

Metra



RETIREMENT OF THE LAST 1970s-ERA METRA ELECTRIC DISTRICT HIGHLINERS
MAY 31, 1971 TO FEBRUARY 12, 2016
44 YEARS OF SERVICE



Service on what is now the Metra Electric Line began on July 21, 1856 with one train making four round trips between Chicago and Hyde Park. Since that time nearly 160 years ago, the line has been served essentially by four different fleets of railroad equipment. From the start in 1856 until the line was electrified in 1926, the Illinois Central operated a number of different kinds of coaches hauled by steam locomotives. In the 1920s, when the city of Chicago required the line to be electrified, the IC acquired 140 electric motor cars and 140 trailer cars for \$11.1 million. Those cars remained in service until 1971-1979, when they were phased out by the original "Highliners." Those cars make their last trip today, replaced by a new set of Highliners.

Here are some interesting facts about the original Highliner cars:

There were 166 original Highliners. The first 130 (numbered 1501-1630) were built by the St. Louis Car Company and delivered in 1971-1972. The next 36 (numbered 1631-1666) were built by Bombardier and delivered in 1978-1979.

The first batch were purchased by the Chicago South Suburban Mass Transit District, made up of 11 communities served by the IC and created in 1967, and leased back to IC. Federal funds paid for two-thirds of the \$40 million cost, and IC paid the rest. The newly formed RTA bought the second batch for about \$28 million, using federal and state money.

The IC held a contest to name the new fleet and the winning entry, "Highliners," was submitted by 16-year-old rail fan Arthur Peterson.

The Highliners were the first Metra Electric Line cars with air-conditioning and the first bi-level Metra Electric cars. They also featured coat hooks for each seat, storage shelves, luggage compartments and, as one periodical noted, modesty panels on the upper level "for the benefit of mini-skirted women."

The Highliners were always entirely non-smoking cars (smoking wasn't banned on the other Metra lines until 1990).

The cars originally seated 156 passengers. Seats were fixed; they could not be flipped to face the direction of travel.

The cars operated in pairs. Odd-numbered cars pointed south; even-numbered cars pointed north. The cars were capable of being used singly.

Historical information provided by
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