

ON THE BI-LEVEL

Metra®



Metra's Monthly Commuter Newsletter

August 2015

About our mobile app and Ventra

Last October, Metra entered into a regional partnership with the CTA and Pace with the goal of giving transit customers the ability to use one form of payment for travel on any of our buses and trains. The first result of this partnership will be a regional mobile application, or app, which will allow our customers to buy and display Metra tickets on their smartphones. It also initiates Metra's participation in the Ventra regional fare payment system, transforming

the way our customers pay for transit services.

We couldn't be more excited about the mobile app and we think our riders will be, too. It's packed with new and useful features, including mobile tickets, train-tracking and schedule tools and Ventra account management. Feedback we've received from our testers has been overwhelmingly positive and extremely valuable. We are currently using that feedback to fine-tune the
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On-time performance data is easy to find

Metra customers who are interested in how timely their trains are operating can access a wealth of on-time performance data on Metra's website, including a new chart that details and ranks the top reasons for delays.

For the record, Metra's overall on-time performance for the first six months of the year stands at 95.8 percent. From March through June, we bested our goal of operating 95 percent of our trains on time. Like the rest of the U.S. commuter railroad industry, Metra considers a train to have operated on time if it reaches its final destination within five minutes and 59 seconds of its scheduled arrival.

"A critical part of Metra's on-time reports is a comprehen-

sive analysis of what causes train delays," said Metra Executive Director/CEO Don Orseno. "Our goal is to identify delays that could have been prevented so that we can continue to improve our performance."

Every month, Metra's Deputy Executive Director/Operations, Pete Zwolfer, delivers a presentation to the Metra Board of Directors about the "State of Metra Operations." The report includes on-time performance data about the most recent month, and it now includes the chart listing the top reasons for delays.

In addition, a written, more detailed on-time performance report is filed with the board.

Both reports can be found on Metra's website. The easiest

way to find them is to click on "About Metra" from the homepage, www.metrarail.com, and then click on "Board Meeting Information" on the left-hand side. That will bring up a list of monthly agendas. Click an agenda and you'll see listed both the "State of Metra Operations" report and the "Commuter Rail System On-Time Performance Report."

In June, Metra's on-time performance rate was 95.8 percent – up from 93.1 percent in June 2014. This improved performance follows three months in which Metra's on-time performance met or exceeded 97 percent: 97 percent in March and 97.2 percent in April and May. For the first half of 2015, the sys-

temwide on-time performance rate was 95.8 percent.

The most common cause for delays in June was mechanical problems, either due to a mechanical problem on the train itself or a delay caused by a mechanical problem on a train or trains ahead. Although some mechanical delays can be prevented, the age of Metra's rail cars makes it increasingly difficult and time-consuming to keep engines and cars operating smoothly.

Other reasons for delays in June were train loading issues, freight train interference, signal or switch failures, right-of-way accidents, weather, track obstructions/debris, track construction and human error.

Metra

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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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Ventra

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app with a goal of unveiling it sometime this fall.

The following Q and A addresses some questions our customers and other Chicago area residents may have about regional fare payment systems, the Ventra mobile app and state law.

Q. What does state law require the region to do?

A. In 2011, the RTA act was amended to mandate that the region develop and implement a "regional fare payment system" by 2015 that must "allow consumers to use contactless credit cards, debit cards and prepaid cards to pay for all fixed-route public transportation services." Metra, CTA and Pace all accept contactless credit cards, debit cards and prepaid cards for payment for transit fares and RTA has indicated that we are in compliance with the law.

Q. Doesn't state law require a universal fare card?

A. No. It does not explicitly require the adoption of a universal fare card nor does it mandate a universal fare system. By joining CTA and Pace and embracing the Ventra system, we will develop the foundation for a regional fare payment system that will give our customers the ability to ride on CTA, Pace and Metra using one means of payment.

Q. So Ventra will be the universal card?

A. Yes, with this important distinction: Ventra will serve as a way to *buy* Metra tickets, starting with the mobile app. However, unlike on the CTA and Pace, on Metra the card will not serve *as* a ticket or pass.

Q. Why not?

A. It would be extremely challenging to do on our system. On the CTA and Pace, riders pay a flat fare by tapping the Ventra card on a reader to enter a turnstile or pass a bus opera-

tor. It's a closed system with flat fares. By contrast, Metra has an open system – multiple entrances, no turnstiles – and our fares are based on how far a rider travels. Put simply, there's nowhere to tap, and if there was, the system would also need to know how far each customer was traveling to deduct the correct fare.

Q. Can't you solve that?

A. There are a few options, most of them very costly. Metra received no funding from the state to meet this mandate. We ruled out putting turnstiles or gates at all our stations as prohibitively expensive and impractical. It would also slow boarding, and we don't think our riders would support that. An option that requires a customer to "tap on" to a card reader before or when they board a train and "tap off" when they leave also would require extremely expensive equipment and slow the boarding process. We also could equip our conductors with handheld readers or credit card swipe machines. But we would likely experience connectivity issues on our trains and relying on such machines would significantly slow the ticketing and verification process. That would more than likely require additional train personnel and increase our operating costs. In short, there is no simple, inexpensive way to do it.

Q. So that leaves using Ventra as a way to buy a Metra ticket. How are you doing that?

A. Mobile ticketing will enable us to take the smartphones that most of our customers already own to deliver a solution at little cost to Metra. It will be like putting a ticket vending machine in the pockets of everyone with a smartphone. This seems to be the path that other large U.S. commuter railroads are taking, too. The app will accept credit, debit and Ventra accounts to allow our customers to buy tickets on the train with something other than cash.

Q. How does it work?

A. It's simple. Metra customers who own Apple and Android phones will be able to download the app and register their credit, debit and/or Ventra accounts. They can then buy any Metra ticket – a monthly pass, 10-ride ticket, one-way ticket, weekend pass, even reduced fare tickets – via the app. On the train, they will display the ticket on their smartphone, showing the screen to a conductor to verify that they have a valid ticket.

Q. Who will be able to use the new Ventra mobile app?

A. Anyone with an Apple or Android smartphone will be able to use it.

Q. If I don't have a smartphone, how can I buy a ticket?

A. If you don't have a smartphone, you will still be able to buy a Metra ticket using existing payment options from our ticket agents and conductors, at our vending machines and on our website. Mobile ticketing is a supplementary system; we are not taking away the paper tickets for those who prefer that option or don't own a smartphone.

Q. You say you're starting with mobile ticketing. What comes next?

A. We've always said that the Ventra mobile app is just the next step with our regional partners to implement more fare payment options. We are excited to be able to offer so much functionality in the first release of the app, and we will continue to upgrade the app to add more functionality. In addition to the app, we plan to explore integrating the Ventra card into other fare payment options, such as our ticket windows. Our goal is to work with our regional partners to leverage new and existing technologies to increase convenience for all of our customers.

A slightly longer version of this story, and more info about the app, can be found at www.metrail.com.

SOUND OFF

Sound affected

I find it incredibly ignorant when other passengers share their audio experiences. Putting a call on speaker, letting their kid play a game on a tablet with the volume maxed, and (my personal favorite) playing music with speakers instead of using headphones are just a few examples. (And it's never a good song, either! That's just cruel.) There's no reason to do this and it's rude to other passengers, but I find it happening more and more often.

Dustin

We completely agree. Think of the worst music you can imagine – just not bagpipes, we like bagpipes – and ask yourself: would I want to hear this on train, in a confined space? The answer's no, right? So before you start playing something for all to hear, think of this: your choice is likely going to someone's else worst choice. And then turn it off or plug in your headphones.

Not a game

Why do people think it's OK to watch videos and listen to music on their smartphones with no earphones on the train? I do not care if it's not the Quiet Car – we don't want to hear Beyoncé singing or that funny video you show to everyone you sit with, or hear your music or play name that tune!! Put your earphones in!

Jenny

We can name that rule in three syllables: Plug it in! (For those playing at home, "Turn it off!" is also an acceptable answer.)

Canine alternative

Keep the dogs on the train and throw off some of the humans!!! I have been on this line almost 23 years and the habits of



Magically eliminates noise (when properly used).

the humans are far more disgusting than a dog's habits are: they don't blow their nose without Kleenex, they don't polish their fingernails and most of all, they do not sit through a train ride with a phone beeping the whole time while texting.

I would gladly give my seat to a dog or other animal than a human.

Kathy

We're fairly confident that, if asked, riders could come up with some pretty disgusting dog habits. We'll just leave that to everyone's imagination and gently remind the humans out there to think about others before engaging in, shall we say, questionable habits.

Support after a fall

On Thursday, June 25, I took a "bone density test" on the cement platform at the LaSalle Street Station, landing on my knees, palms and chin. I'm not

sure how many caring commuters took the time to stop and see if I was OK and give assistance for my bleeding chin. I was given tissues and one kind soul even had Band-Aids to give me. Everyone could not have been kinder. They helped this 80-year-old to her feet to make sure she was OK. I know I thanked everyone at the time, but I would like to again thank each and every one of them for their kind words and assistance. Officer Berman from the Metra office took my name and phone number for filling out a report. In the evening I had my paramedic grandson look at my chin and he suggested I see a doctor so I went and got four stitches in the wound. I am happy to say I passed the bone density test with flying colors as I had no broken bones.

Colleen

We can't tell you how pleased we are that you passed your test. And it's always nice to be

reminded about the good in the world. Metra would also like to thank everyone who helped Colleen.

Seats not for feet

I have been riding Metra for many years. In the last few years I have seen more people with their shoes up on seats than ever before, young and old, good weather and bad.

First, I have to wonder where their manners are, or if they have any at all.

Second, I never hear any announcements or conductors asking people to keep their feet off the seats. Why is this?

I would like to sit down without wondering what shoes have been on the seat and what might have been on said shoes.

Denise

Thanks for the letter. We've reminded your conductors to remind your fellow customers that their feet should stay off the seat.

Rock Island express

I love the new weekend service that you are running this summer on the Rock Island Line. I used to take the No. 834 Pace bus to Downers Grove and take the Aurora train to downtown because the Rock Island took too long and was too crowded. I hope that you are able to keep the weekend service permanently.

Michael

We're glad you like it, thanks very much. For those who don't know, we've added six express trains each way on Saturday and Sunday on the Rock Island Line. They bypass the Beverly branch, speeding the trip downtown by about 20 minutes. It's a trial lasting through November that is partially funded by our friends at the RTA.

Summer Travel Notes

Late board member gets APTA honor

Former Metra Board member and CTA executive Elonzo “Lonnie” Hill is being posthumously inducted into the American Public Transportation Association’s (APTA) Hall of Fame. The Hall of Fame was started in 1983 as a special honor reserved for individuals who have had long and distinguished careers in the transit industry, made extraordinary contributions to public transportation and actively participated in APTA activities. Mr. Hill’s achievements will be saluted during APTA’s 2015 awards ceremony in October at the organization’s annual convention in San Francisco. Mr. Hill served on the Metra Board of Directors from 2003 until his passing in 2009. One of his greatest accomplishments was providing leadership to secure funding to replace all the cars on the Metra Electric Line. He had a lengthy career at the CTA before coming to Metra.

Metra worker named a “rising star”

Lexie Walker, the Manager of Capital Projects in Metra’s Mechanical Department, was honored last month as one of the railroad industry’s “Rising Stars” by Progressive Railroading magazine. She received the recognition during the annual conference of the American Association of Railroad Superintendents in Baltimore, Md. The magazine defines a “Rising Star” as someone under 40 years of age who has made, or is making, a positive impact on his or her company, organization, department or team, and is viewed by others – peers,

colleagues, supervisors, clients or associates – as an up-and-coming leader in the rail industry. Ms. Walker, 30, joined Metra in 2008 and worked her way through the ranks. In her current role she oversees and coordinates material and labor for two car rehab projects and secures and monitors expenditures for two engine rehab projects.

Work begins at Waukegan, Mayfair, Glencoe

Metra has begun renovation projects at the Mayfair Station on the Milwaukee North Line and the Glencoe and Waukegan Stations on the UP North line. At Mayfair, the \$500,000 job will replace and extend the platforms, replace the lighting and add two new shelters. The \$530,000 project to rehabilitate the Waukegan Station calls for replacing the existing roof, partially repairing and painting the ceiling, partially removing and replacing floor tiles, renovating two entrance vestibules, constructing a new ADA-accessible ramp, installing a bus shelter with solar panels, lights and concrete pad, replacing the existing fence with a taller, decorative fence and partially replacing masonry walls. The \$210,800 Glencoe work involves tuck-pointing the entire depot building, the removal and replacement of deteriorated brick and stone in the depot building, the installation of a new damage-resistant stone base at the wall/platform interface and the application of protective treatment on all exterior masonry.

Use Metra for the Air & Water, Jazz shows

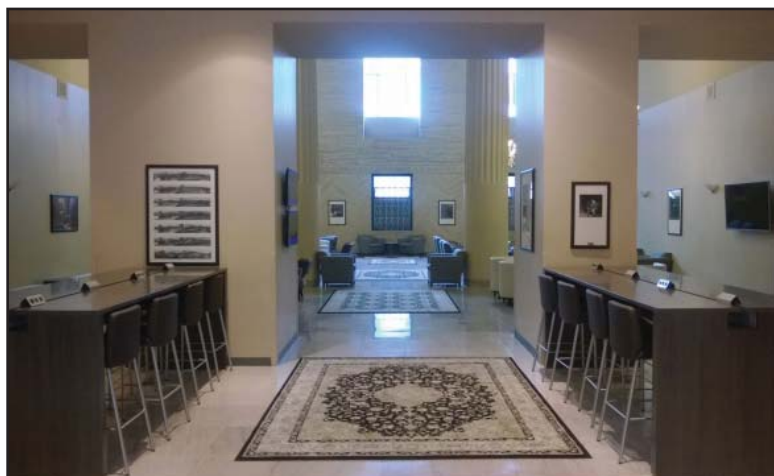
Heading to the Chicago Air and Water Show this month or the Chicago Jazz Festival next month? Use Metra to get there. The free Air & Water Show will take place from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Aug. 15 and 16 along the lakefront from Fullerton to Oak Street, with North Avenue Beach serving as the show center. The free Jazz Fest will take place Sept. 3-6 at Millennium Park. Metra’s \$8 weekend pass is good for unlimited travel on Saturdays and Sundays, and up to three children 11 or younger can ride free with each fare-paying adult.

Blackhawks rally tally is 3rd highest

The results are in, and Metra carried 421,409 passengers on June 18, the day of the Blackhawks rally. It was the third-busiest day in Metra’s history, behind only July 3, 2007 (when Chicago still did its big fireworks show) and the Blackhawks rally of 2013.

Help students in need!

Metra and NBC 5 are teaming up for the third year in a row to collect school supplies for Chicago Public School students on August 18-20. Bring notebooks, paper, pencils, pens, markers, glue and more to the collection boxes at all five downtown Metra stations or at our headquarters at 547 W. Jackson. Help make a bright beginning this school year for students in need. For more information, contact ctucker@metrarr.com or emma.assante@nbcuni.com.



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