

# ON THE BI-LEVEL



Metra's Monthly Commuter Newsletter

February/March 2015

## Mobile ticketing coming to Metra

### *App will turn your smartphone into a ticket vending machine*

A major change in the way you can pay your Metra fares is coming later this year, when Metra unveils an app that will allow riders to buy and display Metra tickets on their smartphones using a credit or debit card.

And because the regional fare payment app is being developed in conjunction with the CTA and Pace, it also will allow riders to use a Ventra account to pay for Metra fares for the first time. That means Ventra – as

well as credit and debit cards – can be used to travel on all three of Chicago's transit providers.

“The best way to think about this new app is that it will turn your smartphone into a vending machine for Metra tickets,” said Metra Executive Director/CEO Don Orseno. “That means you can buy your ticket anytime, anywhere – no more waiting in line at the station, and no more fumbling for cash to buy it on the train.”

The app will actually include a variety of features that will be introduced in phases. But the mobile ticketing component will be of most interest to Metra

riders, and it's part of the first phase. Testing of the app has already begun, and soon we'll be posting information on our website about how you can volunteer to help us with the testing. If all goes well, the official debut of the app will take place in late spring/early summer.

It will be simple to use. First, you'll download the free app. It will be available for Apple and Android smartphones and tablets. Then, you'll simply follow the prompts to buy a one-way ticket, a 10-ride ticket or a monthly pass with a credit or debit card or Ventra account (which must be set up separately

through Ventra). Once you buy a ticket, you'll store it on your phone until it's time to use it. You will also be given the option to create an account to store your information to make purchasing future tickets quicker.

The app will also allow the purchase of all reduced fare tickets and weekend passes.

To use your mobile ticket, simply “activate” the ticket when you're boarding a train. When conductors come by to collect tickets, you'll show them the ticket on your phone. A quick tap on the display, and they will be able to tell if it's a valid ticket

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## Where does your station rank for ridership?

Route 59 on the BNSF Line remains the busiest Metra station by far, and the 99th St./Beverly Hills stop on the Rock Island Line is once again almost exactly average, according to Metra's first complete count since 2006 of the riders at each station.

The “on/off count,” conducted last spring, attempted to answer a basic question: how many people use each station? Of course, we have a general idea about the answer, but since we have no turnstiles at our stations, we can't know the exact number unless we physically

2014 Rank/Station	Boardings	2006 Rank
1. Route 59	5,874	1
2. Naperville	4,002	2
3. Downers Grove Main St.	2,473	5
4. Ravenswood	2,363	9
5. Arlington Heights	2,349	6
6. Palatine	2,334	8
7. Elmhurst	2,313	11
8. Aurora	2,107	7
9. Evanston Davis St.	2,070	10
10. Lisle	1,993	3
11. Tinley Park 80th Ave	1,932	4

count riders as they get on and off the trains.

Getting a good count for each station is important. If we know where and when passengers

use each station, we can better understand how our system is being used and how potential service adjustments may affect riders.

Since we only counted on one day at each location and daily use of a station can vary, we know the actual number of riders at each station could be slightly more or less. But the count is still a good approximation. And it's just fun to see where each station lands on the list.

Before we say more, one caveat: the 2006 count was conducted in the fall, while the 2014 count was conducted in the spring. Since ridership is typically about 5 percent heavier in the fall, the tallies are not

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## On the Bi-Level

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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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## Mobile

(Continued from Page 1)

by looking at it, just like they can with a paper ticket. We'll provide all the details about the process when it's ready to launch.

In addition to the Metra mobile ticketing features, the first phase of the app also will allow users to:

- Add transit value and passes to their Ventra cards.
- Check Ventra account balances.
- Manage funding sources for the Ventra card.
- View transaction history.
- Sign up for customizable account notifications and alerts for account balance, low balance and expiring passes.

Later phases to come in 2015 will provide additional Ventra account management features (e.g. card ordering, replacing a lost/stolen card), multiagency transit tracking features, and an integrated regional trip planner with service information for CTA, Metra and Pace that allows customers to navigate the region from door to door using all three transit systems.

By early 2016, the app will allow customers to download a virtual Ventra card onto their Near Field Communications-compatible mobile devices, which will allow them to access their Ventra transit accounts to pay for rides on CTA trains and buses and Pace buses directly from the Ventra app by touching the phone or device to a Ventra reader.

Specific timetables for each phase of the rollout are still being finalized. Customer feedback and insights will be used to help guide the development process.

The app development cost is budgeted at \$2.5 million, to be split among the three transit agencies. The app and supporting system are being provided through a partnership between Cubic Transportation Systems, the operator of the Ventra fare payment system, and GlobeSherpa, an industry leader in mobile app development and mobile ticketing platforms for transit.

GlobeSherpa has previously developed similar transit applications for Portland's TriMet transit system, the Los Angeles Department of Transportation and the Virginia Railway Express, among others.

## Count

(Continued from Page 1)

directly comparable. Our goal, however, was not to assess ridership growth but rather to determine where and when passengers use each station.

Here are some other interesting tidbits from the count:

- There were some minor changes in the rankings for the top 10 busiest stations (see chart on Page 1). Only one new station – **Elmhurst** on the UP West Line – cracked that list, replacing **Tinley Park 80th Ave.**, which dropped to No. 11.
- **Route 59** remained the Big Kahuna, with 5,874 boardings. The next closest was **Naperville**, with 4,002.
- The average Metra station outside of downtown handles 623 boardings. Three stations tied for being closest to that average with 621 boardings: the **99th St./Beverly Hills** Station on the Rock Island Line, **Orland Park** on the

SouthWest Service and **Buffalo Grove** on the North Central Service.

The 99th St./Beverly Hills Station was closest to the average in 2006, too.

• The busiest stations on each line are:

UP North: **Ravenswood** (No. 4 overall)

Milwaukee North: **Glenview** (No. 22 overall)

UP Northwest: **Arlington Heights** (No. 5 overall)

Milwaukee West: **Schaumburg** (No. 14 overall)

UP West: **Elmhurst** (No. 7 overall)

BNSF: **Route 59** (No. 1 overall)

Heritage Corridor: **Lemont** (No. 110 overall)

Rock Island: **Tinley Park 80th Ave.** (No. 11 overall)

SouthWest Service: **Oak Lawn** (No. 31 overall)

Metra Electric: **55th-56th-57th St.** (No. 17 overall)

• **Ravenswood** is the busiest reverse commute station outside of downtown (defined as the

number of people riding outbound trains in the morning peak period). During the morning rush period, 689 people board outbound trains there. That's more than the total number of boardings in either direction at 161 non-downtown stations. (**Clybourn** is a close second, with 665 outbound riders on the UP North and Northwest lines.)

• The least busy of 236 non-downtown stations was **75th St./Grand Crossing** on the Metra Electric line, with 15 total boarders.

• The least busy station in 2006, **Laraway Road** on the SouthWest Service Line, rose to No. 232.

• There were two new stations since 2006: The **35th St./"Lou" Jones** Station on the Rock Island Line debuted as No. 159, while **Grand/Cicero** on the Milwaukee West (which replaced two stations, Hermosa and Cragin) was No. 193.

• For full details about the on-off count, please go to [www.metrarail.com/2014count](http://www.metrarail.com/2014count).

# SOUND OFF

## Let's not be peevish

Looking at the December "Sound Off" section, I was really surprised by a lot of the comments from people, especially about the Quiet Cars. One person complaining about hair over the back of a seat, another complaining about someone typing on their computer (Really? How noisy can it be?), and another complaining about someone coughing. All of them expecting Metra to make new rules to accommodate their personal pet peeves. Come on people, get over yourselves. The job of Metra is to get us from Point A to Point B, this is public transportation! Be happy you have a Quiet Car, they didn't have to give you one! If you don't like being around other people, maybe you should hire a limo instead of riding public transportation. If you don't like what someone near you is doing, why don't you open your own mouth and say something to them? If even the Quiet Car is too loud, get some noise canceling headphones. Stop complaining to Metra, and do something yourselves. I think most people would understand your concerns if it is that bad.

Annoyed by the Whiners

*We thank you for your nonsense words. But remember, we've invited people to send complaints to us. We don't think they really expect new rules. We offer this page as a way to vent, and maybe to get people to think a little bit about how their actions affect others.*

## Good idea

As I sit on the train today reading your flyer try to justify yet more rate increases, I look around myself and see Life-source ads along the upper level foot well and on a wrap cover-



### Can you keep it down over there?

ing the whole train car. Why not have all cars covered in advertising like this and use the money generated to keep our fares as low as possible?

If the money goes directly into fare price relief, I can't imagine any but a small minority of passengers would object.

Thanks for your consideration.

Brian

*Why not indeed? The short answer to your question is: we're trying – you may have recently seen a Scottsdale, Ariz., and a Northwestern train wrap, too – and we would like to sell more! In fact, we generate a few million bucks a year for advertising on trains and at stations. (However, remember, Metra does not own Union Station or the Citicorp building that feeds into our Ogilvie train shed, so although there are plenty of ads displayed there, we don't get revenue from those locations.) That said, it's a good chunk of money but not enough to offset the need for a fare increase (which this year is estimated to generate the extra \$27.3 million needed to support*

*the operation of the system.) We also continue to expand advertising products, such as external advertising frames on the outside of 30 cars, station campaigns and product samplings.*

## Muffed it

Thank you to the kind/honest person who turned in my fur earmuffs to the Metra Lost and Found (lost Jan. 15 on SouthWest Service). I am SO HAPPY to have them back. (I thought they were gone for good!) THANK YOU SO MUCH!

Debra

*We're glad a warm heart was able to keep your ears warm. Our thanks to the anonymous rider as well. This is a good letter to remind riders that each line has a designated Lost and Found office at the downtown terminal. Phone numbers for each are listed on timetables.*

## Cold fall, warm lift

On a recent dreary Monday morning, I lost a battle with a patch of ice just as I was boarding the train at Fairview Ave. and wound up getting a close-up

view of the concrete platform. No harm done, but my thanks to the three passengers who immediately stopped to lend a hand and the conductor who came running to double-check that all was OK. It is heartening to be reminded that even in this age of earbuds and tablets, people's first instinct is to watch out for each other.

Bill

*Another tale to warm our winter hearts. Thanks for sharing.*

## Answering the call

The crew of UP West train No. 26 (Conductor Nate Russell, Engineer Mark Kaspar, Brakeman Deion Wright and Collector Eric Burnham) would like to give a shout out to a few medical professionals who assisted with an onboard medical emergency on Feb. 4.

Passengers alerted us about a man having a seizure and we immediately made a radio call for paramedics to meet our train at Ogilvie. When our ailing passenger began to lose consciousness, we made a call over the PA inquiring if we had any doctors, nurses or EMTs on board who might assist us. Three terrific women immediately sprang into action and took over until we arrived downtown.

Our hats are off to nurse Linda, nursing student Rebecca and another nurse whose name we didn't get (we hope you're reading this). Ladies, thank you so very much!

A Grateful Crew

*Metra would also like to thank the medical professionals who assisted with this incident as well as any others that have occurred on our trains. You are certainly a valuable asset to have available when needed, and we appreciate it.*

# Winter Travel Notes

## Metra names top administrative officer

Metra has appointed John A. Milano as the agency's Deputy Executive Director for Administration. Milano, 50, who had been Metra's Deputy General Counsel, will serve as the top administrative officer for the Chicago area commuter rail agency under Executive



**John Milano**

Director/CEO Don Orseno. He was selected from a field of 10 candidates after a nationwide search. "John brings the perfect combination of extensive experience and solid expertise to this role," Orseno said. "I am confident that he can help make Metra's administration work better for its customers, employees and vendors. In addition, at a time when Metra faces a tidal wave of retirements, he represents the next generation of transportation leaders." In his new role, Milano will be responsible for planning, developing, organizing and directing administrative activities at Metra. Milano joined Metra in 1998 and has served in various capacities under different administrations.

## Onboard penalty increase postponed

Metra's plan to increase the penalty for onboard ticket purchases has been postponed until mobile ticketing is unveiled later this year. The fee, which is assessed when riders board at stations with open ticket windows or vending machines, was scheduled to be raised to \$5

from \$3 on Feb. 1, when other fare increases and changes to fare policies took effect. The delay was made in response to a discussion at the January meeting of the Board of Directors. The penalty is intended to discourage riders from paying on the train in cash, and board members suggested it might be appropriate to postpone the increase until the start of mobile ticketing, which will allow riders to pay on the train (or anywhere else) using their own smartphones and a credit/debit card or Ventra account. (See Page 1.)

## Metra ridership increases in 2014

Ridership on Metra climbed 1.3 percent in 2014, to 83.4 million passenger trips – the second-highest annual total in Metra's 30-year history. "We are thrilled with the growth in ridership in 2014, and we are committed to drawing even more riders to our system by emphasizing how Metra offers fast, reliable, comfortable and safe service for the six-county Chicago area," said Metra Executive Director/CEO Don Orseno. Nine of Metra's 11 lines saw ridership gains in 2014. The largest percentage increase was on the North Central Service, which jumped 7.9 percent, to 1.8 million trips from 1.7 million trips, while the largest gain in passenger trips was on the Union Pacific Northwest Line, which increased by 400,000 trips, or a 3.8 percent, to 11.6 million from 11.2 million trips. The BNSF Line remains Metra's busiest line by far, recording 16.7 million passenger trips, a 0.6 percent increase over the 16.6 million trips provided in 2013. The UP Northwest Line was the second busiest line.

The remaining lines, in order, are:

- Metra Electric Line, which had 9.4 million passenger trips in 2014, a drop of 1.5 percent from 9.6 passenger trips in 2013.
- Union Pacific North Line, which had 9.33 million passenger trips in 2014, an increase of 0.6 percent from 9.27 million trips in 2013.
- Rock Island Line, which had 8.5 million passenger trips in 2014, a drop of 0.5 percent from 8.6 million passenger trips in 2013.
- Union Pacific West Line, which had 8.4 million passenger trips in 2014, an increase of 2.1 percent from 8.3 million passenger trips in 2013.
- Milwaukee North Line, which had 7.2 million passenger trips in 2014, an increase of 2.8 percent from 7 million passenger trips in 2013.
- Milwaukee West Line, which had 6.9 million passenger trips in 2014, an increase of 1.7 percent from 6.8 million passenger trips in 2013.
- SouthWest Service, which had 2.7 million passenger trips in 2014, an increase of 2 percent from 2.6 million trips in 2013.
- North Central Service, which had 1.8 million passenger trips, up 7.9 percent from 1.7 million trips in 2013.
- Heritage Corridor, which had 729,000 passenger trips in 2014, an increase of 3.6 percent from 703,000 passenger trips in 2013.

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