

UP North bridge work to resume

Project will require no schedule changes

Metra will resume work in April on a major project to replace 22 aging bridges along the Union Pacific North Line on the north side of Chicago, as well as to build a completely new Ravenswood Station.

Unlike last summer, when Metra tried to operate inbound and outbound UP North trains on a single track in the construction zone, the new plan calls for maintaining the existing two-track operation. That means the current UP North schedule will not be changed.

However, the new approach will cost up to \$42.2 million more, bringing the total cost of the project to \$215 million. That's because keeping two tracks open will require a new track to be built closer to the western edge of the elevated right of way, which in turn will require extensive and expensive retaining wall work to support the new track. It was Metra's desire to save money on the retaining wall work that prompted us to attempt the single-track plan last year.

The 22 bridges are more than 100 years old and can no longer be economically repaired and maintained. The new bridges will last for more than 100 years.

Their replacement will be done in two phases of 11 bridges each. The first phase, which will cost \$112 million and take until November 2015, will cover bridges over Balmoral, Foster, Winnemac, Law-

Metra will work to minimize impact on landscaping, Page 4

rence, Leland, Wilson, Sunnyside, Montrose, Berneau, Irving Park and Grace. Construction of the new Ravenswood Station, the only stop in the construction zone and the busiest stop on the UP North line, will also be done in the first phase.

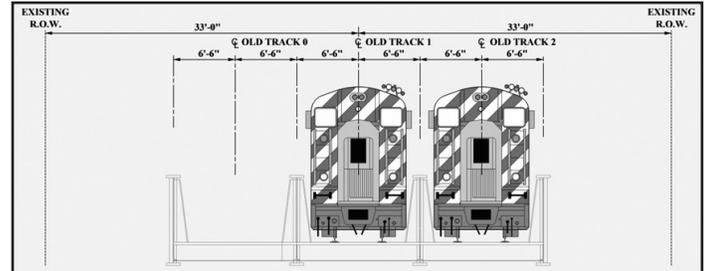
Bridges between Addison and Webster will be done in the second phase, which will cost \$103 million and will finish in November 2019.

The new Ravenswood Station, to be rebuilt in its current location, will offer longer, covered platforms, warming shelters, improved lighting, landscaping, a ticket office, vendor space, ramps and stairs. It will be compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

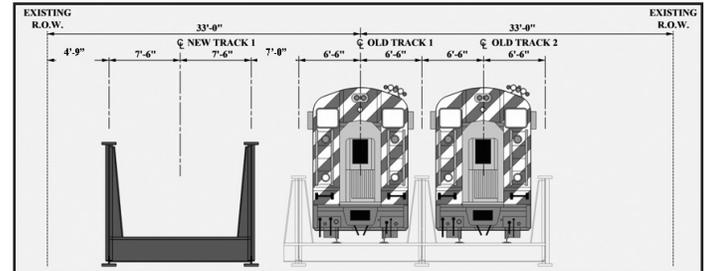
UP North trains have been using a temporary platform on the inbound side of Ravenswood since last fall. Trains will continue to use that platform until the first phase of the bridge project is done in 2015.

Now a temporary platform will also be built on the outbound side, north of Lawrence. Trains will use that temporary platform until the outbound side of the new station is completed in about two years.

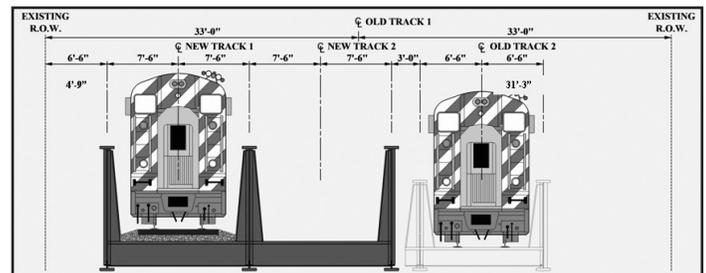
Construction updates and alerts will be sent to all riders who have signed up to receive them under the "My Metra" feature at Metra's website, www.metrarail.com.



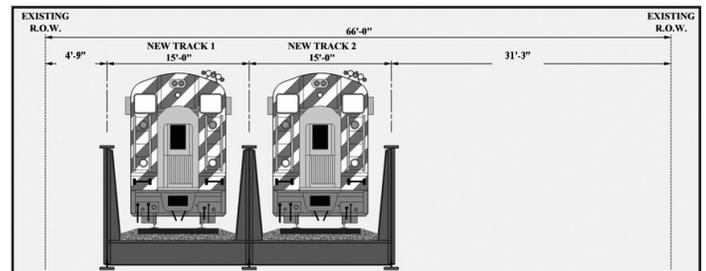
The UP North Line in the area used to have three tracks, but the third track was removed decades ago and now there are only two. The space for the third track, however, remains along the western edge of the right of way, and the bridges retain the third span.



The project will start by removing the spans for the old third track. New Track 1 bridges will be built and connected to a new Track 1. Because the new track will be closer to the western edge of the right of way, extensive retaining wall work will be needed. During this phase, trains will operate on old Tracks 1 and 2.



Once New Track 1 is done, trains will operate on New Track 1 and Old Track 2. Old Track 1 bridges will then be removed and New Track 2 spans will be built and connected to a New Track 2.



Trains will then operate on New Tracks 1 and 2. Old Track 2 will be removed, but the space will remain available to add a third span and track in the future if there is demand and money to do so.



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.

Board of Directors

Carole R. Doris
Chairman
DuPage County

Larry A. Huggins
Vice Chairman
Chicago

Jack Schaffer
Treasurer
McHenry County

Arlene J. Mulder
Secretary
Suburban Cook County

James V. Dodge
Director
Suburban Cook County

James C. LaBelle
Director
Lake County

Edward W. Paesel
Director
Suburban Cook County

Jack E. Partelow
Director
Will County

Willis E. Pennington Jr.
Director
Cook County

Caryl J. Van Overmeiren
Director
Kane County

William A. Widmer III
Director
Suburban Cook County

Alex Clifford
Executive Director/
Chief Executive Officer

SOUNDING BOARD

Got a question? We've got an answer

Man, the gates

I started a new job in Wood Dale in early January. I typically travel south on Wood Dale Road at about 6 p.m. weeknights. I have grown to become frustrated with the signal gates at the intersection of Irving Park Road and Wood Dale Road. The gates remain down far too long! The station seems far enough east of the intersection that there is no reason for the gates to be down the entire time that the train approaches the station, while boarding/deboarding then proceeding east or west. This is ridiculous. The gates could be timed differently to still be safe, yet let traffic flow and minimize wasted fuel consumption.

Dick

Eastbound trains should clear the intersection and then the gates should rise. However, westbound trains are a different matter (and that is likely what is affecting you at 6 p.m.). The traffic lights and gate crossing signals are all interconnected. When a train approaches, the signals and crossing protections are activated to clear the path for the train. Those protections can't assume the train is going to stop (they usually do stop, but for safety's sake they still have to be activated in case they don't). They stay down because we are trying to avoid a situation where the gates go down, go up, and then go back down again in quick succession, especially in rush hour. If we followed your suggestion, that's what would happen as a train approached, stopped at the station, then headed west again. A big risk is that traffic would get stuck on the tracks, creating a dangerous situation as well as gridlock. The system there was mandated by IDOT and approved by the Illinois Commerce Commission.

Passing the pass

I have a monthly ticket that I have been buying for years now. I had the day off and my wife wanted to go downtown so I let her use my ticket since I was not going to use it. When it came time for the conductor to check tickets he said she couldn't use it because it was for a man and if she tries to use it again he would take it from her. What's the big deal? I paid for a monthly spot on the train. If you are going to make such a big deal over male or female then you need to put passenger pictures and names on tickets. Why should I be forced to pay for a ticket when my monthly isn't being used on that day?

All would be fine if I was in a relationship with another man I guess so I'm going to call this discrimination! But seriously, that rule is stupid. A ticket equals a spot. End of story.

A Rider

You aren't supposed to share your ticket with anybody, male or female. We indicate gender simply to make it easy for conductors to spot the obvious sharing of tickets between a man and a woman. You are still not allowed to share with a man, but there is no equally easy way to catch that, short of requiring photos.

We've made it clear that our unlimited ride monthly pass does have one limit: it's good for only one person's use. It says so right on the back of the pass. We cannot allow the unlimited ride passes to be used by an unlimited number of people or we'd be broke in no time.

Electronic dreams

Are there any future plans for an electronic ticketing system on the suburban lines similar to that employed on the CTA system?

John

We can tell you that such a system has been looked at before over the years, and is being looked at again now. The challenge for us is the fact that a) we charge by distance traveled, and b) we have an "open" system, which means there are no turnstiles or other barriers to get into our stations. On the CTA, they have turnstiles and they charge a flat fare, so you pay once when you pass through the turnstile and ride until you exit another turnstile, and you pay the same amount whether you travel one stop or to the end of the line. We would need a system that would be able to tell how far the passenger traveled, which would likely entail some sort of a way to read a passenger's fare card when they start and when they end their trip. Enclosing our stations would do that – but that would be prohibitively expensive and impractical. So we have to come up with another way. Perhaps we could have a rider "tap on" a reader at the start and "tap off" at the end, though that may be cumbersome, especially for the masses getting off downtown. Or maybe we could have a system that is a combination of electronic readers and conductors. There are certainly many options to explore, and most of them are going to be pretty expensive.

App-lication

I am requesting that you guys design phone apps for Windows Phone 7, iPhone, Android, and Blackberry. A lot of people would love this app.

Antonio

We've made the decision to not do apps because we can't afford the development and upkeep costs, especially for multiple platforms. That's why we have a mobile website that can be viewed by all.

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

Get outta the way

To the person getting out of the Acura who took umbrage at being honked at on the morning of March 7 at the Route 59 train station: when your ride blocks the through lane instead of pulling over to let you out, those of us who have to park our cars to catch the train are going to honk. Save the smart comments and ask your ride to be considerate of the rest of us.

Greg



Look on the bright side: there’s nothing like a little road rage to get the heart pumping in the morning, is there?

She’s not laughing

To the woman in the third car standing up, waiting to get off at Union Station on Wednesday, March 2, at 7:56 a.m., who thought it was funny to hit me while I was sitting down with her purse: IT’S NOT FUNNY. I am highly aware it is the “last stop” on the train. You DO NOT have to hit me and tell me that! A gentle tap would have sufficed. Maybe I am meditating or thinking with my eyes closed! Just be lucky you didn’t hit someone who might have hit you back or cursed a blue streak at you. You should think before you act next time!

(Almost) a Disgruntled Passenger

Almost?

Paper explosion

I’m a commuter student, and I take the Milwaukee District North Line trains between Union Station and Lake Cook. On this particular day (Wednesday, Feb. 16) I took the 4:40 train out of

Union. As I took something out of my backpack, the train hit a bump and my papers and trading cards went flying. Luckily, all the people around me helped me gather things up. They left no stone unturned. I ultimately collected everything, but I had missed my stop. Luckily, one of my fellow passengers offered me a ride back to the Lake Cook stop. If it wasn’t for the kindness of my fellow passengers, I would have had a lot of trouble. So, I want to thank everyone who helped me.

Jake

That must have been some bump. Sorry about that, and thanks to all for helping.

Crowding the aisles

I ride the 4:10 p.m. Rock Island train to 80th Avenue. There are a lot of people who exit at the 80th Avenue station. And there are a number of people who start to stand to exit at the 80th Avenue station TWO stops before!! This is very annoying because they block the aisle and people getting off at either Oak Forest or Tinley Park-Oak Park Avenue have a hard time making it through to get off at their stops.

I have even seen a person miss their stop at Oak Park Avenue because they could not make it through the people standing. Is there something that can be done – maybe possibly asking people not to stand and crowd the aisle until their stop is next? This is a very big problem on this train! It amazes me that people want to be the first off the train because they feel they will get somewhere so much faster than the next person!

Hannah

Aisle-blocking has been a rider gripe since the early days of On the Bi-Level. We understand the phenomenon: it’s a combination of herd mentality and a desire to step off the train ahead of all those slow pokes and get to your car quickly so you don’t have to wait behind another line of slow pokes to exit the parking lot and get where you need to get to a few minutes faster than the slow pokes. We have over the years asked riders to wait before blocking the aisles, and we now do so again: Please don’t stand to get off the train until approaching your stop, so those getting off the train before you can actually, you know, get off the train before you.

Can we all get along?

Let me first say that “Sound Off” is great entertainment! I look forward to reading *On the Bi-Level* every month. What has happened to common courtesy? The anger in some of these letters leads me to ask what is going on? Do you get off on being rude? Are you really road rage drivers who also ride the train? Obviously, if someone is bringing a crock pot on the train, the food in that pot is probably a blessing to someone else. It’s sad that we live in a society where people rarely speak and look for ways to be hurtful. Things could have been handled differently. You could have just asked her to kindly remove the crock pot from the seat. I’m sure you spent most of your day telling people what a maniac you were on the train as did she. A few suggestions for rush hour commuters: Take some deep breaths, pray or meditate before you board the train and be patient. We are living in tough times but we don’t have to be awful Americans.

ATC

“Sound Off” offers our riders a place to vent, which undoubtedly explains all the venting you see here. As we said in the very first “Sound Off”: “Does something that happens on your train get your goat? Tell us. We expose goat-getters.” That said, we’re not sure the crock pot letter writer, or most anyone else, for that matter, would disagree with your call to be more civil. There’s no indication that she was not. However, you must admit there is something a bit incongruous about encountering a crock pot on a rush-hour train. Disbelief, and not civility, is perhaps a natural first reaction.

Metra will address impact of retaining wall work

The new plan to rebuild 22 bridges along the Union Pacific North Line will require the construction of sturdier retaining walls along the western edge of the right of way on the north side of Chicago, which will impact existing landscaping.

Metra is committed to doing everything it can to minimize the impact of the retaining wall work on landscaping in the area. The project will resume work in April.

The sturdier walls are needed because the plan now calls for keeping two tracks open for trains during construction. In order to do that, a new track must be built closer to the western edge of the elevated right of way, on the west side of the two existing tracks. The walls are needed to support that new track.

It was Metra's desire to avoid the expensive retaining wall work that prompted the unsuccessful plan last summer to operate inbound and out-

bound trains on a single track in the construction zone. That plan would have centered the new bridges and tracks in the right of way, minimizing the retaining wall work needed on either side. Under the new plan, the extra retaining wall work will cost up to \$42.2 million.

Where there is room to do so, Metra will minimize the size of the wall by putting in a landscaped slope up to the tracks. In other locations, the higher walls will be made as presentable as possible. For instance, in the rendering at right the wall is shown adorned with ivy.

When the project is completed, there will be room along the eastern edge of the right of way to add a third new track in the future, if there is demand and money to do so. If that third track is added in the future, similar retaining wall work would be needed along the eastern edge of the right of way.



This photo of an area along the UP North right of way on the north side of Chicago shows the existing retaining wall and streetscape.



This artist's rendering shows what the same area could look like, with a higher, ivy-covered retaining wall and more greenery.



What is this?

That, our friends, is called a QR code, or quick response code. If you download a QR-reader app to your smartphone, you can scan this image with your phone's camera and it will take you straight to our "My Metra" sign-up web page. Why would you want to do that? Because once you sign up for "My Metra" you can get e-mail alerts and updates about service on your line, that's why.

Spring Travel Notes

Station at 35th St. to open

Metra will open a new station in Chicago at 35th St. along the Rock Island line on April 3, just in time for the Chicago White Sox home opener at nearby U.S. Cellular Field. Rock Island trains will begin stopping at the station, which is on 35th just east of the Dan Ryan Expy., on Sunday, April 3. The first White Sox game will be held the following Thursday, April 7. The new station features heated ramps, stairways, eight-car platforms, heated platform shelters, bicycle racks, benches, Metra's audio and visual information system, lighting and landscaping. It is the first new Metra station since 2006. The Rock Island schedule is being adjusted to accommodate the new station, but there are also other modifications to the schedule to improve on-time performance, to make the schedule more consistent and to reflect actual operating conditions. Rock Island riders are urged to view the

new schedule at www.metrarail.com.

Take Heritage Corridor survey

Pace is currently working with communities in southwest Cook and Will Counties to explore the possibility of providing supplemental service to Metra's Heritage Corridor rail service. Workday commuters traveling from the Heritage Corridor to downtown Chicago by car, bus and rail are encouraged to take part in this survey because the results will be used to determine if supplementary bus service is feasible along the corridor. Please visit PaceBus.com/survey beginning April 4 to have a say in whether this potential service will be implemented. The survey should not take more than 10 minutes to complete. Your responses will then be sent directly to Pace. As Pace is committed to ensuring your privacy, all personal information will be kept confidential.

Interested in advertising in On the Bi-Level? E-mail onthebilevel@metrarr.com.

Interested in advertising in Metra timetables, trains, stations, website or mail?

E-mail marketing@metrarr.com