Metra
ON THE BI-LEVEL
Commuter Newsletter, August 2012

CLIFF NOTES

Survey will help Metra improve

A recent RTA survey that asked riders in the Chicago area about the region's public transportation system is giving Metra some extremely valuable information about what we should be doing better – and I can assure you we will put the results to good use.

Alex Clifford
Metra CEO

The survey asked riders to rank attributes of Metra service in order of importance and then say how satisfied they were with Metra's performance in each area. For instance, riders listed "Getting to destination on time" as the most important attribute of Metra service, and 84 percent said they were satisfied or very satisfied with our performance.

"Availability of seats" was next in importance, and 85 percent were satisfied or very satisfied. Other attributes, in order of importance, were:

• Safe train operation (99 percent satisfied or very satisfied)

(See Survey on Page 4)

Carman Bryant Howse replaces a window on an Amerail passenger car at Metra's 49th St. Shop, where the Amerail rehab program is based.

Car rehab program benefits riders, workers and taxpayers

We could dazzle you with all the passenger improvements we've added to our newly rehabbed railcars.

We could point out that the passenger cars are being refurbished in-house, by Metra workers with years of experience, dedication and know-how.

We could tell you how we've streamlined our processes and procedures and created an ultra-efficient operation that can strip and fully rebuild a car in just 36 days.

We could boast about a rehab program that is saving riders and area taxpayers a great deal of money while pumping dollars back into the local economy.

But we think maybe the benefit riders will most appreciate is the smallest: an electrical outlet – several of them, actually – near passenger seats that can be used to power all your gizmos.

Charge iPhone here.

If we sound excited by our Amerail passenger car rehabilitation program, it's because we are. We're getting like-new cars for a fraction of the cost of new ones, giving our riders some nice improvements and amenities and keeping 60 jobs in Chicago. It's a win-win situation for all involved.

The program aims to rehabilitate 176 cars that were built by Amerail (originally Morrison Knudson) between 1995 and 1998.

About 45 cars have been completed so far and we'll have 60 done by the end of the year. The entire Amerail fleet, which includes 79 cab cars and 97 trailer cars, should be done by the end of 2016. The work will extend the life of the cars by 12 to 15 years; with more rehabs down the road, we should be able to get 50 years of service or more out of these cars.

The work is costing about

(See Rehab on Page 3)

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.

Burlington trains have served western suburbs for 148 years

Here's the latest installment of our history of Metra lines. Much of this BNSF history was taken from a pamphlet issued by Burlington in 1964 to mark the Chicago-to-Aurora route's 100th anniversary.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the western suburbs served by the BNSF line grew up with the railroad and that the railroad grew up with the suburbs. The two have been intricately linked since the very beginning, nearly 150 years ago.

The route had its origins in 1850 with a 12-mile railroad that connected Aurora to the recently completed Galena & Chicago Union, now the UP West Line, in what is now West Chicago. The Aurora Branch Line allowed trains from Aurora to head north to the G&CU and then east into Chicago. By 1855, the branch line became part of the Chicago Burlington & Quincy.

That route, however, proved to be short-lived. Traffic on the G&CU became so heavy that it moved to terminate its trackage rights agreement with the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy to make way for more of its own trains. After trying to buy one of the two G&CU tracks, the Burlington decided instead to build its own direct route to Chicago.

Work began during the Civil War in October 1862. There were many hurdles, including the high cost of labor due to the war, a harsh winter that year and a "seemingly bottomless bog" between Hinsdale and Western Springs that had to be filled in. The work was done by May 1864, at a cost of about $1 million.

Although passenger trains started operating on the line immediately, the first trains primarily carried milk, hay and wheat to Chicago from small agricultural towns such as Naperville, Downers Grove, Hinsdale and La Grange. However, the towns soon began to take on a more residential character, with businessman from Chicago moving in. By the end of the decade, the first trains catering to commuters to and from Chicago started operating, and the towns along the line began to grow into the suburbs we know today.

The 1871 Chicago Fire further highlighted the advantages of living in the suburbs. (The Burlington's offices at 2 S. Water were destroyed; but company records survived in a fireproof safe.) In the years following the fire, real estate developers and the railroad promoted suburban life over living in the city.

In 1881, Burlington trains began to use the original Union Station at Canal and Adams. Before this time, Burlington used the Illinois Central station at Randolph and Michigan, reaching the IC's tracks via the St. Charles Air Line. In 1925, its trains started to use the current Union Station.

Other notable events in the BNSF Line's history include:

1934: Burlington debuted its stainless steel, diesel-powered Zephyr "streamliner" locomotive in stylish fashion – it covered 1,015 miles from Denver to Chicago's Century of Progress Exposition in 13 hours, 5 minutes, half the time of a conventional train. The Zephyrs never pulled suburban trains, but diesel engines were here to stay – and the lightweight stainless steel was soon adopted for passenger cars.

1950: Burlington became the first Chicago area railroad to use stainless steel, bi-level, air-conditioned gallery cars, setting the standard for Chicago commuter rail lines. The "Suburbanaire Service" cars enabled Burlington to expand capacity without the need for more trains or longer trains. Five of the cars from the 1950s, manufactured by Budd, are still in use.

1952: The railroad completed the replacement of steam locomotives with diesel engines on the suburban line. At this time it also moved its Downers Grove terminal operation to Aurora, which resulted in more train service for the towns west of Downers Grove.

1965: Burlington started to use a push-pull operation into and out of Union Station.

1970: The Burlington Northern was formed by the merger of the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy, Great Northern, Northern Pacific and Spokane Portland & Seattle. Also that year, the railroad adopted a new schedule with more express trains to and from far western suburbs.

1972: The West Suburban Mass Transit District was formed by communities along the line to help BN secure funding for capital improvements.

1973: Area voters approved the creation of the Regional Transportation Authority to assist all public transportation.

1983: The RTA Act was amended; Metra and Pace were created.

1996: BN merged with the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway to form BNSF Railway.

Today, BNSF Railway still owns the BNSF line, and operates the commuter rail service with its own crews under a purchase-of-service agreement with Metra. It is by far the busiest line on the system, providing 16.6 million of Metra's 82.7 million passenger trips in 2011. (The UP-NW was second, with 11.1 million trips.)

Rehab program has many benefits

(Continued from Page 1)
$650,000 per car, or $115 million for the entire project. Contrast that with the going rate for a new car, which is $2.5 million to $3 million depending on the type of car and the number ordered. That's a savings of about 75 percent or more.

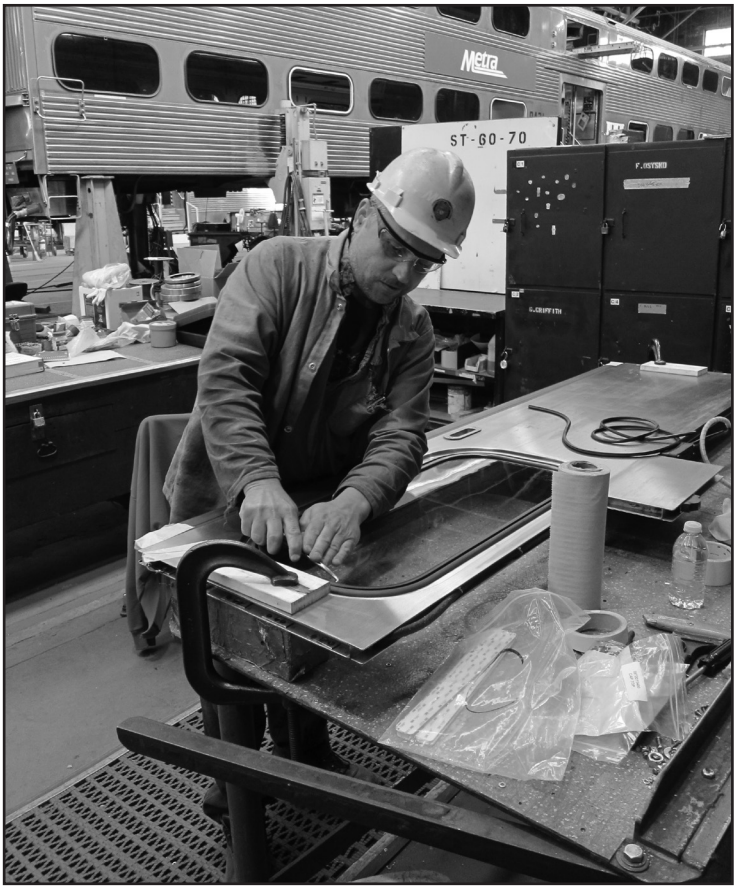
What will passengers notice when they board a new car? The first thing is probably the new-car smell, actually not that different from the smell of a new automobile. When the doors close, they may notice that the doors now have sensitive edges, like elevators doors, so they will retract if they come in contact with a person or object in the way.

They'll also see new LED signs that will assist all passengers, but especially passengers with hearing disabilities, with location announcements. They will walk on new composite floors, sit on brand-new seats that meet the latest safety regulations and feel the cool air from rebuilt AC units. If they must use the bathroom, they'll be flushing brand-new toilets, and if they're in a wheelchair, they'll get a ride on a new lift.

And then there are the electrical outlets. There are 19 of them, spaced throughout the seating area on the lower level of the car to power all those phones, computers, iPods, iPads and other gadgets that none of us can live without any more.

All the work is done at Metra's shop at 49th St. along the Rock Island line. The cavernous building, originally built by the Rock Island Railroad, is easily large enough to allow for four cars to be worked on at the same time, with room to spare.

Metra has been rebuilding passenger coaches at this shop for decades and intrinsically benefits from a skillful and dedicated workforce. Over the past two years the efficiency of the rehab program has improved tremendously. In addition to having an experienced workforce, Metra restructured the operation by implementing multi-station manufacturing processes learned during the procurement of 300 new Nippon Sharyo gallery cars and 26 new Nippon Sharyo Highliner cars for the Metra Electric Line. Metra unions have been very receptive and cooperative in the implementation of the new processes.



Carman Frank Osysko replaces a window in a door from one of the Amerail cars being rehabbed by Metra workers at the 49th St. Shop along the Rock Island Line.

The efficient operation is set up as an assembly line, with four stations where various tasks are performed. Of the 60 carmen, electricians and sheet metal workers assigned to the project, about 18 work at each of the first three stations with the rest at the last station.

At the first station, the car is stripped: seats, bathrooms, heater guards and doors are removed. The old plymetal floor is ripped up, and the new composite floor is installed. That's the "fun part," says Carman Bryant Howse, who means it's a lot of hard work. Windows are replaced. The metal diaphragm – the accordion-like structure that connects two cars – is replaced with a rubber one. Steps are sandblasted and replaced if necessary. Electrical boxes are rebuilt and the event recorder, sort of like an airplane's "black box," is replaced.

At the second station, the wheelchair lift is removed and replaced with an upgraded model. The battery charger and battery box are replaced. A new retention toilet tank is installed and new heating and lighting is put in.

At the third station, all the interior work is done. That includes installing new passenger seats, rebuilt AC units, new toilets and bathroom walls, new LED signs, new windshields and new windshield wipers. Also at this station, rebuilt trucks – what we in the railroad industry call the wheel assemblies – are installed.

The final station involves putting the finishing touches on the car and carrying out various tests. Painting is done and decals are installed. The batteries, battery chargers, event recorders, cab signals, LED signs, doors and other elements are tested. If the car passes the tests it is sent out into service. The cars can be found on most deisel Metra lines.

Each car spends nine days at each station and gets through all four stations in 36 days. The streamlined, efficient process means we can rehab 27 cars a year.

With each car, the process gets better and better. Workers on the project say the experience they gain with each car helps them improve their efficiency and effectiveness on the next. They've developed a nice camaraderie, something that is apparent in even a brief visit to the shop.

And the workers are definitely keeping riders in mind as the cars are rehabbed. "We take pride in our work. We try to make sure everything is as safe as it can be," said Lisa Nelson, a carman for 14 years. "We know that if the passengers aren't happy, it trickles down to us."

But so far, the feedback has been positive, she said. "We've heard that some passengers thought they were riding in brand-new cars."

Summer heat presents challenges to keeping Metra system operating

This summer's prolonged heat wave has been hard on all of us in the Chicago region, including your commuter railroad. Extreme temperatures place stress on all Metra's equipment and increase the need for diligence on our part to ensure that we continue to provide safe and efficient service.

The safe operation of Metra service and the safety of our passengers are our primary concerns. Weather conditions present challenges to railroad operations that must be dealt with on a daily basis; and even though the skies are clear, the effects of extreme heat can result in delays that affect Metra's on-time performance.

Speed restrictions are one safety measure used by railroads during extreme heat. The conditions triggering speed restrictions vary from railroad to railroad but are generally put into effect on the Metra system when temperatures exceed 95 degrees. These restrictions require that trains operate at least 10 mph below a posted speed limit for a section of track. The restrictions are intended to reduce the stress on the track and prevent issues that would result in a major service disruption. However, lowered travel speeds result in longer travel times and schedule delays.

Metal rails expand in the heat and contract when it's cold. Exposure to the elements can put even the best-maintained track out of alignment. Federal Railroad Administration regulations require the rail to be inspected every three days at minimum year round. As an added measure of safety when extreme temperatures are forecast, Metra increases the frequency of track inspections, going over each mile of rail at least once a day with major switching points and other vulnerable sections of track inspected multiple times a day.

Signals, crossing gates, catenary wires and other components powered by electricity are also affected by extreme heat. Power outages and overheating of equipment can affect service. And heat waves can produce severe storms, lightning strikes high winds and flash flooding, which all have the potential to slow or halt service.

Metra tries to address the potential for service disruptions by keeping extra track inspectors as well as track and signal maintainers on duty through the morning and evening rush hours when extreme heat is forecast so that we can quickly address problems that may arise. In addition, any Metra employees who spot what they believe to be a track defect are empowered to contact the rail line's dispatch office so that the section of track in question can be immediately taken out of service, inspected and repaired if necessary.

The extremely hot weather also stresses our rail fleet and can contribute to mechanical failures. To minimize disruptions and ensure safety, Metra's Mechanical Department deploys extra personnel to inspect equipment more frequently throughout the day.

Every weekday, Metra trains carry more than 300,000 passengers. Providing safe passage for each and every one of them is a responsibility we take very seriously. Although Metra also prides itself on its on-time performance, we will always put safety first. While we understand that slowing our trains down during hot weather may disrupt our riders' schedules, the speed restrictions and other measures imposed on our service are intended to preserve safety while enabling our trains to operate as efficiently as possible.

♫ Workin' on the railroad ♫

(This is the first of what will be a regular feature about notable Metra employees or riders.)

Anyone who's spent time in Union Station has probably seen our Joe Sykes, a customer service supervisor at the busy facility. Sykes, who has worked for Amtrak and Metra (mostly at CUS) since 1980, can often be seen with his illuminated "Need Help? Just Ask" badge, giving riders directions or information.

What most riders don't know is that on his own time Sykes raises money to combat neuroblastoma, the rare disease that claimed his 7-year-old son Joey in 2004. For several years after his son's death, Sykes organized a fund-raising bowling event, and the Joey Sykes basketball tournament is held each January at St. Raymond school in Mount Prospect. The money he has raised was donated in Joey's name to Bear Necessities to call attention to the disease and fund research into a cure.

You can donate to Bear Necessities in Joey's name by going to *www.bearnecessities.org* and following the prompts.

Survey

(Continued from Page 1)

- Value of service for fare paid (84 percent)
- Cleanliness of train interior (83 percent)
- Number of scheduled rush-hour trains (83 percent)
- Personal safety on train (98 percent)
- Total travel time for trip (84 percent)
- On-board personnel courtesy (91 percent)
- Number of scheduled non-rush-hour trains (67 percent)

As you can see, there is plenty of room for improvement in nearly every area. We have to pay extra attention to those areas where we are falling short, and we have already begun to do so.

For instance, our Mechanical Department is putting a plan together to boost the cleanliness of our trains. We have been working hard in recent months to try to operate every train on schedule, but these results tell us we must work even harder. And while a customer-focused organization shouldn't need to be told how important it is for our employees to be courteous and professional, the survey gives us some pointed direction that we must redouble our efforts.

Two-thirds of riders said they are satisfied or very satisfied with the ease of paying for transfers, the ease of transfers and signage to service, which tells us other areas that could be improved.

About 90 percent of riders said they were satisfied or very satisfied with Metra's overall performance. I hope that by using this survey constructively, and making improvements in problem areas, we can also boost the overall percentage of happy customers.

You can follow me on Twitter @MetraCEO