



CHICAGO MAROON

Chicago colleges lobby for Metra line discounts

By [Kate Shepherd](#)

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The Coalition of Chicago Colleges (CCC) is working to secure discounted fares on the Metra rail system for Chicago-area college students. Student representatives from CCC schools, which include the U of C, are traveling to Springfield on May 7 to lobby state legislators in support of the Metra Initiative Amendment, HB2144. If the State Senate and House pass the bill, the amendment would require the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA), which runs the Metra system, to give all Chicago-area university students a 50-percent discount on monthly passes.

Second-year College Council (CC) member and CCC founder Jarrod Wolf, as well as student government leaders from other universities, has been meeting and working with state legislators to curry favor for the discount. The bill's sponsors are House Speaker Mike Madigan, House Majority Leader and Hyde Park Representative Barbara Flynn Currie, and Representative John Fritchey of Lincoln Park. The CCC discussed the issue at its first meeting on February 21 and students from 18 schools throughout the city are working to get the bill passed.

According to DePaul Student Government Association President Kurt Gonska, students originally met with a Metra representative but when negotiations did not pan out, the CCC decided to take the issue to the state government. DePaul's and Columbia's student governments had individually been thinking about pushing for a Metra discount before the CCC was formed but coordinating communication between local universities proved difficult. The CCC has made it easier to organize efforts and work toward common goals for all universities, Gonska said.

"We hope to get discounts in a way that will help all students," he said.

A discount on monthly Metra passes could save people who commute to U of C's Hyde Park campus a couple hundred dollars each year, Wolf said. The legislation might expand to include discounts on other Metra passes such as the 10-ride pass.

"It would be really helpful for graduate students at our school who ride the Metra daily and also for commuter students at schools such as DePaul and Columbia," he said. "Currently the created amendment is written to give a discount on monthly passes. However, we think that will change shortly."

U of C's Student Government (SG) assembly approved the initiative and SG President Scott Duncombe, along with other area student-body presidents, will sign a letter of support.

According to Wolf, the discount would be beneficial for all U of C students because it will make the Metra a cheaper option for leaving Hyde Park than the Chicago Transit Authority's bus routes. A ride on the Metra,

with the 10-ride pass, would be about a dollar cheaper than a CTA ride if the discount is enacted, he said.

“The Metra is cleaner, safer, and quicker. This is just one step towards improving transportation on our campus,” he said.

The RTA currently offers a state-funded Metra discount for elementary- and high-school students but there is no such program for college students. Adding college students to the program would not exhaust Metra’s state funds for student discounts, Wolf said.

Columbia College Student Government Association President Brian Matos said CCC’s biggest concern is that the RTA will do everything it can to fight the legislation, even though he believes that the discount would be a good move for Metra.

“The more rides they have the better it is for them financially,” he said.

According to Gonska, the Metra discount is the first big issue the CCC has worked on, and it has been a great way for area universities to start working together.

“It’s been a great starting point for us. We hit the ground running right off the bat,” he said.

Matos said the effort has been a great experience for all the students involved, and it will show state leaders that college students are politically active and concerned.

“It’s always good to have students in Springfield and show the legislators that we care,” he said.