

Metra ON THE BI-LEVEL

Commuter Newsletter, May 2014



Board focuses on reforms

The Metra Board of Directors has been powering up change at Metra, pushing several measures to demonstrate its commitment to reform and to establish Metra as a professionally run railroad, free from political interference and dedicated to providing outstanding service to its customers.

At its April meeting, the board unanimously passed a reform measure aimed at increasing transparency in the hiring process and reinforcing a ban on political influence. The new ordinance requires all employment-related communica-

tions to be entered into a log that is available to the public.

"We want the message to be loud and clear that political considerations in all employment-related matters are not and will not be tolerated," said Metra Chairman Martin Oberman.

The ordinance was inspired by a recommendation of the Northeastern Illinois Public Transit Task Force, which said agencies should be required to disclose communications between elected officials or their representatives regarding employment matters via a publicly

available and regularly updated database.

The new ordinance is just one of many steps that the board has taken in recent months to build and sustain a successful transportation enterprise that is accountable to the public it serves. In another important change, adopted in December, Metra's Human Resources Department now requires both interviewers and managers to certify that political affiliations are absolutely no factor in employment decisions.

In another milestone for the

board, the April meeting was held in Wheaton, the first time Metra has held a meeting outside Chicago in its history. The intention is to periodically meet at locations across the region so riders have a better opportunity to directly address Metra's board and management.

Other key reforms include:

• **New Chief Audit Officer:**

The new Chief Audit Officer, to be named soon, will operate according to the strictest business and accounting standards, and will be directly accountable to

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Amerail rehabs pass halfway point

Metra's multi-year, \$115-million program to renovate 176 Amerail rail cars has now passed the halfway point.

About 98 cars have already been restored to like-new condition, and a variety of passenger amenities have been added. Those include power outlets for customer use; sensitive-edge doors that retract like elevator doors if they come in contact with someone or something; scrolling LED signs; new flush toilets; new wheelchair lifts; overhauled air conditioners; and new seats and composite floors.

Another highlight of the program is that the cars are being refurbished in-house, at a Metra facility at 49th St. and the Dan Ryan. We're saving riders and

Electrical outlets coming to more cars, Page 2

area taxpayers a great deal of money while providing local jobs and pumping dollars back into the regional economy.

"We are extremely proud of this program," said Metra Executive Director/CEO Don Orseno. "We are giving our riders like-new cars with new amenities, while at the same time we are keeping the work in the region, and employing 60 professionals who have years of experience, dedication and know-how."

All the cars being renovated were built by Amerail (originally

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Glendon Griffith, a veteran carman in Metra's program to rehabilitate passenger cars, unloads seat frames for installation in one of the cars being worked on.



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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More cars to get outlets

Metra will be making it easier for more riders to get a charge out of their commute by installing electrical outlets on 300 more train cars.

Thanks to a \$900,000 grant from the RTA, we will begin to install electrical outlets this year on 300 cars that were built by Nippon Sharyo and delivered to Metra a decade ago. The outlets to be installed on the lower level of the bi-level cars will allow riders to charge their cellphones, computers and other electrical devices while riding the train.

The outlets will be installed as cars are brought in for other scheduled work. It should take about four to five years to complete the work on all 300 cars.

"We are excited to be offering this amenity on 300 more cars, so that more and more riders will be able to plug in during their commutes," said Metra Executive Director/CEO Don Orseno. "We



are grateful for the RTA's assistance in expanding the number of cars with outlets in our fleet."

Metra already has been installing the outlets on the 176 railcars that were built by Amerail (originally Morrison Knudson) between 1995 and 1998. That work is part of a much more extensive project that is restoring the Amerail cars to like-new

condition.

When the Amerail and Nippon Sharyo projects are completed, Metra will have outlets on 476 of its 837 passenger cars for its diesel lines.

The 160 new Highliner cars that are being introduced to the Metra Electric Line also have the power outlets. About 80 of those cars have been introduced so far.

Rehab

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Morrison Knudson) between 1995 and 1998. The work will extend the life of the cars by 12 to 15 years. The entire Amerail fleet, which includes 79 cab cars and 97 trailer cars, should be done by the spring of 2017.

The work costs about \$800,000 per cab car, and about \$700,000 for regular trailer cars. The going rate for a new car is about \$3 million.

There are four stations in the shop where various tasks are performed, so that means four cars are being worked on at all times. Of the 60 carmen, electricians and sheet metal workers assigned to the project, about 18 work at each of the first three stations with the rest at the last station.

At the first station, the car is stripped: seats, bathrooms, heater guards and doors are removed. The old plymetal floor is ripped up, and the new composite floor is installed. Windows are replaced. The metal diaphragm — the accordion-like structure that connects two cars — is replaced with a rubber one. Steps are sandblasted and replaced if necessary. Electrical boxes are rebuilt and the event recorder, sort of like an airplane's "black box," is replaced.

At the second station, the wheelchair lift is removed and replaced with an upgraded model. The battery charger and battery box are replaced. A new retention toilet tank is installed and new heating and lighting is put in.

At the third station, all the interior work is done. That includes installing new passen-

ger seats, rebuilt AC units, new toilets and bathroom walls, new LED signs, new windshields and new windshield wipers. Also at this station, rebuilt trucks (what the rail industry calls the wheel assemblies) are installed.

The final station involves putting the finishing touches on the car and carrying out various tests. Painting is done and decals are installed. The batteries, battery chargers, event recorders, cab signals, LED signs, doors and other elements are tested. If the car passes the tests it is sent out into service.

Each car spends nine days at each station and gets through all four stations in 36 days.

On the web: You can see a slideshow of the Amerail car rehab program by clicking [here](#) or going to the Metra website at www.metrarail.com

SOUND OFF

Allowed to be loud?

If you're going to have "Quiet Cars" then you also need to have "Loud Cars." And by "Loud Cars," I don't just refer to people being allowed to converse at a reasonable level, but cars where passengers are encouraged to be as loud as possible. Perhaps Metra could consider distributing noisemakers – such as air horns – in these cars to encourage loud behavior. Anything less is discrimination.

William

Thanks for your humorous suggestion – at least we, um, think you're joking. In case you are not, however, let's just say there has been no huge outcry for such a thing. (And judging by some of the complaints we field here, some might argue we already have "Loud Cars.")

Seat-hogging, Part 263

I would like to address Sean, the rider who believes it is not seat-hogging if, upon request, he removes his bag from a second seat.

Sean, it is inconsiderate to make me ask you to move your bag. I used to say "Excuse me" to get someone to move their bag and then a polite "Thank you" when I sat down. I did this until I realized that the seat-hogger should say "Excuse me" to *me*! His bag doesn't belong on the seat, no matter how dirty the floors are. Your bag, as well as everyone else's bags, belongs on your lap or on the upper shelf.

Now, when a seat-hogger needs to move his bag so I can sit down, I stand there and look at him until he moves his bag. He isn't doing me a favor and doesn't deserve a thank you.

You also need to understand



Not coming to a train near you.

that people should be courteous in the most basic and decent ways. This includes assuming the seat next to you *will* be taken by a human so your bag needs to find a home on your lap or the shelf during the commute.

A Normally Pleasant Rider

And Part 264

Regarding Sean's comment: When a Metra commuter uses a space for their bag or any personal belongings, they are being rude, selfish and inconsiderate to all other passengers. You said you prefer not to place your bag on a filthy, slushy floor, and if anyone asks to sit down "it's a non-issue" – you will accommodate this person. You are not "looking out" for someone if you take up a seat with your personal items. You are only thinking of yourself, which is insensitive and thoughtless to everyone else.

Margaret

We suspected Sean's position would prompt some disagreement. Blocking the seat next to you with your belongings is classic seat-hogger strategy, whether it is your intention to willingly move them or not. The one-passenger, one-seat rule is easy to follow.

Pay attention, please

I am amazed that people are oblivious to the needs of others. I am almost nine months pregnant and ride the same UP West Line train and the same car almost five days a week (for the past four years). I am amazed how individuals who get on the train at the same time in the morning are not considerate enough to move past the seats designated for those with disabilities and the elderly for expectant mothers as well. I feel ashamed to ask them to move when there are other seats in the car, even though I am finding it increasingly difficult to

walk any distance. I understood up until about a month ago when my belly was clearly hidden under my winter coat; however, now that my coat no longer zips and it is increasingly clear of my condition, people's lack of consideration is astonishing. There is a reason I stand on the platform and try to be one of the first to board in Villa Park, because if I don't and there are no seats, I would be forced to ask someone to move (unless I want to walk through multiple cars) rather than people having the courtesy to offer a seat on the lower level. I hope I teach my child to be more understanding than those I see on the train daily.

Discouraged Mom-to-Be

We believe the issue here is not a lack of consideration but a lack of attentiveness. Most people sit down, get involved in a book or something and don't look at who's walking past them. We are confident that if they noticed you they would give up their seat, just as we are confident they would gladly do so if asked. Metra riders are nice people.

Metra celebrating the Big 3-0 in June

On June 13, 1984, the newly created Commuter Rail Board, soon to be branded as Metra, held its first-ever meeting. To help celebrate our 30th birthday, On the Bi-Level wants to hear from you. We're looking for your memories about riding on Metra. Have you been with us the whole time? Did you meet your spouse on Metra? Do you have any good stories to tell about riding the rails? What's your favorite memory? Send us an email at onthebilevel@metrarr.com.

Metra News Briefs



Officials broke ground earlier this month on the Flossmoor platform rebuild project. Left to right are: Flossmoor Trustee James Wilder; Metra Executive Director/CEO Don Orseno; Trustee Philip Minga; Mayor Paul Braun; Metra Board Member Don A. De Graff; Congresswoman Robin L. Kelly; Trustee James Crum; and State Rep. Anthony DeLuca.

Construction work is ramping up

Construction season is underway, with many projects already started or about to start. Work began last month to rebuild the platforms at the Downers Grove Main St. Station, and work is beginning this month to construct a pedestrian tunnel at the Lombard Station and to rebuild the platform and do associated work at the Flossmoor Station. Major track maintenance projects are also underway on the BNSF and Metra Electric lines. And a key switching location known as A-5 (where the Milwaukee North meets the Milwaukee West and North Central Service) is undergoing a major renewal that will re-

place both the switching and signaling system. For more information about these projects, go to the “Newsroom” at www.metrarail.com.

Citizens Advisory Board gets new members

The Metra Citizens Advisory Board (CAB) welcomed three new members last month. They are Dave Walker, who was appointed by Metra Board Chairman Martin Oberman, representing Chicago; Michelle Machay, who was appointed by Director Brian Reaves, representing southwest suburban Cook County; and Glen Holland, who was appointed by Director Manuel Barbosa, representing Kane County. The CAB was formed to provide valuable feedback from customers on Metra’s service and the impact of policies and programs on the communities it serves. Information about the board, including full biographies, can be found by clicking [here](#) or by clicking “About Metra” at www.metrarail.com.

Putting the memorial in Memorial Day

With the Memorial Day three-day weekend serving as the semi-official start to summer, it’s perhaps easy to forget that the holiday was established to honor the nation’s war dead. To help Americans remember the reason for the holiday, Congress in 2000 passed the “The National Moment of Remembrance Act.” According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, “The National Moment of Remembrance encourages all Americans to pause wherever they are at 3 p.m. local time on Memorial Day for a minute of silence to remember and honor those who have died in service to the nation.” There are always numerous Memorial Day events around the area – Chicago, for example, will hold its annual parade starting at noon on State St. – but everyone can also observe it in their own way at 3 p.m.

Reforms

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all eleven Metra board members and the CEO.

• **Board Audit Committee:** Board member Norman Carlson will chair a new Board Audit Committee and oversee the financial activities of the agency. Carlson has more than 40 years of experience in railroad finance. The Audit Committee will provide accountability, enhance transparency, increase efficiencies and maximize the use of taxpayer dollars. One of Carlson’s first tasks as chair will be to work with the new Chief Audit Officer.

• **New evaluation process for the executive director:** The board is currently reviewing a comprehensive evaluation pro-

cess for the agency’s executive director that includes clear goals and objectives by which to measure progress and performance.

• **Legal work brought in-house:** Since the middle of last year, the board has eliminated retention of an outside law firm that reports only to the board. The board has been transitioning legal work from outside firms back to the agency’s in-house lawyers to ensure consistency and control costs.

• **More comprehensive board training:** All new board members now receive a comprehensive briefing packet and are required to attend personalized meetings to learn about and discuss governance and operational issues.

• **Renewed commitment to ethics:** We have now created a comprehensive ethics manual

for all employees and are in the process of doing so for the board, in addition to the ethics training mandated by state law.

• **Separation agreements:** The board has enacted an ordinance that now requires any separation agreement exceeding \$100,000 to be reported immediately to the RTA.

• **Information to legislators:** Metra is providing regular news and information updates to state legislators, and county commissioners in its service territory.

• **Hillard Heintze report:** Because of a concern with the

operational effectiveness and efficiency of the Metra police operation, the previous board retained the nationally respected security experts at Hillard Heintze to take a hard look at the police department. As a result of their critical review, Metra has hired a new chief to reorganize the police department in a manner consistent with the Hillard Heintze recommendations.

• **On the web:** More information about many of these reforms can be found by clicking [here](#). Information about board members is [here](#).

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@metrarail.com.