



Metra urges PTC extension

Unless Congress acts, Metra will not be able to operate in 2016

The Metra Board of Directors at its September meeting formally called on Congress to extend the Dec. 31, 2015 deadline to install the Positive Train Control (PTC) safety system, agreeing with a staff analysis that in the

current regulatory environment Metra will not be able to legally operate beyond that date.

Although Metra and the rest of the U.S. railroad industry have invested significant time and money and have made significant progress on PTC implementation, they have also warned for years that the deadline can't be met due to a variety of operational, technological and

financial challenges. Congress, however, has yet to act. In a resolution, the Board again urged Congress to extend the deadline to a date that realistically accounts for the numerous challenges.

If Metra did choose to operate without PTC in place, it would be subject to potential FRA enforcement actions brought by the Department of

Justice, including substantial civil penalties, issuance of compliance or emergency orders, and injunctions or criminal penalties, according to an analysis by Metra's Law Department. The analysis concluded that Metra will be unable to legally operate its trains beyond the deadline.

"This Board will do all it can to avoid this crisis within the
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Pet pilot project expanded and extended

Metra is expanding its "Pets on Trains" pilot program to allow small pets in carriers on all weekend trains beginning Oct. 10, after a successful pilot program on weekend Rock Island Line trains.

"We are pleased that the test on the Rock Island Line went well and that we can now offer this option to all of our customers," said Metra Executive Director/CEO Don Orseno. "It's in Metra's best interest to offer a program like this that serves our riders and, for some, makes travel by train an even more convenient choice."

Metra started looking into allowing pets on trains after it was presented with a petition. Metra staff then surveyed other mass transit agencies and found many of them have policies allowing

small pets without any issues. Metra also consulted with its Citizens Advisory Board and surveyed riders before the three-month pilot program began July 4 on weekend Rock Island Line trains. The pilot will now expand to all weekend trains starting Oct. 10 through Jan. 31, 2016.

During the Rock Island program, 39 riders traveled with their pet, according to an online survey. Riders who completed the survey overwhelmingly supported the program (68 percent to 24 percent, with 8 percent not answering the question) and endorsed expanding it to weekends on all lines (62 percent to 5.5 percent, with 32.5 percent not answering the question). In addition, Metra did not receive any complaints about the policy



during the Rock Island Line pilot.

The rules are simple:

- Only small pets in enclosed protective carriers are allowed.
- Carriers can't take up seats,

seating areas or obstruct pathways on trains or in stations and must be small enough to be carried on by a single person. They must fit in a passenger's lap or under the seat at all times.

- Metra reserves the right to remove passengers with pets that disturb other customers.

- Owners are responsible for the behavior and cleanup of pets.

After January, Metra will assess how the expanded pilot program worked and then determine whether and how to proceed. Metra will again ask riders to complete a survey at www.metrarail.com

about their experiences with the expanded weekend pilot program.

Service animals are allowed on all Metra trains at all times.



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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Metra to test Wi-Fi on 11 cars

Metra today announced plans to install Wi-Fi technology on 11 railcars systemwide as part of a new test program to provide free, onboard Wi-Fi to customers. These railcars will be retrofitted with cellular hot spots before January 2016 to determine whether the technology can provide free and dependable Internet access to customers onboard Metra trains.

"We have explored several ways to provide free Wi-Fi on Metra trains and are committed to doing all we can to get this done for our customers," said Metra Executive Director/CEO Don Orseno. "If it's financially feasible and our customers like the level of service this technology can provide, our agency would seek funding or sponsorships to install free Wi-Fi on more railcars."

The test program is similar to one recently launched by the Northern Indiana Commuter

Transportation District (NICTD) on its South Shore Line. Like the NICTD program, this Wi-Fi service would be on a car-by-car basis instead of a full train, and require only onboard technology instead of a capital investment along the right-of-way.

The six-month pilot program is expected to cost approximately \$35,000. Once the technology is installed, Metra plans to alert customers about the test program and how to identify which railcars will have "hot spots." The agency will also notify them that there may be dead zones along the route and advise them that streaming video onboard will likely impair service. The agency will also post information on its website about how to provide feedback on the quality of Wi-Fi service.

To further enhance the agency's customer connectivity options, Metra is also completing

installation of charging stations at all five downtown stations and plans to install free Wi-Fi in the waiting areas. The agency anticipates having all of the waiting area hot spots live within 45 days.

Metra has previously issued two requests for proposals asking firms to propose how they could offer free Wi-Fi on trains at no cost to Metra by installing technology on trains and along right-of-way. Neither RFP was successful at identifying a responsible vendor capable of providing free Wi-Fi to Metra customers.

The agency is actively searching for a viable Wi-Fi solution that has been difficult to find for most large and complex commuter agencies across the nation. In 2013, Metra also commissioned a study which indicated that installation of Wi-Fi could cost Metra approximately \$72 million over a five-year period.

PTC

(Continued from Page 1)

confines of the law as it exists today and continue to work with members of Congress on legislation that is needed to extend this unattainable deadline," said Metra Board Chairman Martin J. Oberman. "In the meantime, on advice of counsel, Metra cannot operate any of its trains under current law as of midnight on Dec. 31, 2015."

If Metra is unable to operate beyond December, it will work to ensure an orderly shutdown of its system and communicate with its customers with sufficient time for them to consider the effects of the shutdown, the resolution also states. Metra will also work with its transit partners in the Chicago area to provide alternative transportation but recognizes that

feasible alternatives do not exist for the vast majority of Metra customers.

PTC is a computerized system that prevents certain types of train-to-train collisions, helps avoid derailments and other accidents caused by excessive speed and increases safety for workers. The system integrates GPS, way-side sensors and communications units and a railroad's centralized dispatching system. Together, these components track trains, convey operating instructions and monitor the crew's compliance. PTC will automatically stop a train if the system detects that a violation or equipment failure is about to occur.

PTC is not off-the-shelf technology but had to be designed from the ground up, and certain components were not immediately available. There also have been limitations on design expertise

and necessary equipment. The onboard software is still being developed, and a final release date is not known at this time. It has not yet been determined whether there is enough radio spectrum available in Chicago for the PTC needs of all of the railroads that operate here. In addition, PTC systems adopted by various railroads must communicate with each other, so trains can move seamlessly between tracks controlled by different systems. Achieving that interoperability in Chicago is complicated, since the region has such a complex railroad network. Finally, this unfunded mandate is expected to cost Metra more than \$350 million, equal to 100 percent of its federal funding for 2½ years.

Metra's current timeline for full PTC implementation is 2019, although we expect several lines to be completed before that date.

SOUND OFF

An opposing view

We've seen lots of complaints over the years in "Sound Off" from passengers about seat hogs and seat savers. We'd like to provide a different perspective in response to saving seats on the train. I sit with a group of 10 ladies who have been riding the same train for over 20 years together. As you've noted in many articles, friendships develop over the years of commuting. Many of us have rather long commutes and it's these friendships that make the commute easier. We've all become great friends over the years both on the train and off. We all sit together and yes, we'll save seats for our group. If a member of the group isn't coming, she lets one of us know. On several occasions we have experienced what we call "rude" commuters. The train is virtually empty, but for some reason they insist on sitting in the seat(s) we're saving for our friends. They get very angry – we're not sure why as there are plenty of other open seats available. When the train is full, we release the seats and our friends sit wherever there is space available. We have also never refused a seat to fellow commuters when the train is full. Long story short, we're not being rude by saving a seat for our friends. Rather, we're trying to enjoy what can be a very long ride at the end of a long day. A little advice to those of you who feel the need to break into a group of friends when there are plenty of open seats available – ask yourself – who is the rude commuter? You just might be surprised, if you're being honest with yourself, that you are the rude commuter.

We love the conductors on the 4:40 to Fox Lake too!

Warm regards,
The Train Ladies



A train faux pas?

Hmm... We suspect your letter will prompt some interesting debate: is such a practice reasonable or unreasonable? That might depend on the circumstances – are you trying to save an empty row or rows, or the seat next to you? Are you saving them briefly, or saving them for someone who's getting on seven stations down the line? People may understand the desire to sit with your friends, but they may also ask what gives you the right to determine where other people can sit. What does everyone else think? For the record, Metra does not allow the reserving of seats.

And another

I understand being appalled by the disgusting habits of passengers on trains, but I don't include applying makeup as an offensive habit and fail to understand why people continue to complain about this. After getting up at 5:15 a.m. each day, getting myself ready, feeding my animals and then driving 20 plus minutes to get to the train,

I'm not going to allow an extra 15 minutes to put my makeup on, when I'll be sitting on a train for almost an hour, just because some people may be offended. Maybe if they were minding their own business instead of other people's, they wouldn't be so offended.

KW

We'll offer this one up to the Court of Public Opinion, too. What do you think?

And another

I suggest you discontinue the 'Sound Off' column. The same complaints, e.g., feet on the seats, filthy cars, etc., have appeared for over 25 years. You could be more customer-centric and fix if not all at least the recurring complaints. And yet all you do is provide flippant, sarcastic remarks that probably only you find humorous. In summary, keep your reply and fix the complaint.

Daniel

Another one for the Court: what

do you think? In our defense, we have tried to tread lightly with flippancy (is that a word?) and sarcasm since "Sound Off" returned in January 2014. We've tried to be thoughtful, but still fun, because we think most people enjoy the column. And we do try to fix complaints that are fixable. But many of the letters we publish are about basic manners, and as we said way back in 1993: "If Metra thought we could eradicate rudeness from the face of the earth, we'd stop running trains, open up charm schools and make millions."

Witness for the defense

Just read the latest *On The Bi-Level*, which I love for the information but, gotta admit, especially the "Sound Off" section. I guarantee that every regular Metra rider has witnessed all of the bad behaviors so often complained about. Please add to that my personal favorite, a woman delicately pulling bite-sized pieces from her Cinnabon with her fingers and after every bite, licking each and every finger – YUMMMM!!! My solution to all of this: Metra can still keep it to one train car, but instead of calling it the "Quiet Car," let's really be honest and call it the "Get Off My Lawn Car!" Yes, some of us really do wish to sit quietly and enjoy the ride with a book, paper or our own thoughts. There are at least five other train cars that can handle those who want/need to do their own thing – seat hog, eat, talk loudly so everyone-in-the-car-can-hear conversations (in person or on the phone), ping/ding/chirp, bodily groom, etc.!! Everyone wins! C'mon, pretty please with sugar on top????

Miss Kitty

Thanks for the suggestion and for testifying on our behalf!

Fall Travel Notes

Metra buying plan now online

Metra has posted its annual buying plan online to provide prospective vendors, contractors and subcontractors with a list of equipment, goods and services it expects to purchase the next twelve months. The 2015 4th Quarter thru 2016 3rd Quarter buying plan lists the estimated term of each contract, the anticipated timeframe for when the solicitation will be issued and an estimated contract value to provide prospective vendors with information they need to bid on Metra contracts. Metra regularly updates its annual buying plan on a quarterly basis. This is the second issue of the plan online as part of an initiative to increase the agency's transparency by publishing detailed information about design contracts, construction projects and other professional services. Metra remains focused on promoting, assisting and ensuring diverse participation in all aspects of its contracting, consulting and the supply of goods and services.

Outlets now available at 4 downtown stations

Metra has completed installation of charging stations at four of its downtown stations. Charging stations are now available at Millennium Station, Van Buren Street Station, LaSalle Street Station and the Ogilvie Transportation Center, providing Metra customers with a convenient and free place to recharge electronic mobile devices including smartphones, tablets and laptops. Metra also anticipates installing charging stations in the coming months in its ticketing area

at Chicago Union Station and adding another charging area at Ogilvie near the Metra Market. "Making the right capital investments so that riders have access to technology is a good business decision for Metra. Our riders have told us that access to their electronic devices is important and we were able to respond to their needs by adding this amenity to our downtown stations," Metra Executive Director/CEO Don Orseno said.

Metra safety director honored

Metra Director of Safety Hilary Konczal has been named to the World Safety Organization Board of Directors and has received the group's James K. Williams Award. WSO is an international professional organization that promotes public interest in the field of environmental and occupational health and safety in more than 150 countries. With the motto "Making Safety A Way of Life...Worldwide," WSO also collaborates with the United Nations Economic and Social Council to host conferences, symposiums and international congresses, and makes safety recommendations to the United Nations for worldwide implementation. In addition, WSO grants safety certifications for the rail and bus transportation industry. The group's James K. Williams Award recognizes a member "who has unselfishly provided significant assistance with and support of the programs of the WSO, as well as a strong dedication to the WSO purpose of protection of people, property, resources, and the environment, and with a full support of the WSO motto."

Metra launches 10th annual safety contest

Metra has launched the tenth edition of its annual Safety Poster and Essay Contest, asking students to illustrate through posters and essays how everyone should "Make Safety Your Focus: Look, Listen Live" when near railroad tracks and crossings. The contest is open to all students in grades K through 12 living or attending school in the railroad's six-county service area. The deadline is Friday, Jan. 29, 2016. One first-, second- and third-place winner will be selected from each grade, K through 12, and awarded the following prizes: First Place, iPad; Second Place, \$250 gift card; Third Place, \$100 gift card. Students are also encouraged to enter the 2015-2016 Metra Safety Essay Contest. Contest participants are asked to describe in 300 words or less how to "Make Safety Your Focus" when near trains and railroad tracks. First-place winners in the essay contest will also receive an iPad.

Metra 2016 budget coming

Metra's 2016 budget will be unveiled at the Oct. 14 meeting of the Metra board. We will provide all the details, including a list of public hearing dates and ways to provide feedback, in a special issue of *On the Bi-Level* to be published at that time.



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