and would prefer more room, but it doesn't always happen. I'm shocked by your absurdness!"

"Only a very inconsiderate and rude person would claim to deserve an extra seat just because of working hard. We all do."

"I ask you to move your stuff just to (*@# you off!"

"Drive to work, you ignorant jerk!"

When we started this newsletter 15 years ago, we tried to be educational. We explained what Metra was, what we could and couldn't do – and on and on until it became more fun to print your gripes about each other. Ever since, "Sound Off" has become an effective forum of customer exchange.

Intended to present gripes mainly as minor irritations, "Sound Off" gives you a chance to blow off some steam, something many of you certainly seem to enjoy. We know of no other company that allows its custom-

ers to vent annoyances the way that we do.

We have fun printing and you have fun reading about the small gripes and irritants associated with daily commuting. By publicizing bad etiquette, we make you aware of what bugs others. It may even prompt some change in behavior. Without your wild wisecracks, we wouldn't be quite as readable or interesting. Keep the letters coming!

December 1999

2000

"Because I have nothing bet-

ter to do, I'm writing to complain about people who have nothing better to do than to complain about people who have nothing better to do than complain."

January/February Sound Off

"Recently, on an early morning train from Big Timber, when I went to retrieve my bag it was gone! I think it was stolen by someone hoping to find a laptop or valuables inside. Actually, it was a Sunday school teachers' guide. Whoever you are, you may not have gotten what you wanted, but you got something you needed. Read the book, you have much to learn."

June Sound Off

"The amount of perfume and cologne worn by riders is nauseating. ...Incidentally, men are the worst offenders – men should smell like men, not perfume."

October Sound Off

2001

"Why are there no restrooms on Electric line trains? Are we not entitled to the same amenities as riders on other lines?"

The current Highliner coaches were designed in pre-Metra times over 30 years ago when most riders boarded at closer-in stations for relatively short trips.

May Sounding Board

"In response to the person who's annoyed by newspaper readers hitting his or her head while napping, please be informed that train seats are designed for sitting upright. The space behind your seat belongs to the person behind you."

Metra Sez: Most snoozers slouch in their seats instead of craning their heads over the seatback, which would be infringing "air rights."

June Sound Off

(continued on next page)

"To those who think children should not be on rush-hour trains: Grow up. Or did you forget that you once were a child?"

August Sound Off

"Hey Joe Pick-Your-Nose: We see you from the upper level and not only are you grossing us out, I'm sure the people sitting around you don't appreciate your inconsiderate and disgusting habits."

September Sound Off

"I would like to commend Metra for their response to the unusual circumstances of September 11. You were ready for the mass evacuation of the Loop after the tragedy at the World Trade Center."

November Sound Off

"I have something to say to all the whiners, complainers and nit-pickers. Please, for just five minutes, stop it and shut up!"

December Sound Off

2002

"Loud talkers? Seat hogs? Standees? Slobs? Maybe the time has come to designate a 'complainer' car."

January/February Sound Off

"It always amazes me to hear the outraged bleatings of liberal elites when their claimed personal privileges are questioned."

"Last month in Arlington Park someone ran in front of the train. The engineer got on the PA and explained that he can't stop quickly, and although he has never put anyone in the hospital he has put two in the cemetery and doesn't want to make it three."

April Sound Off

"Recently some little piggy was chomping on an apple with his mouth open. I'm writing because as he was chomping, smacking and talking, small flecks of apple deflected out of



his mouth onto my hair. Now that's gross."

July/August Sound Off

"Don't pick at your ears as if you were excavating a tunnel; this is disgusting. Don't rotate your head round and round; it may be relaxing to you but it still resembles a Linda Blair 'Exorcist' imitation."

October Sound Off

2003

"For those who really want to occupy two seats, Metra should offer a PPP (Piggy Package Pass). ...This way, fellow passengers would have no right to feel resentful because a ticket was purchased for the seat."

April/May Sound Off

"To the writer who submitted the laundry list for newspaper readers: should I leave my muffin and coffee for you as well, so that you may have great pleasure reading the newspaper you asked me to donate to you? How do you take your coffee?"

December Sound Off

Metra News: The Metra Board of Directors voted Nov. 18 to remove the electronic gates from the Metra Electric District.

December

2004

"To the people who like to share the newspapers: I guess you haven't seen the readers that sneeze right into the papers that they are reading. And they are not little sneezes."

March Sound Off

"As pleasant as our daily commute is, there's one small request that would make our ride more enjoyable: more hunk conductors, as in 'top quality.'"

August Sound Off

"Why don't conductors open the doors on both sides of the train so customers who arrive at a station's non-boarding side with just a minute or less before the train departs wouldn't have to choose between running in front of the train to get to the other side or missing the train?"

Conductors don't do it because they have a strong antipathy to customers being run over by trains on the parallel track.

December Sounding Board

2005

"The worst seat-hog violators are those who hog four seats.

The first is used for their coat, the second for their briefcase or bags, the third for their opened laptop and the last one (directly in front of the laptop) for their selfish selves."

February Sound Off

"One small request would make our ride more enjoyable: more hunk conductors, as in 'top quality.'"

As sure as spring is guaranteed to bring crabgrass and weeds, winter weather introduces the perennial problem of seat-hoggism. Unfortunately, the solution isn't found in little green bottles of lawn care products, it can only be found in you.

March

"A scent level should be established and anyone who smells too loud should be told to stand in the vestibule."

June Sound Off

Metra News: Metra allows bikes on many trains for the first time.

June

"There seems to be a temperature control problem on some of your trains. Why does this happen?"

Thermostats are set between 68 and 72 degrees. If the climate seems too hot or cold, there could be a malfunction. In the future, please tell a train crew so they can address your concern and request repairs, if necessary.

September Sounding Board

2006

Metra News: UP West Line extended to Elburn, SouthWest Service extended to Manhattan.

Winter

"I'm tired of people complaining about cell phones. Some people obviously fail to realize that there's no difference between cell phone conversations and people talking on the train. Hey people, this is public transportation, not church or a library."

April Sound Off

"Yes, there is a difference between cell phone conversations and people talking on the train, a big difference. If you'd get off your cell phone, you'd be able to tell."

June Sound Off

Metra News: Jeffrey R. Ladd, the only chairman Metra has ever known, stepped down last month after 22 years leading the railroad.

July

(continued on next page)

“Today I saw an all-time first. ...A young brunette began fumbling with her purse, pulled out a can of aerosol hair spray and began spraying her hair. The man behind her gagged a bit but no one said a word. Unbelievable! I am never going to complain about cell phones again.”

August Sound Off

Metra News: Downers Grove resident Carole Doris became just the second chairman in the commuter railroad's 22-year history after being elected by a unanimous vote of the Board of Directors last month.

September

2007

Metra News: Metra christens the new Millennium Station.

March

“I think all the monthly gripes about cell phones, multi-seat takers, etc., all funnel into the same gripe. Ignorance. I've been riding Metra for three years now and I find it comical the regression to pre-teen attitudes you see on the train. ...In the end, there is no answer for Metra for these issues, because these childish actions would require childish sanctions like timeouts, and I don't think the state legislature would be willing to give them that power.

April Sound Off

“Since when is it allowed for someone to take off his or her shoes and hang his or her feet over the ledge of the upper level? ...If that wasn't bad enough, many times he moved his foot over the knee of the other leg and began picking his toes and removing whatever from between and in back of his toes.”

June Sound Off

“Metra tries to make light of the rudeness of those people who think the Metra cars are their own private chat rooms.

The folks who just want some quiet time before or after work will soon have no other choice than asking these people to stop. If that leads to confrontations **MAYBE METRA WILL FINALLY DO SOMETHING** to alleviate this problem.”

In a civilized society, one doesn't throw down just because another is talking in a public place. We remind you that this isn't your private sleeping car just as it's not loudmouth's private chat room. Asking people to stop is what happens everyday, on every train in the civilized world.

September Sound Off

2008

Metra News: Metra's bar cars serve their last drinks.

August

“To the guy who is constantly making those hacking noises with his throat and sinuses, please get better soon.”

October Sound Off



“I just have to ‘sound off’ over the ticket designs. Come on. Kids’ drawings belong on their parents’ refrigerators. Why do you subject the rest of us to this scribble?!”

“I would like to sincerely thank the rude, short, chubby crazy woman (you know who you are because you told me you read this column) who called me ugly and threw her glass of water

on me. ... After I made out the police report in Tinley Park and then made a report with Metra Police and went home to pack, I overslept, missed my flight, and had to go standby. But the great news is that after I checked into my hotel and on my way up to my room, I threw \$20 into a Wheel of Fortune slot machine and hit a progressive jackpot of \$168,137.69. After taxes I was able to pay off my mortgage and have a heck of a vacation. If it were not for that altercation resulting in me missing my flight, I would never have been at that machine at that point in time to win.

December Sound Off

2009

“Why do Metra trains run on the LEFT side of the railway?”

Not all of them do - it's just what are now the Union Pacific lines. The most plausible theory is that the lines originally had a single track, with the depots on the left side (as you head downtown). When a second track was added, it was easiest to put it to the right of the first track, since the depots were taking up space on the left side.

But the first track remained the inbound track, because a) the depots were all on that side, and you want the sheltered waiting areas for inbound riders since most people waiting at the station are heading downtown, and b) the railroad didn't want to pay or couldn't afford to pay to move them or build overpasses or underpasses.

February Sounding Board

(Note: Guy Tridgell column about OTBL in the March 13 SouthtownStar gives “Sound Off” its third and current intro quote: “The snarky, snotty ob-

servations by Metra's customers about fellow commuters ... offer some of the best free entertainment around.”)

“Pointing to the stimulus advantages you mention a \$71 million project will save 62 jobs. I'd feel better if you did not brag like that. I have 61 friends willing to give up our jobs for just \$62 million to split between us – and the treasury would be \$9 million ahead!”

Ah, but we wouldn't get renovated locomotives out of the deal, would we?

That's the main goal of spending the money. We're sure you could do a lot of stimulating things with a million bucks, but can you pull a nine-car train?

July Sounding Board

“The loudest, most annoying person we have to deal with ... is one of the conductors. Today he loudly, and poorly, sang happy birthday to a passenger. ...Based on the groans and grimaces I saw today, I am far from the only passenger that is tired of this.”

We forwarded your complaint to the right people at UP. They had a word with the conductor to remind him that singing happy birthday, while a nice gesture, is not an appropriate use of the intercom system. A few days later, we got the following e-mail:

“On Tuesday, one of the conductors had the audacity to bring a moment of levity to our trip by singing the happy birthday song over the intercom to a passenger named Sue. For this offense, at least one of my fellow travelers felt the need to complain to Metra, who then in turn chastised said conductor to prevent any further outbursts of light-hearted behavior.”

Sheesh. We can't win.

August Sound Off

