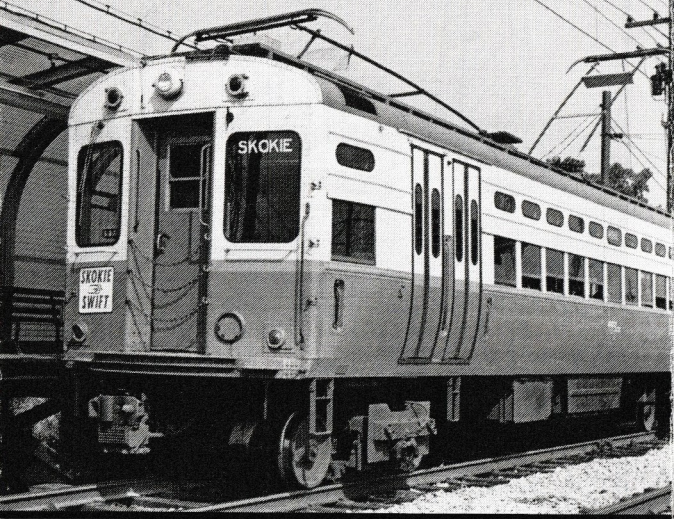


Chicago Transit Authority



Skokie Swift



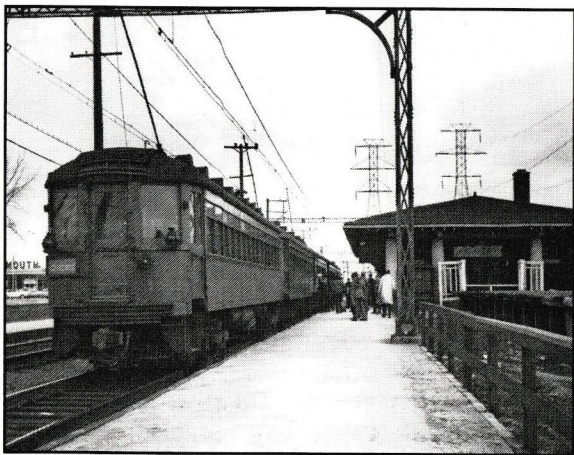
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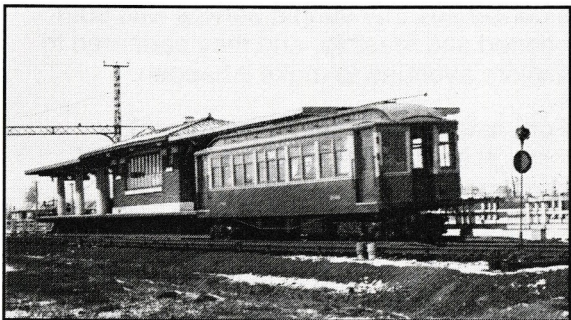
On April 18, 1964, a new form of rapid transit made its debut linking Chicago with Skokie and nearby suburban areas. Christened the *Skokie Swift*, this five-mile high speed rapid transit line provided a commuting alternative for motorists tired of expressway congestion and slow moving traffic on arterial streets.



Car 182 trails the end of a northbound North Shore Line interurban train boarding passengers at Dempster station on April 15, 1962, shortly before the line was abandoned.
– Victor G. Wagner photo, J.J. Sedelmaier Collection

The establishment of the Skokie Swift service can be traced to the abandonment of passenger service through Skokie by the Chicago North Shore & Milwaukee Railroad, commonly known as the North Shore Line, on January 21, 1963. The North Shore Line operated an electric interurban railway between its namesake cities and the intermediate North Shore suburbs. The North Shore's electric trains used the tracks of the Chicago Rapid Transit Company and the successor CTA to reach the Chicago Loop, giving its riders exceptionally convenient access to all parts of Chicago's downtown business and shopping district.

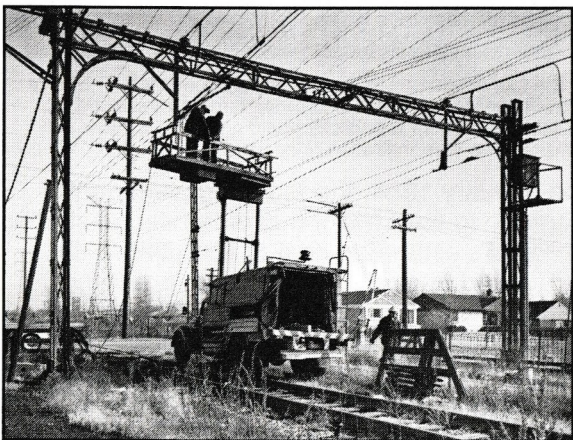
In 1925, the North Shore Line built a high-speed by-pass route through Skokie to reduce commuting times even further. As part of this, local rapid transit service between Howard and Dempster was provided by the affiliated Chicago Rapid Transit Company beginning in 1925 including stopping at seven local stations not served by the interurban;



Wood car 1804 makes up a single-car train – typical for the lightly-used service – on the Niles Center branch at Crawford-East Prairie station. – *Bruce G. Moffat Collection*

'L' service was discontinued in 1948. The North Shore's own trains served Skokie from 1926 until the railroad closed in 1963 due to declining revenues and expressway competition.

Skokie had long realized that rail passenger service was key to the continued growth and prosperity of the village and had been active in supporting commuter-based efforts to keep the North Shore Line in operation. When the trains stopped running, village leaders approached the Chicago Transit Authority about providing rapid transit service over the now abandoned tracks. Although both the village and the Authority lacked sufficient funds to cover the costs of acquiring the North Shore's tracks and making the needed physical improvements, there was



A wire crew works on the overhead catenary wire at East Prairie Road on February 4, 1964, only days after the grant was approved. The overhead wire needed considerable work to improve its state or repair and adapt it for the Swift cars' use of pan trolleys instead of trolley poles. – *CTA Collection*

a consensus that such a service was both needed and feasible, and they partnered to explore avenues to make it happen.

Fortunately, the federal government, through its National Housing Act of 1961, had empowered the U.S. Housing and Home Finance Agency (a predecessor of the Department of Housing and Urban Development) to make grants for “demonstration projects” for both community development and transportation purposes. Up until this time, the federal government generally did not actively participate in funding public transportation improvements. The primary goal of the Skokie Swift “demonstration project” was to prove the feasibility and cost-effectiveness of linking fast-growing suburban markets with an existing central city using rail transit.



The four single-unit PCC cars initially converted for Skokie Swift service are lined up in order, pantographs raised, at Oakton Curve for a publicity photo on April 18, 1964, just before free demonstration rides were given. — CTA Collection

In January 1964, the federal government agreed to fund two-thirds of the demonstration project's estimated cost of \$523,825, with CTA and Skokie furnishing the remaining funds. Not included was the \$2 million dollar cost borne by CTA to purchase the five miles of trackage between Howard and Dempster streets – a portion of which was required to maintain access to the Authority's rail car overhaul facility.

Work on rehabilitating the line, including building a terminal station and parking



A ribbon-cutting ceremony kicked off free demonstration rides on Saturday, April 18, 1964, two days before regular service began on Monday the 20th. Holding the ribbon from left to right are CTA Chairman George DeMent, Chicago Deputy Mayor Raymond Simon, William B. Hurd of the U.S. H.H.F.A., and Skokie Mayor Myron Griesdorf. – *CTA Collection*

lot at Dempster, began that same month. Fortunately, the tracks, power distribution and signaling systems were in largely good condition and required only some refurbishment, allowing the new Skokie Swift rapid transit line to be ready for its first customers in a matter of only a few months.

On April 18, 1964, the line was dedicated by Skokie and CTA officials and introductory free riders were given to the public. On April 20th, the line was officially opened for service using four high-speed single-car trains. Convenient connections at Howard with Evanston Express (today's Purple Line) and the North-South subway (Red Line) trains made commuting to the Loop by CTA rapid transit easy and fast.



Ridership was high – far beyond projections and expectations – as evidenced in this May 5, 1964 photo. Note that there are also a lot of “reverse commuters,” something else not anticipated when the project was planned. – *CTA Collection*

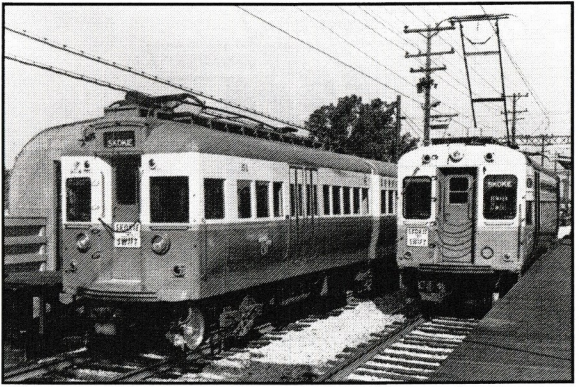
The five miles from Dempster to Howard took only 6-1/2 minutes, making it the fastest rapid transit line in the world when it opened. The public took notice and patronized the new service to a degree far above the CTA's modest goal of 1,000 daily riders - on that first weekday over 3,900 customers rode.



A park-n-ride lot (pictured above on May 12, 1964) and a kiss-n-ride drop-off/pick-up area (pictured below in 1965) – common today, but novel at the time of the project – were integral parts of CTA's plan to adapt urban transit for the suburban market. – *CTA Collection*



The project plan provided for 15- to 30-minute headways weekdays only, but the schedule was thrown out and rewritten with more frequent service based on first day demand, and Saturday service was added immediately. The four single-unit cars initially assigned proved to be wholly inadequate, so four more cars with quickly added, followed by four three-compartment articulated cars. The park & ride also had to be expanded. By the end of its two-year demonstration period, the Skokie Swift clearly demonstrated that with sufficient up front infrastructure investment, a median-density suburban areas can be effectively and



The service was so popular from launch that additional cars had to be added immediately to provide sufficient service. By the time of this 1965 view, four more single cars (one of which, car 25, is on the right) and four three-compartment articulated cars (car 51, on the left, being one) were added to the Swift roster. – *CTA Collection*

economically linked with a central city using high-speed rail transit without necessarily requiring long trains, frequent stops, or even a one-seat ride. The use of park & rides and the importance of the reverse commute market were also important project outcomes. In many respects, the Skokie Swift was a prototype for the light rail systems that would be developed across America in subsequent decades, before the term was even coined.

So successful was the Skokie Swift that it became a permanent part of the CTA's rail system and continues to serve as an important commuting alternative. The line was renamed the "Yellow Line" in 1993, following the CTA's assignment of color names to all 'L' routes, though the line continues to use the distinctive "Swift bird" icon that branded the line since its inception. New cars were assigned to the line in 1994, and recently brand-new 5000-series cars have been assigned to the line. The temporary Dempster station from 1964 was replaced with a permanent facility in 1994, and in 2012 the first intermediate station on the line, Oakton-Skokie, was opened. The overhead wires that powered the line's trains since the first day of the Skokie Swift (as well as the predecessor services back to 1925) was replaced with third rail in 2004. Weekend service was added in 2008 (Saturday service having been annulled in 1992), offering Sunday service on the line for the first time.



1964

Chicago Transit Authority

George L. DeMent, Chairman

Walter J. McCarter, General Manager*

Thomas B. O'Connor, General Manager*

George Krambles, Skokie Swift Project Mgr

Village of Skokie

Myron Greisdorf, Mayor

Bernard L. Marsh, Manager

U.S. Housing and Home Finance Agency

Robert C. Weaver, Administrator

*McCarter until October 1964, O'Connor after October 1964



Chicago Transit Authority

2014

Chicago Transit Authority

Terry Peterson, Chairman

Forrest Claypool, President

Village of Skokie

George Van Dusen, Mayor

John T. Lockerby, Manager

Federal Transit Administration

Peter Rogoff, Administrator

Cover photos: Top: Car 30 at the Dempster Terminal in 1964. – CTA photo. Bottom: New 5000-series train, led by car 5157, near Crawford in 2013. – Bruce G. Moffat photo