

**CLIFF NOTES****Metra gearing up for winter**

With winter just around the corner, we at Metra have started to prepare for those days ahead when snow could impact our operations and your commute.



Alex Clifford
Metra CEO

Our snow emergency plan relies heavily on gathering information, providing good communication and mobilizing our snow-fighting resources in a timely and effective manner.

The primary driver of the plan, of course, is the weather forecast. If it calls for more than six inches of snow, then we know we're going to need a stepped-

up effort. As soon as we get such a forecast, we activate our snow command center and hold a conference call with all field directors and managers from all our districts, including our contract carriers, Union Pacific and BNSF. Since Metra serves such a large area – it's nearly the size of Connecticut – the actions we take can vary across the region.

Following the conference call, our forces are dispatched to be in place as the storm starts. It's critical to be there early, because we can't afford to play catch-up. It's especially important to prevent snow from building up at our yards and interlockers, which are essential to operating reliably.

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**Metra kicks off 6th annual safety contest**

Nothing is more important at Metra than safety. That's why we're happy to report that we have officially kicked off the latest edition of our safety contest.

"Lead the Way: Look, Listen, Live" is the theme for the 2011-2012 contest, which is designed to educate children throughout our service area about the importance of safe behaviors around railroad tracks and onboard our trains.

Children in grades K through 12 are invited to design a poster illustrating the theme or to write an essay about that theme using

300 words or less.

Posters and essays must be submitted by the contest deadline March 15, 2012. Information about the contest rules and how to submit entries can be found on the contest website www.metra-contest.com.

Contest entries will be judged by a panel that includes rail safety experts, community leaders and members of the media. Members of the public also have an opportunity to select their favorite poster for the "People's Choice Award" at displays at each of Metra's downtown

commuter stations in June. Last year's contest drew a record 5,000 entries from 250 schools across the region

First-, second- and third-place winners are chosen from each grade level for the Metra Safety Poster Contest. One winner from each grade group – elementary school, middle school and high school – is selected for the Safety Essay Contest. First-place poster and essay contest winners will receive an Apple iPad, while second- and third-place poster contest winners receive \$250 and \$100 gift cards, respectively. The

"People's Choice Award" winner receives a \$250 gift card. Metra also rewards the school with the most entries with a desktop or laptop computer.

Copies of the winning posters will be distributed to more than 2,000 schools in Northeastern Illinois. The posters will also be featured in station displays, in Metra's 2013 safety calendar, on monthly tickets and on Metra's contest website and Facebook page. Winning safety essays will also be featured in the safety calendar, the Metra contest website and Facebook page.



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

Bears train

Please add cars to the No. 710 run on Sunday mornings on the UP-NW line. This request is specific only to those Sundays on which the Chicago Bears are hosting an NFL game at Soldier Field with a noon kickoff. That train is the only run on the UP-NW that will get fans downtown in time to see the beginning of the game. Consequently, any fan from the northwest suburbs who is going to a game on Metra has to catch that train. Because of this, the train is overcrowded and usually full before it reaches Arlington Heights.

Bill

We're already doing what you've asked. They problem is, we've added as many cars as we can on game days – that train is now 10 cars long. That's the longest train that line can accommodate.

Phone found

Last month on my way home on the Milwaukee North line I left my phone on the train. It was the Thursday before Labor Day and we were leaving to go out of town as soon as I got home. My husband tried calling my phone and one of the conductors on the train answered it. His name was Tom. Tom told my husband that

the train would be heading back to downtown Chicago after completing the route. He told him exactly what time to be at the Golf station and what car he would be on when the doors opened. Sure enough, he was there to meet us with my phone in his hand. I am so grateful that Tom took the time and initiative to get my phone back to me, especially on a long weekend out of town. I wanted someone at Metra to know this level of service that he took upon himself in returning my phone within an hour of my losing it. Great job, Tom.

Kathy

We appreciate you passing on the kind words.

Loud lights

The Berkeley station house on the UP West Line has horribly loud noise coming from the light fixtures. The station is so tiny that it's really bothersome. Would you please send this to the people who can help?!!!!

TJ

Done. Our friends at Union Pacific have taken care of this

Cyclists respond

I am one of the cyclists that Irene complained about last month. Because I can take my

bike on the train, I now use Metra six to 14 times a month (year round) to get to meetings for work. It is unrealistic for me to ride my bike 42 miles round trip on a regular basis. It is, however, quite realistic for me to ride two miles to the train station and another three to eight miles once in the city. Meanwhile, I am getting exercise and fresh air while reducing my carbon footprint, taking a car off the road, and supporting public transit. I am grateful that Metra allows bikes on trains, and so should Irene!

Jane

I live and work in Park Ridge, 17 miles from the Loop. My wife and I frequently go to the Loop evenings and weekends for concerts, meetings, language lessons, sailing, etc. If we couldn't take our bikes on Metra we would have to drive, take the Blue Line, or figure out how to get from Ogilvie to where we are going in the city. As we are near the UP-NW Line, Metra is faster and more convenient than the Blue Line so we often take bikes on the train to get to our Loop destination and back to Ogilvie.

We ride Metra much more frequently because they allow bikes on trains.

Lowell

Read details of our fare increase proposal at www.metrarail.com

This issue falls between our special October issue, which detailed a fare increase plan as part of our 2012 budget, and the Nov. 11 board meeting, where that budget will be adopted. Under our fare proposal, one-way tickets would increase an average of 15.7 percent, ten-ride tickets would go up an average of 30 percent and monthly passes would increase an average of 29.4 percent. In addition, we have proposed to change a variety of fare policies. One-way tickets would only be valid for 14 days, instead of a year, and they would no longer be refundable. The ten-ride ticket discount would be reduced so that riders would get 10 rides for the price of nine, rather than 10 for the price of eight. Ten-ride tickets would remain valid for a year, but would only be refundable within three months of the date of purchase. The 10-ride tickets could be refunded on a pro-rated basis, but there would be a \$5 handling fee. Monthly passes would be valid through the end of the month (instead of noon on the first weekday of the following month) and refunds would be subject to a \$10 fee. All the changes, if adopted by the board on Nov. 11, would begin Feb. 1, 2011. You can view our 2012 Proposed Program & Budget Book and other budget-related documents at www.metrarail.com.

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

Close call at Arlington

This morning at Arlington Park, we saw a young woman start to run across the tracks, even as the train was fast approaching the crossing. Not “we can see the lights somewhere down the track” close – the train had already reached the end of the platform when she came out of the station. It took all of us screaming at her to stop before she pulled up. I think a few people yelling “NO!!!” this morning just saved that woman’s life.

John

Sounds like it was a scary moment. Many thanks to you and everyone else who shouted.

Sorry about that

To Merry Ms. Berry: This is the young lady in the black trench and black shoulder bag. (I’m not kidding, this is actually me.) I saw your note to me last month in *On The Bi-Level*.

I remember accidentally running into you, but I wasn’t doing that on purpose to be rude or hurry you along. I was distracted by something and not paying attention to where I was going. Much to the chagrin of my friends and family, I am just clumsy, inattentive and off in my own little world. I realize my behavior after scurrying off (weaving/bobbing) made it look like I didn’t care that I ran into you and that I was rudely trying to get you to move, but I was really just distracted. That doesn’t justify my rudeness; I am really sorry. I enjoy speed-walking like I am in the Olympic games because it psyches me up for the boring day that I am about to have at school. You’re right, though, I should be more polite. I will try to exercise more restraint.

Love on the tracks

Last month we asked for stories about missed connections or couples who met on Metra. No one emailed with a missed connection but here are some of the Metra meets we received. Thanks to all for sharing.

I just wanted to write in and let you know that I met my husband on the train 16 years ago. We both traveled between Fox Lake and Union Station. We started talking with a group of people and before you know it we went out on our first date. We are now married and have three beautiful kids.

Traci

I must share our story with our fellow Metra riders. I’ll try and keep it short and sweet, but how can you when it’s a True Love story? We met eyes on opposite sides of the tracks at the Deerfield Metra station the fall of 2004. He was already standing on the northbound side, as I crossed over to catch the same train. We eyed and smiled at each other, without

uttering a word, for around a month. It was glaring eyes and all smiles – what a beautiful smile it was. The time came when the first word was spoken: “Hello.” Oh how my heart tingled. That went on for a



few weeks, then we graduated to sitting next to each other on the train. And we talked and talked, learning so much about each other. I didn’t ride the train for a few weeks and he thought he lost me forever. But I reappeared and it was at that moment I gave him my number, because someone

was afraid to ask me for mine. And the love blossomed from there. Six years later, we joined hands in marriage and have been blessed with a beautiful baby boy. Our anniversary is this year on Nov. 20. I am now the happiest woman alive with a loving husband and two wonderful children. I love you my darling husband, Marshall “MAC”!

Shelly

My husband and I met while riding on Metra. It was eight years ago, and he had started sitting with a large group I had been riding with for many years. I would see this gentleman as he would look up at me over his computer and periodically he would talk to me. After a while, he just changed seats so that he could sit right next to me, and over time we would just talk and really got to know each other better. Eventually, he asked me out to lunch and our relationship progressed from there. We were married a year and a half after we first saw each other on the train, and we have now been happily married for seven years!

Karen

I thought I should write to you because it upset you enough to write in. I have my own special pet peeves and am sometimes annoyed by the weird habits of other riders. (I’m looking at you, guy who listens to music on his smartphone without headphones), so I know how annoying that is.

Sincerely sorry,
Trench coat/black bag

We’ve all had similar moments. Thanks for ‘fessing up.

On second thought

After a hard day at work, I got on a BNSF train departing Chicago. Emboldened by the conductor’s announcement about the Quiet Cars, I turned to the gentleman behind me who was talking on his cell phone and said, “This is a Quiet Car.” He said he was sorry and quickly ended his conversation. Just goes to show you that Metra has some great riders, willing to follow the

rules after a little prompt! The quiet was wonderful. What a great way to travel. At Route 59 it quickly dawned on me how extra courteous this rider had been to me – as I exited from the THIRD car from the engine (which is NOT a Quiet Car). My apology and a special thanks to my fellow rider.

RS

What a great story. Thanks, that made our day.

Metra Briefs

Englewood Flyover work begins

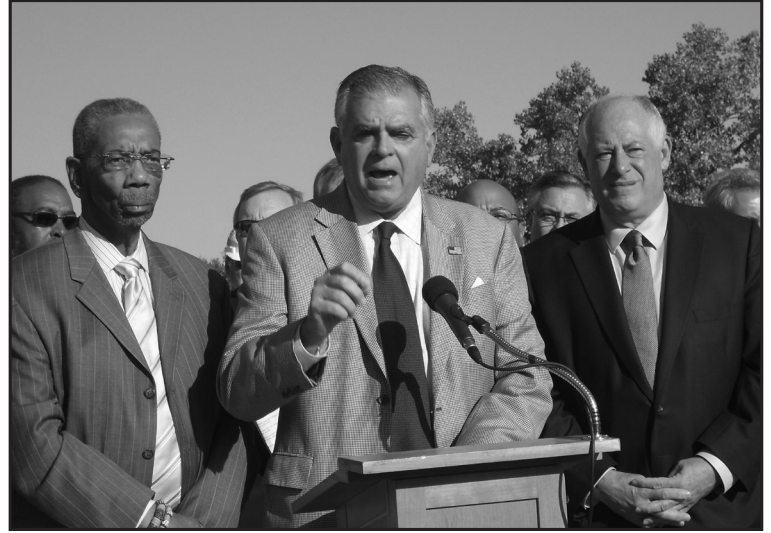
Ground was broken last month on a complicated bridge that will carry the Metra Rock Island line tracks over some Norfolk Southern railroad tracks in the Englewood neighborhood on the south side of Chicago. The ceremony was attended by U.S. Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood, U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin, U.S. Reps. Bobby Rush and Dan Lipinski, Gov. Pat Quinn, Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel, Metra CEO Alex Clifford and a variety of other officials. The \$133 million Englewood Flyover project will eliminate a major rail choke-point in the Chicago region, lessening train delays for Metra, Norfolk Southern and Amtrak, which uses the NS tracks. Some preparatory work is underway now; major construction is expected to start next year. The project is funded by \$126 million in federal stimulus dollars and \$6.6 million in state construction money.

Early trains, Family Fares for Thanksgiving

Several Metra lines will offer extra afternoon trains Wednesday, Nov. 23 for commuters wanting to get an early start on the holiday. Special schedules will be available at the downtown terminals and at www.metrarail.com. Additionally, Metra's "Family Fares" will be in effect Friday, Nov. 25 on all trains. Normally available on weekends and holidays, "Family Fares" allow up to three children 11 and under to ride free with a fare-paying adult. "Family Fares" also will be available all weekdays from Dec. 19 through Dec. 30.

Stuck in traffic? Use Metra

A new report has some good news and bad news about Chicago's traffic – and some good reasons to ride Metra. The good news is that Chicago is no longer the most congested city in the country. The bad news is that it's the second-most congested. The average Chicago



U.S. Rep. Bobby Rush (left to right), U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood and Gov. Pat Quinn were among the dignitaries who helped break ground on the Englewood Flyover project last month.

driver spends 71 hours a year stuck in traffic, according to the 2011 Urban Mobility Report by the Texas Transportation Institute at Texas A&M University. That's second only to Washington, D.C., where drivers are delayed 74 hours a year. Those delays cost the average Chicago driver 36 gallons of excess gas each year and costs him or her \$1,568 in fuel costs and lost time. The bad news would be even worse if not for Metra and other public transportation, the report said. If public transportation in Chicago were eliminated, drivers would spend an extra 23 hours a year stuck in traffic.

Snow

(Continued from Page 1)

Depending on the storm's duration, Metra workers may be required to work long hours without being able to go home. This may also require us to reserve rooms at hotels or motels to house our crews near key areas.

We may also decide to change certain operations. For instance, we may fuel our locomotives overnight at outlying locations. Fueling is normally done as part of the midday servicing routine. But because the locomotives must be disconnected from their cars to be fueled, doing that during winter storm conditions can take longer and cause yard congestion. And that, in turn, can delay timely dispatch of evening

rush-hour trains.

Our snow plan also depends on accurate field information being relayed to snow command and then to our riders. Our GPS system is a big help in giving us real-time information about every train operating, and we are getting ready to upgrade that system so it is even better. And we can call in extra customer assistance teams – employees generally outside the operating department who volunteer to help with customer service during emergencies.

Riders who want to get the most up-to-date information during storms should continuously check our website, www.metrarail.com, and listen to local TV and radio reports. And we highly recommend riders sign up to receive emailed service alerts

through the "My Metra" feature on our website. (If you have a QR reader app on your smartphone, you can scan the code at the end of this column and you'll be routed to our "My Metra" sign-up page.) We use those alerts to keep riders informed about service issues. For instance, we will send systemwide alerts to riders whenever wintry weather threatens to disrupt our service, telling them to allow themselves extra time and to pay close attention to their email and our website in case there are problems.

We also rely on capital investments to fight snow. These include hot-air blowers to keep the snow and ice out of critical switches, train de-icing equipment and fixed portable electric generators to power our signals in case ComEd has problems.

They also include plenty of snow plows and snow jets, which we use to help keep our yards clear.

We can't eliminate every snow-related delay, but we can and do try to mitigate the impact of a snowstorm as much as possible through good planning. And we will continue to do all we can to keep our customers informed about problems as they arise.

You can now follow me on Twitter @MetraCEO.

