

## (July 29, 2008) Southtown Star: Metra open to weekend service on SouthWest Service Line

Metra open to weekend service on SouthWest Service Line

By Nathaniel Zimmer, Staff Writer

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Metra's executive director said Monday that the agency will work to bring Saturday train service to the SouthWest Service line as early as next year.

Metra previously had shown little sign of heeding calls for weekend trains from residents who live along the 41-mile line between Union Station in Chicago and Manhattan.

But Phil Pagano told area mayors and others Monday at a meeting organized by U.S. Rep. Dan Lipinski (D-3rd) that Metra would draw up a proposal by Oct. 1 for adding a few trains to test the waters and see if there is enough demand to support making Saturday service permanent.

"I was very happy with the meeting," Lipinski said afterward. "You never know that it's definitely going to happen, but it looks very good."

One of the keys to eliciting Metra's support was that supporters didn't demand too much, according to Lipinski.

"It's not jumping in and saying, 'We need to have 10 round trips a day or 15 trips a day,'" he said.

Metra leases the SouthWest Line tracks from Norfolk Southern Corp., and one of the obstacles to weekend service has been objections from freight carriers that make heavy use of the tracks on Saturdays and Sundays. But railroad representatives were present for the meeting, and they reportedly indicated they were willing to work with Metra.

Metra spokeswoman Judy Pardonnet said that if all goes as planned, the trains could be added as early as February of next year. But getting to that point will require coordinating with a number of rail companies whose lines cross the Norfolk Southern tracks.

"We can run more trains there in accordance with our lease agreement, but more than NS will be impacted if we increase trains there on the busiest freight day of the week, which is Saturday," she said.

Putting two or three round-trip trains on the line would require coordinating with the railroads. But it shouldn't require additional federal funds, Lipinski said.

RTA executive director Steve Schlickman said there was an area of the transportation agency's budget where money could be found to cover the cost of the extra trains, Lipinski said.

Among those in attendance at the meeting were Oak Lawn Trustee Jerry Hurckes, Lipinski's local chief of staff, and Oak Lawn village manager Larry Deetjen.

Deetjen started making noise about the need for weekend service shortly after arriving in Oak Lawn last year. He said Lipinski "did a great job" and that he was pleased Metra had committed to a trial run.

Lipinski said he planned to push for Sunday service as well, but he said it would be more difficult to find time then.