

2016 budget includes fare increase

The Metra Board of Directors approved a \$945.5 million budget that provides for \$759.8 million in operating costs and \$185.7 million to fund capital improvements in 2016.

The 2016 Budget includes a 2 percent net increase for a total of \$6.5 million. This fare increase, smaller than the previously projected 5 percent increase, will pay for a portion of the new operating costs for the federally mandated and unfunded Positive Train Control (PTC) safety system and help fund a bare-bones

capital budget.

Metra's Monthly Pass will increase by \$2.50, the 10-Ride Ticket will cost \$1.75 more and a One-Way Ticket will increase by a quarter. Even with these increases, Metra's one-way and monthly fares remain the lowest of any of its peer railroads in the nation. The new fares will take effect on Feb. 1, 2016.

"We promised our customers we would hold the line on spending and avoid higher fares whenever possible. This budget does both," said Metra Board

Chairman Martin J. Oberman. "Now it's time for our leaders in Springfield to do their part so the \$400 million in Metra capital projects that are currently on hold can move forward."

Metra expects its operating expenses to grow by \$40.2 million in 2016, including: \$23.2 million in contractually obligated wage and benefit increases; \$6 million in reduced capital project billings; \$1.5 million in higher snow removal costs; \$1.4 million in new information technology software and system enhance-

ments; \$1 million in increased maintenance costs due to our aging fleet; \$800,000 in added police costs for video surveillance monitoring; \$700,000 for new safety equipment and new positions to enhance safety functions and training regulations; \$500,000 for new marketing initiatives aimed at growing ridership; \$3.3 million in higher PTC operating costs; and \$1.8 million in price changes for materials and utilities, increases in rent, maintenance and utility costs at
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Customer satisfaction up, but Metra's not satisfied

Four out of five Metra customers are satisfied with the service we provide, according to our most recent Customer Satisfaction Survey.

The survey, conducted in June of this year, found that 81 percent of customers were satisfied overall with Metra, up from 73 percent in the spring of 2014, the last time we conducted a survey.

Metra is committed to monitoring customer satisfaction. We want to hear what our customers think about the job we are doing in providing reliable and safe transportation that represents a good value. Overall, the 2015 re-

sults are encouraging, reflecting mostly higher satisfaction levels from 2014, but the results also point to areas that need improvement.

"We are certainly happy to see that the satisfaction results are heading in the right direction and that our customers are generally pleased with our service," said Metra Executive Director/CEO Don Orseno. "At the same time, we are grateful for the constructive feedback we received and we are committed to addressing areas that need improvement."

The 2015 survey was conducted
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Mobile ticketing is here

Metra Executive Director/CEO Don Orseno unveils the Ventra App during a press event at Millennium Station last month while CTA President Dorval Carter (from left), RTA Executive Director Leanne Redden and Pace Executive Director T.J. Ross look on. The free app, available in the App Store or Google Play, allows Metra customers to buy and display mobile tickets on their smartphones using a credit or debit card or Ventra account. It also allows customers to pay for CTA and Pace fares and includes a tracking feature for buses and trains of all three agencies. Download it today.



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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Budget

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downtown stations and joint facilities and changes in credit card and bank fees. The increases are partially offset by \$5.7 million in efficiencies and \$19.4 million in lower fuel prices, for a net growth of \$15.1 million.

Metra expects an increase of \$19.6 million in sales tax revenue (assuming no change in state funding policy). That increase is partially offset by a \$5.4 million reduction in other revenue and an expected \$2.4 million reduction in fare revenue as riders switch to cars due to lower gas prices.

Metra's 2016 capital budget includes \$85.4 million for railcar and locomotive work; \$23.9 million for replacing or improving ties, ballast, crossings and bridges and other track and structure work; \$36.9 million for signal, electrical and communications work, mostly PTC-related; \$17.1 million for facilities and equipment; \$13.2 million in station and parking improvements; and \$9.3 million in support activities. About 57 percent of the total, or \$106.4 million, will go towards

Fare Changes effective Feb. 1, 2016

- **Metra customers who buy One-Way Tickets will pay a quarter more per ticket**, an increase of 2.4 percent to 7.7 percent depending on the zone. If these customers take the train 30 times a year, they will pay an additional \$7.50 annually to ride Metra.
- **Metra customers who buy 10-Ride Tickets will pay \$1.75 more**, or 17 cents more per trip. The increase works out to 1.9 percent to 6 percent, depending on the zone. If these customers ride the train to work about half the time, they will pay about \$3.50 more per month and about \$42 more per year.
- **Metra customers who buy Monthly Passes will pay \$2.50 more per month**, an increase of 0.9 percent to 2.7 percent, depending on the zone. Assuming most of these customers use Metra to commute full-time to work each month, they will pay about 12 cents more per day and \$30 more per year.
- Other fare increases include an additional 75 cents on the reduced fare 10-Ride Ticket and \$1.25 on the reduced fare Monthly Pass.

the needs identified in Metra's modernization plan – railcars, locomotives and PTC.

“With this bare-bones capital budget, we will continue our work to operate a commuter rail system that delivers customers to their destinations safely and efficiently,” said Metra Executive Director/CEO Don Orseno.

“Despite our budget challenges, Metra operates the oldest fleet in the nation with the lowest cost per passenger mile; the best on-time record month after month and the lowest fares of any of our peer railroads including New

York, New Jersey, Boston and Philadelphia.”

The 2016 Budget was the subject of eight public hearings throughout the Chicago area, including one at Union Station that was webcast. At those events, 20 individuals provided testimony. Twenty-four public comments were accepted via email, regular mail and a comment form that appeared in a special issue of this newsletter.

To learn more about Metra's 2016 Budget and to view the final public comment report, please visit www.metrarail.com.

Survey

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ed entirely online, with respondents recruited via email, the Metra website and this newsletter. Participants were asked to answer several demographic questions, rate overall satisfaction, rate their satisfaction with 26 unique service features, list most important features while traveling and provide general comments. The responses we received were roughly proportional to the ridership of each of our 11 lines, so every line was appropriately represented in the 2015 survey.

On most of the 26 service features, our customers were more

satisfied in 2015 than they were in 2016, including the feature riders said was by far the most important – “Getting to destination on time.” In the 2015 survey, 80 percent of customers said they were satisfied with the timeliness of our trains, up from 71 percent in 2014.

Improvements were also made in other areas, including service availability; cleanliness and comfort; courtesy and knowledge of Metra staff; parking availability; and communications and information. There were slight dips in the areas of safety and security, although the satisfaction levels in those areas – close to 90 percent and above – were still the highest in the survey.

Despite the gains in the survey, Metra recognizes that there is still plenty of room for improvement, particularly in the area of customer communication and information, where satisfaction levels were lowest. We are committed to doing everything we can to make your ride as safe, reliable and enjoyable as possible. We believe some of the recent changes in that area – including customized alerts and an improved train tracker – helped boost satisfaction since the 2014 survey, and we will continue to look for ways to do better, particularly in communications.

For more details about the 2015 Customer Satisfaction Survey, visit www.metrarail.com.

SOUND OFF

A belated thank-you

I would like to belatedly thank the FOUR unknown people who stopped to assist me last Halloween night. I fell in the parking lot at the Tinley Park/80th Ave. station. I was stunned and had difficulty standing, but these four would not leave until I assured them I could make it to my car. Little did we know then that I had fractured the humerus bone in three places and broke the humerus cap. Your kindness can never be repaid.

Thank you!
Caroline

It's nice to start out with a heart-warming letter before we get to the gripes, isn't it? Metra would also like the thank the anonymous quartet who pitched in to make sure a fellow rider was OK.

About the Quiet Cars

I personally loved the November issue of "Sound Off" and the debate over various topics (and it should be at least two pages per month since there is a lot to complain or praise about). As for my gripe, I HATE the idea of the Quiet Car! I especially hate the self-appointed Quiet Car Nazis who sometimes rudely remind you that this is one. I hate to say it, but Metra, where were your brains about five years ago when you made up this policy and kissed the behinds of the people who demanded this waste of space? In my line of work, I'm still working sometimes after I leave the office and after a long day of work I don't want to be told where I can and can't talk. Who else agrees with me?

M.

Look, we know some of you don't like the Quiet Cars, so there will be people who agree



with you. But there are enough people who do like them to justify setting aside a car or two per train for solitude. We feel it's a reasonable accommodation. A lot of those people who like the Quiet Cars really, really like them – some even want more quiet. Read on.

Pipe down over there

It's another morning of the same routine, sitting on the Quiet Car with my fellow passengers as we are forced to listen to the caucus being held in the vestibule. News flash to those who stand in the vestibule of the Quiet Car and talk: we can hear you. The 50, 80 or 100 of us seeking peace and quiet, we know all about your nasty divorce, your trip to Barcelona, your son's baseball stats, and all the other minutia you discuss. You are the reason the Quiet Car was invented. Move to a regular car to hold your morning/afternoon meetings; show an iota of respect for others.

Elizabeth

Our rules do allow for talking in the vestibule. But that is so someone in the Quiet Car who needs to take a call has some place to do it without disturbing others. Otherwise, we do respectfully ask those who stand in the vestibule to respect those people in the Quiet Car. If you must converse, try another vestibule or car, please.

Hairy situation

When folks pushed for a "Quiet Car" I got it.... I understand the desire for a relatively serene ride to and from work. Maybe we also need a "personal space" car? Honestly, I thought "Cousin It" from the Addams Family was on my train (see photo)... and he looked like he'd had a rough day. Just wish he hadn't felt compelled to come over onto MY lap!

Lance

We'd like to make every car a "personal space" car. There's only one rule: don't violate someone else's personal space.

A new perspective

I really like your monthly newsletter. It is very informative and I do like the "Sound Off" column as well as it brings lot of new perception to me. I have been regularly commuting on the NCS for the last two years and what really annoys me is my fellow passengers who keep their belongings on the seat, thus depriving someone their seat! Metra should think about some innovative ways to educate such passengers. Either they should be ticketed for the additional seat or you should ask them to stand while their belongings can enjoy a seated ride on their behalf! But then I say to myself: Wait, what are you complaining about? These are probably good people. They are carrying some sort of germs or disease that they do not want to spread, and they probably are looking out for others since they are sick! So anytime I come across a fellow passenger who has their belongings on the seat, I quip to myself: Move away from those sick bodies!

P.B.

We're not sure if this qualifies as glass half-full or glass half-empty, but we like your way of thinking.

A new sight

I thought that I saw everything people may do on the train. But this passenger was different. The well-dressed gentleman decided to take a blood glucose test! He opened a test kit, prepared the tool, then pricked his finger. When he discovered that there was no cotton swab, he carefully licked blood drops off his forefinger. Seriously, absolutely unpleasant sight.

Commuter A

Well that certainly is a new one.

Winter Travel Notes

Metra prepares for wintry weather

Metra has added some weapons to its annual battle against cold and snowy weather, installing covers and more efficient heaters to several of the most critical switches in its system and continuing to repair and replace railcar doors that are prone to fail in winter conditions. This year, Metra has added 21 switch heaters to three more yards. In addition, it installed covers along the switches at 35 mainline locations on the Rock Island Line, Milwaukee lines and Metra Electric. In addition, Metra improved the efficiency of switch heaters at 52 locations on the Rock Island Line, Milwaukee lines and Metra Electric by installing nozzles that concentrate the heat precisely where it is needed. Switch heaters and covers are a good way to prevent falling and drifting snow from accumulating on switches and causing them to fail. Unfortunately, they cannot completely eliminate a common winter switch problem: snow and ice falling from the underside of a train into a switch, jamming the switch and delaying trains until a worker clears the switch. In addition to its work on switches, Metra has continued a program that began last winter to address issues with doors malfunctioning due to snow and ice building up on its older cars, Metra so far has replaced weather stripping on 191 cars, replaced doors on 35 cars and done further heavy maintenance work on the door tracks and door pockets on 13 cars. For more information on Metra's preparations for winter, go to www.metrarail.com.

Weekend RID express trains now permanent

Metra's experiment with weekend express trains on the Rock Island Line was made permanent and a new weekday outbound express train made its debut on Nov. 30. Last June, six express trains were added to the Rock Island schedule in each direction on Saturdays and Sundays. The express trains bypass the Beverly Branch, which is served by separate trains, prompting a 20-minute reduction in travel time between suburban stations and downtown Chicago. The weekend express service was set to end on Nov. 29, but is now part of the permanent weekend schedule. In addition, Metra added an outbound express train to the weekday schedule. Train No. 413 departs at 4:57 p.m., stops at 35th Street, expresses to Tinley Park/80th Ave. (the busiest stop on the line) and then makes all remaining stops with the addition of Joliet.

Use "Family Fares" this Christmas break

During the Christmas break, Metra will expand its "Family Fares" program to include weekdays. Starting Monday, Dec. 21 through Jan. 3, adults can bring along up to three kids 11 and under for FREE! There are plenty of holiday events throughout Chicago that Metra can take you to. Visit www.metrarail.com for a comprehensive list. And don't forget about Metra's \$8 weekend pass, good for unlimited trips on Saturdays and Sundays. For more details about Metra's holiday service, go to www.metrarail.com.

Lombard Station improvements celebrated

Metra, Union Pacific Railroad, Lombard and DuPage County officials last month celebrated the completion of nearly \$9.8 million in improvements at the Lombard Station along the UP West Line, including a new pedestrian underpass, rebuilt platforms and new platform canopies. The work included an \$8.1 million contract with John Burns Construction of Orland Park for the new pedestrian tunnel, retaining walls, ADA ramps, stairways, platform shelters, canopies over both inbound and outbound platforms, landscaping and other ancillary items for the station. Under a separate project, the platforms were reconstructed, at an estimated cost of \$1.6 million. Some of that work was done in conjunction with the tunnel project.

Safety Contest deadline approaches

Time is running out for your child to participate in this year's Metra Safety Contest! For the past decade, Metra has encouraged children across the Chicago region to spread the word about the importance of safe behaviors near its tracks and trains by creating posters and writing essays illustrating a safety theme. This year's theme is "Make Safety Your Focus: Look, Listen Live." The deadline for all entries is Friday, Jan. 29, 2016. The contest is open to all students in grades K-12 living or attending school in Metra's six-county service area. Poster contest winners will be selected for each grade K through 12, and awarded the following prizes: First Place: iPad; Second Place: \$250 gift card; and Third Place: \$100 gift card. Students are also encouraged to enter Metra's Safety Essay Contest and are asked to describe in 300 words or less how to "Make Safety Your Focus" when near trains and railroad tracks. First-place winners in the essay contest will also receive an iPad. For more information, please visit the contest website at www.metracontest.com.

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