We’ve come a long way in the 40 years since Metra was born, and we are so very grateful that you’ve joined us for this journey...

Together, we’ve seen major changes in the last four decades. We inherited a threadbare system from private railroads, and with the aid of taxpayers and our loyal customers we rebuilt and replaced downtown stations, outlying stations, tracks and signals and other infrastructure.

We bought new locomotives and new railcars.

We modernized and stabilized and standardized service across the region, and even expanded it.

We survived underground floods, polar vortexes and global pandemics.

We provided hundreds of millions of rides.

And we gained a reputation for timeliness, reliability and safety that is second to none.

We know there is more work to do, and we have no intention of resting on our laurels. But like anyone else turning 40, we’ll take a moment to reflect on what we’ve accomplished so far while acknowledging that we’re not done yet.

Just as Springfield was responsible for the birth of Metra, Springfield will have a large say in deciding what comes next. The funding model that our region used for decades no longer works in the new post-COVID world.

Will Illinois now provide additional subsidies, and if so, how? What changes will be made, if any, to how public transit is governed? What other changes might also happen? Those are the questions that our state lawmakers will be tackling in the coming months.

For Metra, we will continue to demonstrate our value to the region. We will remain the most affordable, safest, most reliable, most comfortable, most relaxing option to get around. With the right funding, we can expand our service to be more useful to more regional residents.

We’ve devoted this issue of My Metra to a celebration of our first 40 years. After we blow out the candles, we’ll be devoting all our efforts to make sure we’re around another 40 years and more.
TAKE OUR READER SURVEY

My Metra is your magazine. So, of course, we want to know what you think of it. Do you like the content? Do you find it informative? What would you like to see in future issues? We want to hear from you.

The survey will take just a few moments. And with your help, we can create a magazine that is even more informative, engaging, enlightening, and fun.

Thanks for your help!
June 8, 1984
The Commuter Rail Service Board meets for the first time.

July 12, 1985
The Board adopts the word “Metra” as a service mark.

August 1, 1985
The first locomotive painted with Metra’s blue and orange colors makes its debut. It is named after Kane County.

Winter 1985
First issue of the passenger newsletter, On the Bi-Level, is published.
For most of Chicago’s history, commuter rail was operated by various private railroads. But they had been losing money for decades due to fewer riders (lost to the car and the subsidized CTA) and higher costs (accelerated by inflation in the early 70s). There was not enough money to operate the trains and invest in the system, and the railroads were threatening to discontinue commuter service.

To keep the railroads running, voters in the six-county region in 1974 approved the creation of the Regional Transportation Authority. Initially, the RTA just provided subsidies to the private railroads (and assistance to the struggling CTA and suburban bus companies). But when the Rock Island and Milwaukee Road railroads went bankrupt, the RTA in 1981 formed the Northeast Illinois Railroad Corporation (NIRC) to start running the trains directly.

For a variety of reasons, including city-suburban squabbles, “Council Wars,” and a cash crunch that doubled commuter fares, Springfield reorganized and decentralized the RTA in 1983. It created a special Commuter Rail Division to coordinate and oversee all commuter rail operations in the six-county area, and a Suburban Bus Division (Pace) to address suburban bus issues. The new rail division, starting work in 1984, would continue to provide subsidies to the private railroads that were still solvent and through the NIRC operate the Rock Island and Milwaukee lines.

But it also had to make up for decades of underinvestment, end a rollercoaster ride of fares going up and down, standardize service and fares from line to line, stabilize or acquire the struggling private rail lines and check off a laundry list of other chores.

Due to the patchwork nature of commuter rail at the time, the division in 1985 came up with “Metra” (short for “Metropolitan Rail”) as a service mark. The idea was to bring a unifying identity to all the various components. That system still is in place, although the ownership and/or operators of several lines have changed.

Metra acquired the Metra Electric from Illinois Central Gulf in 1987, a transaction that included the NIRC taking over operations of (but not ownership of) the Heritage Corridor Line. It also took over the SouthWest Service (from Norfolk Southern) in 1993, and in 1996, started a whole new line – the North Central Service – the first new commuter line in Chicago in about 70 years.

Metra still subsidizes operations on four lines – the three Union Pacific (UP) lines and the BNSF Line, which are owned and operated by those freight railroads. (Metra and UP are currently negotiating Metra taking over operations on, but not ownership of, those three lines.)

While capital funding has never been sufficient, Metra over the years managed to make major improvements to rolling stock and infrastructure, including downtown stations, a noticeable change from the threadbare system it inherited. And recent state and federal capital infusions have allowed Metra to undertake the biggest capital program in its history, though we still can’t afford to do everything that’s needed.

Operating funding swung from stability to crisis over the years, until COVID-19 completely upended the funding model. Thanks to the pandemic, Metra, CTA and Pace are now threatened with funding shortfalls that echo those faced 40 years ago.
THE ROAD TO THE METRA SYSTEM

Our region has always been a great center for rail transportation, and over the years Metra has established itself as our nation’s fourth-busiest commuter rail system and the largest outside the New York City area. It all came together by bringing together historic rail lines that served our area. Here is their history.

METRA ELECTRIC

Started: By Illinois Central Railroad, which was chartered in 1851 to build a railroad from Cairo to Centralia (named for the railroad) and then branch from Centralia to Chicago and to Galena. The 700 miles of track were completed in 1856.

- “Suburban service” to Hyde Park started on July 21, 1856. (Hyde Park wasn’t part of Chicago until 1899.)
- The branch lines were added in 1883 (South Chicago, extended to 93rd by Metra in 2000) and 1892 (Blue Island) and service was extended south, eventually to what is now University Park in 1977.
- Metra bought the line for $26 million in 1987. It is the only electrified line (finished in 1926) and has the newest fleet of cars. Under a multimillion-dollar, multiyear project, 15 stations along the line are being rehabbed and made accessible.

ROCK ISLAND

Started: As the Chicago and Rock Island Railroad, which operated its first train between its downtown station near Van Buren St. and Joliet in 1852.

- Commuter service really started when the first part of the Beverly Branch was built in 1870; that part was extended to the current alignment in 1889. Stations were opened in Midlothian, New Lenox, Tinley Park and Mokena by 1905 and Oak Forest by 1911.
- The Rock Island Railroad entered bankruptcy in 1975; the new Regional Transportation Authority assumed operation of the commuter service in 1981 and bought the commuter assets in 1982 (turning it over to Metra in 1984).
- Metra added a station at the White Sox stadium in 2011 and is building the new Auburn Park Station at 79th St.

June 15, 1990
Smoking banned on all trains.

January 17, 1992
Metra buys 173 new wheelchair accessible coaches from Morrison Knudsen. (The order was completed by Amerail.)

April 1992
LaSalle St. Station renovation completed.

April 13, 1992
Metra gets people home early following the infamous Loop flood. (Metra’s HQ at 547 W. Jackson was flooded, too.)

May 28, 1993
Metra takes control of operations on the Norfolk Southern tracks and renames the line the SouthWest Service.
**SOUTHWEST SERVICE**

**Started:** The tracks were laid in 1880 by the Wabash Railway and Chicago & Western Indiana Railroad (which was owned by Wabash and other railroads). They eventually became part of Norfolk Southern.

- Commuter service began as early as 1893, operating as far south as Orland Park, but was never particularly robust.
- Metra took over operation of the service from Norfolk Southern in 1993 and named the line the SouthWest Service. (There were four trains a day at that point.)
- Metra extended service from 143rd St. to 179th St. by the mid-1990s and extended it another 12 miles to Manhattan in 2006. Stations were added and upgraded, and parking was expanded.

**HERITAGE CORRIDOR**

**Started:** As the Joliet & Chicago Railroad in 1856, but really was envisioned as the Chicago, Alton and St. Louis Railroad’s route into Chicago from Joliet and soon became part of that railroad. They eventually became part of the Baltimore and Ohio, then Gulf Mobile & Ohio, then Illinois Central.

- Lemont and Lockport are the oldest depots in the Metra system; those stations were already built when President Lincoln’s funeral train passed through on its way to his burial in Springfield.
- When Illinois Central sold the Metra Electric Line to Metra in 1987, it also handed over commuter operations on the Chicago-Joliet route, although it still owned the tracks.
- Metra still operates the line, which it renamed the Heritage Corridor, but the tracks are now owned by CN. Romeoville Station was added in 2018.

**BNSF**

**Started:** As the Aurora Branch Railroad, which connected Aurora to the Galena and Chicago Union Railroad (now the UP West Line) in what is now West Chicago in 1850. It built its own route between Aurora and Chicago in 1864 as the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad.

- The first trains primarily carried milk, hay and wheat to Chicago from small agricultural towns such as Naperville, Downers Grove, Hinsdale and La Grange.
- In 1950, Burlington became the first Chicago area railroad to use stainless steel, bi-level, air-conditioned gallery cars (some of which are still in service). In 1965, it started to use a push-pull operation.
- BNSF Railway still owns the BNSF Line and operates the commuter service with its own crews under a purchase-of-service agreement with Metra.

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**December 1994**  
The SouthWest Service is extended from 143rd St. to 179th St.

**April 1995**  
Union Pacific Railroad buys Chicago & North Western and assumes control of its three lines in Chicago.

**November 1995**  
metrarail.com (now metra.com) debuts.

**August 18, 1996**  
Service begins on the North Central Service, the first new commuter route in Chicago in more than 70 years.

**October 15, 1997**  
The former Chicago & North Western terminal is renamed the Ogilvie Transportation Center after the former Illinois governor following a major reconstruction project.
**NORTH CENTRAL SERVICE**

**Started:** By Metra, in 1996, over tracks first built by the original Wisconsin Central Railroad in the late 19th century.

- The Soo Line took control of the tracks in 1909, sold them to a new Wisconsin Central in 1987, which was then bought by Canadian National, the current owner, in 2001. There was never any real commuter service before Metra.
- The 53-mile, $131.4 million line had about 1,000 passengers ride on the first day, boarding one of the 10 trains on the initial timetable.
- By January 2006, Metra added a second track, four new stations and 20 more daily trains.

**MILWAUKEE ROAD**

The two Milwaukee lines were once part of the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad, known as the Milwaukee Road. The once-mighty Milwaukee Road had a long and storied history that ended in bankruptcy in the late 1970s. In 1982, the RTA started operating service on the routes. Metra took ownership in 1987.

**MILWAUKEE DISTRICT WEST**

**Started:** As the Atlantic & Pacific Railroad on its charter in 1865, but the name was changed to the Chicago & Pacific Railroad by the time it got going in 1871.

- The first tracks were laid on July 10, 1872, and they reached Elgin a year later. An 1874 timetable shows four round trips daily between Chicago and Elgin. The one-way fare was $1.25.
- In 1879, the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad (a.k.a. the Milwaukee Road) acquired a controlling interest in the C&P and leased it in perpetuity a year later.
- What was once a C&P right of way just northwest of downtown fell into disuse and was later turned into Chicago’s Bloomingdale Trail at the 606.

**MILWAUKEE DISTRICT NORTH**

**Started:** By the Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad, which added Chicago to its name when the tracks were laid in 1872, becoming the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad.

- The railroad helped establish Morton Grove’s famous greenhouses and Northbrook’s brick businesses (bricks were in high demand following the 1871 Chicago Fire).
- In 1881, a three-mile spur to Libertyville was built from the mainline at Rondout. The extension of the spur to Fox Lake began in 1899.
- Commuter rail service grew slowly over the years, with the spur to Fox Lake eventually becoming the main commuter route.

**April 3, 1998**

Metra announces that every train on every line will now have at least one car that is accessible to people with disabilities.

**December 13, 2000**

Metra orders 300 new cars from Nippon Sharyo, still the largest procurement of railcars in Metra history.

**January 12, 2001**

Metra orders 27 new MP36-3S locomotives from Motive Power Industries.

**September 11, 2001**

Metra wins praise from riders for scrambling to get them home early following the Sept. 11 attacks.

**October 11, 2002**

Metra orders 26 new Highliner cars for the Metra Electric Line.
CHICAGO & NORTH WESTERN

The three Metra lines now owned by Union Pacific spent most of their existence as part of Chicago & North Western. In the late 1950s C&NW won praise for seeking to catch up on deferred maintenance, modernize ticketing and collection, revise schedules and adjust fares. It also introduced bi-level coaches and shuttered about 20 close-in stations in 1958 to concentrate on suburban service. In 1960, it was the first commuter railroad to use the push-pull format. C&NW was bought by UP in 1995. UP still owns the railroad and operates the trains, although it is now negotiating to have Metra assume control.

UNION PACIFIC NORTH

Started: In 1851, as the Chicago & Milwaukee Railroad, and became part of C&NW in 1866.

- The Chicago & Milwaukee reached Waukegan in 1854, and passenger service began immediately.
- In 1869, service between Chicago and Kenosha consisted of seven trains each way daily. The trip from Kenosha took about two hours and 10 minutes.
- In 1896, work began to elevate the C&NW tracks and bridge over streets on the north side of Chicago and in Evanston to comply with ordinances aimed at eliminating grade crossing accidents. (Those bridges are now being replaced in Metra's UP North bridge replacement project.)

UNION PACIFIC NORTHWEST

Started: As the Illionois & Wisconsin Railroad, which received a charter in 1871.

- The line opened with passenger train service in 1854, with one roundtrip daily between Chicago and the area near Palatine and Barrington.
- After a bankruptcy and several mergers, what had been the Illinois & Wisconsin Railroad became part of the Chicago & North Western Railroad in 1864.
- By 1874, there were eight trains in each direction operating every day. You could buy an annual pass from Palatine to downtown for $95. (Adjusted for inflation, that’s about $2,500 today. A year’s worth of monthly passes from Palatine now cost just $1,620.)

UNION PACIFIC WEST

Started: As the Galena and Chicago Union Railroad, Chicago’s first railroad. It was chartered in 1836 but work did not begin until 1848. It merged with the C&NW in 1864.

- In October 1848, a small second-hand locomotive made a publicity run to what is now Oak Park pulling a couple of cars fitted with about 100 seats. (The “Pioneer” locomotive is now at the Chicago History Museum.)
- There was passenger service on the line almost from the beginning. The first passenger coach, built in Chicago for $2,000, arrived in 1849.
- The line was extended from Geneva to La Fox and Elburn in 2006. Work is currently underway to add a third track in the only remaining section that narrows to two near West Chicago.

January 30, 2003
Metra announces plans to build the suburb-to-suburb STAR Line. Two weeks later, it announces plans to build the SouthEast Service Line. (Both lines are back-burnered due to funding issues.)

June 22, 2003
A fire destroys a wooden Metra Electric Line bridge in Riverdale. Metra erects a replacement in about a week.

November 18, 2003
Metra removes turnstiles on the Metra Electric that had been installed by Illinois Central 40 years earlier.

June 1, 2005
Bikes are allowed on (non-peak) trains for the first time.

January 23, 2006
The UP West line is extended to La Fox and Geneva. A week later, North Central Service and SouthWest Service are extended.
WHAT ELSE HAPPENED BACK IN 1984, WHEN METRA WAS BORN?

- The Summer Olympics are in Los Angeles and the Winter Olympics in Sarajevo, Yugoslavia.
- Ronald Reagan was reelected, winning every state but Minnesota.
- Sally Ride became the first U.S. woman in space.
- The Macintosh (128 KB of RAM!) debuted with an Orwellian Super Bowl ad.
- Thomas the Tank Engine started making friends on the rails.
- Chrysler created the first minivans.
- Band Aid asked, “Do They Know it’s Christmas?”
- Clara Peller asked, “Where’s the beef?”
- Ghostbusters asked, “Who you gonna call?”
- The Chicago Cubs made the playoffs (Steve Garvey! Leon Durham!)
- Ed Debevic’s opened in Chicago
- Murder She Wrote, Miami Vice and The Cosby Show debuted.
- It was the year “When Doves Cry” thanks to Prince.
- Who made his debut as the host of Jeopardy?
- Mark Zuckerberg, LeBron James & Katy Perry were born.
- L.A. Raiders, Detroit Tigers and Boston Celtics win championships.
LOOKING BACK AT SOUN丁ING OFF

For most of Metra’s history—until the pandemic changed everything—the Metra passenger newsletter was known as On the Bi-Level. And for most of its history, On the Bi Level was known for “Sound Off,” a monthly feature that chronicled the commuting experience through letters from riders.

Mostly, the letters were gripes from riders about other riders. As we described the feature when it was introduced in 1989: “Does something that happens on your train get your goat? Tell us. We expose goat-getters.”

People who hogged seats were a frequent target. (“If you want a seat for your belongings, buy an extra ticket.”) Or people who threw recently clipped fingernails or peanut shells on the floor. (“Where did he think he was, Wrigley Field?”)

Or people who too noisily jangled their keys, or slurped their coffee, or turned their newspaper pages. (“There is a polite way to turn pages and there is a rude way.”) People who stood in the aisle as the train pulled in. People who stayed seated and expected the standees to let them off first. (“To equate prematurely standing in the aisles with waiting in line is a preposterous notion.”) Women who applied their makeup on the train. People who put their feet, muddy or otherwise, on the seat or over the first level.

Sometimes the complaints struck readers as preposterously petty, and we were accused of making them up (never!). And sometimes the complaints were about the complaints (“These whiners who write to you should all be condemned to riding CTA for a month!”) or Metra’s perceived endorsement of or lack of action about the bad manners at hand.

“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,” we responded.

“Where did he think he was, Wrigley Field?”
WHERE DID THE METRA NAME COME FROM?

You could be reading My Cord, My Corta or My Trac right now.

Instead, you’re reading My Metra, because that is the name picked for the RTA’s new commuter rail division by its Board of Directors nearly 40 years ago.

The Board wanted a service mark that would bring the complicated patchwork of rail lines under one umbrella. Their final choices, as outlined in a memo from the April 9, 1985, Board meeting, were:

- **CORD (Commuter Rail Division)**
  A very direct approach. The entire name describes the organization while the word “CORD” describes the rail network.

- **METRA (Metropolitan Rail)**
  A combination of words that suggests a commuter-oriented service by the wide use of “Metro” to represent commuter transportation. The “a” ending gives it distinctiveness.

- **CORTA (Commuter Rail Division of the RTA)**
  By incorporating “RTA” in the name, the relationship between the two organizations is suggested.

- **TRAC (Total Rail Access)**
  The word “TRAC” quickly identifies this as a rail service. The entire name states the benefit to the user.

While some made fun of the name at first (one newspaper columnist called it “the dumbest thing I heard of in my entire life”), the name stuck and was so successful that many riders today don’t realize that four lines (BNSF and the three Union Pacific lines) are still run by freight railroads.
The people who designed our timetables way back when picked colors for the timetables based on each line’s history. They even made up names for each color.

**UP North Line**
The old C&NW (now Union Pacific) used green and yellow. So those colors were natural for its timetables. “Flambeau Green” is named for the Flambeau 400 train to Wisconsin. (“Flambeau” is the French word for torch, used by natives to fish at night.)

**UP Northwest Line**
“Viking Yellow” is named for the C&NW Viking train to Minnesota.

**UP West**
With green and yellow already used, they opted for “Kate Shelley Rose,” named for a teenage girl from Iowa who saved a train from disaster in 1881.

**Milwaukee District North**
“Hiawatha Orange” is named for the Milwaukee Road’s famed Hiawatha trains.

**Milwaukee District West**
“Arrow Yellow” is named for the Milwaukee Road’s Arrow train to Nebraska.

**BNSF Railway**
“Kelly Green” or “Cascade Green” is named for the color used by the BN.

**Heritage Corridor**
“Alton Maroon” is named for the color used by the Alton Railroad.

**SouthWest Service**
“Banner Blue” is named for the Wabash Railroad’s Banner Blue train.

**Rock Island Line**
“Rocket Red” is named for the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad’s Rocket trains.

**Metra Electric**
“Panama Orange” is named for the Illinois Central Railroad’s Panama Limited passenger train.

**North Central Service**
It’s just purple.
As the days get longer and temperatures rise, our region comes alive with events, festivals, shows, and more. Don’t let road construction stop you from enjoying everything the season has to offer. Metra can eliminate all the stress of highway congestion and the high cost of gas and parking. The events listed here are just a few highlights of all you can enjoy during summer in the city.

Getting around our area is easy on Metra. Metra offers a wide array of fare options, including Day Passes and the money-saving Day Pass 5-Pack, as well as Saturday, Sunday, Weekend and Holiday Passes. There are special savings for groups and with our Family Fares, up to three children aged 11 or under ride free with fare-paying adults. So, this season Drive Less and Do More with Metra.

**NASCAR IS BACK FOR 2024**

This two-day festival of racing and music in the heart of Chicago was such a success in 2023, it’s back again on Saturday and Sunday, July 6-7. Don’t miss it…and leave the driving to the professionals. Take Metra to all the action. Learn more at nascarchicago.com
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<th>EVENT / ATTRACTION</th>
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<tr>
<td>Chicago Fire</td>
<td>Through October 19</td>
<td>Soldier Field</td>
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<td>Chicago White Sox</td>
<td>Through September 26</td>
<td>Guaranteed Rate Field</td>
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<td>Chicago Cubs</td>
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<td>Chicago Sky</td>
<td>Through September 14</td>
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<td>Buckingham Fountain</td>
<td>Through Mid-October</td>
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<td>007 Science: Inventing the World of James Bond</td>
<td>Through October 27</td>
<td>Museum of Science &amp; Industry</td>
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<td>Chicago Area Beaches</td>
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<td>Hamill Family Wild Encounters</td>
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<td>Butterflies &amp; Blooms</td>
<td>End of May-Labor Day</td>
<td>Chicago Botanic Garden</td>
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<td>Chicago Gospel Music Festival</td>
<td>June 1</td>
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<td>Georgia O’Keeffe Exhibition</td>
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<td>Art Institute of Chicago</td>
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<td>Six The Musical</td>
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<td>Chicago Blues Festival</td>
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<td>Ramova Theatre Millennium Park</td>
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<td>Puerto Rican Festival</td>
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<td>Grant Park Music Festival</td>
<td>June 12-August 17</td>
<td>Millennium Park</td>
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<td>Ribfest Chicago</td>
<td>June 14-16</td>
<td>Lincoln Avenue and Irving Park Road</td>
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<td>Gold Coast Art Fair</td>
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<td>Chicago Pride Parade</td>
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<td>African/Caribbean International Festival of Life</td>
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<td>Millennium Park Film Series</td>
<td>July 9-August 27</td>
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<td>Windy City Smokeout</td>
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<td>Chosen Few Picnic &amp; Music Festival</td>
<td>July 13</td>
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<td>Millennium Park 20th Anniversary Celebration</td>
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<td>Pitchfork Music Festival</td>
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<td>George Strait Concert</td>
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<td>Fiesta del Sol</td>
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<td>Lollapalooza</td>
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Free Rides to Ravinia

Once again, for all summer 2024 performances all trains on the Union Pacific North Line will honor Ravinia tickets as train fares. Just show your dated concert ticket for a free train ride to and from the park on the performance date. Visit Ravinia.org for details and a full calendar of this season’s performances.

Your Bike Is Welcome on Board

Now is a great time to hit the more than 4,800 miles of bike trails in our region. And Metra has made it even easier to bring your bike on board. There are new bike racks, dedicated bike cars, no additional charge to bring a bike on the train, and E-bikes and E-scooters are welcome. Check out metra.com/bikes for details.
In a world where speed and efficiency reign supreme, there are those who find comfort in the gentle rhythm of the rails. Meet Lori Rosiejka, a devoted Metra passenger who has spent the last four decades crisscrossing the Chicagoland area by train.

**When did you start riding Metra and why?**

I started taking the Rock Island Line in 1978 from Tinley Park to Chicago. It was my first job in the city and there was really no other way to get downtown, other than driving. I moved to West Chicago in 1995 and have been taking the UP West Line since then.

**How has Metra changed throughout the years?**

Of course, when I started commuting, smoking was allowed on the train. Then smoking cars and bar cars were added. I think the smoking cars were taken away in the early ‘90s and the bar cars were discontinued years later. Other than a few schedule changes and fare adjustments, not much has changed—at least for me.

**What can you tell me about the crew members over the years?**

Most recently, I have met Mark (Lilly) and Drew (Woodard) on the 51 out of Chicago. I could take an earlier train home, but I enjoy riding with them. They are friendly, funny, and most of all, kind. I had surgery in January and on my last day on the train before surgery, Mark (on the right) and Drew (on the left) gave me flowers. Seriously, how nice is that?

**What is your hope for Metra’s future?**

My hope is that Metra stays up and running for future commuters. I hope they continue to grow and add lines. For strictly selfish reasons, for the West Line commuters who live in the far western suburbs, it would be nice to have an express train to West Chicago!

**If there is anything else, you want to share with us?**

I have so many stories of my years on the train. I have read countless books and met so many nice, friendly people. I ride the train now with my good friend Trudy, who I met on the train. I hope to retire soon, and I will miss the camaraderie, but not the commute time!
Three employees are celebrating a remarkable milestone—they are the only three who have been with Metra for all of its 40 years (in fact, they all started with predecessor railroads). Through the highs and lows, Salvador Ochoa, Kevin Clifford, and Leonard Hasse have remained committed to their roles, contributing their skills and unwavering dedication to the success and growth of the organization.

**How has Metra changed?**

**Salvador:** Oh man it’s grown! It started small, it has grown immensely, and I’ve been around since the beginning of it so it’s pretty cool. The passengers have changed, they are different, there are a lot of good people riding our trains. There are a lot of people that come from out of town, and I look for them; I go the extra mile for them, I make them feel welcome.

**Kevin:** Technology and the way they treat employees.

**Leonard:** Not much change at all.

**Would you recommend Metra to a young person starting out?**

**Salvador:** Yes, Metra has been great to me, it put a roof over my head, supported my family, helped send kids to college, it’s been great.

**Kevin:** Yes! Opportunities are here if you want it, but you must want it and you have to be conscientious and work hard.

**Leonard:** Yes! I love my job, I do, otherwise I wouldn’t have worked for 55 plus years. I like everything about my job, you can’t be fussy.

**What’s your advice to a new employee?**

**Salvador:** You don’t need a master’s degree, just work and be conscientious, take care of your job, come to work, be responsible and follow the guidelines, but the sky is the limit.

**Kevin:** Work hard in your efforts and your time because hard work helps you in the end.

**Leonard:** Always do what the boss says.

Three employees are celebrating a remarkable milestone—they are the only three who have been with Metra for all of its 40 years (in fact, they all started with predecessor railroads). Through the highs and lows, Salvador Ochoa, Kevin Clifford, and Leonard Hasse have remained committed to their roles, contributing their skills and unwavering dedication to the success and growth of the organization.
THE CHOO CHOO
600 LEE ST., DES PLAINES, IL 60016

For our anniversary issue, we decided to take you to a restaurant that has been around even longer than Metra.

Step into a train lover’s paradise at The Choo Choo — located just off the Des Plaines Station on the UP Northwest Line. This family-friendly diner has been open for 73 years and features railroad paraphernalia, a real train whistle, and a locomotive that brings your food directly to your seat.

Opened in 1951, The Choo Choo has been family owned and operated ever since. With an old-school soda fountain, delicious burgers, and top-notch shakes and malts, this neighborhood favorite has only gotten better as time’s gone by. They even brought back “Champion: The Wonder Horse,” an original 1950s coin-operated horse ride that was a Choo Choo staple that had been missing for 20 years.

The Choo Choo has something for everyone. Whether you’re looking to keep it classic with a cheeseburger, warm up with some chili, or satisfy your sweet tooth with a homemade brownie or cupcake, you will never leave The Choo Choo hungry. Plus, food tastes better when it’s brought out to you on a motorized train, right?

“I recognized shortly after we opened that The Choo Choo was more than just a fun restaurant — that it really had to do with connecting families, really, in a very meaningful way,” said owner Dale Eisenberg.

The atmosphere at The Choo Choo is unbeatable. Made for families and small children, this restaurant most definitely caters to the young, and the young at heart. The friendly staff is always there to serve you with a smile, and they even give you special treats on your birthday! All in all, The Choo Choo is a Chicagoland institution and an absolute must-visit for everyone with a love for all things railroads. We congratulate them on 73 years and can’t wait to have them around for at least 73 more.

For more information visit them online at thechoochoo.com.
As Metra celebrates its past 40 years, it is also looking to its future by buying zero-emission, battery-powered trainsets. Metra will be one of the first in the nation to operate this innovative technology.

“This purchase demonstrates Metra’s commitment to cleaner power, to quieter trains, and to thinking outside the box as we plan for our future,” said Metra CEO/Executive Director Jim Derwinski. “We are excited to bring this technology, and its efficiency, flexibility, and reliability, to Chicago and to our riders.”

A trainset is a group of permanently or semi-permanently coupled railcars powered by a propulsion system without a separate locomotive, with operator controls at either end so they can quickly change directions. The contract with Stadler U.S., of Salt Lake City, Utah, includes a $154 million base order for eight two-car, battery-powered trainsets, including engineering, training, and spare parts, with options costing up to an additional $181.4 million for eight more trainsets and up to 32 trailer cars, which could be added to the two-car trainsets to create three- or four-car trainsets. The trainsets will have low-level boarding and will be equipped with lifts to make them ADA-compliant. They will include such features as passenger information signs, bike racks, luggage racks and USB outlets.

Metra believes the battery-powered trainsets could be a more economical and environmentally friendly way to provide the same level of service or better, particularly during off-peak times. The first sets are expected to be delivered in 2027-2028.
Just in time for the busy summer season, Metra significantly boosted weekend service on the BNSF Line, including offering weekend express service for the first time, with new schedules that debuted in April.

“We continue to listen to our riders and adjust our schedules to meet their needs,” said Metra CEO/Executive Director Jim Derwinski. “We’re especially excited to be offering more weekend service so that Metra is an even better option for anyone wanting to enjoy all the events and attractions that are part of summer in Chicago.”

Metra added six trains to the BNSF Line’s Saturday schedule and 16 trains to the line’s Sunday schedule. The changes mean that there is now the same level of service on both weekend days, with inbound hourly service from 5 a.m. to noon and from 2 p.m. to 7 p.m. and outbound hourly service from 10 a.m. to midnight. In addition, weekend trains no longer stop at the LaGrange Stone Avenue Station but do stop at the nearby LaGrange Road Station.

Metra also adjusted the schedule on the UP North Line when it added the new Peterson Ridge Station to the schedule May 20.

The 95th Street/Chicago State University Station on the Metra Electric Line is due for a major makeover that will start this year. The project aims to improve accessibility to the station, improve connectivity to Chicago State University, enhance the customer experience, and provide greater access for park-and-ride commuters.
DuPage County recognizes the great partnership our communities have had with Metra for 40 years. Metra has 26 stations in DuPage County and transports more than 50,000 people every weekday between those stations and the rest of the region. Metra services are important to the region in so many ways. They save the region from additional roadway congestion and the resulting greenhouse gases. Metra’s safety record is stellar and creates confidence in the population that families will safely reach their destination with a minimum of worry. DuPage County looks forward to the next forty years, to innovating new services and building a stronger, more resilient, transportation network.

—DuPage County

Metra celebrates its 40th Anniversary this year and I am pleased to congratulate them on their great stewardship to communities across the State of Illinois. Residents regularly depend on commuter trains to get to work and school, so it is imperative that we provide them with access to safe, fast, and low-cost public transportation. This monumental achievement is a testament to their committed approach to improving the quality of life for those who rely on public transit and making it equitable for every person regardless of their zip code.

—Senator Laura Ellman
District 21
Why did you purchase rail cars for bicycles with stairs? Lower cars would work from Union and Ogilvie stations.

— Susan

Those cars aren’t new—they were purchased, in some cases, many decades ago. What we are doing is taking old cars with stairs and creating spaces for bicycles, which is all we can do until we have procured cars with lower floors. But while we don’t currently have any cars with lower floors, because we haven’t had the money to buy new cars until recently, we have placed an order for some; the first cars from that order are expected in August 2025.

I wanted to know if Metra has any future plans to begin connecting suburbs from different lines. It would be so convenient to be able to take a train from West Chicago to Schaumburg or Schaumburg to Aurora, but since the lines don’t connect it’s obviously not an option.

— Sam R.

We have planned for such a connection but lacked the funding to pursue it. And while our funding situation has improved substantially, we still don’t have money to do everything we need and want to do. Our priority, for now, remains maintaining and improving our existing system, not any expansion projects, for that reason.

I ride on the Quiet Car to accommodate my sensory needs. Towards the end of my morning commute, I will often move forward a car and stand in the aisle along with the other eager beavers aiming to get off first (and furthest forward) at Ogilvie. Is it considered bad train etiquette to move to the head car before exiting?

— Sam M.

Back when we still put out our passenger newsletter, “On the Bi-Level,” your letter would have set off a lively debate between the “stay seated until the train stops” group and the “crowd the aisles two stops earlier” group. Over the years there was no clear consensus on the right approach. We suspect some people would be annoyed by your moving up a car, while others would say no problem, and others wouldn’t even notice. In other words, the Court of Public Opinion would be split, and we have no appellate court.

For those portions of Metra’s lines that are elevated in Chicago, what are the railroad embankments made out of? Is it landfill?

— C

Sand and gravel were used for the fill. Landfill was not used because organic material has poor structural qualities and tends to settle over time.
Chicago commuter railroads provided **56.4 million** passenger trips.

There were **3,481 trains** a week.

The average trip distance was **20.74 miles**.

A One-Way Ticket to the farthest stations cost **$5.80**.

The average price for a gallon of gas was **$1.24**.

There were **52,602 parking spaces** at stations.

7,730 bikes were brought on trains.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1983</th>
<th>2023</th>
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<tr>
<td>Chicago commuter railroads provided</td>
<td>56.4 million passenger trips.</td>
<td>Metra provided 32 million.</td>
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<tr>
<td>There were</td>
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<td>There are 3,765.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The average trip distance was</td>
<td>20.74 miles.</td>
<td>Now it's 22.1 miles.</td>
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<td>A One-Way Ticket to the farthest stations cost</td>
<td>$5.80.</td>
<td>You can travel to the same stations for $6.75. (It would be $17.50 if it kept up with inflation.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>The average price for a gallon of gas was</td>
<td>$1.24.</td>
<td>It was $3.52 a gallon. (and climbing!)</td>
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<tr>
<td>There were</td>
<td>52,602 parking spaces at stations.</td>
<td>You can park in 92,387 spaces.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7,730 bikes were brought on trains.</td>
<td></td>
<td>260,000 bikes got a ride.</td>
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**Advertise with us to reach thousands of Metra riders.**

*My Metra* magazine is a great, cost-effective way to connect with thousands of consumers. Your ad will be seen by riders on all 11 of our rail lines and will appear online in the digital version of *My Metra*. For more information on advertising opportunities, email us at marketing@metrrr.com.
Transit is the answer to saving on your commute.

Enroll now for pre-tax savings at mytransitbenefit.com

$SSSS$ Use the promo code: Transit2024 to get the first three months of fees waived when you sign up by 6/30/24.