



Wind speed monitors will help UP lines

Some little devices with a tongue-twister name could make commuting on Union Pacific lines a lot easier starting this spring.

They are called anemometers, and they measure wind speed. Metra is investing in the devices for the Union Pacific Railroad which will install eight of them along the three UP lines this

spring, where they are expected to monitor local wind conditions and reduce long delays.

To understand why, a little background is necessary. As many riders know, the three UP lines – North, Northwest and West – are owned by Union Pacific Railroad. They operate the commuter service on the lines with their own employees under

a purchase-of-service agreement with Metra. We have a similar purchase-of-service arrangement with BNSF Railway, which owns and operates the BNSF line.

Because UP owns the lines, their crews follow UP's operating rules. Those rules are very similar to Metra's operating rules with some slight differences. Although we all share

the goal of operating safely and protecting our riders, one of the differences is in our approach to operating in extreme weather.

In the case of Union Pacific, their rules do not allow passenger trains to operate in extreme high wind. Wherever possible, they try to stop trains in stations to give riders a choice between

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Seeking info about and from riders

Metra riders, we're going to be counting and querying you a lot in the next few weeks.

Metra is embarking on three separate efforts this spring to get information about and from our riders. In the first, which is already underway, we'll be counting the actual number of riders who board and get off at each station. In the second and third, we'll be onboard every weekday morning train, distributing a short origin/destination survey and inviting you to participate in a longer customer satisfaction survey that asks a lot of questions about how we are serving you.

The passenger count work is not directly related to the origin/destination and customer satisfaction surveys, although the information that we get will help us make sure that the survey data is correctly weighted. The count will attempt to answer a simple question: how many people use



each station? Of course, we have a general idea about the answer, based on the number of tickets sold for each fare zone and passenger counts on trains. But since we have no turnstiles at our stations, we can't know the exact number of people using each sta-

tion unless we physically count them as they board the trains.

We haven't done such a count on weekdays since 2006 (although a weekend-only count was done in 2010). But getting an accurate count for each station is important because it helps us

determine if we are using our equipment in the most efficient way to meet demand. The on/off counts have already started and will continue through May.

The origin/destination survey will ask questions about your

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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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Light bulbs illuminate Metra's money-saving energy efforts

How many light bulbs does it take to run a railroad?

As it turns out, a lot – think of all the platforms and parking lots and stations and other buildings that we have to illuminate on a daily basis.

In recent weeks, Metra has been taking steps to make sure we're using the most efficient ones possible. We're conducting six tests at various locations where we are replacing older light bulbs with newer, more energy-efficient models. Most of that work qualifies us for rebates from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, so in addition to saving money on energy costs we're getting reimbursed for some of our upfront expenses.

Bottom line: we can save a great deal of money each year and, thanks to the rebates, recoup our investment much more quickly. On the six tests now underway, we estimate our annual savings at \$110,000, and project that it will take us a little more than a year to recover our costs.

Metra spent about \$10.4 million last year on electricity. About

\$5.5 million of that total was to provide motive power for the Metra Electric, our only electrified line. The rest is spent on signals, switches, yards, platforms, parking lots, buildings and all our other electrical needs.

New light bulbs have already been installed on the platforms in Elmhurst, one of the six test projects, and we are working on replacing the platform lights at the Ogilvie Transportation Center. In those cases, we are replacing metal halide bulbs with induction lamps. High-pressure sodium 300-watt bulbs covering about half the parking lot at Pingree Road are being replaced with 102-watt LED lights.

At our main headquarters at 547 W. Jackson, all T12 fluorescent bulbs (the ones that are now outdated) are being replaced with longer-lasting, more energy-efficient T5 bulbs. In our Western Avenue Coach Yard, we are replacing conventional 1000-watt bulbs in three high-mast lighting fixtures with 405-watt LED lamps. And in two of our work facilities in Blue Island, we are using the T5s to replace 58 400-

watt metal halide bulbs.

Also on the energy-saving front, Metra worked with the RTA, CTA, Pace and other agencies in 2012 to complete a Regional Green Transit Plan. One of its recommendations was to develop an energy management solution to track energy use, something the RTA had also established as one of its priorities. The agencies worked together last year to secure EnergyCAP energy management software, and we are now about to start using it.

The software will provide efficiencies in data collection, energy use monitoring and benchmarking facilities, and will be used to track the use of electricity, natural gas and water. It will greatly enhance Metra's ability to manage its energy costs.

Metra will continue to look for ways to reduce utility costs. We'll be working on a new electricity supply contract later this year, and we will explore electricity rebates. We're also looking for more lighting projects similar to the ones we've already started and possibly some similar gas projects.

Winds

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waiting and seeking alternative transportation. Right now, UP relies on weather forecasts and some internal analysis to determine when and where trains may be halted because of high winds. Those forecasts can cover a broad area and a long time period, and therefore may result in wide-spread halts in service.

Once the anemometers are installed and tied into UP's

dispatching center – and that is expected to happen by early May – the UP will be able to supplement its forecasts with actual conditions to determine whether trains should be halted and for how long. The added information should mean any halts in service will affect a smaller area (and fewer trains) for a shorter period.

BNSF Railway's operating rules in extreme weather are similar to UP's. Metra provided the funding for anemometers to be installed on that line last year and the results were excellent. In the last big high-wind event,

there were no stoppages on the BNSF line. The devices cost about \$25,000 each.

Metra's operating rules in extreme weather generally allow trains inside the warning area to move at greatly reduced speeds, and we rely on information from the field when making decisions about train movements. Trains outside the warning area may be stopped before entering it or allowed to proceed at greatly reduced speeds, depending on the type of warning. Metra's policy allows for flexibility while still making safety the top concern.

SOUND OFF

Early strumming

To the obnoxious bully, wannabe guitar player in the horn-rimmed glasses, Harley hat and jacket, listening to “Guitar for Dummies” in the Quiet Car at 5 a.m. on a Monday morning on the UP West Line, the other guy asked you nicely to quiet it down. No need to be a jerk to him. How about a little civility instead of being such a tool! Didn’t you notice, nobody was talking? Nobody was playing music? It was quiet! Until you got there. Buy a set of earbuds, go pay for private guitar lessons, it’s only \$10-\$20, and take your own advice and “shut up and sit down” if you’re gonna be in the Quiet Car!

Thanks from your fellow passengers who enjoy the quiet.

Ken

Do we need to write a “Quiet Car for Dummies” manual?

Gesundheit

Given our very long winter season, many are sick, yet can’t take off work. May I suggest when one is sick, or not sick, that you cover your sneeze and cough with something? Your sleeve, coat or the sports section of the newspaper. Please don’t spit into the air on a closed train. That’s rude and it literally makes others sick.

I appreciate your consideration of this suggestion.

C.W.

Or maybe a “Sneezing for Dummies”?

Save me from savers

This past week I was taking my usual evening train home. I walked through the train cars looking for an empty seat. When I found an empty seat, I was informed by three differ-



Even strumming dummies should be quiet.

ent people in different train cars that the seat was being “saved” for a friend or spouse. I had to continue to walk through the cars to find a seat that was not being saved. This is grammar-school behavior. Metra seats are available on a first-come basis. You have no right to save a seat when someone is on the train and looking to sit down. I pay for my train fare and I have a right to sit down in any unoccupied seat.

Kim

Allright, this is the last time we’ll tap into this joke, but how about a “Seating for Dummies” solution?

Seat hog solution?

I suggest Metra simply add a few more cars to their rush-hour trains. There. Problem solved!

Tom

Oh, if only it were that easy. As many riders discovered this winter, when many cars were damaged by the harsh weather, Metra is very short on spare cars. We are currently looking into the possibility of purchasing used cars from other railroads to help us expand capacity.

Quiet end

I am very pleased that Metra has designated a Quiet Car. At the end of the day, I cherish the peace and quiet of the car. HOWEVER, why do some people think that just because their stop is coming up, the Quiet Car stops being the Quiet Car? If you want to talk because you’ve had to spend the past 50 minutes in silence, get up a little early and move into the vestibule!!

Anonymous

A little quiet goes a long way. But, apparently, not all the way.

Hogging and clogging

Why are Hazel Crest riders so disrespected? When I get on the train in the mornings I have to pass several seats with bags or coats or lunch or newspapers occupying them. These items do not pay for a ticket. I do. If you don’t want me to sit next to you, drive your car. I guarantee I won’t try to sit next to you in your car.

And, why do I have to stand up in the vestibule to beat the Calumet riders to the door? Please wait until we get off the train before blocking the aisle.

I have missed my stop because of it. Unless you plan to take me back to Hazel Crest, sit down until we get off.

Giselle

Two of the oldest Metra complaints combined into one. We’ll ask it again: please don’t hog seats. Please don’t clog aisles. Please be polite. Thank you.

A timely reminder

This morning I had my monthly pass stolen as I was sleeping on the second level of the Metra UP Northwest Line. I put it on the clip by my seat on the second level. Two witnesses and the conductors helped me recover my monthly pass. First of all, I want to thank the witnesses for saying something and I want to thank the conductors for helping me recover the pass from the person who took the pass. Without all you, I wouldn’t have got it back.

Also I want to make sure everyone signs their monthly pass with their phone number and puts some kind of mark on the front of the pass to identify the pass. I was told it would be helpful not to sleep on the train but I know that is impossible for me and others. Please everyone, “say something” when you see theft and make sure you mark your pass on the front to identify it. Hopefully this will help others from getting their pass stolen. I got lucky with help from a lot of people and I appreciate it very much

Kevin

We’re glad everything worked out for you. And thanks for the reminder. Signing your pass not only helps with theft, but it also helps if for some reason you lose your pass and it ends up in Lost & Found.

Spring Travel Notes

Metra ridership rose in 2013

Metra provided 82.3 million passenger trips last year to commuters in the six-county region, a 1.2 percent increase over 2012 and the fifth-highest total in the agency's history. Metra posted ridership gains on eight of its 11 lines in 2013. The busiest route continues to be the BNSF Railway, between Aurora and Chicago Union Station, which saw 16.6 million trips in 2013. Ridership on the BNSF rose 1.2 percent in 2013 compared to 2012. The rail line posting the highest percentage increase in ridership in 2013 was the Heritage Corridor, which experienced a 3.1 percent increase over 2012, providing more than 703,000 trips. Other lines reporting significant gains in 2013 included a 3 percent gain on the SouthWest Service at 2.6 million trips and the UP West Line at 8.3 million trips. Metra's other two UP Lines also reported gains in 2013, with the UP North Line reporting a 2.4 percent increase at 9.3 million trips and the UP Northwest Line gaining 1.4 percent at 11.2 million. For the remaining lines, the Milwaukee District North increased 2.1 percent to 7 million and the Rock Island District went up by 1.4 percent to 8.6 million while the Metra Electric, the Milwaukee West and NCS lines posted decreases of 1.2 percent to 9.6 million, 0.4 percent to 6.8 million and 0.3 percent to 1.7 million respectively. 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 1.5 percent growth per year.

CREATE public hearing scheduled

IDOT will host a Public Hearing concerning the CREATE 75th St. Corridor Improvement Project, which will eliminate bottlenecks and lead to more reliable service on the SWS line. The Preferred Alternative would route SWS trains to the LaSalle Street Station instead of Union Station. The purpose of the hearing is to: provide an overview of the project and its Draft Environmental Impact Statement; review alternatives developed to address identified project purpose and need; present the benefits, impacts, and mitigation measures for the project; and obtain public comment on the project and the Draft Environmental Impact Statement. The Public Hearing will be held from 4 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. on Tuesday, April 22 at the Freedom Temple Church of God in Christ, 1459 W. 74th St., Chicago. For more information go to www.75thcip.org or call Gretchen Wahl at (312) 612-7294.

Metra billboard wins award

A digital billboard touting Metra as the Chicago area's "Real Expressway" has been honored with a local Silver Addy award from the American Advertising Federation. The billboard, created by Staples Marketing and Metra's marketing team as part of the "Metra Makes Life Easier" campaign last spring, won the award in the category of "Out-of-Home, Outdoor Board, Flat." The American Advertising Federation's Madison, Wis., chapter announced the award.

Counting and surveying

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journey that day – where did you come from and how did you get to our station? Where are you going, and how are you going to get to your ultimate destination once you leave our train? We'll also ask a little information about what tickets you use and how you buy them.

The survey will help us get a detailed picture of trip patterns and travel choices, which will help us (and the CTA and Pace) spot trends, identify transportation needs and plan for the future.

Finally, we will be inviting you – encouraging you – to take a customer satisfaction survey that will ask you a variety of questions about your experiences with Metra. These include: obtaining travel and fare information; purchasing tickets; the reliability of service; the comfort, safety and cleanliness of stations and of trains; the availability and cost of parking; how you feel about our staff; communications; and other matters.

The goal is to learn what we should be doing better and to measure our progress against a similar survey that was done two years ago. We invite any comments and/or constructive criticism that would help us improve our service and your experiences on Metra.

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 metrarail_feedback@metrarr.com.

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