



ON THE BI-LEVEL

Commuter Newsletter, May 2009



Stimulating projects

New cars for the Metra Electric District. Major rehabilitation of 40 diesel locomotives. A new station near U.S. Cellular Field. Renovated bridges and stations. More parking.

Those are among the many projects throughout the six-county area that Metra will start this year using its share of money from the new state public works program and the federal stimulus legislation.

Metra is receiving \$290.7 million from the \$3 billion state public works program that was passed by the Legislature and signed by Gov. Pat Quinn this spring. Gov. Quinn envisioned the “mini” capital program as a piece of a much larger \$26 billion capital bill, which lawmakers have yet to take up.

Metra will spend the entire \$290.7 million to start buying badly needed cars for the Metra Electric line, fulfilling a promise to replace the cars as soon as the state provided money to do so. The money should allow Metra to acquire 75 of the 160 cars that are needed. They will be similar to the 26 newer cars already in service on the line, with bathrooms and modern propulsion systems. The rest will be bought when the larger state program passes.

Metra is receiving \$140.9 million as its share of the federal stimulus legislation, the American Recovery and



Metra will order new cars like this one for the Metra Electric line, thanks to the “mini” capital bill passed by lawmakers and signed by Gov. Pat Quinn this spring.

Reinvestment Act of 2009. Contracts have already been signed or soon will be, and work will start quickly.

We will be tracking how many jobs these projects will create or retain. For instance, we know the first contract to be signed, for the **remanufacturing of 40 locomotives for \$71 million**, will retain 62 employees at the Progress Rail facility in Mayfield, Ky. These locomotives were built and delivered between 1977 and 1980 and have major components that are in need of rehabilitation. The

work will extend the life of the engines by 20 to 25 years.

Other federal stimulus projects include:

HVAC rehabilitation on 41 commuter cars, \$1.3 million.

Replacement of bridges on UP North, Phase 1, \$40.1 million: The bridges over Montrose, Sunnyside, Wilson, Leland, Lawrence, Winnemac, Foster and Balmoral are old and need to be replaced. Retaining walls will be built on both sides of the tracks between Berneau and Balmoral. Track and signal work will be done between Lawrence

and Balmoral. The work also includes a modern new Ravenswood Station across Lawrence from the current station.

Winnetka Station restoration, \$5 million: The work includes reconstructing platforms, rehabilitating the depot and shelter, replacing or rehabilitating the pedestrian bridge and stairs, and adding elevators and elevator vestibules.

Pingree Road Station parking, \$1 million: About 330 park-

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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 letters for length and grammar.

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SOUNDING BOARD

Got a question, we've got an answer

More on the left

You had a wrong answer about Metra trains running on the left-hand side. This is the old Northwestern line and it was originally laid out by English engineers. They laid it out as they would have in England, hence left-handed running.

Harold

Well...we're not wrong, but neither are you, exactly. There are competing explanations for the left-handed operation. Yours is one of them. Another is that British investors dictated it. But as far as we can tell, no one has definitive proof that their theory is the right one. Several historians and researchers, as well as the Chicago and North Western Historical Society, favor the explanation we gave, which is why we said it was the "most plausible" theory. A researcher at the society concluded that the British capital theory doesn't hold up because the vast majority of early stockholders of the predecessor railroad, the Galena & Chicago Union, were Midwesterners, not Brits. And we could find no mention of British engineers in an admittedly quick search of histories of the railroad. If anyone out there can cite a definitive explanation, send us an e-mail.

UP West questions

I was reading the last issue of OTBL about the UP West line upgrades. Isn't there supposed to be a new station just west of 25th combining the Melrose Park and Bellwood stations?

Also, River Forest Park District (location of River Forest station) is also saying that they are talking with Metra to close off the open area that is part of the building. Are you

aware of this as well?

Judi

The new station in Bellwood is being planned by the villages and is not part of the Metra/UP West line upgrade project. Although Metra (and UP) support the consolidated station, we are not providing funding. As for River Forest, what is happening is that the open area is being enclosed with glass walls to create a larger heated waiting area for Metra passengers.

Ravenswood station

I attended a community meeting last month in Ravenswood. It included a brief announcement by a spokeswoman from Metra about moving the Ravenswood station north to the other side of Lawrence Avenue in order to make it ADA-accessible. The sound system left a lot to be desired and it was unclear just how far north the new platform would extend along Ravenswood. I also understood her to say that the project would take 40 months to complete, once construction got started. Since that is longer than the CTA Brown line multiple-station rehab timetable, I was quite confused as to why it could possibly take that long to install a single station. More details about this project would be appreciated.

Dave

that we will have to schedule construction so as to not disrupt service on the line.

Right now the Ravenswood station south of Lawrence can only accommodate six train cars. As you know, ridership has grown at that station and we want to put in a modern station that can handle an eight-car train. Moving the station just north of Lawrence gives us room to handle eight cars, and it also allows us to keep the old station open while the new one is being built. The new station will of course be ADA accessible, but that is not the sole reason for the project. The station will have a center platform with exits at Lawrence and, at the north end, Ainslie (the leg of Ainslie to the west of the tracks).

Ravenswood parking

Are there any plans for Metra to get more parking spaces at Ravenswood?

Steven

We are aware of the tight parking situation at the Ravenswood station. We are working with the developer of a project in the Sears lot to provide more parking for our passengers in a planned parking deck. Talks are in the early stages so we don't yet know how many spots will be created.

80th Ave. work

I've heard a lot in the past few months about a new station at 80th Ave. When is construction slated to start?

Kyle
Rock Island

Watch for work on that station in Tinley Park to be starting later this year.

SOUND OFF

"...the snarky, snotty observations by Metra's customers about fellow commuters ... offer some of the best free entertainment around." - SouthtownStar, March 13, 2009

Another cell gripe

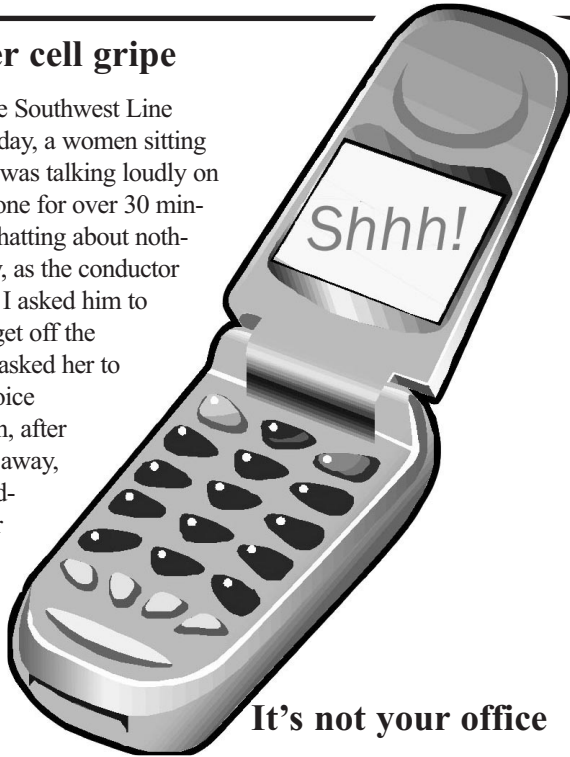
I take the Southwest Line daily. One day, a women sitting behind me was talking loudly on her cell phone for over 30 minutes, chit-chatting about nothing. Finally, as the conductor walked by, I asked him to ask her to get off the phone. He asked her to keep her voice down. Then, after he stepped away, she proceeded to swear at me and give me hard time until I got off the train.

This was certainly not the first time I have been on the train when a person talked loudly on their cell phone for an extended period of time.

First off, I believe the conductor should have asked her to get off the phone – period. She was interfering with everyone else's ride on the train. Secondly, there should be cell-phone free cars for those of us who don't want to listen to loud blabbermouths and personal conversation. Please take this idea under consideration. Non-phone talkers should have rights too.

Jean
SouthWest Service

OK, she was annoying. But the conductor did the right thing – he asked her to tone it down. What else can he do? He has no authority to tell her she can't use her phone. And we are occasionally asked about establishing quiet or cell-phone-free cars. Our answer is that it would be impractical.



It's not your office

As a decades-long train rider, my personal peeve is riders who push a seat back so that they can have a "quad seat" to themselves or a friend. I see this so often during rush hour – one or two people taking up seat space intended for four. I often see one person doing this, with laptop, folders and notebooks spread out, turning the other three seats into a private office space.

Whenever I ask one person if they mind folding back the seat, they invariably give me a grunt and a dirty look. How dare I invade their personal space. If I ask a couple to do so the answer is always, "we have two more friends boarding."

During the morning and evening rush hours why do the conductors disregard this impolite behavior? I feel the conductors have a duty to all rush-hour passengers, to tell these seat hogs they have to return the seat to its intended position so that four riders can comfortably sit, without having to implore some-

one to be respectful of others.

Larry
North Central Service

The conductors are instructed to address such behavior when necessary. But just like the aisle-blockers we wrote about last month, the people who hog/save seats already know what they are doing is wrong. They know they are being rude. They don't care. They're just hoping they can get away with it. We've tried to shame them in this space many times, but they seem to be impervious to shame.

Nailing the problem

I couldn't agree more with Kate (last OTBL) about the "disgusting habit people have of cutting their fingernails on the train." It is absolutely intolerable; that sharp, intermittent clicking sound just goes right through me. Yes, personal grooming of that sort should definitely be done at home (or, if they must do it on the train, then they should go into the restroom so they're not inflicting these pesky noises on others.)

It's unfortunate that most riders, if told how annoying this is, do not seem to "get it." They'll look at you like it's your problem instead of theirs. Perhaps these letters will help them figure out that they should limit this activity to "alone time."

Becki
Milwaukee North

Perhaps. But this isn't a new gripe – complaints about nail clipping and other grooming gripes go almost as far back as OTBL. And we still haven't eliminated such nasty habits.

Random kindness

I would like to thank the Palatine rider for thanking me. When you left your monthly pass on the train during the first week of the month, there was no doubt in my mind as to the right thing to do. That being said, I never considered being rewarded for it. Your gift of appreciation was far too generous: \$25 gift card to Starbucks. Since you gave it to me though, I will let you know that gift cards to Starbucks are my favorite and it was a wonderful surprise.

Many thanks to you, and I am glad to know you and I feel the same about doing good deeds!

Jennifer
UP Northwest

Although there are still plenty of nail-clippers out there, we know they're outnumbered by riders who are considerate and watch out for one another.

Snuff it out, smokers

I wonder if Metra might make some announcements or put up signs reminding people not to smoke where it is prohibited. I ride the UP North line every morning (Central St. stop), and now that the weather is warm enough to wait for the train outside, I've notice quite a few people puffing away as they wait. The wind blows the smoke around and you can't get away from it.

Cheryl

Good idea: to all you smokers out there, if there's a sign at your station that says don't smoke here, then don't smoke there. Don't smoke within 15 feet of a building door, window or ventilation intake. And don't toss your butts all over the place.

Stimulus

(Continued from Page 1)

ing spaces will be added to the 400 existing spaces for phase II expansion. The work includes fencing, lighting, landscaping, fare collection facilities (including a shelter over the collection boxes) and signage.

Elburn Station parking, \$1.8 million: Increase parking capacity with the addition of 330 spaces to the existing 300 spaces for phase II expansion. Work includes fencing, lighting, landscaping, fare collection facilities (including a shelter over collection boxes), new stairs, platform access and signage.

Heritage Corridor platforms, \$2.4 million: Platforms will be rehabbed at Joliet (\$1.4 million) and Lockport (\$1 million), with the replacement of deteriorated tactile services and other work to improve or retain accessibility for the disabled.

35th St. Station, to be funded

with \$6.8 million in stimulus money and \$4.9 million from U. S. Rep. Bobby Rush's legislative initiatives: The new station on the Rock Island line will serve an area that has experienced significant residential and commercial development, and an area that is home to U.S. Cellular Field. Work includes platforms, lights, ramps and stairs, and kiss-and-ride and parking facilities.

Metra Electric bridge replacement, \$3.5 million: Bridges will be fixed at 59th, 60th, 73rd, 75th, 76th and 79th. Work includes replacing deteriorated concrete, steel and waterproofing material. Some bridges will get new walkways and handrails.

Golf Station renovation, \$1 million: Work includes replacement of platforms, brick pavers, headers and tactile surfaces.

BNSF signal system and telecommunications work, \$7 million.

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—Marisa Busca

M.A. in Public Policy and
M.A. in Adult Education

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