

Metra ON THE BI-LEVEL

Commuter Newsletter, April 2009



Metra ridership sets record

Metra trains provided nearly 87 million passenger trips last year to commuters in the six-county region, the most annual riders in the agency's 25-year history. The 86.8 million trips represent the highest number of rides provided by commuter rail in Northeastern Illinois in 40 years.

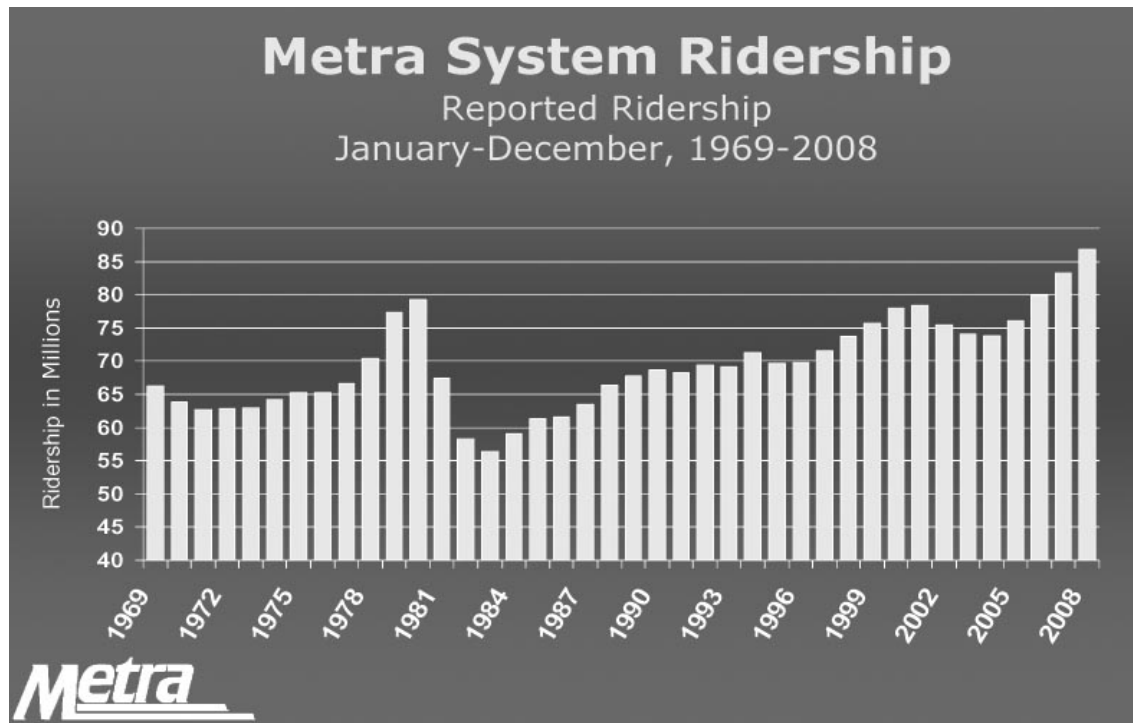
Since dipping to 56.4 million passenger trips in 1983, when Metra was formed, the number of commuter rail riders in the region has jumped 54 percent, averaging 2 percent growth per year. Compared to 2007, the previous annual system ridership record of 83.3 million, Metra saw an increase of 4.2 percent.

It's the third year in a row that Metra set a ridership record.

"We keep growing because we provide safe, reliable service as an alternative to road travel," said Philip A. Pagano, Metra executive director. "The traveling public has also become more aware that riding the train is considerably cheaper and faster than commuting by car on slow, congested highways. This surge in ridership highlights the need to continue to maintain and expand our commuter rail system."

Other major contributors to rising ridership include record high fuel prices and weekend service enhancements on two lines. Snowy weather last winter and in December was another factor, pushing some drivers to trains.

Seven of the 10 highest ridership months in Metra's history



occurred last year, including July, the first month with more than 8 million riders.

The busiest route continues to be the **BNSF Railway**, which saw 17 million trips in 2008. That's a 4.3 percent increase from 2007.

The two largest gains were on the **Union Pacific North** line and the **North Central Service**. The UP North jumped 14.1 percent, providing 10.5 million rides, while the NCS went up 13.6 percent, providing 1.6 million rides.

On other lines:

- The **Milwaukee North** saw a 10.9 percent increase to 7.8 million trips.

- The **Milwaukee West** line

increased 5.9 percent to 6.9 million rides.

- **SouthWest Service** ridership increased 5.7 percent to 2.5 million trips.

- **UP Northwest** ridership increased 4.7 percent to 10.6 million trips.

- The **UP West** line increased 3.1 percent to 8.1 million trips.

- The **Heritage Corridor** line saw a 0.8 percent increase to 746,000 trips.

- Service on the **Metra Electric** dropped 3.9 percent to 11.3 million trips, while **Rock Island** trains saw a 2.8 percent drop to 9.6 million trips. Those decreases are at least partly due to riders

shifting back to their cars in 2008 after the November 2007 completion of the Dan Ryan reconstruction project. But those lines are still above 2005 levels, the last full year before the construction project began.

Metra's on-time performance for 2008 was 95.4 percent, a slight drop from 2007. A significant number of delays were caused by larger-than-normal passenger loads. Passenger loading accounted for 13.5 percent of delays in 2008, versus 11.9 percent in 2007. In addition, Metra had 683 weather-related delays in 2008, up from the average of 138 in the previous five years.



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 letters for length and grammar.

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SOUNDING BOARD

Got a question, we've got an answer

A news blackout?

As a BNSF rider it's very frustrating to spend my trip to the train station listening to the radio, hearing multiple traffic reports that never mention any delays on the BNSF (on multiple channels even), even though there are delays on other Metra lines mentioned, only to arrive at the station, get out of my car, and hear the "voice in the sky" at the station announcing delays. I'm trying to figure out whether Metra doesn't want to publicize problems on the BNSF, or if the staff of the BNSF is that good that they can immediately determine the length of a delay before it hits the radio and I happen to arrive at the station at the precise moment that a problem happens every single time it happens. What gives?

Greg

We know there have been problems on the BNSF this winter but a news blackout isn't one

of them. Information about delays on that line is given out in the same manner and with the same frequency as other lines.

35th St. stop coming

Is there going to be a new stop at 35th Street from the Rock Island line this year?

Tammy

Thanks to the federal stimulus program and the efforts of U.S. Rep. Bobby Rush (D-Ill.), that project is fully funded and work will begin soon.

It's just optimism

The paper had an article saying Metra is bidding for 10 new locomotives. I read in the last issue of OTBL that Metra had no funding. Has this changed?

Kyle

No change. To speed things up, we started the bidding process even though we don't yet

have funding. We're hopeful the Legislature will come through in time.

EJ&E impact

Will the increase in train traffic on the EJ&E crossing the UP West tracks have an affect on commuter trains? Will there be delays, change in schedule?

Don

We had expressed fears to the Surface Transportation Board, the agency that ultimately approved the deal, that extra traffic on the EJ&E line could potentially expose Metra trains to delays, particularly at a crossing in West Chicago, where the increased operations leave little room for error. STB, however, concluded CN could use the EJ&E without adversely affecting Metra. CN has agreed to continue to give priority to passenger trains over freight trains at those crossings. There won't be any schedule changes.

Tax benefit for transit increases

Commuters who participate in a transit benefit program at their jobs saw their benefits nearly double -- to \$230 a month from \$120 a month -- as part of the fiscal stimulus bill that was passed by Congress and signed by President Obama.

Employers can offer their employees who commute a tax savings benefit when they enroll in the RTA/CTA Transit Benefit Fare Program. This program enables employers to use pre-tax dollars to purchase either CTA fare cards or RTA FareChecks which are then distributed to employees to cover the cost of their monthly commute. CTA fare cards can be used to pay for fares on both the CTA and Pace

while RTA FareChecks are vouchers that can be redeemed to purchase fare media on the CTA, Metra, Pace, the South Shore Line, vanpool and on certain Amtrak routes.

The benefit can be used in three ways:

1) Employers can give workers up to \$230 a month to commute by mass transit or eligible vanpool. The workers get the money tax-free and the employer gets a tax deduction.

2) Employers can allow workers to use pre-tax income to pay for transit or vanpools, up to the \$230 monthly limit. Workers save money on federal and state taxes, and employers save on payroll costs.

3) Employers and workers share the commuting costs with the combined contribution not to exceed \$230 a month..

Check with your company to see if it offers the transit program. For more info go to www.rtachicago.com.

Crossword solution

S	N	E	D	E	S	O	S	A	D	E
D	S	E	M	S	E	R	I	E	N	L
E	A	R	B	A	R	O	M	A	R	O
M	C	R	O	A	T	I	N	G	A	S
S	S	H	O	G	N	O	S	N	V	M
S	E	P	S	N	O	I	L	V	N	O
T	A	V	A	L	I	L	O	D	A	V
S	H	A	R	Y	L	O	D	S	O	I
S	U	H	E	L	T	O	L	E	T	A
S	E	S	E	R	I	R	D	E	L	O
E	E	N	G	N	I	R	H	R	H	E
D	O	G	A	V	A	R	E	C	O	L
L	O	I	D	O	A	M	E	N	A	N
L	E	T	S	H	A	M	S	H	E	R

SOUND OFF

“...setting new standards of thoughtlessness, grouchiness, pettiness, elitism and self-absorption.”
-Chicago Sun-Times, June 12, 1994



Restroom warning

To all the North Central riders who use the bathrooms in the Buffalo Grove station: be careful if you use them when the sun is shining on the windows because you can see EVERYTHING. The person picking me up pointed that out. She got quite a show while she was waiting for my train.

Pam

OK, everyone, consider yourselves warned.

A helpful hand

An incident last summer reminded me there are good people in the world. I was careless one day and left my monthly pass at home. I boarded at Park Ridge and it was an express train to Clybourn. The conductor asked for my pass and I realized I didn't have it. To my horror, I realized I didn't have my wallet either. I was certain the conductor would ask me to get off the train at Clybourn. But a nice woman who also got on at Park Ridge caught on to my predicament and let the conductor punch an extra ride on her 10-ride card. So, to that very nice woman I'd like to say "Thank you." I now carry an extra 10-ride card in addition to my monthly. It's yours whenever you need a ride.

Tim

It's always nice to be the recipient of a random act of kindness. Your letter helps balance all those gripes from riders about other riders...

Like this one

Many of us downtown Naperville riders have significant difficulty trying to safely exit at our stop due to many Route 59 riders blocking the doors and aisles as they try to position themselves for an early exit. I understand what their objective is but they cause great difficulty for us downtown Naperville riders. There is no attempt by the conductors to make announcements to not block the aisles. Why is there NO enforcement or mention to these Route 59 riders?

Bob

We can't tell you how many complaints we get about this issue, on this line and every other. Look, the people lining up early know they're inconveniencing others. They know they should wait. They know they're being rude. But that herd mentality clicks in and overrides everything else. Conductors do make announcements, and we at On the Bi-Level have addressed this issue many, many times. But it seems the me-firsters don't listen, don't read, and don't care.

Or this one

They say a picture is worth 1,000 words, and the attached is what were subjected to on SouthWest Service train #827 in February, on the second car back from the engine. This

man (he cannot be called a gentleman, as a gentleman would never do this), proceeded to take his shoes and socks off and stick his bare foot between the seat back and bottom of the seat in front of him! Unreal to think he did this in



the middle of winter. I do not want to think what he will remove on the train in the middle of summer!

Joanne

Really? This is inappropriate behavior? Doesn't everyone love stinky feet?

Or this one

I have been talking Metra for years. I can pretty much tune everything out (jacking up the iPod helps).

What I cannot stand is the disgusting habit people have of cutting their fingernails on the train. In addition to sounding like fingers on a blackboard, it is unsanitary and disrespectful. Wake up people, Metra is not your garbage can. Do this at home!

Kate

Common sense tells us that this behavior is not appropriate. But sometimes sense is not so common after all.

Or even this one

Some people on Metra need to loosen up when other passengers talk on their cell phones. I've been riding Metra every day for over a year, and have used Metra countless times before then. In that time, there maybe has been three or four incidents where someone was talking on their phone in a loud and disruptive fashion which truly annoyed me. Most people talk so quietly, I cannot hear what they are saying. If I can hear, I swear they are some of the most boring conversations I've ever overheard. The average time passengers probably spend on their phones is about 2.7 minutes I'd say. So why do so many people make such a big deal about a whispered three-minute conversation? The common occurrence on Metra that I feel is impolite which gets overlooked is eating on the train. Food can really stink up an entire car. A lot of times, the smell is very unpleasant. Other times, it just makes me hungry. I think the dated sign in cars about being courteous while talking on your phone should be replaced by one that addresses eating while riding.

Brian

Most riders would probably agree that most cell phone calls are innocuous and not annoying. But it's that small number of loud, obnoxious you-do-realize-we-all-can-hear-you-don't-you? calls that we all remember. It's the same way with food: most of the time it's not a big deal, but there's always someone who takes things too far. (And doesn't clean up after themselves.)



Saturday trains arrive on SouthWest Service line

Metra's SouthWest Service line began operating on Saturdays on March 21, giving residents of the South Side and south suburbs an alternative to driving when they want to enjoy shopping, cultural events and recreational activities in downtown Chicago.

Three trains leave Manhattan for Union Station at 6:15 a.m., 11 a.m. and 3:15 p.m. on Saturdays, and three trains make the return trip from Union Station to Manhattan at 1:30 p.m., 5 p.m. and 10:30 p.m.

Metra also expanded weekday service on the line starting March 23. Train #815, which used to run from Union Station to 179th St. in Orland Park, and #830, which made the return trip from 179th to Union Station, now serve the last two stations on the line, Laraway Road in New Lenox and Manhattan.

The change means riders who use those last two stops to com-

mute to Chicago in the morning don't have to wait until 5 p.m. to board a train that can take them home. Instead, they can now take train #815, which leaves Union Station at 12:35 p.m. and arrives at Laraway Road at 1:46 p.m. and at Manhattan at 1:57 p.m. The train arrives at 179th St. at 1:36 p.m., three minutes earlier than the old schedule, but the other scheduled stops for that train did not change.

However, riders of #830 should note that there were changes to the scheduled stops for that train. It used to leave 179th St. at 1:58 p.m. and arrive downtown at 3:01 p.m. Under the new schedule, it leaves Manhattan at 2:25 p.m. and Laraway Road at 2:33 p.m., hitting 179th St. and the rest of the inbound stops about 45 minutes later than the old schedule. It arrives at Union Station at 3:48 p.m.

Come along for the ride

Do you have something to say to the 150,000 people who ride Metra every day? Then we have the perfect opportunity for you.

Metra is interested in creating advertising partnerships for On the Bi-Level, one of the industry's most-read commuter newsletters. Our surveys show our riders value commuter rail's ability to remove stress from their lives with reliable, cost-effective service. By advertising in OTBL, you'll be able to reach a broad spectrum of the region's savviest consumers.

Metra riders by the numbers:

- More than 60 percent have annual household incomes exceeding \$75,000
- 37 percent are college graduates
- 17 percent are under 30 years of age and 23 percent are 30 to 39.

Why do they ride?

- 81 percent say it cuts their stress and gives them time to relax
- 79 percent say it reduces travel time
- 73 percent say it saves them money
- 37 percent say its one way to help the environment

If these numbers add up to you, consider advertising in On the Bi-Level. For information, e-mail us at onthebilevel@metrarr.com

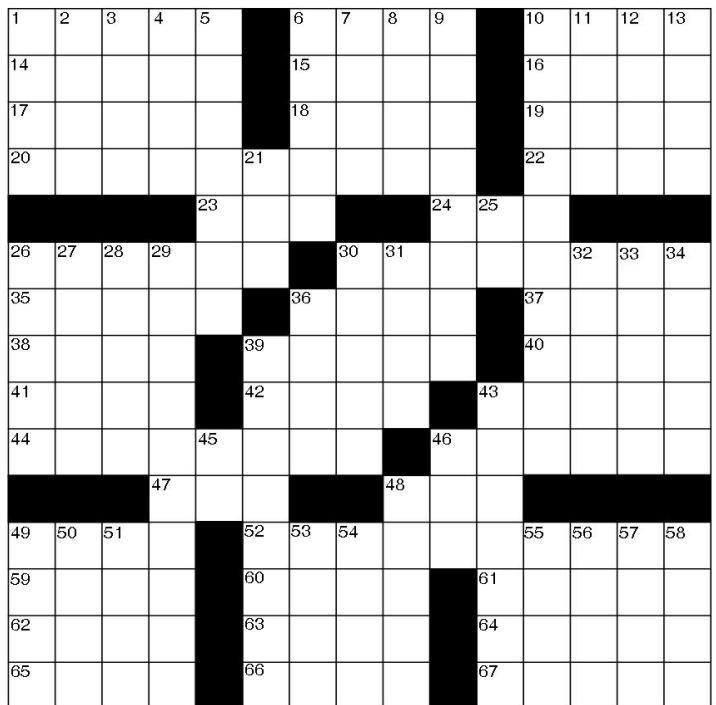
Crossword

Across

- Cut ties
- Bogus
- Allows
- Upper-crust
- Christen
- Hero
- Vote for
- Field
- Monster
- Misleading fish?
- Requirement
- Texting guffaw
- Paramedic service
- ___ with (pile on)
- Far-seeing avian pupil?
- Groups of three
- Usage fee
- Shades
- Sprawled like ___ doll (floppy)
- Table lace
- "I smell ___" (suspicious)
- Strega ___ (children's book)
- Charged atoms
- Writing
- Waterfowl's final act?
- Family symbols

Down

- M.D.
- Frazier or Biden
- Grating
- Consuming a humiliating avian meal?
- Sandwich cookie
- Resident of Belgrade
- Scent
- Legal claim
- One of the Great Lakes
- Thought
- Swirl
- Soaks up
- North suburban expressway
- Wizard
- Women's magazine
- Competed
- Scratch
- Says again
- Growl
- Mata ___
- Prayer ender
- Frugally
- Simba's cut?
- Brink
- Ripped
- Iditarod transport
- Fish eggs
- Musial and Lee
- Pointer
- Goddess of the hunt
- Show with Lassie and Pokey?
- Spring sound
- Evils
- French currency
- Bread ingredient
- Melrose Place, 90210 actor Rob ___
- Warner Bros. creation
- Religious subdivisions
- Before the Super Bowl
- Picard's command: "Make it ___"
- Criminal
- Agrees
- Part
- Dry
- Plant
- Relating to aircraft
- Journey
- Dirt
- Sweet-smelling flower
- Sign
- Used pieces of gum



Solution on Page 2