

report on Shelter Situation, Sept 1, 2011,
to Edgebrook Chamber of Commerce

Dear Noble Leaders of the Edgebrook Business Enclave,

Please accept my apologies for not being able to attend what would undoubtedly have been an entertaining and informative meeting in a wonderful restaurant. I wish I could have been here, but domestic tranquility, and forgotten prior obligations, intrude. Here's the low down on the Metra Shelter situation.

For the past couple of years the ECA (Edgebrook Community Association) has been in communication with Metra in regard to upgrading the safety parameters of the the Metra Station and its surrounding approaches, etc. Among its concerns has been the route that was supposed to be the "safe" approach from the bus station to the train station. Ideally, a bus/train commuter would leave the bus terminal at Caldwell and Central and proceed West along Caldwell, across Lehigh to the "triangle", North along the triangle's sidewalk to Devon, across Devon and then east, back across Lehigh, to the southern end of the Metra Station. Needless to say, no one does this. The ECA had received a commitment from Metra to install fencing at various areas to channel pedestrian traffic on safe routes alongside the tracks, where everyone, basically, walks, from the bus station to the Metra station, hopefully guiding commuters to crossing gate protected areas of the tracks. No fencing was installed. In addition to this, discussions have occurred regarding lines of sight at the crossings and additional active crossing gates. Metra did send representatives to speak at ECA General Meetings for question and answer sessions. For further information, enclosed is a copy of our most recent letter to Metra management (enclosure #1).

Due to this degree of supposed comraderie, it came as a surprise to be notified only in the Nadig Reporter that the northbound shelter at the Metra station, referred to in the letter, was being demolished. During all of our communications this option had never been suggested. Of greater concern was that, at the same time as the shelter was described as "being of no

historical significance”, it was also not going to be replaced until “Metra had the money”. This was, at best, an undesignated date.

At this point calls and sending emails were sent to various Metra officials. While at first the “no historical significance” argument was offered, it was later modified to suggest that the shelter was unsafe and, on that basis, was to be demolished. An engineer at metra pronounced it unsafe after a brief visual inspection due to some decayed supports. Incidentally, while built at a cost of \$80,000 dollars (a rumor, admittedly, I heard while collecting signatures for petitions), it has been reinforced in the past.

The ECA’s position is this. It is not a great shelter by any means, but it the only one we have. Its utility is unquestioned in rain, snow, and sun. Most important, the lack of a shelter going North would force people, in inclement weather, to wait in the Southbound shelter, crossing across tracks when the Northbound train approaches, (that cannot be guarded by automated crossing guards due to proximity restrictions) at risk of life and limb. The Association’s perspective is that, while Metra is fully welcome to demolish what is, in the end, a structure they own, they must have plans to immediately replace it, for the safety of the community. Or don’t tear it down.

Speaking to a Metra official I met coincidentally at the station in my additional office of ECA Metra Maintenance Superintendent (gardener), I received the comment, “We are not responsible for personal choices”, regarding crossing safety, and, “A lot of stops only have one shelter”. This, it was decided, Would Not Do.

I designed and had produced, as President of the ECA, the “Don’t let Metra take your Train Shelter” poster, with assistance from local businesses, and began to collect names on petitions. (Samples of both, enclosures #2 and 3) are enclosed with this report) Response has been overwhelmingly supportive, resulting in hundreds of signatures and, more importantly, a conditional, while possibly temporary, reversal of Metra’s destructive ambitions. For now, while they have declared that repair work is “finished” at the Metra station for this year, the “dangerous” state of the shelter will be repaired.

While this may assure commuters shelter through the upcoming months of fall and winter, the situation will again arise during next year’s construction season. Obviously the improved, southbound side is in need of the final asphalt or concrete paving. The Disabilities Act may have

provided some of the impetus of suggest the removal of the shelter in question, in that there is (reportedly) a provision in the act for a 10-foot unimpeded area for handicapped accessibility to loading ramps alongside the metra trains. The exposed gravel southbound will not ease snow shoveling in winter, however, and certainly will not aid in wheelchair accessibility, nor will the exposed mini-trenches bordering the sidewalk. On the other hand, it is possible that the whole idea of destroying the shelter was based on convenience, being that the removal would greatly ease the rehabilitation of the northbound side by not barring of bulldozers, easy pouring of paving materials. and the like. The official calls for the proposed shelter removal, it has been suggested, have the air of reasons offered after the fact, following the unanticipated, justified response from the Edgebrook populace. In addition, "Grandfather" clauses may help protect the shelter from modifications due to the Disabilities Act, in that it was made before the stipulations were in effect.

This was an easy issue for the ECA and much of Edgebrook to support. The decision reversal by Metra is by no means set in stone, however, and will come up again at the onset of the next construction season. The Chamber of Commerce is invited to speak, as is anyone concerned, to aldermen, representatives, and Metra officials alike. The ECA can furnish names, addresses, and email addresses. The shelter removal statement, was, I believe, meant to be lost in the media, and the actual removal ignored until it was too late. If we all stay on top of this issue no one's granny will end up standing in the rain, snow, sleet, or burning sun, or running in front of trains, over icy tracks, to catch their ride across from the one remaining shelter. This is a no-brainer. Thank you for your time and, hopefully, your support.

Jeff Manuel, President, Edgebrook Community Association