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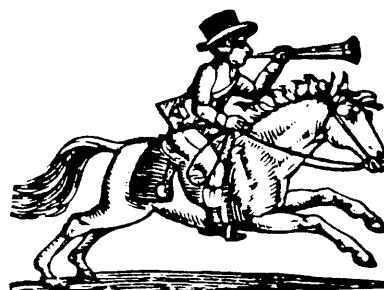
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THE IC'S COMMUTER NEWSLETTER AND A DECADE OF TRANSITION

by John G. Allen

In October 1966 the Illinois Central Railroad inaugurated *Hello!*, a monthly newsletter for its Electric commuter rail customers on the South Side and in the south suburbs. Lasting through February 1975, *Hello!* was an easily forgotten and often overlooked publication of the railroad's public relations department to help convey the railroad's perspective at a time when fares were rising, ridership was declining, and the original electric fleet was approaching the end of its useful service life. Yet despite these limitations, *Hello!* has much redeeming value for today's historian. It brought together much information about IC Electric operations, it provided a comforting sense of community among riders, and its candid editorial style provides a welcome contrast to the sanitized euphemism of much of today's "corporate communications".

When the first issue of *Hello!* appeared in 1966, the original electric cars, built for the electrification of commuter service in 1926, had been in service for 40 years and provided service on all trains. Painted dark green, the cars had taken on a color more akin to brown after four decades amid smoke from the city's heavy industry and the coal which still heated many buildings. Inside, passengers sat on rattan-covered seats (once the finest in comfort) with reversible backs. Interiors were painted a pinkish tone, with maroon below the windows. Incandescent bulbs provided light, there were advertisements above the seats throughout the length of the cars, and the northernmost car of every train was designated as the smoking car. Underneath, the compressors which held air to release the brakes would recharge with a high-



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HELLO!

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Published only for our
Illinois Central commuters.

pitched "thunk-thunk-thunk". At each end of the cars were bench seats, above which stood grab handles for standing passengers. Twin sliding doors opened onto vestibules, painted the same dark green as the exteriors, where another set of doors opened onto high-level wooden platforms at almost every station. The only concession to modernity was a recently-installed Automatic Revenue Collection System, which had yet to shake off an unfortunate reputation for unreliability.

By the time *Hello!* ceased publication, the experience of riding the IC differed from today's Metra Electric largely in the still-prevailing use of wooden platforms, and the colors of the Highliners' exterior paint and seats – minor details compared to the change that swept the railroad during the past decade. At no point since electric service started in 1926 had the IC's "suburban service", as the railroad long called it, undergone more change than during the nine years that *Hello!* was published.

The newsletter was printed on letterhead or card stock, and was invariably 8½ inches high. Different issues appeared with one, two, or sometimes three folds (the latter being on 8½ by 14 inch paper). With the exception of a two-color issue commemorating the arrival of the Highliners, the newsletter was printed in one color—usually black, although brown, dark blue, and even dark green were also used.

The masthead was the same every month, with the volume and issue noted beside the *Hello!* name (which always carried the exclamation point), and immediately underneath appeared the words "Published for our Illinois Central commuters". ➤

