

## (October 24, 2008) Southtown Star: More trains on Metra SouthWest Line come with a catch

If you asked for weekend trains on Metra's SouthWest Service Line, be prepared to follow through on your request.

Metra will start running three inbound trains and three outbound trains on Saturdays in early March, local politicians and transportation officials announced Thursday at a Chicago Ridge ceremony.

But the additional service on the Chicago-to-Manhattan route comes with a caveat.

If the Saturday trains prove popular, more trains, including Sunday service, might be added.

If no one jumps aboard, the weekend trains will go away altogether.

"I believe if you run the trains, they will come," said U.S. Rep. Daniel Lipinski (D-3rd), of Western Springs, who worked

with the freight railroads to find room for Metra to operate the SouthWest Service Line on weekends.

Chicago Ridge Mayor Eugene Siegel predicted the Saturday trains will be a hit with families who want to avoid driving or catching trains in neighboring suburbs for events in Chicago

"Just looking in our parking lot, I see cars from Alsip and Palos Heights," Siegel said. "But we will have to market this."

An agreement between Metra and the Regional Transportation Authority will split the \$680,000 cost for the first year of Saturday trains.

But Metra officials said they are committed to offering the new schedule for at least two years.

Metra executive director Phil Pagano said a target ridership number has not been set to guarantee that the trains continue to run.

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The SouthWest Service Line, with stations in Manhattan, New Lenox, Orland Park, Palos Park, Palos Heights, Worth, Chicago Ridge and Oak Lawn, is one of two Metra lines without weekend service in the south suburbs. The other is the

Heritage Corridor Line that stops in Lemont, Lockport, Willow Springs and Summit.

Lipinski said an Amtrak reauthorization bill signed last month will provide \$250 million a year for infrastructure improvements on commuter rail lines nationwide.

He hopes an investment in the Heritage Corridor Line, one of the most congested on the Metra system, could lead to more trains one day.

"Once we ease congestion, we can work on putting more Metra trains in there," Lipinski said. "The delays right now are terrible."