

**CLIFF NOTES**

Getting to know Metra and its riders

During my first 60 days as CEO, my mission has been to work as hard and as fast as possible to learn all about the extensive Metra system and its loyal riders.

That task meant visiting all of Metra's downtown stations. It meant meeting conductors at Ogilvie and Millennium, ticket agents at Union Station and LaSalle Street, and the many men and women who work behind the scenes at Metra headquarters to keep the trains running and the system operating. It required visits to our large construction projects, like the grade-separation project now underway at our Belmont Road Station.



CEO Alex Clifford

Most importantly, it called for introducing myself to many of you on your way to work or on your way home, and it will have me shaking hands with many more of you in the days and weeks ahead. Meeting you, talking to you and listening to you have been invaluable as I plan for Metra's future.

What has also proved invaluable was a customer survey that we posted on our website just after I arrived at Metra. The goal

was to get a quick idea about what riders, and non-riders, thought about the agency.

To my great surprise and pleasure, the survey was completed by 5,876 people during the two months or so it was posted at www.metrarail.com. It consisted of 14 questions that sought information about how you use Metra, what you think of the service and what your views are about such things as quiet cars and Wi-Fi on trains.

In general, respondents were satisfied with Metra. Asked to rate the on-board experience, 84 percent of riders said it was excellent or good. We know we'll have to work harder to impress the 16 percent of riders who rated their experience as fair or poor.

It's not surprising that most of you – 62 percent – ride Metra five times a week, with the rest of you riding it less often. And it's not surprising that most of you – 72 percent – are using us to get to work, with the rest of you riding for leisure, special occasions or other reasons. We are a commuter rail agency, after all.

Where do you get your tickets? More than half of you buy them at the ticket window. The rest of you get them through our ticket

(Continued on Page 4)

Update on air tests of trains and stations

Metra will soon be conducting another round of tests on the air quality in our passenger cars in order to better pinpoint the sources and duration of high levels of black carbon emissions that were found in the first round.

The tests are part of a comprehensive response by Metra to articles in the Chicago Tribune that raised questions about the quality of the air in our stations and on our trains. One part of

that response was to conduct tests of the air on the trains and in the stations.

The testing so far has found:

- There are federal standards for many, but not all, of the chemicals and other components of diesel exhaust, and Metra met all standards that exist.

- Those standards are for the emissions coming out of the locomotives. There are no standards for onboard air quality.

(Continued on Page 4)



Board honors Metra police officer

Metra Police Officer Douglas M. Weincek (second from left) was honored by the Metra Board of Directors for his actions on Feb. 15. While on routine patrol, Weincek saw a suspicious vehicle in a commuter parking area near 91st and Prospect in Chicago. Upon further investigation he determined the car was occupied by a 15-year-old female runaway and a 36-year-old registered sex offender with a suspended license. The board said his efforts and actions "likely averted what could have been a more serious situation between the offender and juvenile." He is pictured with Metra CEO Alex Clifford (left), Metra Chairman Carole Doris and Metra Police Chief James Sanford.



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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SOUNDING BOARD

Got a question? We've got an answer

Calumet Station

Just wondering: what's going on with the concession-like new building at the Calumet Station? It took a year to build and seems it's just been sitting there not being used for at least as long.

Wayne

That building is complete and we have turned it over to the village to open. They are now working on lining up a vendor for the space before opening it. We are also working on completing the storm sewer connection.

Double the fun

On Monday, March 21, I was riding in on the UP West train No. 30 when the locomotive had trouble at the River Forest Station. We were told that they had a man trying to fix it, and we would be notified when it was resolved. As a longtime rider, I know that trouble with the locomotive is almost never fixed in a few short minutes. You could see all the riders up and down the car start texting or calling their offices to say they would be late. Within 2 minutes of this announcement, the train behind us passed on another track, and I was angry to see that this train had a spare locomotive and they were not stopping to shift it to our train! Salvation passed us right by!

I thought that the purpose of having an extra engine on a train every so often in the schedule was to help out in situations like this! As it happened, our locomotive could not be restarted, and we had to have another train hook up and push us into Ogilvie. We were 50 minutes late, and all the trains behind us were late, too. Wouldn't it have been a better idea to use the extra engine right away, and saved all those thousands of commuters the extra delay?

David

First, we're sorry about the delays that day. But that extra locomotive couldn't have helped you and your fellow riders – it was on the train you saw going past you because it was already helping that train's engine.

Rock woes

I ride the Rock Island line. I would like to know if it ever occurred to anyone at how overcrowded the 5:15 p.m. departure might be in order to accommodate a few people who want to use the 35th Street Station? Did you not realize that half the people who used to take the 5:20 would also switch to the 5:15?

Rock Rider

Please accept our apologies for the conditions you experienced.

We did not make that particular schedule change due to the new station. Rather, the switch was due to No. 415 (5:15) always catching up to No. 413 and operating late. To help correct this we adjusted the departure times 5 minutes later on a few trains, one of them being No. 415. We have reviewed the passenger loadings on No. 415 and they have increased. The crew has made announcements informing passengers that No. 417 is an option and will get them home at the same time as the old schedule even though it leaves 5 minutes later. We have added a car to 415 for now, and we will monitor the situation to determine if there is anything else we can/should do.

Belmont stakes

When will the construction be finished at Belmont Road Station in Downers Grove?

Maureen

It's not the station that is under construction. We are tunneling under the railroad tracks so that Belmont Road will pass under

the tracks. The underpass will be partially open this fall, with the full project done in 2013.

Starting STAR

At least four years ago, I read about a proposed Metra line that would be a suburb-to-suburb line. It would connect O'Hare, Schaumburg, Aurora, and Joliet. I think that is a great proposal, because many people who live in a western suburb and work in a different western suburb would use the train, instead of driving. Will that line be built? If so, when will the construction start and end?

Phil

The STAR line, or Suburban Transit Access Route, is still in our future plans, but its development has been slowed by the funding problems at the state and federal level. The timeline for construction really depends on when and how quickly those financial problems are resolved.

Wants recognition

I have commuted from Naperville to Union Station every business day for over 20 years. Over those years I have enjoyed the amazing service delivered by the people of Metra – you guys are the best! After 20 years, however, I want a little recognition. I am respectfully requesting some sort of loyalty award. For 20 years I would like a silver commuter medal. I will wear this medal every day proudly to show those youngster that they have much to learn about the train game. After 30 years of commuting, I will require a gold commuter medal. Please initiate this program as soon as possible.

Steve

Would you settle for a pat on the back, our eternal gratitude and recognition in the world's best passenger newsletter?

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

Keep it clean

I think the “Quiet Cars” are a great idea, and I can’t wait until they come to the UP West line. However, I have another concept for the people at Metra: Hygiene Cars. That’s right, cars that are reserved for those who practice good hygiene on a regular basis and don’t fart, belch, and stink of various odors while riding the train. I’m not saying I’m perfect, but I think there are too many others who don’t try at all...and no matter where I move to on the train, I seem to get stuck next to an odorous individual who ruins my commute.

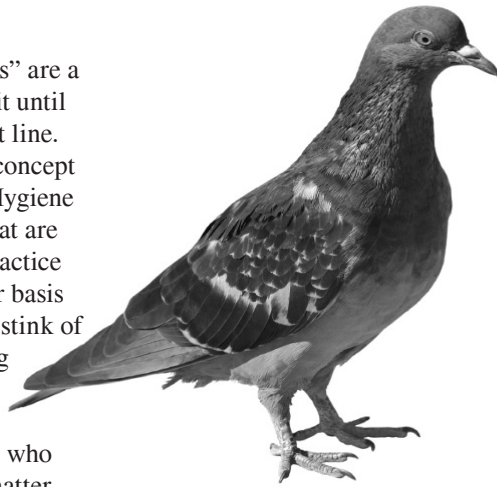
Think about it Metra people, the Hygiene Cars are the next thing!!

James

Um, well ... shouldn't we strive for every car to be a Hygiene Car, and every passenger to be hygienic?

For the birds

Today, while waiting at Millennium Station, a brave pigeon walked up to me (inside the station) and I promptly shared a crumb of flat bread. I noticed the bird was all alone and had made its way upstairs in the terminal cutting itself off from the exits back outside. I tried leading it down the stairs with bits of bread, but no luck. A nice police officer saw my efforts and flagged down a Metra worker to help. All three of us spent the better part of 20 minutes luring the bird down one level to freedom. The Metra worker even tried to use his vest to capture and free it. We tried and tried and tried, each time getting the bird closer and closer to a way out. And you know what? It



worked. I know some people disregard pigeons as “flying rats,” and would not have gone out of their way to help. I consider them living creatures who are only doing what they do to survive; no different than the family dog. So many many thanks to such a nice officer and kind Metra worker. You both reminded me that the world has some compassionate and caring men out there, who not only freed a pigeon, but also came to the aid of a woman who needed help.

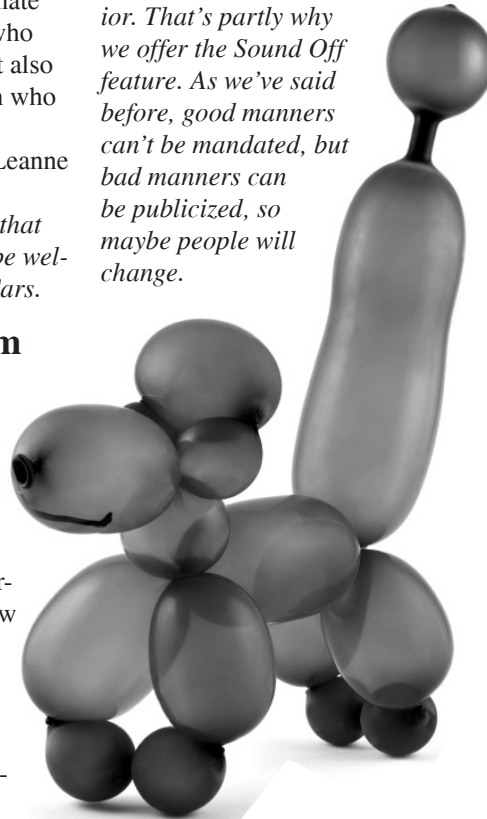
Leanne

That's a nice story, but that pigeon probably wouldn't be welcome on James' Hygiene Cars.

Ballooning problem

I’ve been riding the UP West line for 10 years and thought the following might be a first for you all as well: a woman making balloon animals on the train. It was a bit like fingernails on a chalkboard. A few animals understandably sacrificed themselves during this tortuous process between Oak Park and Elmhurst, where she disembarked.

Bill



You're right, that's a new one. Would balloon animals be allowed on James' Hygiene Cars (or even Quiet Cars)? Perhaps as long as they're made beforehand and don't pop.

Message to all

Every month, all I hear are complaints about people eating, drinking, talking, taking up a seat with their bags, snoring, whatever. It’s called PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION. If you don’t like it, don’t use it. It won’t bother me at all, and there will be extra seat space for my bag.

P.S. I realize some people rely on public transportation due to a disability or another reason, this is not aimed at you.

Anonymous

Just because it's public transportation doesn't mean we have to tolerate boorish behavior. That's partly why we offer the Sound Off feature. As we've said before, good manners can't be mandated, but bad manners can be publicized, so maybe people will change.

Seat savers

In an attempt to prevent other riders from sitting next to them, I have noticed riders using the “I’m saving this seat” ploy more often. It is a simple tactic. As riders board the train and ask the passenger if they may sit down, he or she will simply say “I am saving this seat,” and they will pretend to look for the person they are saving the seat for. Yet this person never shows up and said person now relaxes in his/her two seats. Two people on the UP-NW train do this consistently. Today, however, was the worst. As people asked if they could sit there, he did his typical routine. But today, he actually laughed and gloated about his tactic to his friend in the seat in front of him. What kind of people do this? Are they really that inconsiderate or just plain mean?

Tom

Couldn't they be both?

Preferred seating?

To the woman on the March 25 Pacific West morning train who rudely demanded that her (friend? husband?) in a wheelchair required three seats, only to sit in one of the seats herself: please keep in mind that your friend’s disability does not extend to you. If the seats are full, people will move for the wheelchair. Wheelchairs typically take up two seats, and commuters are well aware of this. If there is no room for you, and you would like to sit next to your friend, kindly ask someone to move for you. The wheelchair will always have priority, and you will attract more bees with honey. Please ask nicely next time, or sit elsewhere.

Christina

Riders respond

(Continued from Page 1)

by mail program (19 percent), through our website (10 percent) or on-board the train (8 percent).

Do you want self-service ticket vendors? The answer was mostly yes – 56 percent said they were very interested or somewhat interested. The rest of you said you weren't interested.

Nearly three-fourths of you also want quiet cars or said they'd be nice, while the remaining quarter of you believe they are not necessary. That result tracks with earlier input we solicited about quiet cars in *On the Bi-Level*.

As for Wi-Fi on trains, we asked if you'd be willing to pay a small fee for it. About 11 percent said yes and 27 percent said no. The rest said it "Depends on the fee," with 34 percent and "Not really, but I could change my mind" with 28 percent.

Finally, we gave you the chance to add any other thoughts or comments and nearly 3,300 of you grabbed that chance. The comments covered a wide range of topics, including but not limited to demands for better timeliness, more trains, more courtesy from conductors, more courtesy from fellow riders, more parking, more quiet cars, better communication, better speakers, improved stations, cleaner cars and better air quality.

We can't promise that all your concerns will be addressed immediately – some of them would require spending a great deal of money – but we can promise you we will put this valuable information to good use to make a better Metra experience for everyone.

We know this survey was not scientific. But the goal was to get a feel for what our riders think about some key issues, and we accomplished that goal. Thanks to everyone who participated.

You can now follow me on Twitter @MetraCEO.



Opening Day

More than 1,200 Chicago White Sox fans on their way to the home opener on April 7 rode the Rock Island line to our new "Lou" Jones/Bronzeville Station, at 35th St. just steps away from U.S. Cellular Field. The new station opened April 3. Go to www.metrarail.com for more information about service to White Sox games. An official dedication ceremony for the station will be held on May 6. It will feature U.S. Rep. Bobby Rush, who was instrumental in securing the federal dollars that funded station construction.



What is this?

Still don't know? It's a QR code, or quick response code. If you download a QR-reader app to your smartphone, you can scan this image with your phone's camera and it will take you to our "My Metra" sign-up page. Once you sign up for "My Metra" you can get e-mail alerts and updates about service on your line.

Metra to do more air tests

(Continued from Page 1)

- There is no federal standard for black carbon particulate emissions, also called soot, the component of diesel emissions that was the subject of the Tribune stories.

- Our tests found "spikes," or high levels, of black carbon emissions on our trains. Half were measured in downtown terminals, but there was no discernible pattern to the remaining spikes.

As the Tribune noted, breathing soot can inflame the lungs and trigger asthma attacks, and several studies have linked soot exposure with heart attacks and premature death. But the effects of brief-but-intense exposure are still being studied.

Metra will soon begin another round of tests to better understand the spikes that were found in the first round. The goal will be to help determine the duration of those spikes, as well as to determine if there are other sources that could be contributing to them. (If there are secondary sources, such as another train or passing truck, that could explain at least some of the spikes outside the downtown stations for which there was no pattern.) Identifying the exact sources and duration of the spikes will help us address the problem.

In the meantime, Metra has taken several other steps to address the issue. For instance, we switched to using all ultra-low

sulfur fuel on April 1. Previously, we were using a mix of low and ultra-low sulfur fuel. The ultra-low sulfur fuel will reduce black carbon emissions by about 8 percent.

We continue to work with Amtrak, the owner of Union Station, and the building owners above the tracks to determine if the ventilation systems are working properly. We have tested better filters on the train cars and hoods over the air intakes. We are looking at whether the locomotives can be modified to reduce emissions.

In addition, we are working to identify funding sources to help us pay for air quality improvements that may be needed.