



Metra stands for transit

Metra joined its fellow Chicago area transit agencies and a bipartisan group of federal lawmakers last month to highlight the need for consistent, long-term federal funding for the nation's transportation and public transit systems.

The Stand Up 4 Transportation event was part of a national initiative sponsored by the American Public Transportation Association. A press conference at Chicago Union Station focused on the Move Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21), which expires on May 31, and the Highway Trust Fund, which will start teetering on insolvency this summer. The region's transit agencies, like others around the country, rely on federal funds to keep their systems in working order.

Present at the event were representatives of Metra, RTA, CTA, Pace and Amtrak, along with U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin (D-Ill.) and U.S. Reps. Dan Lipin-



Metra Chairman Martin Oberman speaks at the Stand Up 4 Transportation event last month at Union Station. Behind him are (left to right) state Rep. Al Riley (D-Olympia Fields); U.S. Rep. Bob Dold (R-Kenilworth); Joe Szabo, senior fellow at the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning; Amtrak Board Member Tom Carper; U.S. Rep. Dan Lipinski (D-Western Springs); CTA President Forrest Claypool; Metra Board Member Norman Carlson; and Metra Executive Director/CEO Don Orseno.

ski (D-Western Springs), Mike Quigley (D-Chicago), Bill Foster (D-Naperville) and Bob Dold (R-Kenilworth).

"It's tempting to say that as a

nation, as a state and as a region, we can't afford to pay for our infrastructure," said Metra Chairman Martin Oberman. "But the reality is, we've put it off for far

too long. We can't afford to put it off any longer."

The region's transit system has been severely underfunded
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Metra launching new effort to improve safety

Representatives of Metra management and transportation unions joined officials from the Federal Railroad Administration last month to announce the creation of a "Confidential Close Call Reporting System," which is

designed to proactively address safety issues and create a more positive safety culture.

At a ceremony at Metra headquarters, labor, management and FRA officials signed a memorandum of understanding

committing to implementing the voluntary system.

"Safety is Metra's highest priority, and this new program is a major and exciting enhancement to our safety efforts," said Metra Executive Director/CEO

Don Orseno. "We are particularly pleased with the enthusiastic cooperation of our labor unions, who have demonstrated their commitment to making Metra the safest possible railroad."

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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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Safety

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According to the FRA, which has promoted the adoption of the system by a handful of railroads so far, the system complements existing safety programs, builds a positive safety culture, creates an early warning system, focuses on problems instead of people, provides an incentive for learning from errors and targets the root cause of an issue, not the symptom.

Under the new system, employees will be able to confidentially report "close calls" – such as safety concerns or violations of operating rules – without facing sanctions from Metra or the FRA. The goal is to collect data about close calls that otherwise would have gone unreported or underreported, and to use that data to identify safety hazards and take steps to correct them before an accident occurs. Those corrective steps could include new or better training, physical changes, changes to safety rules or changes to operating rules.

To maintain confidentiality, the close calls will be reported to a third party, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, which would remove any information about the incidents

that could lead to the identification of the employee. NASA will compile the data and then forward it for analysis by a peer review team of labor, Metra management and FRA representatives, which will recommend corrective action. NASA also will monitor trends across railroads and share results.

A close call is defined by the FRA as "a situation in which an ongoing sequence of events was stopped from developing further, preventing the occurrence of potentially serious safety-related consequences." Examples of close calls would be trains traveling at excessive speed, workers nearly struck by trains, trains running through a switch or a passenger door opened on the wrong side of the train. Personal injuries, serious train accidents and alcohol or drug use would not be considered a close call.

Results from railroads that have adopted such systems are encouraging. According to the FRA, a Confidential Close Call Reporting System resulted in a 31 percent increase in the number of cars moved between minor derailments and a 90 percent drop in disciplinary cases at one railroad.

That railroad, which was not identified, also reported significant improvements in safety

culture and labor-management cooperation.

The adoption of the Confidential Close Call Reporting System will bolster Metra's numerous existing safety programs and reinforce safety as Metra's highest priority. Those programs include our annual Safety Poster and Essay Contest, nearly a thousand annual Operation Lifesaver safety presentations and frequent safety blitzes conducted at Metra stations throughout the six-county Chicago region.

Signees of the memorandum included Orseno; Pete Zwolfer, Metra Deputy Executive Director for Operations; Marty Ryan, Metra Chief Transportation Officer; Hilary Konczal, Metra Director of Safety; Robert Lauby, FRA Associate Administrator for Railroad Safety/Chief Safety Officer; Ron Wesolowski, General Chairman of the American Train Dispatchers Association; Anthony Siriano, National Representative of the Transportation Communications Union; Pete Semenek, Clay Craddock and J.J. Balonek, General Chairmen of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen; John England, Vice President of the Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers (SMART); and Barry Abbott, General Chairman of SMART.

Stand

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by federal and state resources for many years. The system covers six counties, representing 70 percent of the state's population, and is the second-largest transit operation in the country by passenger miles traveled, behind only New York.

Without federal assistance, the region may not be able to make the capital investments that are required to meet its growing transit needs.

"The RTA is proud to stand unified with the CTA, Metra and Pace in recognizing the need for Congress to pass a sensible, long-term surface transportation bill that fully funds our region's and nation's public transit needs," said RTA Chairman Kirk Dillard. "The residents of northeastern Illinois deserve reliable and affordable public transit options to get them to work, school, the doctor's office, and everywhere in between. We cannot do more with less."

The RTA, CTA, Metra and Pace have taken action to address

this capital shortfall on their own, issuing bonds, pursuing other financing tools, implementing fare increases and instituting operational efficiencies. While these actions have offered some support, the magnitude of the challenge makes it impossible for these actions alone to sufficiently address the problem.

Riders and residents are urged to visit rtachicago.org to learn more about the region's capital funding needs and how best to encourage their federal legislators to support public transportation funding.

SOUND OFF

Triply agreeable

I would like to address Ira's comment in the April issue. I AGREE 100 percent. No. 1, in addition to the sneezing, add the coughing. People who cough in the air think it's okay. It can spread germs, which makes it NOT okay. Cover your mouth when coughing, sneezing and eating.

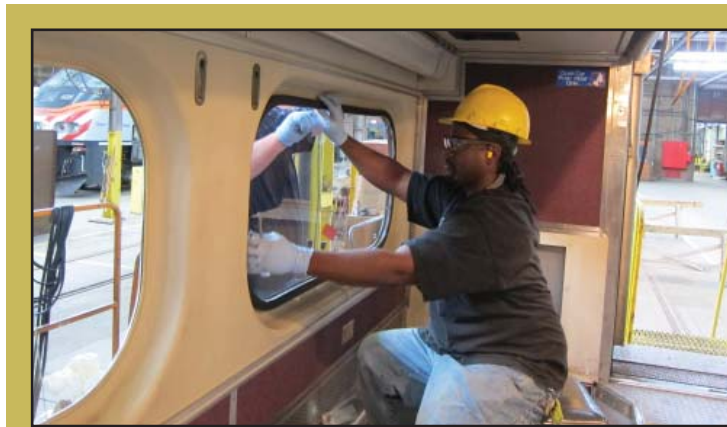
No. 2 Seat hogs: I agree with Ira on this as well. Charge an extra fee for the people who need to put their bags on the seat next to them. I have a backpack that I use daily and it sits on my lap fine. There are people who sit in the last seat "sleeping" with their bags on the seat next to them. Considerate people don't want to wake them in order to move their bags, but I say WAKE THEM. They are not sleeping and are not considerate to you!

No. 3: I again agree with Ira that those who stand in the aisle waiting to exit the train are waiting in the aisle for a reason, so let them go. Those sitting should wait until the aisle clears, then exit. You had a seat the entire ride (and probably got a window seat), so wait your turn and quit cutting in on everyone else.

A Rider

Doubly agreeable

I am in complete agreement with the April writer who suggested charging double to those who take up an extra seat with their bags. This would be a perfectly fair thing to do. You want to use two seats, you pay for two seats. A perfect example: I normally ride the weekday 7:35 a.m. inbound train from Elmhurst. A woman often gets on with her roll bag, sits on the window seat and plops her bag next to her. She is completely clueless or couldn't care less that with snow and other bad



Carman Bryant Howse replaces a window in a car being rehabbed at Metra's 49th St. Shop along the Rock Island Line.

I can see clearly now

For many years in the 1980s and 1990s, I commuted downtown on Metra. I didn't like being on the upper level because the windows were always dirty, smeared and nearly opaque. And one of the nice things about the upper level should be the view. Yesterday, riding home to Lake Forest where we now live I rode on the upper level and thoroughly enjoyed the trip and the view. Windows were very clean and you could see many things you miss when driving.

I don't know when these kinds of changes were made but a clean car and clean windows make the trip enjoyable. Thanks.

Davey

Thanks for noticing. There's a bit of a back story here related to our funding shortfalls. Normally we would replace our 36,000 windows when cars go through the recommended 14-year rehab cycle. Well, since money was tight, that cycle got extended.

The result was a lot of windows that some riders complained were dirty but were basically just old – sunlight, cleaning fluid and normal wear and tear take their toll and they start to get opaque no matter how clean they are. So a couple of years ago we started to be more aggressive about replacing the windows even though the cars weren't undergoing major rehab. (We are, of course, also replacing them in our in-house rehab program, which is ongoing.)

weather, the wheels just dirty up the seat. And unless someone is bold enough to make her move the bag (not all that often), she is clueless when there are no more seats and folks have to stand.

So YES! Double charging (or the threat to) will begin to put a stop to this thoughtless practice. Do it!

Paul

Singly agreeable

I agree about sneezing; it's extremely gross when people don't cover their mouths when sneezing and I don't mean with a hand that they'll then use to touch everything else on their way off the train. But I am OK with people who cover their sneezes with a newspaper – at

least it's something! If you don't have a tissue, pull your shirt up over your mouth and nose or sneeze (and cough for that matter) into your elbow. Perhaps posting signs in your existing sign-holders reminding people of how we can avoid spreading germs will suffice. Or, would you consider putting hand sanitizers on cars?

I don't agree with Ira's recommendation for charging passengers an additional fare for occupying a seat with their personal belongings (by the way, my belongings are not crap). I do hear announcements by the UPNW conductors reminding passengers that seats are for people, not bags. I think conductors would face a lot of hostility if they had to charge passengers another fare. We can't expect conductors to control everything and everyone's behavior. As a paying customer, I have no problem asking a fellow passenger for a seat occupied by their belongings and I have no problem with passengers who do the same to me. If a train isn't packed wall-to-wall, I will occasionally have my bag on a seat. But when the train even starts to get crowded I move my bag to the floor or a rack/shelf.

I know not everyone behaves the same. Some are just more considerate and inconsiderate of others.

Mandy

We understand the sentiment to double charge, but for the reasons Mandy states, it would be difficult on our crews. We'll continue to remind people to think of others as the train gets crowded and refrain from taking up more than one seat. And don't be afraid to politely ask others to move their cra – er, belongings so you can sit down.

Spring Travel Notes

Gospel Music Festival coming to Chicago

Gospel music enthusiasts will be in for a treat with a weekend of inspirational music in the gospel tradition at Chicago's 30th Gospel Music Festival, May 29-31, 2015. Scheduled artists this year include Chicago's very own Ricky Dillard, Anita Wilson and Israel Houghton and many more local, international and national artists. All performances are free and will be at Millennium Park. Go to Chicagogospelmusicfestival.us for more information on guest artists and times. And don't forget to take Metra downtown. Riders of the Metra Electric Line can take the train directly to Millennium Station, just under the park. Metra's \$8 Weekend Pass gives you unlimited rides on Saturday and Sunday, and on weekends up to three children aged 11 or younger can ride for free with each fare-paying adult.

Learn to save a life in 60 seconds!

Metra, Northwestern Medicine® and the American Heart Association are teaming up to provide lifesaving demonstrations at all downtown Chicago stations as well as several other stations on Thursday, June 4, 2015, from 6:30 a.m. to 9 a.m. Metra customers will get a quick education on administering the new hands-only CPR method and a brief demonstration of an automated external defibrillator (AED) machine. These demonstrations are being offered in recognition of National CPR and AED Awareness Week, June 1-7, when the public is encouraged to learn how to save a life.

Tune in to Metra Board meetings

Did you know you can now watch Metra Board meetings live? Beginning in January, months before a deadline set by Springfield, Metra started webcasting its monthly Board of Directors meetings. Just go to www.metrarail.com, click on "About Metra" in the blue bar across the top and then click on "Webcast Events" on the left-hand side. The agenda for board meetings and supporting documents are posted two days in advance of the meetings, and prior meetings are archived there. We're confident viewers will find these meetings to be informative and provide a better understanding of our organization.

Taking the show on the road

This month the Metra Board will be taking its meeting on the road to McHenry County. The May Board meeting will be held at 10:30 a.m. on May 14 in Conference Room C on the second floor of the McHenry County Administration Building, 667 Ware Road, Woodstock.

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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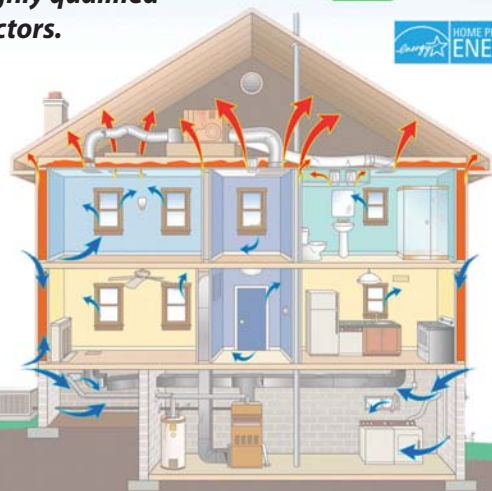
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