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(A video about the new cars can be found at https://youtu.be/DYfJ_X3gUMI)

Metra Board approves purchase of up to 500 modern railcars

Cutting-edge design will deliver enhanced passenger experience while significantly reducing operating costs

CHICAGO (Jan. 13, 2021) – The Metra Board of Directors today approved the purchase of up to 500 state-of-the-art railcars from Alstom Transportation Inc., opting for new multilevel cars that will be more comfortable, accessible, reliable and safe than the outdated gallery cars they will replace.

“This move is truly transformational.” said an elated Metra CEO/Executive Director Jim Derwinski. “We are finally modernizing one of the oldest fleets in the country and, in doing so, we will improve operations while elevating our passenger experience to an entirely new level. It’s really part of our long-term plan to evolve and serve the changing needs of today’s commuters.”

About 40 percent of Metra’s current fleet of 840 cars are rated in marginal or poor condition, although they are still safe to operate. The new cars will offer increased reliability, while reducing operating costs – a substantial improvement over the increasing expense of maintaining the older cars.

This acquisition has been part of Metra’s Board plan since 2014. The Board reviewed and discussed the need for new railcars through a lens of fiscal responsibility, while acknowledging this as the first coach fleet purchase in more than two decades. With consideration given to the impact of operational cost savings, the Board voted unanimously to approve the purchase.

The new cars will have two entranceways on each side with doors nearly level to the platform, thereby requiring only one step to enter instead of multiple steps on the old gallery cars. These changes will improve passenger flow, increase safety and reduce time spent boarding and deboarding at each station. The cars will also be wheelchair accessible for people with disabilities, deploying lifts to bridge the slight difference between the platform and entrance.

Driven by consumer research conducted in 2019, the new cars will be designed for modern-day comfort and teeming with passenger amenities, including video screens, bike racks, storage for bags, charging outlets, cupholders, arm rests and more.

From a mechanical perspective, the new cars will be significantly quieter and deliver a noticeably smoother ride. But, one upgrade that may interest today’s riders is the addition of the most advanced HVAC system available, which will scrub the circulated air – reducing staleness, allergens and airborne viruses.

“From an operational perspective, most people don’t realize that we are constantly making upgrades to tracks, bridges and our car servicing.” said Bruce Marcheschi, Chief Operating Officer/Deputy Executive Director. “But this is something that our passengers will immediately see, feel and smell. This is a real game-changer for our riders.”

The new cars will have stainless steel bodies and be compatible with Metra’s existing fleet, which means they can be coupled to current cars. They will also feature many reliability and safety upgrades, including a microprocessor-controlled braking system, electrically operated doors and passenger area cameras.

The initial order will be for 200 cars. Metra will have the option to buy up to 300 additional cars for up to \$1.8 billion total. The cars specified in the contract are a customized version of Alstom’s Coradia Duplex model and will be built at their Hornell, N.Y. manufacturing facility. It should be noted that Alstom is an Illinois company headquartered in Naperville. The company indicated that a third of the railcar contract value will be provided by Illinois-based suppliers. The first car is expected to be delivered 42 months after the contract is finalized, with the full base order complete 30 months later.

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About Metra

Metra is one of the largest and most complex commuter rail systems in North America, serving Cook, DuPage, Will, Lake, Kane and McHenry counties in northeastern Illinois. The agency provides service to and from downtown Chicago with 242 stations over 11 routes totaling nearly 500 route miles and approximately 1,200 miles of track.

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