Ridership: The Transit Culture of Chicagoland

An Honors Creative Project
HONRS 499

By

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Abstract

The Metropolitan Rail Division of the Regional Transportation Authority in Chicago and its surrounding suburbs is responsible for moving millions of people each year along its several heavy rail lines. Traveling below ground, at grade, and on elevated lines, commuters embrace this system, locally known as Metra and the CTA, as part of their daily lives. I wish to explore the impact this system has had both historically and in the present day. Inspiration for this project was drawn on years of living in suburban Lake County, Illinois, and as my interests have continued to evolve, I have grown more fascinated with rail transportation. The following pages represent for me an initial look into work that I plan to continue at the University of Illinois at Chicago in transportation planning. I am addressing Chicago’s commuter past with history and data, and analyzing the present day situation with observations, current data, and interviews from riders of Metra trains.
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Submitted by: Timothy Gustaison
Ball State University 23 April 2004
My interests in trains and Chicago have been with me for quite some time. I do not know how or when each was piqued, but they have been a part of my life since the start. Having grown up in Lindenhurst, Illinois, a northern suburb of Chicago, travel to the city was common. As a student of urban planning, my past four years have been spent focusing on cities and their transportation systems. Chicago is one such example of a city that is shaped by its transportation modes. Often called “the city that works”, Chicago sports many different modes of transportation for its residents and the goods that serve them, including heavy rail system for travel within the city and commuter rail. Travel by train makes up about 13% of the market in Chicago, and a considerable amount of infrastructure is dedicated to this purpose. Growth of the rail system has occurred over more than 100 years, and its impact has been seen long into the age of the automobile. For some reason the train has not disappeared completely with the construction of paved roads and interstate highways. What factors enable this persistence?

Rail travel is particularly unique because a train delivers its passengers directly to the city center. Once arrived, no parking or docking at a gate is required, and a train passengers immediately find themselves in the midst of a working metropolis. Daily commuters travel to the city to do business, leaving cars at home for the sake of the density in the city center. Their purposes for doing so include the time cost of driving, the cost of parking within the city, and the concern over safety of a car that is unattended all day. Regardless of these purposes, urbanites of Chicago have chosen the life of a train commuter. It is not merely a means of transportation for delivering citizens to work. It is an entire culture that revolves around departures and arrivals by rail. The rush hour or peak travel period is not a traffic jam on a stretch of road but rather a “people jam” within a terminal station, clustering upon platforms awaiting permission to go aboard. It is a community that moves into and out of the city for several minutes each day sharing a common path. Despite intentions for use or opinions of service, commuter rail is a part of life for many in northeastern Illinois. Exploring the uniqueness of the Chicago metropolitan area and its trains is the impetus for this project.

The pages that follow present a discussion of northeastern Illinois' history as a rail-connected network of villages and towns satellite to Chicago. Included in the history are personal journal accounts of rail travel along with comments provided from other area residents.
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The city of Chicago and its surrounding counties comprise the third largest metropolitan area within the United States. More than 9 million people reside within this area, dependent on Chicago as its city center. The morning and evening commutes last far longer than the old adage “rush hour” truly describes, and the amount of traffic is made more complex by the number of different modes by which people travel. The automobile, while still dominant, is not the only mode of transit Chicago area residents use. Rail is one such mode.

Since its inception in the United States in 1830, the presence and influence of train travel has grown in popularity, fallen from grace, and returned steadily to the transportation scene. Whether subsidized from taxes or privately owned, rail transportation is a force I believe has greatly shaped the city of Chicago and its surrounding areas. More importantly, I believe that the pattern laid out by commuter rail in the late 1800's is still present today, and affects the urban form in many of the same ways as it did before the automobile. Metropolitan Rail, more commonly known as Metra, is the provider of rail service to Chicago metropolitan area. It serves the city, its 6 collar counties, and one county each; Wisconsin and Indiana. Geographically it is the nation’s largest system, and second only to New York in ridership. The commuter suburb, or “bedroom community” is a common name for an incorporated village or town satellite to a major city and this pattern is common in northern Illinois. Specifically, Lake and Cook counties are the focus of this discussion, as the historic and present-day information has been gathered for these areas. This area today is very dense; village boundaries butt up against one another and very little unincorporated land remains. Many towns possess their own Metra station with acres of parking, serving a community whose citizens spend a great deal of time traveling to and from work.

It is apparent that the life of an individual living in these suburbs is not radically different from the rest of the country, but the presence of the train does impact their lives. Offering an alternative to the car in some instances, or in some cases replacing it, the train provides a means by which suburbs are more closely connected with the city. In Building Chicago, Ann Durkin Keating comments that the presence of the train “affected the settlement of the county by making time rather than distance to the city center a decisive factor” (83). Suburbs developed first along plank roads a short distance from Chicago, then along canal routes, and third, along rail lines. Improved transportation draws suburbs within closer range of the city center, creating a unique model for the areas first bedroom communities. Connecting a village to a rail station became increasingly important, and historical data assured that even towns located closer to the city than its neighbors without a
ail connection would be “left behind” (Keating 15). Opposite this, there were towns whose location and connection afforded them huge growth in the heyday of the railroad suburb. If a town, located along a rail line, also happened to have a connection to the Fox River, The Illinois-Michigan Canal, or Lake Michigan, the town would undoubtedly flourish in its early years. Families could locate in a rural area and within minutes find themselves in the city center. Land was purchased more cheaply in outlying areas of Lake and Cook County, and the railroad suburb was born as the first bedroom community.

All rail transportation endeavors were undertaken before public ownership and many were highly successful. Trains are capable in competing with streetcar suburbs and other forms of transit because their function is not primarily dependent on density. Railroad companies built their fortunes by extending service into the countryside, spurring linear development along the lines surrounded by unsettled land. This was an attractive lifestyle sought by urbanites, and creates a relationship today that balances the urban with the suburban. How did this unique relationship between city and suburb develop? The following chapters provide an account of the Chicago area’s rail history, discusses the cause and effect of rail transit, and explores to what extent the current-day relationship is between Metra and its station towns, and if that relationship has changed over time.

There still is a strong connection between residents of rail suburbs and the city of Chicago. Life in a rail suburb puts the city in closer reach without compromising a suburban lifestyle. Congestion is less of an issue, and residents are more likely to visit the city, confident that their commute is stress-free, independent of roadway conditions, and more economical. While many view suburbanization with cynicism and an eye for sprawl, the railroad towns that made up Chicago’s first suburbs are in some ways the first transit-oriented developments of the region’s history. Extension of rail into rural counties was a purposeful and carefully planned effort, with an obvious goal of profit for railroads. Towns were concentrated within short walking distance or a streetcar ride to the station, and it was common to locate the depot near the town center. The train was seen as a respectable means of travel for the well-to-do citizens of Chicago’s young suburbs.

26 November 2003, 11:10 a.m.

I am sitting in the large main hall of Chicago’s Union Station staring up. I can’t help it. I’ve seen it many times before and, with luck, will hold a job that will bring me back there from time to time. The multi-story hall is filled with merchants and I remember upon passing them that little room is left to walk through the spaces between tables; they would rather I walked around to shop. Nothing interested me, so I took a seat along one of the many great wooden benches, and face south, looking towards the exit to Jackson Street. Staring at the large expanse of glass in the ceiling must have made me appear a tourist or an out-of-towner; for I am approached by an older man who wishes to draw my portrait. Holding an apple in one hand I state that he is free to practice all he wants, but I do not wish to buy anything. Suddenly he seems less interested in me. I offer again to take a free portrait of myself, but instead he proceeds to tell me that he was an art teacher for 14 years in the Chicago Public School system. “Ride the trains out to the suburbs much?” I ask, receiving a “no” disguised as a grunt. After such an exchange, I would think that either he or I would rise to leave, but we remain. Both staring up.
Discussing the relationship between the suburban commuter and the railroad network in Chicago’s metropolitan area is five-fold. The history of Chicago rail displays the origins of such a grand system and offers an explanation to when and how the railroads wielded so much development power. Second, there exists a cause and effect scenario between transit and settlement that will be explained. Third, it is beneficial to observe and discuss any current-day villages or real estate ventures in the suburbs that rely on rail transit. Lastly, included in this text are personal accounts and interviews of travelers within the region. Interview comments not only add depth to a dialogue of this nature, they illustrate the true impact upon the daily lives of Chicagoans with respect to rail transit.
Chicago began as a trading post. Situated on Lake Michigan, Chicago grew from the shore of the lake in three directions, serving as a link between the East and South via the lake and the Mississippi River. By 1857, the city was 24 square miles in area, stretching from present day Chicago Avenue (800 North) to Roosevelt Road (1200 South). Its eastern limit was the lake (which then stood at Michigan Avenue) and Halsted Street (800 West). The city continued to thrive as railroads were built in the area, and in 1837 eight independently-owned commuter railroads were doing business between Chicago’s downtown and the suburbs to the north, west, and south. The city was growing because of its location, and as David Young describes, “...Chicago was destined by geography and technology to become the most important transportation center in the American interior” (3).

With this growth came the railroads. The concept of commuter rail was borrowed from New York, who already maintained a series of commuter services, most of which were subsidiaries of industrial rail. Industrial carriers, noticing many individuals in horse-drawn carts along city streets, began to offer line haul service from a particular boarding point and delivered these new passengers to the city center. Chicago’s Union Stockyards are the first place that recorded passenger travel terminated. In the 1850’s Chicago’s meatpacking industries would offer rides to its employees entering the yards from points further out. The “express” trains in this day traveled at 30 miles per hour and carried up to fifty passengers. (Young, 14) Early schedules offered one train in each direction daily, and the original commuter model was born. Surrounding the city center lay a large expanse of still-undeveloped land in the mid-nineteenth century, and the wealthy and upper middle class began to move outward. Some remained within the city limits, and others headed still further to a more rural location. Rail lines radiated in exactly the same manner as did their predecessors: canals and plank roads. Traveling into the city prior to the railroads was by these two means, and as the train became a frontrunner in urban transportation, settled areas located within close distance to the train grew and prospered. These settled areas were uniform in their transportation patterns to the city, some areas were settled by workers all from the same factory. Thus, the first workman’s suburbs were created. (Durkin, 23)

All of the city residents who were exiting the city did so with the intent of escaping the congestion of Chicago. Those who were businessmen, factory managers, or other upper middle-class professionals were among the first to make exodus. It was at this time that rail companies constructed lines from the city, offering land for development whose sale price was based on distance from the city center. The term “commuter” is derived for the name of an individual who traveled only a portion of a train’s entire distance along a line. In exchange
for a ride from one suburb to the city center, this individual was charged a commuted shortened fare. Doing this became so popular that over time a very large number of people moved to the suburbs. Although compromised by congestion and pollution, the city also offered city services, which suburbs lacked. Growing populations in the rural fringe of Chicago were given their municipal independence in 1872 when Illinois state law granted the village charter enabling legislation. This new status permitted areas to incorporate without the grant of a city charter, the type upon which Chicago was founded. These new suburbs could now levy taxes and provide city services just as the city did. The benefit, however, was in the ability to select the extent to which services would be provided. It is at this time that residents were able to tailor their suburban location based not only on physical desirability, but on political climate as well.

The first six villages in Cook County to incorporate were Barrington, DesPlaines, Evanston, Glencoe, Palatine, and Winnetka. All six had railroad stations.

Suburbs grew rapidly with the railroads leading to them, and railroad companies began planning routes and speculating upon land. New suburbs were planned at stops along the lines, and rail companies advertised with respect to their distance from the city. The further out the village was, the lower the cost of land. Conversely, zone-based fares increased with distance to the city, and the annual cost of transportation was a factor in determining the affordability of a suburban home. “These changes affected the settlement of the county by making time rather than distance to the city center a decisive factor” (Keating, 83). Suburbs could now have the effect of being very close to the city for business purposes while at the same time enjoying rural surroundings. Original market towns located on rail lines changed over time to become suburbs and places like Hyde Park, originally a resort suburb, were built out with homes for families whose men rode the train to work each day.

In 1837, the state passed its Internal Improvements Act, which was intended to create a state-owned rail company, integrated with Chicago. The state is reluctant to build and lacks the business expertise and management time to make its 8 proposed railroads work, and within years after passing the act, the project is abandoned and Illinois leaves rail building to the private sector. The private companies are marginally successful and manage to stay in business. The success for this is due to the nature of the companies. Because they
egan in freight, railroads were able to cross-subsidize passenger travel in times when it was not profitable. This ability to cross-subsidize is a key factor to the presence of railroads today. Running a line was very costly business, and often was not possible with just one investor. Joint venture capital projects were far more common, which is why we see rail names with more than one title. Names like “Baltimore & Ohio,” “Elgin, Joliet & Eastern,” and the particularly long “Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul & Pacific” were more common. These railroads did not receive their name only from the cities to which they traveled; major investors often had offices at these terminals. Rail lines were built privately all over Cook County and extended into McHenry County, DuPage County, Will County, Lake County, Illinois, and Lake County, Indiana. They had plenty of space to spread out in the rural counties, but as the lines neared Chicago, congestion was just as much of a problem as it was for streetcars, horses, and automobiles. Trains were forced to elevate in northern parts of the city, and the Chicago City Council forbade the extension of later lines beyond district boundaries. In so doing, the city effectively created a bubble around the city, preventing commuter rail from extending further towards The Loop. This is why Chicago has so many terminals. Private companies built their own terminal at the line where the city required rail traffic to cease and many lines chose not to go further. To do so would have required the line to be elevated as Chicago’s elevated trains are, or to be subterranean like the lines that now travel from Van Buren Street Station under Millennium Park. In one case, Metra’s current Union Pacific North line entered the city along a constructed lakeshore causeway to avoid traffic and city regulation. In 1888, the city had six passenger terminals: Canal & Kinzie Station, LaSalle Street Station, Great Central, Union Station, Dearborn Station, and Grand Central Station.

By the turn of the 20th century, rail service in the Chicago area served more than 56 suburbs, whose population comprised more than 50% of the total county population. In 1930, the number of rail-served suburbs had increased to 87, and more than 70% of the total exurban population was concentrated in these railroad villages. The community of Grayslake nearly tripled in population between 1900 and 1930. Commuting by train maintained its power in growing the suburbs, and as David Young writes, “…the commuter railroad was well established as a conveyance of the upper middle class” (119). Ridership on these lines would continue to grow faster than the rate of suburbanization until the postwar era, when suburbanization was aided by federal highway funding and loan guarantees. A major shift in the freight market also occurred when truck transportation entered the scene, and the cross-subsidization for which railroads were famous became much more difficult to do. There was not enough money to operate both commuter and freight lines, and in the 1970’s the commuter divisions of Penn Central, Milwaukee Road, and the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railroad went bankrupt.
The mayor of Chicago, Richard Ogilvie, after whom Ogilvie Station was named, created in 1973 the region’s first inter-county board for mass transportation. With the exception of the Illinois Tollway Authority, this 6-county board was the first of its kind created to oversee, improve, and attempt to save the transit businesses that existed within the Chicago metropolitan area. The Chicago Area Transportation Study (CATS) and the Northeastern Illinois Planning Council (NIPC) joined this group from their previously advisory positions within the political arena, and the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) was conceived. This board was created to operate independent of the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) within Chicago, and was meant only to improve the effectiveness of transit outside city limits. Independent lines that were on the brink of bankruptcy or had drastically reduced service were purchased by the RTA, and in the 1980’s the board initiated its commuter rail division known as Metropolitan Rail, or Metra, for short. This is the organization that exists today for Chicago’s commuter rail. Metra has a fare box recovery of 56-58%, serving 300,000 daily passengers, making 77 million trips annually. (Final 2004 Program) Metra’s presence in the Chicago area transportation world is noticeable, carrying approximately 14% of the region’s commuters.

The impact that the rail division of the RTA has had on the region is one that began with simple commuting to the city center and has grown over time to encompass eight counties, catering to the daily commuter as well as the leisure traveler. Although Chicago and its suburbs is already a relatively densely settled area, the presence of the train has a way of bringing the suburbs within closer reach of the city limits. The lines create a tightly knit community wherein inter-village transportation is common, relatively easy, and unique in the Midwest, if not in the nation. The major characteristics of rail commuting today are the same as they were in the 1850’s. Travel is zone-based to offer a tradeoff between distance from the city, land value, and commuting cost. Large operating costs continue to be a major factor in planning and preserving a rail network. And finally, distance from the city is measured in minutes and not in miles. The lives of Metra-linked suburbanites is quite possibly more integrated with the city than it would be without a rail connection, and I believe it is because of this that many people visit the city so frequently. The following sections explore the relationship that present-day suburbs have with Metra, and what examples may exist to show railroads’ continuing effects on land development.
History has shown that Metra has organized one of the nation’s largest and most influential commuter rail networks. Traffic reports for the region include not only automobile and bus traffic for the interstates and city streets, but for Metra and the Chicago Transit Authority’s inner-city trains. The train is an integral part of travel while remaining comfortably independent of the city’s traffic congestion problems. Time tables for Metra show confidence that a trip to the city center from any stop will arrive on time. This makes for a reliable and attractive mode of travel for many within the region. The relationship is two-sided. Trains feed the travel needs of suburbanites and suburban villages develop in ways to accommodate train commuters. The cause and effect nature of Metra and its users has existed from the speculation of the first commuter suburb and continues to exist today. Government organization, commercial development, suburban settlement patterns, and passenger attitudes all help display this relationship.

The city of Chicago incorporated first as a town in 1833, and was later granted a special charter from the State of Illinois to become a city on March 4th, 1837. At this time, no other city in the state possessed a charter of this nature. (Municipal Reference Collection) Among the rights to regulate health, safety, morals, and general welfare was the ability to regulate commerce within the city limits. Of course, trains were included in this enabling legislation, and the city was strict to regulate the trains that ran into the city as well as those carrying passengers within it. Inner-city trains were elevated to prevent street-level congestion and commuter rail terminals were required to construct on the outskirts of the city. As mentioned in the chapter about Chicago’s rail history, this is the reason there exists so many different terminals today. Consolidation under current law would be a costly exercise, affecting both rail and street traffic in the business center. Pushing train terminals to the city edge can be seen today by examining the locations of certain stations. The Ogilvie Transportation Center and Union Station reside immediately to the west of the Chicago River. In keeping congestion down, the city relegated all train terminals to exist outside the Loop. The Metra Electric Line was permitted to enter the city along an easement on the lakefront when Michigan Avenue was the easternmost street. The train now travels underground to its terminus at Michigan Avenue and South Water Street. Trains entering the city were also subject to regulation. The high cost of operation encouraged full loading of trains to distribute the cost of doing business among all commuting passengers. Union station charges by length of train, also known as a wheel charge. As train technology advanced, manufacturers were able to increase the size of the train by creating the bi-level design, which is implemented in all lines except the Metra Electric and South Shore railroads. This
design effectively increased capacity by 50% without adding length to the train.

The first rural settlements outside of Chicago did not reside along railroad lines, as these did not yet exist. Instead, the first towns, often market towns or resort communities were situated along plank roads or the Illinois – Michigan Canal. Such towns were compact and had small populations, as their purpose was rather singular in early days. The village of Brighton, which was originally a settlement to the southwest of Fort Dearborn served as a rest stop and trading post for travelers along the Milwaukee Road. Hyde Park, now incorporated by the city of Chicago, existed to the south of the city as a resort town for the wealthy. Trains extended to both of these areas; Brighton has become part of current-day Highland Park, Highwood, and Deerfield, and Hyde Park has become a southern neighborhood of Chicago. Rail connections caused these communities to diversify beyond their originally platted purpose. With respect to this gradual transition that elevated land values in tune to residential settlement, Keating notes, “Gone was the era of Hyde Park as a remote summer retreat; now it was an inexpensive half-hour trip on the elevated from downtown” (24).

Growth occurred in a linear fashion along these lines, and as time progressed, the rural space between towns was filled in following the advent of cars and highway travel. Observing incorporation dates today, one finds that towns lacking a train station often are several years younger than their transit-oriented neighbors. The villages of Lindenhurst and Lake Villa share a zip code, but Lake Villa possesses the train station on Metra’s North Central line. The town of Lake Villa was incorporated in 1901, and Lindenhurst was not incorporated until 56 years later. The village of Lake Bluff was incorporated in 1895. Its neighbor to the west, Green Oaks, Illinois, was not incorporated until 1960.

The suburbs today show the effects of train travel in the form of physical layout. As station use grew, simple covered platforms would expand to include warming houses and bicycle racks. When the automobile became a necessity in the suburbs, many passengers began to drive a short distance to the station. The concept of “park and ride” became quite common in the Chicagoland area, and parking lots surrounded train stations, accommodating the cars that would have otherwise been driven to the city center. Parking in the suburbs is far cheaper than in the city, and maintaining parking spaces for Metra is now an integral part of operating the commuter network. In communities such as Naperville, Deerfield, and Schaumburg, suburban buses also serve the station, running a special shuttle during peak travel hours. The villages of Grayslake and Glenview have also undertaken projects to orient a suburban development and even in one case a new town center to maximize the connection made to the station and Chicago. This will be discussed further in the next section, but certainly supports the claim that communities are considering rail transit when planning for future development.
The 2004 budget for Metra includes the goal to "promote development of a regional rail network that responds to the realities of metropolitan growth and improves the mobility of all citizens within the region" (6). In addition to collecting data on train travel and historical impact, I feel it is beneficial to record the attitudes and comments of some present-day users of the system as well. I selected specific individuals, conducting the survey in person with commuters and non-commuters to collect their opinions about Metra service, including its efficacy and ease of use. In a sample size of five, two interviewees were urban residents, one of the five was a planner by profession, and all interviewees currently live or work in a community that has a train station.

**What is the purpose of your travel?**

Most respondents declared that the purpose for travel on Metra trains was for work and pleasure, denoting travel that occurs anywhere from one ride per month to a weekly trip. I did not find this surprising, as the city offers both employment and entertainment, and four out of the five respondents is employed in a suburb, not in Chicago. Thus, taking the train to the city center is not a daily occurrence for those interviewed.

**Is there a reason you don’t travel more frequently by train?**

For the one individual who did not work in the suburbs, the reason for his infrequent train travel was due to two factors. First, he resides in the city and would be a "reverse commuter" (leaving the city center in the morning and returning in the evening), and upon reaching his suburban destination, had no means by which to travel from the actual station to his place of employment. Because of this, he chooses to travel by car.

**When choosing where to live, did you take Metra into consideration when picking your current location?**

The majority of the answers were no. When choosing a place to live, all but one respondent stated that a train station was a necessary amenity for his or her community. Her
reasoning for this was that the car in her household was a shared vehicle, and living near a train station decreased her dependence upon it. Her main travel destination is to work in a suburb along the same rail line, and she felt quite comfortable using the system, although she admitted the train would not be a good option “in anticipation of bad weather” (Julie).

Do you feel having a train station in town makes your community better than a neighboring town?

Four out of five respondents felt that having a train station in his or her community made the community better than a neighboring village. The respondent who did not agree with this statement reasoned that he almost never travels by train and would be just as happy in an area with no station. Those who did feel a train station is a good amenity to the village made comments that it offers an additional travel option, but nearness to a depot is not an absolute must. One interviewee commented that it would have been desirable to live near a station, but location on a lake was more important to him.

If you had the choice, would you prefer to live adjacent to a train station, a highway onramp, a busy intersection, or a subway station?

It is understandable that none of the individuals really cared to live exactly adjacent to any of these choices, but for the sake of discussion the question was aimed at which mode was most favorable to the interviewees. Results were split. Two mentioned that they would prefer a train station nearby. One commented that train stations carry with them a feeling of rural living, away from the noise and pollution of a more urban area while still being connected to a major city. Those who chose a subway station did so because of their desire to live within a city and be within short walking distance to many things. Living near a train station was nice, but service to them was not frequent enough as to be desirable. For the respondent who chose the highway onramp, connection to the highway network was of utmost importance, as nearly all his travel is by car.

What are your impressions of your terminal station in Chicago?

I asked this question for the purpose of learning more about each individual terminal within Chicago. As Metra has five major stations in its system, I wanted to learn if this was confusing for travelers, or if there was anything about the station that made it favorable or unpleasant. Two of the travelers arrive at Union Station, and feel safe when they are there. It is familiar and comfortable, but to them it is a relatively far walk to areas of the city such as the Gold Coast neighborhood and the Magnificent Mile shopping district. Ogilvie Station is the terminus for one individual, who felt that the accommodations for waiting passengers
was lacking. Having to walk through smokers on outdoor platforms he said became a "disturbing pain in the ass" as he walked to his train. (Bruce) Overall impressions of the stations were average, according to the interviewees. The connections outside of the station received the most criticism. The station was too far from the true destinations of travelers, and one commented that when meeting passengers from trains, he is often confused as to which station is the correct terminal. Not all stations are within the Loop as per former city ordinance, but this has the effect of separating and fragmenting the commuting public into several areas within the city.

Overall, the interviews helped me to better understand the reasons for which not everyone in suburbs continues to travel by train. Suburban residents do not all work in the city as they once did, and as suburbs grow and become more complex in land use, many residents are finding all urban services including employment in a suburb, whether connected by road or rail. Train travel is more of a choice than a necessity, yet many still feel that having a rail connection is both desirable and necessary in the metropolitan region.
The presence of Metra has its roots in necessity, but exists today as both an essential form of transportation as well as a leisurely alternative to driving. Villages throughout the region have incorporated under varying degrees of public service provision to accommodate the wishes of its residents. Each suburban village has its own identity separate from the region, yet all work together to make a complex whole. Metra has certainly had an impact in Chicagoland’s past, but it has spurred projects that will affect the lifestyle of suburban residents in the future.

The village of Grayslake, with a population of 18,506 is located in the center of Lake County, Illinois. It is approximately 40 miles from the city of Chicago, and has three Metra stations within village boundaries. Located along both the Milwaukee District North Line and the North Central Line, Grayslake is in an advantageous spot. Its first railroad station was completed in 1886, linking it for the first time to Chicago by rail. Since that time, its population has grown considerably, increasing more four times between its incorporation and 1930. (Village History) What is unique about Grayslake is not only the fact that it possesses three rail depots, but that development has taken shape in a parcel to the village south in a manner that is consistent with original railroad suburban development. The planned-unit development is a great success, drawing media attention for its quality of life standard for residents, as well as its conservation and sustainable development principles. “Convenient and efficient transportation” is one of Prairie Crossing’s guiding principles, and the development possesses two of the three stations within the village of Grayslake. What is interesting to note is that Prairie Crossing makes up less than 10% of the village’s population. The newest station, to open shortly on Metra’s North Central Line “has been designed to incorporate the best practices of small-town architecture and planning with the principles of conservation development” (Guiding Principles). Even in new construction, this development draws upon the theme of the railroad village, for it is consistent with the historic development patterns of the area.

Grayslake is not the only community that is developing with respect to commuter rail transit. The village of Glenview is in a similar position. This village of 41,679 is much larger and is located in suburban Cook County, to the northwest of Chicago’s Loop by approximately 20 miles. It now possesses two stations along Metra’s Milwaukee District North Line, the second one added within the past year. The Glen at North Glenview, a new mixed-use redevelopment parcel within the village, is near completion, orienting its main street and business center directly in front of the train station. One of the defining goals of The Glen was to “create a lasting source of pride for the community by building quality
public amenities, infrastructure, housing, plus recreational and job opportunities” (About The Glen). It has fulfilled that goal by offering housing of many types, including town homes, apartments, and single family homes. The “gateway shops” area, located directly adjacent to the Metra station provides 38,000 square feet of retail space on first and second floors, most of which has already been leased. The 121-acre site will house 10% of the village’s total projected population, placing them within convenient walking distance of the train.

It is quite evident that both Grayslake and Glenview are developing with the intent to link suburban residents to the city, but what is also apparent is that this connection is no longer a one way trip. The construction of retail and mixed-use amenities in these development shows that there is a desire to draw residents out of the city as well, offering retail that is not just for the residents of the community in which it sits. Reverse commuting is more common than it was in the days before Metra organization, and communities are recognizing themselves as a part of the entire region, and no longer a satellite to Chicago. One final example of Metra’s influence on the suburban environment is an action taken by Metra itself. Listed in the 2004 budget for the RTA and backed by the Northwest Municipal Council is the plan for Metra’s Suburban Transit Access Route, also known as the STAR Line. Introduced to the public in 2003, the STAR Line will be a first in Metra history where a new line will be initiated to serve exclusively suburb-to-suburb travel. This concept, already earmarked in the House Committee on Transportation for $1.1 billion is in the process of preparing alternatives to the originally designed route. The line is a product of two separate corridor studies and seeks to address the complaint that many passengers have about lacking rail connections outside the city center. Metra is very efficient at moving passengers to and from the city, but it currently is left to the suburbanite to find his or her own transportation in the suburbs. The STAR Line is projected to run north and south through western Cook County, connecting Joliet to Hoffman Estates, Illinois, with a connection to O’Hare International Airport. Communities along this projected path are in the process of reorganizing land use projections that anticipate the presence of a STAR station. This is a major shift in the pattern of Chicago as the transportation hub for the region. It will undoubtedly remain the center, but a plan for a circuitous route through the region’s suburbs is a clear statement that the collar counties are more than just bedroom communities. Organizations like the Northwest Municipal Conference (NWMC), Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission (NIPC), and the Northwest Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC) show that the suburban environment is an entity unto itself with respect to transportation and several other issues.
Conclusion

Transportation modes, no matter how fixed, are dynamic over time. The development of the railroads in Chicago and its suburbs has greatly affected the shape and function of the region. The city is a booming business center for the Midwest and a majority of the nation and the suburbs in the surrounding eight counties is testament to the strength of Chicago as an employment, commercial, and industrial center. The commuter of the workman’s suburb was resultant of extra room on meatpacking freight cars, but this notion has grown to its height as a conveyor of hundreds of millions of passengers each year. Today, Metra serves an area nearly equal in size to its metropolitan statistical area, and the growth of the rail system is neatly tied to the overall growth of the area. Counties in the Chicago region are urbanizing rapidly, and Metra is present in many of those suburbs to ease congestion and create a connection with Chicago that reduces the travel time to the city center. “The suburban transit system, with the exception of the steam railroads, was only marginally profitable in its best years” (Young, 140). Those steam railroads have given way to diesel-electric engines on Metra’s tracks, but the economic vitality remains. Metra boasts a farebox recovery higher than any other commuter rail district in the county, and with continued success, is extending its rails to bring even more communities within closer reach of the Midwest’s great metropolis.

I have learned in my research that there are many ways to gather data upon which to make a planner’s conclusion. Absorbing census data and historical accounts can only give so much detail. I chose to add current events, personal experience, and user commentary to this project to draw conclusions about past, present, and future events. The regional rail system is obviously growing and headed in a more suburban-oriented direction, as edge cities and the suburban landscape grow. The interviews and journals have illustrated that planning decisions, whether intentional or not, have shaped the daily lives of Metra’s users, and in so doing have become part of the transit culture. Many of the region’s inhabitants consider travel by train to be a normal and necessary part of daily life. My experience and research has shown me that this phenomenon is somewhat unique, and offers an exciting topic of research that has yet to be exhausted.
Bibliography

<http://www.glenview.il.us/glen/abouttheglen/default.asp>


Appendix A

Tim Gustafson
tmgustafson@hotmail.com
Creative Project Questionnaire
773-718-0436

Please respond to the following questions. Call or email me if anything is unclear. You are also free to not answer any of the questions if you wish.

First name: ____________________________

Most frequent boarding station: ____________________________

How often do you use the train? ____________________________

What is the purpose of your travel? ____________________________

Is there a reason you don’t travel more frequently by train?

________________________________________________________________________

When choosing where to live, did you take Metra into consideration when picking your current location? ____________________________

Do you feel that having a train station in town makes your community better than a neighboring town? ____________________________

________________________________________________________________________

If you had the choice, would you prefer to live adjacent to a train station, a highway onramp, a busy intersection, or a subway station? Explain.

________________________________________________________________________

What are your impressions of Chicago’s Union Station, Ogilvie Transportation Center, LaSalle Street Station, Van Buren Station, or Randolph Station? Feel free to comment on the ease of use, feelings of safety, crowdedness, etc.

________________________________________________________________________
Completion Certificate

This is to certify that

Timothy Gustafson

has completed the Human Participants Protection Education for Research Teams online course, sponsored by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), on 02/09/2004.

This course included the following:

- key historical events and current issues that impact guidelines and legislation on human participant protection in research.
- ethical principles and guidelines that should assist in resolving the ethical issues inherent in the conduct of research with human participants.
- the use of key ethical principles and federal regulations to protect human participants at various stages in the research process.
- a description of guidelines for the protection of special populations in research.
- a definition of informed consent and components necessary for a valid consent.
- a description of the role of the IRB in the research process.
- the roles, responsibilities, and interactions of federal agencies, institutions, and researchers in conducting research with human participants.

National Institutes of Health

http://www.nih.gov
The Institutional Review Board received your protocol entitled, *Train Ridership of Chicago’s North Shore Suburbs*. After review and consideration, the IRB concluded that this project does not meet the definition of “research” as specified by federal regulations. Consequently, this project does not require IRB approval.

It should be noted the University counsel advised the IRB to inform you that you should “ensure proper documents have been signed to protect [you and the] Ball Students from liability that could arise from participation in this Project”.

The IRB accepts this information for our records and will retain it in our files. Thank you for providing the IRB with these materials for review and best wishes on your project.

pc: Jim Segedy, Urban Planning