



Who needs a limo?

Newlyweds Jessica Piwnicki of Crystal Lake and Matthew Williams of McHenry skipped the limo and boarded a UP Northwest train to get from their wedding in Arlington Heights to their reception in Crystal Lake on August 11. The couple are frequent Metra riders who used the train on one of their first dates and thought it would add a fun touch to their special day to ride the rails between events. Their wedding photographer, Cameron Cammarata, kindly supplied us with this picture. Congrats from Metra to the bride and groom.

CLIFF NOTES

Metra seeking input on fare payment system

Metra is currently evaluating options for a potential new and improved transit fare payment system. We want to



Alex Clifford
Metra CEO

identify a system that can maximize the convenience for our riders and enhance the customer experience.

To do that, it's critical that we once again ask our riders for their input.

Earlier this year, Metra established an internal working group to guide the implementation of a regional fare payment solution that would meet the

intent of a state law requiring Metra, the RTA, CTA and Pace to accept contactless credit, debit and prepaid cards by Jan. 1, 2015. Metra has held a variety of work sessions to review our fare practices and has conducted significant research to create a road map to guide decision-making and implementation of a fare payment system.

Based on principles adopted by our Board of Directors, Metra's part in the new regional fare payment system must:

- Improve fare collection and simplify overall collection activities and reconciliation;
 - Minimize on-train transactions and overall transaction
- (See System on Page 4)

Metra breaks ground on two new station projects

Metra joined local officials twice last month to break ground on the reconstruction of the Cicero and Fox River Grove stations.

In Cicero, Metra Acting Chairman Larry Huggins and Executive Director/CEO Alex Clifford were joined by State Senator Martin A. Sandoval, Cicero Town President Larry

Dominick and others for the groundbreaking ceremony.

The \$4.5 million project for the station on the BNSF line calls for:

- Two new seven-car platforms with tactile warning strips;
- A new warming house on the outbound side;
- A headhouse and ramp enclosure with a heated waiting

area on the inbound side, and a reconstructed ramp to comply with ADA requirements;

- High-intensity overhead lighting;
- Utility improvements;
- Landscaping;
- A new parking lot.

The station at 25th Place and Cicero was last rebuilt in the 1970s. The effects of time and

weather have deteriorated its concrete stairways, ramps and tunnel, as well as the platform canopies.

When the rehabilitation work is completed in about 18 months, Cicero riders will have a safe, modern and appealing rail station and a new paved parking lot with 136 spaces and room for the

(See Stations on Page 4)



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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Rock Island line bears the same name it had in 1852

Most information for this story on the Rock Island Line comes from company-issued histories and articles by Robert E. Stewart and Thomas J. Mitoraj.

On October 10, 1852, a brightly painted locomotive coupled to six shiny yellow coaches chugged over new railroad tracks between Chicago and Joliet. It was the first train on the first completed section of what would become the immense Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad.

Now, nearly exactly 160 years later, the Rock Island Railroad is gone, but that original route retains the Rock Island name, as Metra's Rock Island Line.

While the Rock is famous for its Rocket locomotives, the popular folk song and its role in the development of the Midwest, its commuter service in Chicago is also notable for the part it played in Chicago history. The communities of Beverly and Morgan Park, for instance, would not exist as they do today if not for the Rock Island Railroad.

There was passenger service on the route from the very beginning, with a few stops between Joliet and Chicago, and maybe a small number of people used it for a daily commute north to the fast-growing city. But the true commuter service can be traced to 1869, when the Blue Island Land and Building Company was set up to develop land centered on Prospect Ave. and what is now 103rd St.

At the same time that what is now Morgan Park/Beverly was being developed, a branch line of the Rock Island was built through the area. The new branch track left the mainline at about 97th St., ran west along 99th for about

a mile and then turned south to rejoin the mainline at Blue Island. The branch was completed in 1870, but even before then the appeal of train service was spurring development in the area.

The Chicago Fire of 1871 burned down the Rock Island line's LaSalle Street Station (the present station is the fifth at that site). But it further increased demand for passenger service on the line, because outlying communities became more popular alternatives to city living. Morgan Park was marketed as an exclusive residential community served by frequent train service.

By 1883 the railroad was operating 10 suburban trains each way every day, mostly on the branch line to Blue Island, and there were numerous stops between the branch line and LaSalle St. Station.

In 1889, the branch line was extended north to serve more of Beverly. Rather than leaving the mainline at 97th, it now left the mainline at 89th and followed the route it still follows today to Blue Island. A year later, the railroad had 19 trains each way between Chicago and Blue Island.

In the 1890s, work began to elevate the tracks in Chicago, which allowed for a speedier operation but also resulted in the elimination of most of the closer-in stops. That work continued into the first decades of the 1900s.

The first decades of the century also saw the addition of service to towns between Blue Island and Joliet. By 1905 one could commute from Midlothian, New Lenox, Tinley Park and Mokena, and Oak Forest was added in 1911. In October 1912, Rock Island worked with other railroads

to build Joliet Union Station, which is marking its 100th birthday next month.

Sometime around 1917-1918, the railroad started using "Beverly Hills" in the names of stations at 95th (formerly called Longwood), 99th (Walden) and 103rd (Tracy). Beverly Hills-107th (Belmont) and Morgan Park-115th St. (Raymond) were put in use several years later.

Other key dates in the history of the Rock's suburban service include:

1948: The railroad emerged from a long bankruptcy and began an effort to make capital improvements.

1949: The first diesel engines began to replace steam locomotives.

1957: The Jet Rocket and, slightly later, the Aerotrains – sleekly designed, air-conditioned trains – started serving riders on the commuter route.

1965: The first bi-level cars were delivered from Budd Company, including cab cars that enabled a push-pull operation on the Rock for the first time.

1974: Area voters approved the creation of the RTA to assist all public transportation.

1975: The Rock Island Railroad entered bankruptcy.

1980: The bankruptcy judge initiated the liquidation of the railroad. The RTA eventually bought the commuter service.

1983: The RTA was reorganized and Metra was created to operate commuter trains.

Today the line serves about 8.6 million riders a year with 22 trains a day serving Beverly inbound and outbound and about 24 serving Joliet inbound and outbound.

SOUND OFF

Keep them on

If you are going to wedge in between two people on the top level while riding the BNSF, the least you could do is leave your shoes on, Smelly. This isn't your family room – show the other riders some common courtesy!

Ed

Are you saying it was totally gross?

Keep them on

To the rider on the 4:45 p.m. UP Northwest Line in the second car from the engine: Leave your shoes on. You don't need to take your shoes off and stretch out with your feet on the bench ahead of you. It's gross, offensive and not courteous to other passengers. You look like a slob.

Ryan

What was it about all the feet on seats this summer? Does hot weather make people forget their manners?

Keep them off

So we BNSFs are riding the UPW due to our line being shut down. The train, as you can imagine, was packed. I found it quite amusing to watch a woman save three seats for her missing companions. With the aisles full I am glad that the briefcase had a seat.

Mark

It's amazing how grouchy briefcases can get when they have to stand – even though they get to ride for free.

Power down, not up?

One question about the 19 electrical outlets being installed on the lower level on rehabbed cars: Why are none being installed on the upper level, especially since that is where

RIDER FOCUS

Mission possible: courtesy and respect

One of the people who bent our ear during our strategic plan open houses this summer was Mr. Les Blau, a UP North rider from Glencoe. He graciously offered to put his thoughts in writing for us.

I urge you to include, in Metra's mission statement, the goal of showing respect to customers and of encouraging customers to show respect to others.



Making commuters feel respected, and encouraging them to show good manners,

does not cost Metra money but it may pay dividends in good will and in customer support.

Without good manners, people leave belongings on their seats, block other passengers and put their feet on seats. A conductor who orders people to behave comes across as a jerk. Convincing them to have good manners and doing it in a way that shows respect for passengers costs Metra very little.

In my experience, a conductor can do this well. I normally go home on the North line at 6:31 p.m. There was a conductor named Dan, who retired about ten years ago. Every evening, as the train pulled out, Dan reminded all the passengers on the train home that

many people on the train were tired and many of them had a hard day. He asked people to show consideration for each other, and he did it in a voice and with words that showed he really meant it. No one thought he was a jerk. When Dan asked people to be considerate of each other, I realized that I was on my way home, instead of in a dog-eat-dog world. Dan made Metra a place where people felt respected and cared for.

That's not the only reason that Metra should include, as part of its mission statement, the goal of respecting customers and of encouraging them to respect others. Commuters vote; they pay taxes. In some cases they have important contacts. Their good will and loyalty can help Metra in the future. A mission statement of treating riders with respect could pay dividends far beyond encouraging good manners.

When I moved here from New York, I was told that I would not believe the civility and courtesy on the railroads in Chicago. I didn't believe it until I experienced it firsthand. Safety and on-time performance are important, but civility and courtesy are also crucial.

Metra beats out most places for civility and courtesy. Part of its mission should be to stay that way.

Respectfully,
Les Blau

persons trying to work in private are more likely to sit?

Jeffrey

There are preexisting conduits on the lower level, which

makes it easy and relatively inexpensive to add them there, but not on the upper level. So adding them to the upper level would have been more challenging and expensive.

Tracker backer

I like the new train tracker. It's very easy to use and gives me exactly what I want....the next three trains! Sweet!!

Bill

We're happy you like our tracker. We hope all riders have gone to www.metrarail.com to check it out.

Double helping

One morning in July, the cute guy who works the 7:18 from Wood Dale into Chicago sweetly suggested that I put my first name and phone number on the back of my monthly ticket, in case I were to leave it behind. I didn't feel I would ever forget my ticket, but I took his suggestion. Later that month, I received a phone call from Danny, who had retrieved my monthly ticket. He told me that he would be coming through Wood Dale about four more times that night and I could meet him at the station to reclaim my ticket, which I did. I guess I left my ticket behind. Thanks to the cute guy on the 7:18 for his suggestion and to Danny, the very nice evening conductor, for the great customer service.

We often take things for granted. The train comes every morning, we board, ride, arrive at Union Station and forget all the people involved in making that happen, day in and day out, without event. Thanks to all of them and a special, big-kiss "thank you" to these two gentlemen.

Diane Anderson

P.S. The cute guy on the 7:18 is Robert.

Thank you for taking the time to write. We appreciate the praise for our crew members and the reminder to always write your name on your ticket.

Metra can putt you at the Ryder Cup

Going to the Ryder Cup on Sept. 25 through Sept. 30 can be quick and easy with convenient train service on Metra's Milwaukee District West Line to the Medinah Station. From the Medinah Station it's a quick walk to the main spectator gate.

If you are coming from downtown Chicago's Union Station, additional early morning departures have been added. If you live in a community along the line, or can

conveniently access a station, you can drive and "park & ride" at the station most convenient for you.

On weekdays, limited daily parking is available at stations along the line. Regular parking rates will apply. On the weekend, plenty of parking is available, plus you can take advantage of Metra's \$7 Weekend Pass, which is good for both Saturday and Sunday.

Train fares are based on the zone you will be riding to and

from Medinah. Tickets should be purchased in advance at ticket offices. A one-way cash fare can be purchased on the train. However, if an agent is on duty where you board, the conductor will charge an additional \$3.

Why putt around in traffic when Metra's Medinah Station is just a chip shot away?

For more information about service to the Ryder Cup, please go to www.metrarail.com.

Sign up to receive transit benefits

Many Metra customers might not be aware that they can save themselves some money simply by doing what they most are likely doing right now – riding the train.

Commuter Benefits is an employer-sponsored benefit that allows a person to have money deducted from their paycheck, pre-tax, to pay for their monthly transit fare. By deducting this pre-tax, you can save up to 40 percent of the amount you had deducted.

For some people, this can be up to \$51 per month, or more than \$600 per year. Keep in mind that everyone's savings will be different because everyone's tax bracket and monthly transit fare

is different.

If you are not currently taking advantage of Commuter Benefits, you should speak to your Human Resources or Benefits department to see if your employer offers it. If you would like more information about Commuter Benefits, and see how your employer can offer this benefit, go to www.lesstaxingcommute.com. There is even a calculator to see how much you can potentially save by using Commuter Benefits.

If you are using Commuter Benefits, you are among the thousands of people and organizations who already know about one of the best-kept secrets.

Besides saving money by riding mass transit, you are also

saving the environment, which is a benefit in itself.

Recently Congress has been debating whether to increase the monthly maximum and return it to the 2010-2011 amounts. At the time of this writing, a measure cleared the Senate Financial Committee and is working through the legislative process. Support for this initiative is always needed.

A website, www.commuter-benefitsworkforus.com, has been set up to provide information and advocate for the issue. You can also use the site to contact your representatives in Congress and voice your support. Obviously, more voices will help advance the cause.

Stations

(Continued from Page 1) possible addition of 100 more. The work is being performed by John Burns Construction of Orland Park.

In Fox River Grove, Metra Board Members Jack Schaffer and Arlene Mulder and Metra Deputy Executive Director Alex Wiggins were joined by Fox River Grove President Robert J. Nunamaker and other dignitaries for the ceremony.

The \$3.5 million project calls for the complete reconstruction of the station on the UP Northwest Line, which dates from 1959. That work includes:

- A new, larger warming shelter that will include vendor space and bathrooms;

- A new, secondary warming shelter on the east end of the station;

- Extension of the platforms to 640 feet from 330 feet, enough for an eight-car train;

- The repaving and restriping of the existing parking lot;

- New LED lighting on the platforms and in the parking lot.

Union Pacific Railroad is rebuilding and extending the platforms, which will cost about \$1.2 million. Path Construction of Arlington Heights was awarded a \$2.3 million contract to do the remaining work. The project should be complete in about one year.

Both stations will remain open during the work.

Metra is paying for both projects primarily with its share of proceeds from the state bond program.

System

(Continued from Page 1) costs;

- Recognize that convenience has a value to the customer;

- Meet the intent of the legislation;

- Simplify and optimize business practices;

- Be cost-effective;

- Ensure a high degree of reliability;

- Promote system use and be easily understood by the customers;

- Have no adverse effect on train operations;

- Allow for effective/efficient on-train ticket validation.

As we move ahead in examining the various fare payment solutions, we want to hear from our customers on how you pay for fares, your use of technology and the types and uses of bank cards you possess today.

We encourage all riders to go to www.metrarail.com and take a brief survey that explores these areas. There are also questions about some of the ideas we are exploring to meet our objectives. The survey will be posted during the week after Labor Day.

The survey also gives riders the opportunity to volunteer for "customer research panels" that we will contact for further input and advice. Panel members may be contacted by telephone and/or email to provide their opinions on transportation issues.

Enhancing our communication to customers is vital to Metra being able to deliver the best possible service. Your answers and opinions are very important to us, because they will help guide our efforts to adopt the best system possible.

You can follow me on Twitter @MetraCEO