



Metra to use better air filters

Metra is moving forward with plans to install high-efficiency filters on the passenger cars of all its diesel lines after its latest round of testing determined the filters dramatically improved the quality of the air on its trains.

The announcement was made at a meeting of the Metra Emissions Task Force, which was formed last fall in response to a Chicago Tribune story that raised questions about the

level of black carbon emissions, also known as soot, on downtown platforms and onboard trains. Among the group's main tasks was to conduct several tests on the air quality onboard trains and explore ways to improve it.

In the latest round of testing, Metra studied the impact of four different strategies to reduce the level of black carbon in passenger cars. Tests were performed on 12 different

train runs (six outbound and six inbound) that simulated a worst-case scenario for a train in service: The train had a non-rebuilt engine pulling seven cars; the train waited 20 minutes at Union Station with its doors open; and the train was not plugged into standby electricity in the station so the engine was used to power onboard systems.

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CLIFF NOTES

New technology coming to Metra

When I came to Metra I stressed that the concerns nearest and dearest to my heart are customer satisfaction and safety. That's why I was pleased to appear with Gov. Pat Quinn last month when he signed a bill



Alex Clifford
Metra CEO

that calls for technological upgrades and other changes that will address those areas and more.

Most significantly, the new law requires Metra to work with our parent agency, the RTA, and our sister agencies, the CTA and Pace, to develop a fare card by 2015 that can be used seamlessly for trips on any public bus, train or subway in the six-county Chicago area. Many riders have requested such a card over the years and we're glad to have the extra prod to get it done.

There are significant challenges, both technically and financially, to implementing

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♪ Workin' on the railroad ♪

Metra earlier this summer conducted its first graduation ceremony for 20 new employees from our two-year apprentice program for assistant signal workers. The class of new signal workers, pictured above with other Metra officials, included Denise Burrell (left), the only female graduate in what has traditionally been a male-dominated field.



The Assistant Signal Apprentice Program uses case studies, signal prints from existing locations and practical exercises to ensure the training is as close to real world job tasks as possible. The program is designed to address the profound attrition of qualified Metra signal employees due to the number of workers eligible to retire.

Burrell was already an electrician when she came to Metra two years ago but still had a lot to learn about the job. The signal workers are responsible for Metra's extensive network of railroad signals, switches and grade crossing protections. The work can be hard – as Burrell says, “The shovel is one of my tools” – but she finds it rewarding because of the role she plays in making sure the system is operating safely. “We're responsible for lives out there,” she said.

Be sure to go to www.metrarail.com to see detailed information about our 2012 budget situation and proposed fare increase and service cuts.



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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SOUNDING BOARD

Got a question? We've got an answer

Reverse logic

You really confused some people with your answer in the July edition. I was sitting in a Quiet Car yesterday on the BNSF at rush hour that was departing Union Station at 4:48 p.m. When I politely told three women sitting next to me that this was a Quiet Car, they insisted that there are no Quiet Cars on the reverse commute. I told them this wasn't the reverse commute, but they insisted that, because it was outbound, it was the "reverse commute." They apparently don't realize that the reverse commute means the trains that are going opposite of the bulk of where everyone else is traveling. Could you please clear this up for the people who don't understand the meaning of the term "reverse commute"?

Mary

Sorry if that was confusing to anyone. ...We assumed most people know that a reverse commute is one that goes in the opposite direction of the more common commute to downtown in the morning and from downtown in the evening. While we're on the subject, we know many riders have concerns about the size and number of Quiet Car signs on the trains and about inadequate announcements by conductors. We have been working to correct those problems. We ask for your patience and understanding.

Surprising discovery

For years, I have been getting off the train and going through the Ogilvie building to Madison where I walked to my office on Michigan Ave. As most of you know, our paths have been redistributed by the closing of Madison and the Wacker Drive construction. In my quest to find a better route, I decided to take the stairwells that are located on

the platforms down to see where it would lead me. WOW, a whole other world is down there. Not only did I discover that I was street level and on Washington, which leads to a fast path to my office and an even faster route home since it brought me right back to the train's platform, but I discovered an amazing place called the French Market, a gourmet coffee shop Lavazza and CVS. Now, I can complete my tasks before jumping on the train. Talk about time savings! I was so excited about this find that I wanted to share my discovery.

Marian

Glad you discovered Metra-Market! But we're a little discouraged you didn't know about it before – we've been trying to get you and everyone else down there since it opened in Dec. 2009. Guess we need to try harder. Your letter will help.

Ankle-biters ride free?

Every public agency is strapped for cash in this economy. One thing I have not figured out is why Metra doesn't charge for children of riders? During the summer, spring and winter breaks, we daily riders have to put up with moms and dads each toting three kids (probably not all their own) who ride free. Meanwhile your "bread & butter," we who ride and pay faithfully each month, have to stand and endure a 30-to-60-minute romper room. How about ... If you occupy a seat you pay for it?

Long Time Rock Rider

We're trying to increase revenue by doing that. We're making the bet that by letting kids ride free we're attracting riders to Metra who wouldn't otherwise use our system. We also have to keep in mind that to appeal to the occasional rider, the cost must

be competitive with our competition – in this case their cars. And we hope that we can turn those occasional riders into regulars, also boosting our bottom line. We also offer a big incentive to our "bread & butter" riders in the form of the monthly pass, which is a substantial discount over the one-way fares that our occasional riders pay.

Missing our queue

This message concerns the June "Sounding Board" item "Platform congestion." Your reply states that riders were cueing up for train 1225. Is there a pool table on the Track 12 platform? There must be if riders were cueing up. Perhaps you meant "queuing up," which is not associated with pool tables.

John

Of course we meant they were playing pool on the platform while waiting for their train – isn't that what you do? No, wait, what we meant was, they were waiting for their cue to enter the train, hence they were "queuing up." No, wait, what we meant was...oh never mind. We meant "queuing." Rats.



What is this?

Download a QR-reader app to your smartphone, scan this image and you'll see. You'll be taken to our "My Metra" web page, where you can sign up to receive alerts about service issues on your line.

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

It’s slot of noise

To the woman sitting upstairs on the Metra Electric to Millennium Station who was confused and thought we were in a Las Vegas airport: we sat there listening to you play slot machines on your phone the whole way downtown today. I don’t care that you like to gamble, and I’ll admit we weren’t even sitting in a Quiet Car, but could you have possibly muted the loud bells, whistles and music? How about at least turning it down? It’s too early, no one wants to deal with that obnoxious noise at 7:30 a.m., Quiet Car or not. Did you not hear the people downstairs asking each other what the annoying noises were and where they were coming from? Oops, my bad. It would be impossible for you to hear them over the annoyingly loud sounds coming from your phone!

Leanne

You know what they say about gamblers – they never make the same mistake twice. It’s usually three or more times.

Car for gamers

First you have the Quiet Car, now people want the hygiene car; I’m suggesting the video game car. I sat next to a person playing a game on a large screen and he was really getting into the game play. He was bouncing around, twisting and turning, arms flying away, a very active player; so much so that he bumped me a few times – and was very apologetic each time. I can see a whole carload of these players where they can be corralled and only cause harm to fellow players.

Doris

We can see it too, and it’s not a pretty sight.



No time to text

I have to tell everyone with a Blackberry or smart phone of any kind: when you get off the train at Ogilvie and are walking with the throngs of people into the station – DO NOT text or e-mail while walking. When you do so, you block the rest of us because you either stop completely or you walk so slowly that the rest of us are stuck behind you. We can’t even safely pass you, because you’re so intently texting or e-mailing that you do not walk a straight line. Rest assured, ALL of us behind you have Blackberries and smart phones

too; yet we contain our business until we are out of the way.

Debbie

ur msg made us lol. but u have a gr8 point. pls do ur txtng b4 u leave da train or after u leave da station. it’s E123. thx & MTFBWY. :-)

Escalator etiquette

Just a note regarding the escalator at LaSalle St. Station. On the way to the train I took the escalator up. Most people had the common courtesy to stand to the right. Then there was the two woman standing next to one another, not walking. As I

approached them, I politely said “Excuse me,” to which the one lady on the left slowly moved. After I passed, both of them shouted to me to “Take the stairs next time.” First off, I don’t want to take the stairs. Secondly, I prefer to use the escalator because it “escalates” my walking time. Thirdly, simple etiquette calls for those using an escalator to stand to the right and leave the left cleared. You tell me to take the stairs as if the escalator was not for people like me who want to keep moving. If you just stand to the right side, like proper etiquette dictates, we would not have any issues. Just saying.

Matt

Agreed, escalators should be for raising bodies, not tensions. There are always going to be those who want to ride and those who want to move. The best way to accommodate both sets is to stand right, walk left and be courteous on either side.

Annoying exercise

Of course we all get annoyed with cell phones and headphones, but watching someone use the train as their fitness center is probably the most disturbing annoyance yet. Squats in the vestibule, laying across the upstairs seats doing scissors, going down in the yoga “dog” pose, lifting your leg all the way up on the top railing to stretch your leg, is more than I can stomach first thing in the morning. I know we all live busy lives but please find 30 minutes to exercise somewhere other than the Metra!

Disturbed

We’re all for exercising your rights and using your commuting time wisely, but that is a bit over the top...

Summer Travel Notes

McCoy joins Metra Board

Mike McCoy is the newest member of the Metra Board of Directors, joining the board at its July meeting. He replaced Caryl J. Van Overmeiren as the Kane County representative on the board. Mr. McCoy is a lifelong resident of Aurora and Kane County and a former chairman of the Kane County Board (1996-2004). He is a professional engineer who currently works as a senior project manager for Omega & Associates in Lisle, where he manages large construction projects such as the recent resurfacing of the Eisenhower Expy.

Sign up for pre-tax transit benefits

Cook County companies can be rewarded with up to \$1,700 for increasing the number of their employees who sign up to receive pre-tax benefits for their costs of commuting on mass transit. The Transit Ridership Improvement Program aims to increase mass transit use by

spreading the word about the benefits of pre-tax transit benefits for employers and workers alike. Workers save money by spending pre-tax dollars for their transit commuting costs and companies reduce their payroll tax obligations and create a valuable benefit for workers. For more about how your company can receive incentives to offer pre-tax transit benefits, go to www.lesstaxingcommute.com and click on the Transit Ridership Improvement Program link, or call James Drew at 773-269-4081 or email to jdrew@cnt.org

Citizens Advisory Board to meet August 26

The Metra Citizens Advisory Board has scheduled a special meeting for August 26 in the Metra Board Room at 547 W. Jackson to discuss Metra's 2012 budget. The function of the CAB is to meet with the Metra Board of Directors periodically and provide counsel on how Metra policies, programs and services affect constituents.

Air

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The first outbound and inbound runs, with no modifications to the train, established a baseline measurement. The second outbound and inbound runs studied an unmodified train that did not enter Union Station. The remaining runs tested the impact of using high-quality filters, installing hoods over the fresh air intakes and exhaust vents, installing an exhaust deflector on the locomotive and manually closing fresh air dampers.

The test using the high-efficiency filters, known as MERV 13 filters, showed the most improvement by far over the baseline test. The other strategies that were tested had a less dramatic impact.

The filters, a step up from the MERV 8 filters that Metra has been using, reduced the average carbon level in the cars closest to the engine by 77 percent for the outbound run and 88 percent for the inbound run. The filters

also reduced the "spikes," or the highest levels of soot that occurred during the run. For the car closest to the engine, the highest spike dropped 74 percent on the outbound test and 99 percent on the inbound test.

The MERV 13 filters are more than twice as expensive as MERV 8 filters and require changing every two months instead of every six months. The cost to upgrade to the better filter will be about \$200,000 a year in materials and labor. The filters should be installed on all 839 passenger cars by the end of September at the latest.

Metra already has implemented procedures to reduce engine idling at Union Station and Amtrak is investigating ways to do the same. In addition, Amtrak is working with the owners of the old post office and other buildings above the tracks to make sure they are fulfilling their responsibilities to properly ventilate the area.

Metra also has switched to using only ultra-low sulfur diesel fuel, which reduces emissions by about 8 percent.

Tech

(Continued from Page 1)

such a universal fare card, but I am confident we will use the best and brightest team to meet the deadline. One key challenge will be creating a card that will work with flat-rate fares on the CTA and Pace's closed systems (you have to enter through turnstiles or past a bus operator) while at the same time working with Metra's distance-based fares and open system. The solution will almost certainly lie with some way for the new cards to be scanned or read on our system, either at our stations or by our conductors.

The new law also calls for other technological advances that will aid riders. For instance, it requires us to implement a real-time tracking system so riders can see the actual arrival time of their train on their computer or web-enabled phone. Metra had already begun an upgrade to our global positioning satellite system and so we should have no

problem providing a train-tracker system by next July's deadline.

The new law also directs Metra to conduct a study regarding the installation of automated external defibrillators on our trains and report back to Springfield next year. Again, Metra already had formed a robust AED committee involving various departments and outside medical experts. The committee has been looking at our peer agencies and evaluating the best practices.

Finally, the law directs the RTA to study the feasibility of providing wi-fi service on all fixed-route buses and trains and directs Metra to provide such service by January 2012, as long as it can be done at no cost to Metra. Metra had already solicited no-cost proposals from wi-fi providers and we are currently evaluating them.

We at Metra are excited about the technological change that is coming in the not-too-distant future. We are committed to making it happen for the benefit of all our riders.

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