

CLIFF NOTES

A brief history of Metra system

What is Metra?

You may think there's an easy answer to that question, and in one sense, there is. Metra is the label we've been putting on commuter rail service in the Chicago area since 1984. Behind that simple name, however, lies a convoluted history and a complex, multi-layered system.



Alex Clifford
Metra CEO

To understand how Metra operates, it really helps to know

how Metra came about and how Metra is composed.

Chicago has always been the railroad center of the nation, and it has had commuter trains almost as long as it has had any trains. Rail service peaked in the 1930s, when Chicago had the largest public transportation system in the world.

But by the late 1960s and early 1970s, the system was failing across the region, with the CTA, suburban bus companies and freight railroads experiencing big financial losses. To keep the system running, voters in the six-county Chicago area created the Regional Transportation Authority in 1974.

Its mission was to coordinate and assist public transportation and to serve as the conduit for state and federal subsidies needed to keep the system opera-

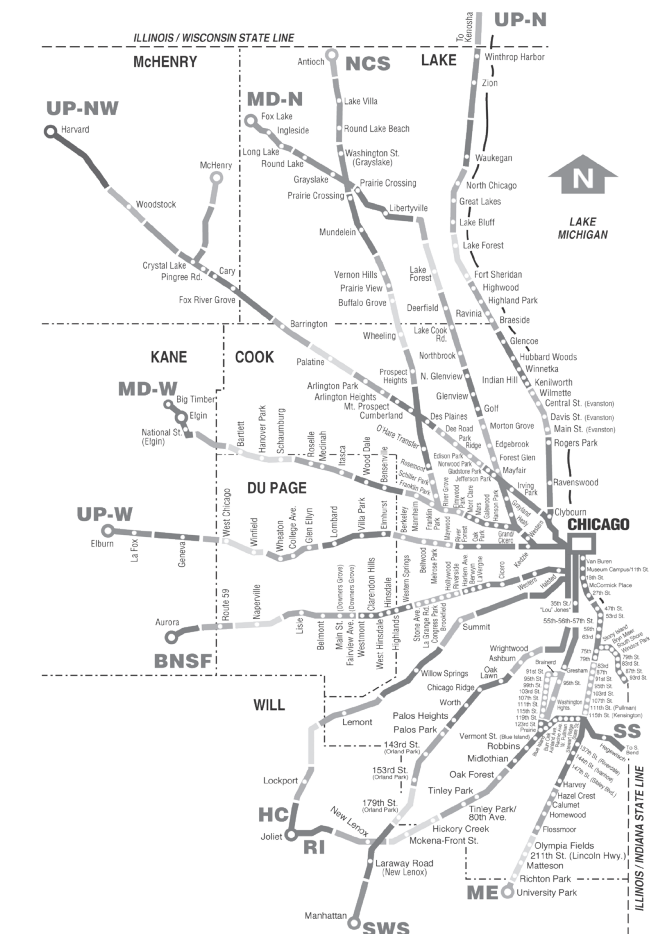
tional. The RTA did not at first directly operate commuter rail service but paid the railroads to do so under purchase-of-service agreements. It also began to reverse decades of disinvestment in the overall commuter rail system, primarily by buying new locomotives and cars.

However, the bankruptcies of the Rock Island and the Milwaukee Road railroads changed the rules of the game. The RTA took over the commuter operations and eventually bought the tracks of those railroads. It created a commuter rail division to operate those lines in 1982.

The RTA was reorganized by Springfield in 1983, and something called the Commuter Rail Service Board was created to oversee commuter rail operations. At the same time, a suburban bus division (Pace) was created. RTA remained as the parent organization for the CTA, Metra and Pace, which are known as the three service boards.

The Commuter Rail Service Board operated the Rock Island line and the two Milwaukee lines directly. It operated the remaining seven lines indirectly, through purchase-of service agreements with Illinois Central Gulf, the Burlington Northern, the Chicago & North Western and the Norfolk Southern.

Due to the complicated and patchwork nature of commuter rail at the time, the rail board in



1984 came up with the "Metra" name as a service mark for the entire system (short for "Metropolitan Rail"). The idea was to bring a unifying identity to all the various components, no matter who owned or operated them.

That system still is in place, although the ownership and/or operators of several lines have changed.

Metra bought the Illinois

Central Gulf's electrified commuter line in 1987 and started operating it directly as the Metra Electric Line. Metra also took over operation of what is now the Heritage Corridor line, which ran on tracks then owned by ICG and now owned by Canadian National.

That same year it also assumed ownership of the Milwaukee (See Metra on Page 3)



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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SOUND OFF

Something different

I always look forward to a fresh collection of Sound Off letters, but I offer something a little bit different. My train time is short and I take those moments to sketch fellow passengers. Attached are a couple from my collection that I like to call "Strangers On A Train." Enjoy!

NEN

Thanks very much. We're happy to publish them for our riders' enjoyment.

Another aisle view

Dear Sick of Self-Centeredness: The perfect response to the self-centered human being wishing to save a seat for a friend boarding down the line....or any other seat saver on any other train is... "Then I'll just enjoy this seat until your friend arrives, thanks!"....and sit down.

Aisle Sitter,
Steve

That really is the perfect response.

And another

This seems so simple – if you REALLY want an aisle seat, why don't you sit next to someone who took the window seat???

A rider

Now we're thinkin'!

Speaking of looks

Regarding your January issue, did someone really think "Take another look at our evolving" was a good headline? Maybe you should take another look at your deciding.

Rich

We didn't give Rich a prize for being the only rider/reader to notice that strange headline and



write in to us, but we hereby give him kudos – and our thanks – in this space. He deserves it not only for his inquiry to us but also for doing it in such a humorous manner. For the record, the word "site" was somehow dropped from that headline during the printing process. And yes, in case you're wondering, we have already taken another look at our printing.

Picking a nit-picker

In your January edition, a rider named Jason called Metra out for some grammatical errors in its posters. In his letter, he cited two errors in "...your 'Be fair, pay the fair' poster" (sic).

Clearly, Jason's letter used the improper form of "fare" in the second "fair" of his diatribe. However, it is not clear whether his letter was incorrect or whether OTBL misspelled what he wrote

in his letter. If the former, you should feel somewhat vindicated. If the latter, you have violated your promise to Jason of limiting your mistakes to three or less. Please investigate this mystery, as I'm sure all Metra riders are on the edge of their seats to find out the answer.

Yours in seeking perfection,
Paul

We are not nearly so devious as to intentionally insert an error into Jason's letter to make us look better. It's more a matter of us being oblivious and not catching the error in his original. We offer our apologies to all.

Belated Valentines

I want to thank two angels who ride the SouthWest line and keep a watchful eye for forgetful people like me. Last month I got up from my seat as we approached Union Station and my monthly pass was still on the seatback. The woman seated next to me spotted it and tried to catch me, but I had left in a hurry for a meeting. She spotted my cell number on the back of my ticket, made a call to let me know she found it and then turned it into the Lost & Found at the Ticket Office (they called too!). I'm grateful for the moment I took to put my info on the back of my ticket and a thoughtful rider who took the time from her busy day to do a good deed.

Three weeks later, my ear muffs fell to the seat as I dug for my ticket. I again left in a hurry and another angel spotted them. She kept them in her purse until she spotted me on the platform several days later.

I hope this note makes it to the next issue of OTBL and brings a smile to both of my special Valentines!

Tom

Metra history, composition is complicated

(Continued from Page 1)

kee lines. It took over operations on the Norfolk Southern line in 1993 and renamed it the South-West Service.

Metra still has purchase-of-service agreement with two railroads. The Chicago & North

Western was merged with Union Pacific in 1995, and UP still owns and operates the three UP lines. Burlington Northern, now known as the BNSF Railway, continues to own and operate that line.

Under those contracts, the

carriers use their employees and own or control the rights-of-way and most of the other facilities required for operations. Metra owns the rolling stock and in conjunction with local municipalities is responsible for most stations. Metra retains overall

authority over fares, service and staffing levels.

Below is some brief information about each Metra line. We'll give more detailed histories in future issues.

You can now follow me on Twitter @MetraCEO

Metra owns tracks and operates trains

Metra Electric: The Illinois Central Railroad started offering commuter service to Hyde Park in 1856. It operated on trestles in Lake Michigan just offshore until after the 1871 Chicago Fire, when debris was dumped in the lake and the landfill surrounded the tracks and created Grant Park. The branch lines were added in 1883 (South Chicago) and 1892 (Blue Island) and the commuter service was extended south, eventually to what is now University Park in 1977. The line was grade-separated starting in 1892 and then electrified by 1926. Metra bought the line for \$26 million and started operating its service in 1987. It is Metra's only electric line. Metra Electric timetables are "Panama Orange" in honor of the IC's old Panama Limited trains.

Rock Island: Train service to Joliet was begun by the Chicago and Rock Island Railroad in 1852. The branch was built in the 1870s and extended north in the 1880s. The Rock operated service on the line until it went bankrupt. The RTA bought it in 1982. For a short time, service on the line was run by Chicago & North Western but eventually the RTA and then Metra started running it. Rock Island timetables are "Rocket Red" for the Rock Island's Rocket trains.

Milwaukee lines: The Milwaukee West and Milwaukee North lines, which date from the 1870s, are Chicago area remnants of the once-mighty Milwaukee Road, which had a long and storied history that ended in bankruptcy in 1980. At that point, the RTA started operating service on the routes. Metra took over and ended up buying the lines in 1987. One historical oddity is that while Metra owns and operates the Milwaukee lines, dispatching duties are performed by Canadian Pacific in Minneapolis. That was the arrangement in place with CP's predecessor at the time. Milwaukee West timetables are "Arrow Yellow" for the Milwaukee Road's Arrow train, while Milwaukee North timetables are "Hiawatha Orange" for the famed Hiawatha trains.

Freight railroad owns tracks, Metra operates

SouthWest Service: Parts of this line originated with the Wabash Railway, which built a link to Chicago in 1880. That section, south of 74th, eventually ended up belonging to Norfolk Southern. Another part, from 21st to 74th, belonged to the Chicago & Western Indiana Railroad (which was owned by Wabash and other railroads) and parts are now owned by Metra or NS. Metra controls none of the six intersections with freight railroads on this line. Wabash and the NS operated commuter trains on the route to Orland Park. Metra assumed operations in 1993, renaming it the SouthWest Service. Commuter service was extended to Manhattan in 2006. Metra leases the route from NS, and trains are dispatched from Dearborn, Mich. Timetables are "Banner Blue" to commemorate the Wabash Railroad's Banner Blue trains.

Heritage Corridor: The line originated with the Chicago and Alton Railroad, then was part of the Gulf, Mobile & Ohio, which merged with Illinois Central. Lemont (1853) and Lockport (1863) are the oldest depots in the Metra system and were there when President Lincoln's funeral train passed through. For many years there was only one weekday round trip on the line. The RTA added a second trip in each direction in 1979. When the Illinois Central Gulf sold the Metra Electric line to Metra in 1987, it also handed over commuter operations on the Chicago-Joliet route, although it still owned the tracks. Metra renamed the line the Heritage Corridor. Metra still operates the service (it added a third round-trip in 1999 but the tracks are now owned by CN and trains are dispatched from Homewood. Metra controls none of the five intersections with freight railroads on this line. Heritage schedules are "Alton Maroon" for a color used by the Alton Railroad.

North Central Service: The North Central Service line, the first new commuter rail line in Chicago in 70 years, began operating in 1996 and was upgraded in 2006. Metra operates the line on tracks originally built by the first Wisconsin Central in 1886. The tracks are now owned by CN, and trains are dispatched from Homewood.

Freight railroad owns tracks and operates

Union Pacific lines: What is now the UP West line started as the Galena & Chicago Union in 1848, the first railroad in Chicago. The two other UP lines had different origins in the 1850s. Chicago & North Western owned all three for most of their existence. These lines passed to UP ownership when the C&NW merged with UP in 1995. UP now operates and dispatches trains from Omaha, Nebraska. The trains run on the left-hand side, thought to be a function of how the first track and depots were situated when a second track was added. The UP West line was extended to Elburn in 2006. Metra timetables for the UP North are "Flambeau Green"; green for the C&NW's historical green and yellow locomotives and Flambeau for one of its passenger trains. UP Northwest timetables use "Viking Yellow," again for the C&NW's colors and one of its trains. UP West timetables are "Kate Shelley Rose," named for a girl from Iowa who saved a train from disaster in 1881.

BNSF Line: The first rail service from Aurora to Chicago in 1850 chugged north from Aurora to the G&CU tracks (now the UP West) and then east to Chicago. When that line got too congested, the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy built their own direct line, which opened with passenger service in 1864. Over the years, the name of the owner changed to Burlington Northern to Burlington Northern Santa Fe to BNSF. This line was the first to use bi-level coaches, built by Budd in 1950. BNSF dispatches trains from Ft. Worth, Texas. BNSF timetables are "Kelly Green" or "Cascade Green" for the color used on BNSF freight locomotives.

Ticket machines offer new benefit

Metra Acting Chairman Larry Huggins and CEO Alex Clifford earlier this month unveiled a major new convenience for Metra customers: credit card ticket vending machines at three downtown terminals.

"We are happy to give our riders yet another option for buying tickets," Clifford said. "We are committed to improving customer service throughout our system. Our riders will find these machines to be quick and easy to use."

Huggins and Clifford appeared at a press conference at Union Station, where three machines were installed near the Metra ticket office. At the Ogilvie Transportation Center, two were installed at the track level near the south end of the platforms and one was installed on the ground-floor Suburban Concourse. Two machines were installed at LaSalle St. Station.

The machines are supplementing ticket agents at each station.

Customers will find the ma-



Rider Caroline Manley of Chicago was the first person to use Metra's new ticket vending machines at Union Station.

chines easy to use. Basically, you tell the machines what kind of ticket you want to buy, what line you want to use and what station you want to travel to, and it will tell you the fare and ask for your credit card. The machines accept Visa, MasterCard, Discover and

American Express.

A phone is located near each machine to connect riders to a customer service representative if they have problems or questions.

The machines can be used to buy full fare one-way, 10-ride and monthly tickets. Reduced

fare tickets cannot be purchased from the machines because riders are required to show a permit or meet other conditions to be eligible. The machines also will sell weekend tickets on weekends.

The machines are the same as the 31 credit card vending machines already installed at the busiest stations on the Metra Electric Line, including at that line's two downtown stations, Millennium and Van Buren. The cost for 43 machines, plus some related expenses, was about \$2 million. The machines for the multiple diesel lines required more complex software than that used on the single Metra Electric Line and also required more extensive testing. About 15,000 transactions were performed during testing.

Two other locations will get machines this spring: McCormick Place, which is served by the Metra Electric Line, and Route 59 on the BNSF Line, the busiest station outside of downtown.

Metra sees 1.6% increase in ridership

We are happy to report that Metra served 82.7 million riders in 2011, an increase of 1.6 percent over 2010 and the third-highest total in Metra's history.

While we always like to see that ridership number going up, this year's increase is particularly gratifying. Mass transit funding is a hot topic in Washington these days, and we have been trying in a variety of ways to shine the spotlight on the important and growing role Metra plays in keeping the Chicago region moving.

Those 82.7 million rides illustrate that fact far better than anything else we could say or do.

Since dipping to 56.5 million

passenger trips in 1983, when Metra was formed, the number of commuter rail riders in the region has jumped 46 percent, averaging 1.6 percent growth per year. The only years in which Metra saw higher ridership were 2007, when Metra provided 83.3 million passenger trips, and its record year of 2008, when it provided 86.8 million trips.

Some contributors to rising ridership included relatively stable regional employment and record high gas prices. Those trends should continue this year.

The busiest route continues to be the BNSF Railway, between Aurora and Chicago Union Station, which saw 16.6 million trips

in 2011. Ridership on the BNSF rose 1.7 percent in 2011 compared to 2010.

The UP Northwest Line jumped 7.5 percent over 2010, providing 11.1 million rides, while the UP North Line fell 6.7 percent to 9.4 million rides. However, Metra believes those changes have less to do with ridership changes and more to do with a new revenue accounting system that we implemented last year.

That system more accurately allocates ticket sales to individual lines, including among the three UP lines, and we believe the old system underestimated the actual number of UP Northwest riders while overestimating

the number of UP North riders.

Meanwhile, the UP West Line increased 2.2 percent to 7.9 million.

For the remaining lines, the NCS went up 6.3 percent, to 1.7 million rides; the Milwaukee West Line increased 5 percent to 7.1 million rides; the SouthWest Service increased 4.4 percent to 2.6 million; the Milwaukee North Line increased 1.9 percent to 7 million; the Heritage Corridor increased 1.6 percent to 0.7 million; and the Rock Island Line increased 0.5 percent to 8.6 million. The Metra Electric Line had a small drop but essentially held steady at slightly more than 10 million.