

Metra ON THE BI-LEVEL

Commuter Newsletter, February 2009



The need for capital

Metra has been sounding the alarm for several years about the massive shortfall in our capital budget. We tell everyone who'll listen, "We're at a crossroads."

What do we mean? Put simply, unless the state creates a funding program to address our needs, the system will fall into a state of disrepair, eroding the region's hard work and investment of the last 25 years. The longer we wait, the harder it will be to recover.

Here are some questions and answers about the issue:

Q: *Didn't Metra raise fares last year? Didn't the Legislature also raise the sales tax to raise money for transit?*

A: Yes, and yes. But that money was needed to plug a huge hole in our budget for operations. Metra still has a crisis in its capital budget.

Q: *What's the difference?*

A: The operating budget pays for fuel, electricity, salaries and all the other day-to-day costs of running a railroad. The capital budget pays for new and renovated rolling stock, repairs and replacement of bridges and other infrastructure and expansions.

Q: *How big is the need?*

A: Very big. Metra estimates it needs at least \$2.6 billion over the next five years just to maintain a state of good repair. We can expect about \$1.1 billion from the feds, unless President Obama and the Congress provide more in a stimulus bill. We



The replacement of Highliner cars on the Metra Electric District is a top priority.

expect to get about \$1.3 billion from Illinois if state lawmakers pass a capital bill. Even with that amount, Metra will still be about \$350 million short of its need. And to carry out four expansion projects on the drawing board - the suburban STAR line, the SouthEast Service line and major upgrades to the UP West and Northwest lines - Metra will need hundreds of millions more.

Q: *Why is the need so great?*

A: One reason is that it has been more than five years since the last state capital program expired. This has caused Metra to defer projects we couldn't afford. The backlog is adding up. And it didn't help that our earlier, operating crisis forced Metra to transfer \$130 million from our

capital budget into operations.

Q: *So what will happen if the state doesn't come through?*

A: We'll have to continue to put things off. As just one example, rail cars should be rehabbed every 15 years, which means we need to do 50 a year. But we've been able to afford just 23 a year since 2005. Station renewal projects also will be delayed. Equipment failures and train overcrowding will become more frequent. We'll have more slow zones due to an inability to perform cyclical track maintenance. Service quality and on-time performance will suffer.

Q: *Is that happening now?*

A: While we would never blame our shortfalls entirely on a lack of funding - that would be

passing the buck - we will say that the funding crisis hasn't helped.

Q: *Why can't you just raise fares?*

A: As regular riders know, Metra has raised fares, incrementally and periodically, over the years. But the fact is, you can't pay for our capital needs with a fare increase. Say we increased fares 10 percent. That would raise only about \$20.5 million, a far cry from our needs.

Q: *What are the biggest needs?*

A: One huge need is to replace 160 or so Highliner cars on the Metra Electric district. These cars are simply beyond

(Continued on Page 4)



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

Why Clybourn?

Most aspects of Metra's service and operations are logical. I am ignoring the left-handed track side arrangement for the moment.

But on the UP North Line, why is the first stop after having left the downtown station called "Clybourn" when the street by that name is over a half-mile away and Elston and Ashland avenues (neither of which are piddly streets) are just down the stairs?

Tom

We get this question every few years. You're right – Clybourn Avenue is a few blocks away from the station. But it didn't used to be. Early Chicago maps show Clybourn ended its northwest diagonal run from Division Street at the point where it meets Racine. It then turned directly west, crossing the river and ending at what it now Damen. When in later years the northwest diagonal of Clybourn was extended (eventually to Belmont), the east-west section that crossed the river was renamed Clybourn Place. That section was later given its current name, Cortland Street, after the street that it almost lines up with at Damen.

A 1908 book on place names associated with the old Chicago & North Western railroad says the "Clybourn Junction" station used to be known as Clybourn Place, "from one of the streets of Chicago. ...The word Place was dropped and the word Junction inserted, as it was the junction of two lines of railroad" (now the UP North and UP Northwest).

However, that book errs when it says the street was



Archibald Clybourn

named for settler "Peter" Clybourn. His name was actually Archibald Clybourn, one of early Chicago's most prominent citizens. His family established their homestead and a slaughterhouse (Chicago's first) on the west bank of the river, near what is now the station, in 1824; he lived there until his death in 1872.

Left-hand question...

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

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.

About those flames

My train buddy and I noticed that most of last week on the Milwaukee District West Line train that some of the tracks around Western Avenue stop or further were on fire and were burning like the eternal flame in D.C. for several days. Why is that? How come it burned over several days and then stopped?
Patricia

Those were the gas heaters that we use on cold days to prevent our switches from freezing up. There are a lot of switches near Western in particular.

Tech is coming

With all the technology available, when is Metra going to start to offer automated alerts to cell phones, etc.? And when is Metra going to make their schedules compatible with mobile software?
Robert

Stay tuned. We've started the bidding process to update our website and harness the latest technology to aid our riders. We'll have more info later this year.

Crossword solution

K	S	D	E	S	D	E	S	T	A	T	E	S	E	R	E	D	E
R	A	V	E	S	O	N	O	H	R	E	K	R	O	N	O	H	E
B	I	A	L	A	R	O	R	A	V	A	R	O	N	I	N	I	E
M	A	L	L	O	T	R	E	H	E	R	A	S	X	H	O	R	E
U	N	D	E	R	S	T	E	R	H	A	V	E	O	S	T	I	E
N	H	O	T	I	G	N	O	N	F	U	N	G	S	A	S	G	A
D	E	A	S	J	A	V	I	T	I	O	S	T	I	I	I	I	I
O	P	T	C	L	O	T	C	L	O	T	C	L	O	T	C	L	O
T	A	B	J	E	C	T	C	H	E	R	A	S	X	H	O	R	E
A	E	R	C	N	O	S	E	R	A	V	E	O	S	T	I	E	K
H	P	I	T	A	P	E	P	I	T	A	P	E	P	I	T	A	P
M	N	A	V	T	O	M	O	W	N	A	V	T	O	M	O	W	N
G	A	N	U	R	L	E	L	B	U	R	L	E	L	B	U	R	L
S	A	V	A	T	A	S	P	A	R	T	A	S	P	A	R	T	A

SOUND OFF

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

Pass support

I wish to offer an opposing opinion to the art critic “Sad Eyes” regarding the student art on the Metra monthly passes. I find the new tickets absolutely charming, and they are among my very favorite tickets in the five years I’ve been riding the Northwest Line. These designs have a kind of guileless whimsy you don’t often see in artwork created by adults, and there is an offhand wit to such captions as, “You’ll REALLY be late if you don’t stop at the gate.” Honestly, if these very same designs had been created ironically by a grown-up artist, they could sell for thousands in Manhattan’s snootiest art galleries. But the beauty of these tickets is that there’s no irony in them whatsoever; they’re absolutely genuine. Sincerity is in short supply these days, and it is nice to have a daily reminder that it still exists in this cynical

world.

By the way, the addition of a crossword puzzle to On The Bi-Level was a masterstroke. I am in your debt.

Gratefully
 Joe

Thanks for your support. The contest is an important part of our safety campaign.

That’s gross

I usually ride Metra on the weekends and have for many years. Recently I have noticed an upsurge of people using the Metra platforms for their own personal spittoon. This is truly a public display of disrespect for both private property and a riders right to clean public areas. Also, it is disgusting. However, there is a solution to all of this. Perhaps Metra could set aside a grassy area for a “spitting zone.” Maybe this would create a cleaner and healthier platform environment.



David Aurora

Or maybe people could just stop spitting?

A mea culpa

As I’m sure even the most jaded and hardened commuter will admit, at one time they were new to the unwritten codes and regulations governing behavior on the train. The proper cell phone volume, the “you better move your suitcase ’cause I’m sitting down” rule, and perhaps the most interesting to watch daily, the inexcusable act of cut-

ting someone off while boarding the train. Well, my fellow riders, I have to throw myself on your mercy, because I broke that rule. While boarding one morning, I managed to cut a woman off. As the train emptied, the woman waited for me. Upon looking into her eyes crazy with rage, I shuddered to think what I could have done. I apologized after being reminded and was summarily subjected to a profanity- and saliva-laced tearing-down as she was mere inches from my face. To this woman I say I am heartily sorry for boarding rudely,

and if she sees me again, I have a fresh peppermint in my pocket for her disgusting mouth.

Art

We’ve found Altoids do the trick.

Grow up

This is to the woman on the Metra Electric Line whom I was accidentally looking at due to elbow nudging, I meant no harm. I looked at you because you were moving back and forth in such a manner that I thought you were either having a seizure or were going to take a nap on my shoulder. I did apologize, you gave me more attitude, and yet you still felt the need to show me to your friends and complain that I was causing the problems when you were getting off. I apologized, grow up.

Signed,
 Anonymous

Wonder if Anonymous and Art encountered the same woman?

Stop the idling

I’ve noticed that a lot of people are sitting in their idling cars, waiting as long as possible to head to the platform. This looks like a lost opportunity of one kind or another – the opportunity to walk or socialize on the platform instead of sitting in a car, or at a minimum, the opportunity to save on gas. I know with cold weather the warmth of an idling car is appealing, but even if you choose not get out and walk or talk, at least turn off the ignition. Odds are the residual heat and being out of the wind will keep you warm enough without having the engine running.

Bill

You know what they say about idle hands? Maybe we need a new, green expression: “Idling cars are the devil’s tools.”

Patella peeve

I ride Metra trains when my work irregularly takes me into the city, so I haven’t developed the habits and routines of the commuter who has taken the train every day for several years. I am not bothered by people speaking on cell phones, hogging seats or leaving newspapers. But for all those people who put their knees into the back of the seat in front them and therefore into my back, please stop. It is irritating to have your knees poking into my spinal column. When I turn the seat to face you and put my knees into your knees, you will have to sit up or move to another seat.

Tom

Kneed we say more?

Send us an e-mail

Write us at:
 onthebilevel
 @metrarr.com

We try to respond specifically to every letter. Our apologies if you never heard back from us. Please keep writing with letters, notes, tales and observations for the next issue of OTBL. The best ones will make the pages of this awesome rail publication.

-The editors

Capital

(Continued from Page 1)

repair. The replacement cost for these cars is currently \$585 million. We also need more rolling stock and locomotives on our diesel lines. Our need is so great, in fact, that Metra has already started the bidding process for the Highliner cars, 10 locomotives and 50 gallery cars, even though we don't yet have the money. We want to be ready to move quickly on these purchases if the state comes through.

Q: How likely is that?

A: We think there is growing recognition that the backlog in capital investment - not just at Metra but throughout Illinois - must be addressed. The job-creating potential of a major capital improvement bill is a key selling point in these tough economic times. Chicago's Olympic bid also could rally support for such a program. And changes in leadership in Washington and Springfield could make a difference.

Q: So what's stopping them?

A: Simply put, it'll cost money to pay for the bonds to cover the program. No one wants to pay higher taxes, especially not when the economy's so sour. But the alternative is worse - letting our infrastructure crumble, putting our economy and environment further at risk.

Q: Why should the regular taxpayers pay for something that only benefits Metra riders?

A: Because everyone benefits from public transportation, whether they ride it or not. It keeps cars off the road. It helps the environment. It bolsters the economy. It spurs neighborhood development. It boosts property values.

Q: Isn't there waste that you can cut?

A: Metra is very careful about spending the public's money. And that isn't just us talking. A 2006 audit of the region's transit agencies by the Illinois Auditor General found that Metra outperformed its peers in nine areas that measure a transit service's efficiency and effectiveness.

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

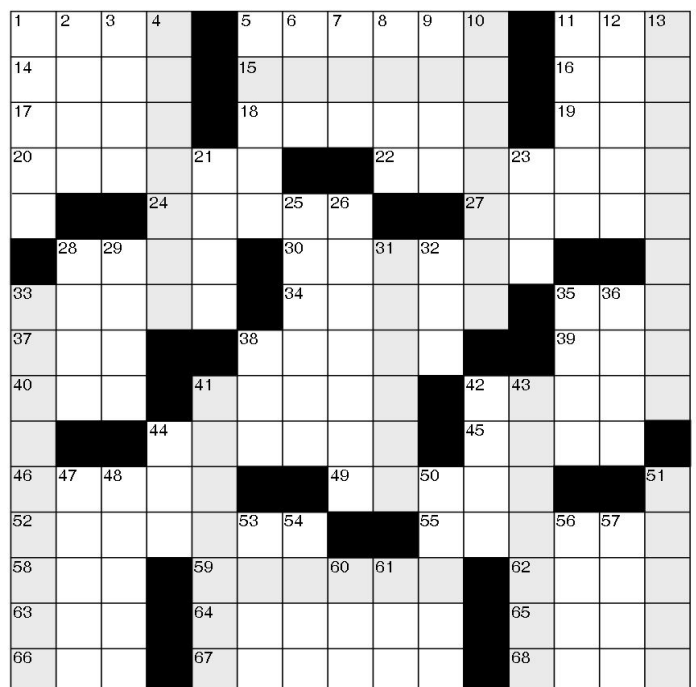
Crossword

Across

- Small job
- Athens' ancient rival
- U.S. uncle
- Regulation
- Kane County town whose name is derived from Melbourne.
- Home of the Bulldogs
- Persia
- Australian marsupial
- Start to hunt, kind, handle
- Chicago gangster
- Tombstone words
- Automatic control system
- Take your vitamins " _ _ " day
- Pain
- Miserable, wretched
- Wide
- Material
- Choose
- S. Side tech school
- Locks up
- Federal anti-drug org.
- Petrol
- Mushroom kingdom
- Rose drawback
- Trendy beard
- Tortoise challenger

Down

- Alternative to treat
- Spirit or vibe
- Reaction to insult
- Wisconsin town named for pike
- Flushing destination
- Arafat's org.
- Missile initials
- Yokel
- Catch
- Lake County town with Biblical name
- Poisonous plant
- Goggle-eyed
- Will County town, or bite of the Big Apple
- Require
- Explosive initials
- Empty
- Indulges
- Opera component
- Temporary beds
- Will County town named for French explorer
- More than one alien
- Paul Bunyan's target?
- Smell
- French father
- Binti _ , Brookfield ape
- Lake County town originally known as Nippersink Point
- Formal you
- The Northwestern of the East
- Hair fixer
- Innocent
- Ate
- Rub out
- Abbreviated alternative to valet service?
- Belongs to us
- Horse's gait
- Lotion ingredient
- Business school grads
- "Hooked _ _ _ Feeling"
- Decompose



Solution on Page 2