

Metra ON THE BI-LEVEL

Commuter Newsletter, January 2014



Riders display their generosity

Metra received an overwhelming response from riders last month when we asked them to donate toys and coats for the holidays. In the photo above, one of the many riders who donated about 5,000 toys and \$5,000 to the U.S. Marines Toys for Tots drive shakes hands with Metra volunteer Sherry Patchin from our Mechanical Department while Metra Police Chief James Sanford (left to right), U.S. Marine Staff Sergeant Takching Shek and Metra interim Executive Director Don Orseno look on. Below, Orseno and a group of Metra volunteers pose with a Salvation Army mascot after turning in more than 24 huge bags of coats that were donated to the charity by riders during a coat drive we held in conjunction with NBC Ch. 5. Many thanks to everyone who donated.



Metra working to install PTC

The subject of train safety was in the news last month following the derailment of a commuter train in New York. We thought riders might want to know where Metra stands with implementing a new safety system known as positive train control.

First, what is positive train control? PTC is a computerized system that will prevent certain types of train-to-train collisions; avoid derailments or other accidents caused by excessive speed; and increase safety for workers on the railroad right-of-way. It relies on computers, GPS devices, radios and other communications equipment to sense when a train is traveling too fast. It will then automatically override the train's engineer to stop the train.

Here's how PTC works: Before a train leaves its originating terminal, all relevant information – such as speed restrictions, and any construction activity that requires work zone intrusion protection – is downloaded into the train.

As the train moves, the PTC onboard computer monitors the train's position using GPS and a geographic track database. As the train moves, the computer constantly calculates a warning and braking curve based on the train's location, the train's speed, speed limits, work zones, signals

and switch positions. It also "pings" devices along the route to check for proper switch alignment and signal issues.

If the train is going too fast, the system takes over to stop the train. For instance, if there is a temporary work zone speed restriction in place because workers are doing a job along the route, and the train goes faster than allowed, the PTC system will stop it.

Congress mandated the installation of PTC after 25 people died in a 2008 collision between a freight train and a commuter train outside Los Angeles. All major freight and passenger railroads are required to have their PTC systems operating by the end of 2015.

Metra has made significant progress towards implementing PTC. To date, that includes:

- Awarding contracts to engineering firms to design necessary upgrades to our signal system and to draft specifications for other key tasks.
- Hiring URS Corp. to oversee the project.
- Beginning signal upgrades at our numerous switching locations.
- In the process of hiring a "system integrator," the firm that will design Metra's PTC system.
- Working to line up the radio spectrum needed for the system.

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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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Metra strives to implement positive train control system

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- Started buying the needed on-board equipment, and this month beginning the installation on BNSF and UP equipment (we are doing those first to maintain pace with those freight railroads).
- Filling key internal leadership positions on the PTC project, as well as in the process of hiring 20 signalman and 33 mechanical employees to install PTC in the field and on our trains.
- Installing prototype PTC kits on each of our seven different types of locomotives and cab cars and developing technical installation guidelines.

However, the railroad industry, including Metra, has asked Congress to extend the implementation deadline to 2018 due to numerous technological challenges. PTC is not a technology that can be bought off the shelf; it is still being developed.

"In fact, the Federal Railroad Administration has reported that in order to implement PTC, railroads must design, produce and install more than 20 major components such as data radios for locomotive communication, locomotive management computers and back office servers," according to a recent GAO report on PTC. "In addition, all components, once developed, must be assembled and integrated to achieve the overall safety function of PTC."

The PTC challenges were recently outlined to the Metra Board of Directors by URS Corp., the firm we hired to manage our PTC project.

First, all railroads are constrained by the limited number of firms that can provide signal design services and the limited expertise available to accelerate

design and deployment. Those firms and expertise are needed by most railroads to help redesign and renew existing signals and install trackside components – a tough job made even more so by the sheer volume and complexity of the task. We are also limited by the availability of the needed equipment.

Another challenge is the deployment of a national 220MHz communications network for PTC among U.S. railroads. The network is critical – onboard, trackside and back office components of every railroad's PTC system have to be able to talk via a radio network. In Chicago there will be 20 channels available for the PTC needs of the region's railroads, but we won't know whether that will suffice until the systems are tested, implemented and operational.

Another challenge is that the onboard software that runs a key train management computer is not available and won't be until at least later this year. Core software delivery dates for the back office software also continue to slip, and aren't expected now until mid-2014.

A major prerequisite for the PTC system is the creation of a detailed database of every route on the system, a time-consuming and extremely labor-intensive process. A process will be needed to document and update GPS coordinates every time a critical PTC asset is moved more than one foot.

Other challenges include expected issues with components and software as full system testing continues into 2015. So far, only partial testing of individual segments of the system has taken place. And the fear of compo-

nent failure is driving designs with more redundancy, which is further lengthening the design process.

In addition, the Federal Railroad Administration must review and certify every railroad's plans.

The last but certainly not the least hurdle is the need for every railroad's system to be interoperable with other railroads. That is a huge challenge in Chicago, which has the most complicated railroad network in the country. Metra is the only commuter rail agency in the United States with such a high level of integration with freight railroads.

Metra must cover the costs of implementing PTC – currently estimated at \$234.7 million – using the same federal and state sources that it uses for infrastructure work. The RTA has estimated that Metra will need \$9.7 billion in the next decade to keep our system in a state of good repair, and we can expect a little more than \$2 billion from traditional federal and state sources. PTC will further strain our resources.

Metra is committed to implementing PTC – we have so far set aside \$43 million – but we are also committed to maintaining our bridges, tracks and other infrastructure that is critical to the safe operation of the railroad.

We believe Metra has made a good faith effort to implement PTC by the 2015 deadline, and we believe Congress should authorize the FRA to extend the deadline for those railroads that can demonstrate such an effort. We remain committed to implementing PTC as soon as possible and we can assure riders that their safety remains our top priority.

SOUND OFF

Joy to the train

On the Bi-Level lost some of its joy when the “Sound Off” column went away. I’m so glad it’s returning.

Arlene

Some?

It’s no joke

OMG! You’ve made my day!! I hope this isn’t a cruel joke! I’ve missed Sound Off! I really have!! Hallelujah!! Thank you!!
Sharon

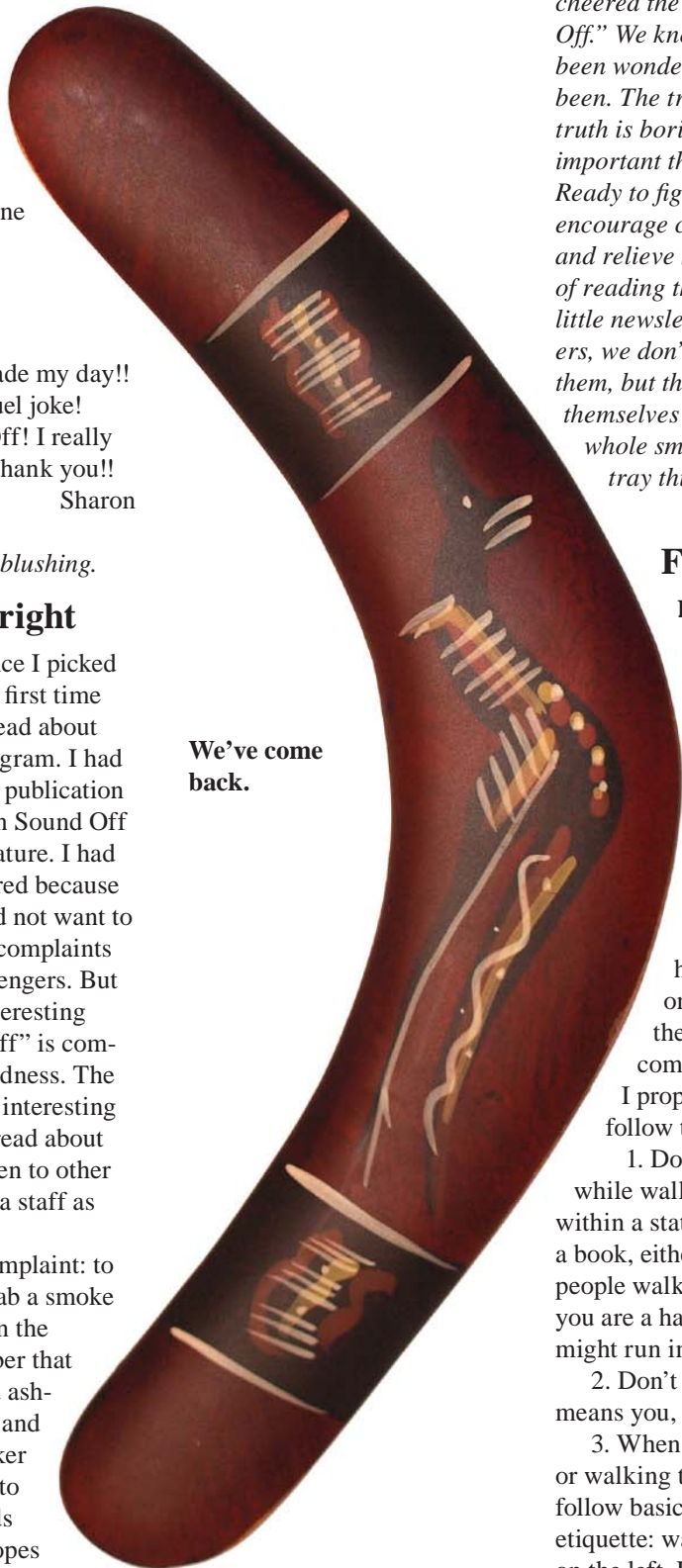
Oh please, we’re blushing.

Doesn’t smell right

Hi, by sheer chance I picked up a *Bi-Level* for the first time in many months to read about the Toys for Tots program. I had given up reading the publication a long time ago when Sound Off was removed as a feature. I had assumed it disappeared because new management did not want to advertise passenger complaints regarding other passengers. But that was the most interesting part! I see “Sound Off” is coming back. Thank goodness. The column is always an interesting read. I also liked to read about the compliments given to other passengers and Metra staff as well.

OK here’s one complaint: to all the riders who grab a smoke just before you get on the train. Please remember that you smell like an old ash-tray when you come and sit next to a nonsmoker in a train car. I have to turn my head towards the window in the hopes of catching a breeze along the wall of the car to keep your smell out of my nose!

Vic



We’ve come back.

Many thanks to everyone who cheered the return of “Sound Off.” We know many of you have been wondering where we’ve been. The truth is – well, the truth is boring. So let’s stress the important thing – we’re back. Ready to fight bad manners, encourage courteous behavior and relieve some of the tedium of reading the other parts of our little newsletter. As for the smokers, we don’t want to pick on them, but they should consider themselves reminded about the whole smelling-like-an-ash-tray thing.

Five simple rules

Within each issue of *On the Bi-Level*, much ado is made about the behavior of people while they are on the trains. I’d like to focus on the poor manners and rude behavior happening every day on the platforms and in the stations. Instead of complaining about them, I propose a solution: Let’s follow these simple rules:

1. Don’t text or read email while walking on a platform or within a station. And don’t read a book, either. You are blocking people walking behind you and you are a hazard for others who might run into you.
2. Don’t run in a station. That means you, even if you’re late.
3. When exiting a train and/or walking through a station, follow basic American driving etiquette: walk on the right, pass on the left. Reread rule #1, too.
4. When taking the escalators inside the station, form two lines for each escalator: stand on the

right, walk on the left.

5. Treat others with respect, especially inside the stations. Be polite when crossing someone’s path and say “excuse me.” A little manners will go a long way.
Nick

Seriously? We’re looking for snark, and you send us an eloquent and sensible list of recommendations that, if followed, would solve a great deal of problems? Are you trying to drive us out of business already?

Plus one more

With respect to seat hogs, I usually say “Pretty Please With Sugar on Top.” Works like a charm...it’s just passive aggressive enough.
Cindy

More sensible advice? Et tu, Cindy?

Not a good idea

I am so angry with people who use train seats for their personal belongings. I have to constantly approach other commuters asking them if I could please sit down. What kind of individual will allow another passenger to look for a seat while their coat or packages take up space? Clearly these individuals don’t know the meaning of courtesy or have any manners. I have seen pregnant woman going from car to car trying to find a seat. I have given up my seat numerous times to these women or the elderly because I was raised right. What they need is a GOOD PUNCH IN THE NOSE!
Kathy

While we understand the sentiment, may we suggest that Cindy’s approach is a better solution to the age-old problem of seat-hogging?



Operation North Pole brightens the holidays

Operation North Pole carried out another successful day of fun and fantasy during the holiday season for about 62 Chicago area families who are battling the emotional and financial stress of dealing with a life-threatening or terminal illness of one or more of their children. The families enjoyed a train ride along the UP Northwest Line, breakfast with Mrs. Claus and a visit with Santa at his workshop. Above left, Santa poses in front of a Metra locomotive, which was transformed via a train wrap into the “Gingerbread Express.” Above right, Mrs. Claus poses with Giselle Fernandez and her mother, Maricela. The group hosts various fund-raising events throughout the year in order to raise the money necessary to fulfill the wishes of these very special children and their families.

Winter Travel Notes

Concealed carry not permitted on Metra

Illinois’ Concealed Carry law begins this month, and Metra would like to remind riders that the law expressly prohibits carrying concealed firearms on Metra property and trains as well as that of other forms of public transportation. It states, “A licensee under this act shall not knowingly carry a firearm on or into any bus, train or form of transportation paid for in whole or in part with public funds, and any building, real property, and parking area under the control of a public transportation facility paid for in whole or in part with public funds.”

Oak Forest opens new station

The city of Oak Forest opened a new station along the Rock Island Line during a ceremony just before Christmas last month. The new 1,700-square-foot station replaced a station that was 42 years old. The new depot building includes a warming shelter, vendor space, washrooms and a geothermal heating system. The \$3 million project also added a new platform warming shelter and partially rehabbed the station platforms. The station serves about 1,500 riders a day, ranking it second on the Rock Island Line (after 80th Ave.) The station is served by 23 inbound and 24 outbound trains a day.

Board searching for next executive director

The Metra Board of Directors at its December meeting voted to empower the board chairman to conduct an expedited search for the next executive director and return to the board with his recommendation as quickly as possible. Board members said acting Chairman Jack Partelow could use a search firm if he deemed it necessary. The board is pleased with the direction the agency is headed under interim Ex-

ecutive Director Don Orseno. Board members want to move quickly to select a permanent executive director in a public, transparent process, free of political interference. They gave no timeline for Partelow’s task, but they said they hoped he could complete it soon. The 11-member board is made up of representatives of the six counties in the Chicago area and the city of Chicago. Metra is currently being led by Orseno, a 40-year railroad veteran who was named interim executive director in August. He had previously served as Metra’s deputy executive director/chief operations officer.

Safety contest deadline coming Jan. 31

The 8th annual Metra Safety Poster and Essay contest is well underway but the one thing missing is your child’s entry. So as the frigid weather keeps us indoors, set some time aside to help your children learn about railroad safety and maybe win a prize! Students in grades K-12 from the six-county region Metra serves are invited to create a poster or essay using this year’s theme, “Get Smart: Look, Listen, and Live.” They could win an iPad or cash prizes! The deadline for entries is Jan. 31. Contest rules and information are available at www.metracontest.com. Also, remember to become a fan of the Metra contest Facebook page for exclusive news and announcements. You can also reach us with any questions at metracontest@metrarr.com.

Contact Metra

If you have a complaint, compliment, service issue or any other issue, we want to hear from you. You can call a Passenger Service Representative at (312) 322-6777 (8 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays) or send email to metrarrail_feedback@metrarr.com.