

# ON THE BI-LEVEL

**Metra**

Metra's Monthly Commuter Newsletter

November 2015



## Introducing Metra's newest locomotive

The newest locomotive in the Metra fleet, an EMD F59 (above), made its debut this month on the Milwaukee lines. It's one of three F59s that Metra bought on the used market to bolster its fleet. The new locomotive was painted to resemble Metra's MP36 locomotives, the sleek, sloped-nose engines that were introduced to the system between 2003 and 2005 and are painted with orange and magenta lines between a field of black and a field that fades from silver to blue, with a silver top. That's a sign of things to come - 42 older F40 locomotives (below) that will be rehabbed over the next four years will also receive the new paint scheme, rather than the current plain blue-and-orange scheme. Eventually all Metra's locomotives will have the more modern look.



# Upgrades to metrarail.com

## *New info increases transparency*

Metra has posted a variety of new information on its website, [www.metrarail.com](http://www.metrarail.com), enhancing the agency's transparency and accountability for its customers and the region's taxpayers.

New information on the site includes Metra employee compensation information, a summary of contracts awarded each month and a listing of the agency's expenditures updated monthly.

The new information being provided on Metra's website will

also be part of a website known as the Greater Chicago Mass Transit Transparency and Accountability Portal. A new state law requires all RTA transit agencies to post such information on the portal beginning Jan. 1, 2016.

In addition, Metra has begun posting all Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests online, as well as posting information that lists how much each firm bid in response to an invitation for bid (IFB) for a formal contract

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## *Split-payment feature added*

Customers who purchase Metra tickets through the agency's website - [www.metrarail.com](http://www.metrarail.com) - now have the ability to split their payments among credit and debit cards, including pre-tax transit benefit debit cards, Metra has announced.

"This new feature removes a huge barrier for more than half of our customers who take advantage of transit benefit programs and want the convenience of purchasing their tickets online," said Metra Executive Director/CEO

Don Orseno. "We've heard from our customers that this has been a challenge and we are extremely pleased to be able to offer this solution."

A recent survey indicates that 52 percent of Metra customers purchase their tickets through a pre-tax or employer-paid transit benefit program. These programs allow users to set aside pre-tax earnings via payroll deduction and use the funds to purchase transit tickets. Using pre-tax

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## 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](mailto: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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## CUS upgrades

Mayor Rahm Emanuel last month helped unveil \$14 million in 2015-16 improvements at Union Station and announce steps to advance the master plan to redevelop the station. Also on hand were Stephen Gardner, Amtrak Chief of Business Development; Metra Chairman Martin Oberman; RTA Chairman Kirk Dillard; U.S. Sen. Mark Kirk; U.S. Rep. Dan Lipinski; and Commissioner Rebekah Scheinfeld of the Chicago Department of Transportation.



## Info

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solicitation at the time of the official public bid opening. All of the Metra's current collective bargaining agreements are also posted online.

"Metra is seeking to bolster the public's trust in our agency and one way we can do that is to be as open and transparent as possible and show we are com-

mitted to being accountable to the customers we serve," said Metra Executive Director/CEO Don Orseno.

"The Metra Board of Directors strongly believes in increased sunshine and transparency," said Metra Board Chairman Martin Oberman. "Our goal is to make it simple to get information about Metra so that our customers and other stakeholders can learn about what's happening at our agency." Previously, Metra has posted

other information on its website to improve transparency, including the agency's annual procurement plan, on-time performance reports, Board meeting minutes and information about the Office of Executive Inspector General.

To learn more, visit [www.metrarail.com](http://www.metrarail.com), click on "About Metra" in the blue bar across the top of the page and then select "Metra and Transparency" from the choices on the left-hand side of the page.

## Split

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dollars can help transit users reduce commuting costs by up to 40 percent. Most transit benefit programs use a debit card system, where value is added monthly and the cards can only be used for ticket purchases. However, the IRS limits payroll deductions for transit to \$130 per month, and in some cases this amount is not sufficient to cover the entire cost of a monthly ticket, requiring the use of a supplemental form of payment.

The ability to split payments

while purchasing tickets through the agency's website resolves this issue for Metra customers, who can now use up to two credit or debit cards on a single purchase. Previously, the ability to split payments between more than one credit or debit card was limited to Metra ticket agent locations.

The upcoming Ventra App will also allow customers to split payments between two options when purchasing Metra mobile tickets.

Customers who wish to purchase their tickets online and use the split-payment feature can visit [www.metrarail.com](http://www.metrarail.com) and purchase 10-ride or monthly

tickets through the "Tickets" section of the site. Customers can also create a "My Metra" account and schedule regular monthly purchases. Current "My Metra" account holders can also modify their accounts to take advantage of the new split payment feature.

To learn more about how to enroll in pre-tax transit benefit programs, please visit [www.metrarail.com](http://www.metrarail.com) and select "Transit Benefits" under the "Riding Metra" section. For more information about pre-tax transit benefits, referrals to qualified plans or other transit support, call 312-322-6326 or email [Transit-Benefits@Metrarr.com](mailto:Transit-Benefits@Metrarr.com).



# SOUND OFF



The Court of Public Opinion is now in session.

## Opening statement

During your October 2015 issue, you asked for responses to a few readers that commented on situations. My responses are below.

To the Train Ladies, who enjoy saving seats for one another: saving seats for your troop of friends is selfish. If you desire to sit together, meet up at a designated Metra stop, board together, THEN sit together. Otherwise realize that there are no assigned seats on Metra, and paying passengers must be able to sit wherever they want.

To KW, who likes to put make-up on during her train ride: the fact that you don't want to arrive to work without make-up says you believe you need it. Frankly, many of us don't care to see your ugly-to-pretty transformation on the train, nor have dust from the items you're using float around as particles in the air. Put your makeup on at home, in your car, or in the bathroom at work.

To Daniel, who feels "Sound Off" should be discontinued: you're wrong. "Sound Off" is a needed reminder to most of how self-centered and spoiled some people can be, and how the rest of us need to exercise patience to keep our mental stability.

T.A.B.

## Mitigating factors

Train Ladies: If the description of the situation is accurate and unbiased, I see no harm in them trying to reserve a section for themselves while many other seats are available, and would say that other people are being rude for raising a fuss over it.

However, I can see things becoming problematic in two ways: a) When it gets to the point of only a few non-train-ladies seats being left, I can understand

people being upset if they are told something like, "Go sit over there in that last seat." There may be reasons not to sit there, like perhaps the person that would be behind them or next to them appears to be sick. b) When the Train Ladies are referring to plenty of available seats, I hope they mean plenty of fully empty benches. It would not be appropriate for them to request people to share a benchseat if that is all that is left and there are empty benches in their section.

Putting on makeup: I don't have a problem with that in general, but I suppose if the person was sharing my bench seat, all that activity, if lasting more than a few minutes, could start getting annoying. Otherwise, I don't see why anyone should be disturbed.

Discontinue "Sound Off"? No way! Even if many of complaints are similar, hopefully some people are wising up over time as they read the letters. And there's always people reading the material for the first time.

Tony

## Objection!

Tell the Train Ladies that no, they do not have the right to proscribe where I sit regardless

of whether the train is empty or full. They are the rude ones, thinking they somehow are special and exempt from the rules that the rest of us abide by. One ticket, one seat. Period.

To KW the makeup lady: Many people would agree that performing personal grooming (i.e., clipping nails, plucking eyebrows, slapping on foundation, etc.) in public is bringing your bathroom rituals a little too far into the public sphere. You say you don't want anyone frowning at you while you tweak your face in public, YET you apply makeup so they will look at you. TIP: If you perform in public, expect a (sometimes disapproving) audience!

A Rider

## More deliberations

I would like to thank the Train Ladies for pointing out a perk that few Metra riders know about. Apparently long-term commuters get to make up their own rules of entitlement. As a rider since the fall of 1984 I look forward to riding the train to-night and lording my commuter seniority over all others whom I will be allowing to ride along with me in MY Rock Island Quiet Car!

And to KW: I too could use an extra 5 minutes in the morning, so from now on I will be shaving on my ride in (Now that we have outlets!) and if it offends too bad, mind your own business or help me out and hold my mirror.

Robert

## Stare decisis

Here's a 1996 quote from the Bi-Level after another complaint about women putting on makeup on the train: "Metra Sez: The high power of the OTBL court, having voted on this issue (50/50 gender for a non-biased opinion), hereby rules the application of makeup on the train an acceptable practice. Case adjourned!" Yes, I've been a commuter this long. Thank you Metra!!

Kathy

## 'Sound Off' sound off

PLEASE don't get rid of "Sound Off"!!!! I was soooooo sad when it went away and was so happy to see it return. After some of the crazy things I have witnessed from riding the train daily for a decade, it is comforting to know that others feel the same way. I wish the entire newsletter was "Sound Off" stories.

RK

*Hey now, let's not get too carried away. "Sound Off" will stay, but it will stay as just one page. As for the other behaviors, the evidence shows that seat-saving is generally frowned upon, but makeup has its defenders and detractors. (And we forgot about the earlier ruling!) Perhaps it's best to simply remember this: We're all in this together so let's try to remain polite, be considerate of others and stay safe out there.*

## Fall Travel Notes

### PTC deadline extended

Congress late last month approved a three-year extension of the deadline for railroads to implement a safety system known as positive train control (PTC). Congress had originally set a Dec. 31, 2015 deadline for implementation, which Metra and most other U.S. railroads determined was unrealistic. Metra feared it may have to shut down service in January 2016 unless the deadline was extended. Metra would like to thank Senators Dick Durbin and Mark Kirk and Representatives Mike Quigley, Dan Lipinski and Bob Dold in particular, as well as the entire Metra congressional delegation, for their unending support during this critical time. Their strong commitment and tireless advocacy for this extension is what made the passage of this legislation possible. This news can finally put all of our minds at ease, knowing that Metra's trains will continue operating in January.

### We want your gently used coats

Metra is partnering with NBC 5 Chicago in its Making A Difference Coat Drive at all five downtown Metra stations and all stations along the BNSF Line, from Nov. 30 through Dec. 2. Collected coats go to the Salvation Army. Last year Metra collected more than 700 coats from its five downtown Chicago stations and 10 large bags of new and gently used coats from the BNSF Line. Look for collection bins at Union Station, Ogilvie, Millennium, LaSalle Street, Van Buren Street and BNSF stations. Thank you for your support.

### Food drive coming soon

The holiday season is fast approaching and there will be numerous opportunities to show charity to those in need. Metra is teaming up with the Greater Chicago Food Depository to collect non-perishable food items for the poor. Volunteers will be at the Ogilvie Transportation Center on Nov. 12 from 3 p.m. to 9 p.m. passing out shopping bags they hope you will fill with food items and return on Nov. 13 from 6 a.m. to 10 a.m. You will see them in the shed and Metra Market areas. Volunteers will also be at Millennium Station passing out shopping bags on Dec. 3 from 3 p.m. to 9 p.m. and will collect them on Dec. 4 from 6 a.m. to 10 a.m.

### Annual Toys for Tots drive on Dec. 9

Mark your calendar for Toys for Tots collections. For the fourth consecutive year, Metra and the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve Toys for Tots Foundation will team up on Dec. 9 from 6 a.m. to 1 p.m. to collect toys for children of all ages. Collections will be held at all five downtown stations - Union Station, Ogilvie, Millennium, Van Buren Street and LaSalle Street. Cash boxes will be on hand for donations. In past years, Metra customers have donated as many as 5,000 toys and \$5,000 in cash to ensure children throughout the region have a toy for Christmas.



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would like to remind everyone...  
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than to lose your life in a minute.

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