

More than 100 daily trains await

West Chicago, Ill., provides Canadian National, Metra, and Union Pacific action



A Union Pacific freight passes the former Elgin, Joliet & Eastern tower in West Chicago, Ill., a great place to watch Canadian National and UP freight action. Dave Kuntz

UP line. Although this looks like an industrial spur, this is actually the birthplace of the BNSF. In 1850, the first Aurora Branch Railroad train ran from Batavia, six miles west, to West Chicago, where, for several years, the trains then used Galena & Chicago Union Railroad trackage (later C&NW, now UP) to reach Chicago. In 1864, the Aurora Branch Railroad became the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy and ultimately the Burlington Northern and then BNSF. The historic line going from West Chicago became obsolete when the Aurora Branch Railroad built a line connecting Aurora to Chicago, now part of BNSF's famed racetrack. In the early 2000s, the connection to the UP line was severed. Trains still run on the Batavia end of the line.

FOR YOUR FAMILY WHILE YOU WATCH TRAINS:

The scenic Fox Valley is to the west, and the river towns of St. Charles and Geneva attract tourists to their antique shops, restaurants, and Fox River vistas. Cantigny Gardens & Park, the estate of *Chicago Tribune* publisher Robert R. McCormick, is opened to the public, four miles away in Wheaton. The park features sprawling gardens and a war museum. Of course, downtown Chicago is always a Metra ride away.

NEARBY: The West Chicago City Museum is on Main Street and open Tuesday-Saturday. The Illinois Railway Museum is an hour north in Union, Ill. The Midwest's largest resort, Pheasant Run in St. Charles, provides lodging, golf, and entertainment.

DAVE KUNTZ of West Chicago, Ill., is a chemistry major at Texas' LeTourneau University, who combines bicycling and train-watching.

CITY: West Chicago, Ill., a suburb located 28 miles west of the city, is well known for its triple diamond mainline crossing. It's common for 100 Canadian National, Union Pacific, and Metra trains to pass through each day. The easiest way to get to West Chicago is to take the train. Metra travels from Ogilvie Transportation Center in downtown Chicago to West Chicago on the UP West line, the former Chicago & North Western portion of Union Pacific's Central Corridor. By car, West Chicago is north of Interstate 88, off the Route 59 exit.

YARDS: To the west of the diamonds is West Chicago Yard, a mid-sized interchange for switching with an automobile unloading ramp. Kress Road passes over the yard's west end. North of the tower, the CN track splits two ways. One track loops around to West Chicago Yard, and the other track continues on to a north yard, which is publicly accessible only via a bike-trail overpass. From that yard, a UP branch goes to Belvidere, Ill., and the CN mainline continues to Waukegan, Ill.

RAILROAD FREQUENCIES: Canadian National: 161.475; UP: 160.890 (road), 161.175 (yard).

TRAIN-WATCHING SPOTS: Visible from the Metra station is UP's Larry Provo Training Center, home to unusual locomotives and rolling stock. The parking lot behind the public library, west of the station,

offers views of UP and Metra trains running left-handed under C&NW-style signals.

The diamonds are a short walk to the west of the train station. On most weekends, train-watchers point the way. Adjacent to the diamonds is the former Elgin, Joliet & Eastern interlocking tower, now operational under CN. West Chicago opposed the EJ&E-CN merger because Washington Street, the main thoroughfare, crosses both railroads within feet of the junction, and traffic backups often extend through the downtown.

A short walk south of the tower reveals an abandoned right-of-way that once reached the

