

RIDE THE L

Data Centers #5 · Teens 10-15

with Dess, the Infrastructure Guard and Lena Ashgrove of Channel 5



CREDITS

Ride the L · Data Centers #5 · Teen edition (ages 10–15)

Story and production: GOTB Consulting, Chicago

Lead: Dess · Heroes: Gridline, The Auditor, Commons, Undertow · On screen: Lena Ashgrove,
Channel 5

AI-GENERATED ART, FICTIONAL CHARACTERS

All characters, the town of Prairie Bend and Channel 5 are fictional. Any resemblance to real people is a coincidence. No real logos are shown. Real institutions are described by role. Every number in this book was checked against public sources before printing; see 'Sources' near the end.

Track safety: the third rail carries 600 volts. Never go on the tracks; stay behind the platform edge line.

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THE CREW



DESS

Our lead. Follows how a city moves.



GRIDLINE

Sees where current flows. Stays off the rail.



THE AUDITOR

Sees and reports. Cannot stop anything.



COMMONS

Hero of crews and neighbors. Lantern up.

UNDER THE LOOP · DUSK



DESS

POWER, WATER, ROADS: DONE. NEW ARC: HOW PEOPLE AND DATA MOVE.
START WITH THE STEEL OVER OUR HEADS.



DESS

8 LINES, 146 STATIONS, 224.1 MILES OF TRACK, 1,660 RAIL CARS. ABOUT 2,374 TRAIN TRIPS A DAY.

FACT FILE

1,660 rail cars, 8 rail lines, 224.1 miles of track, 146 stations; trains make about 2,374 trips a day.

Source: CTA, "Facts at a Glance"

ON THE STRUCTURE



GRIDLINE

EVERY TRAIN PULLS 600 VOLTS FROM THE THIRD RAIL. DEADLY. STAY OFF THE TRACKS. SAME GRID FEEDS THE DATA CENTERS.

FACT FILE

The electrified third rail carries 600 volts used to propel trains, a level of electricity that is almost always lethal; riders must never enter the tracks.

Source: CTA press release, "New CTA Campaign Highlights Dangers of Going on Tracks"



STATION SCREEN

LENA (ON SCREEN)

VERIFIED

2025: ABOUT 421,000 RAIL RIDES AND OVER A MILLION TOTAL CTA RIDES ON AN AVERAGE WEEKDAY.

FACT FILE

2025 average weekday riders: bus 621,159; rail 421,346; total 1,042,505. 2025 annual: rail 138.4 million; total 338.0 million.

Source: CTA, "Facts at a Glance"



THE AUDITOR

FIRST L LINE: JUNE 6, 1892. LOOP ELEVATED: 1897. FIRST SUBWAY: 1943.
CTA TOOK OVER IN 1947.

FACT FILE

Dates: horse cars 1859; first rail line June 6, 1892; Loop Elevated opened Oct. 12, 1897; State Street Subway Oct. 17, 1943; CTA became the operator Oct. 1, 1947.

Source: CTA, "Facts at a Glance"

UP, DOWN, AND LEVEL



THE AUDITOR

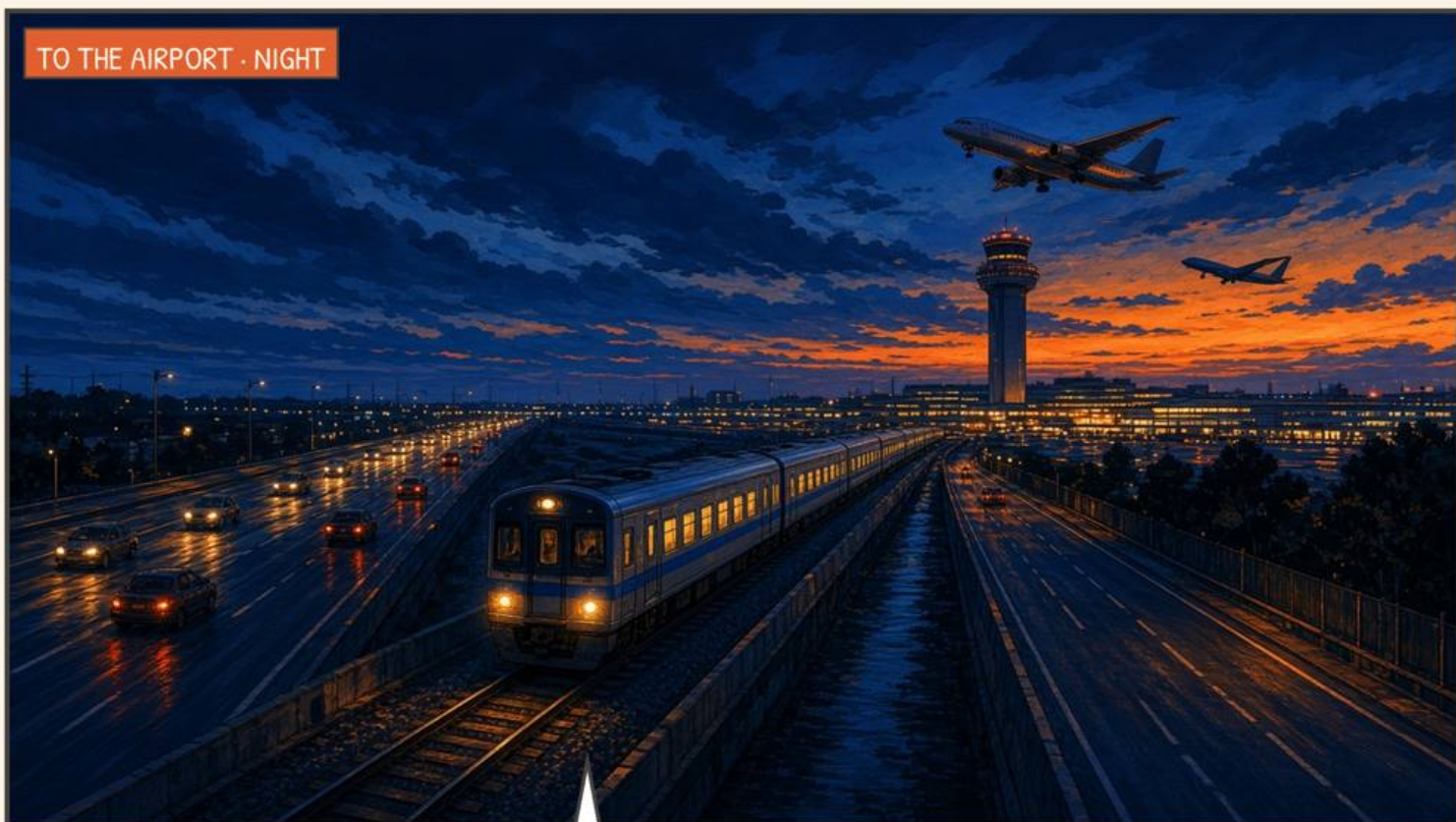
35.8 MILES ELEVATED, 11.4 MILES UNDERGROUND, 35 AT STREET LEVEL.
OLD STEEL, CARRYING TODAY'S CITY.

FACT FILE

35.8 miles of elevated structure; 11.4 miles of subway; 35.0 miles at grade.

Source: CTA, "Facts at a Glance"

TO THE AIRPORT · NIGHT



DESS

THE BLUE LINE RUNS TO O'HARE. THE ORANGE LINE RUNS TO MIDWAY.
THE AIRPORTS ARE NEXT.

FACT FILE

The Blue Line reaches O'Hare; the Orange Line reaches Midway.

Source: CTA, "Facts at a Glance"



TRACK CREW · 3 AM

COMMONS

10,869 CTA POSITIONS. SOME DRIVE, SOME FIX TRAINS, SOME REPLACE TRACK AT 3 AM SO YOU RIDE AT 7.

FACT FILE

2,012 buses, 127 bus routes, 10,667 bus stops; 10,869 employee positions.

Source: CTA, "Facts at a Glance"



THE AUDITOR

NATIONALLY, 34 MILLION TRANSIT TRIPS A WEEKDAY IN 2023, STILL ONLY 73% OF PRE-PANDEMIC RIDERSHIP.

FACT FILE

Americans took 34 million transit trips each weekday in 2023; ridership was 73% of pre-pandemic levels in 2023 (down as much as 80% in April 2020).

Source: ASCE 2025 Report Card, "Transit"



THE FUNDING BOARD

LENA (ON SCREEN)

REPORTED

THE 2021 INFRASTRUCTURE LAW GAVE TRANSIT \$108 BILLION.
ENGINEERS STILL COUNT A \$152 BILLION GAP OVER TEN YEARS.

FACT FILE

The 2021 infrastructure law gave transit \$108 billion; a \$152 billion 10-year funding gap remains; \$618 billion in needs through 2033.

Source: ASCE 2025 Report Card, "Transit"



THE AUDITOR

CTA'S 2026 BUDGET: \$2.231 BILLION TO OPERATE, \$1.505 BILLION FOR CAPITAL. FARES COVER ONLY PART OF IT.

FACT FILE

2026 operating budget \$2.231 billion; capital budget \$1.505 billion.

Source: CTA, "Facts at a Glance"



BUS STOP · NIGHT

DESS

51% OF AMERICANS SAY THEIR BUS OR TRAIN SERVICE ISN'T GOOD ENOUGH. 42% SAY THEY HAVE ACCESS.

FACT FILE

51% of Americans report inadequate bus, subway or commuter bus service; 42% say they have access.

Source: ASCE 2025 Report Card, "Transit"

TOWN HALL · LANTERN UP



COMMONS

SOME SAY FUND IT MORE. SOME SAY FIX HOW IT'S RUN FIRST. BOTH
WANT TRAINS THAT COME ON TIME.

THE LOOP · DAWN



DESS

STEEL, POWER AND PEOPLE MOVING A CITY. NEXT STOP: THE AIRPORTS.

GOTB Consulting works on the infrastructure and procurement behind projects like these.

FACT FILE

The Blue Line reaches O'Hare; the Orange Line reaches Midway.

Source: CTA, "Facts at a Glance"

BY THE NUMBERS

8 LINES • 146 STATIONS

224.1 miles of track, 1,660 rail cars, about 2,374 train trips a day. (CTA)

421,346 • 1,042,505

2025 average weekday rail rides; total bus + rail rides. (CTA)

1892 • 1897 • 1943

First L line; Loop Elevated; first subway. (CTA)

10,869

CTA employee positions: drivers, mechanics, track crews. (CTA)

\$108B • \$152B

Transit money in the 2021 infrastructure law; 10-year gap engineers still see. (ASCE 2025)

600 VOLTS

On the third rail. Almost always lethal. Never enter the tracks. (CTA)

TWO SIDES

The strongest case on each side, labeled. Nonpartisan.

FUND IT

Transit is the city's spine: a million rides a weekday, and a \$152 billion national gap that won't close itself.

FIX HOW IT'S RUN

Prove each dollar moves riders. 51% say service isn't good enough; reliability first, then expansion.

PLAN WITH THE GRID

Every train is load on the same grid as the data centers. Plan power for both, in the open.

WHAT BOTH SHARE

Trains that come on time, crews who go home safe.

YOUR TURN

What would make your ride better? _____

TRANSIT WORDS

THIRD RAIL

A powered rail beside the running rails; 600 volts on the L.

AT GRADE

Track at street level, not raised or underground.

OPERATING BUDGET

Money to run service day to day: crews, power, upkeep.

CAPITAL BUDGET

Money to build and replace: cars, track, stations.

RIDERSHIP

How many rides people take.

FUNDING GAP

What is needed minus what is planned to be spent.

QUICK QUIZ

1. WHEN DID THE FIRST L LINE OPEN?

a) 1892 b) 1947 c) 1990

2. VOLTS ON THE THIRD RAIL?

a) 12 b) 600 c) 6

3. 2023 U.S. RIDERSHIP VS. PRE-PANDEMIC?

a) 150% b) About 73% c) 10%

4. WHICH LINE REACHES O'HARE?

a) Blue b) Orange

ANSWERS

1 a • 2 b • 3 b • 4 a

SOURCES

Full list with fact IDs: FACT_BASE.md and NUMBER_CHECK.md (GOTB internal).

CTA

CTA, "Facts at a Glance"

ASCE 2025 REPORT CARD

ASCE 2025 Report Card, "Transit"

CTA PRESS RELEASE

CTA press release, "New CTA Campaign Highlights Dangers of Going on Tracks"

ABOUT GOTB CONSULTING

WHO WE ARE

A Chicago firm working on infrastructure and procurement for the systems communities depend on.

DATA CENTERS

Siting, delivery and community questions.

POWER

Grid connections, substations and lines.

WATER

Supply, treatment and cooling.

PUBLIC WORKS

Roads, pipes and public spaces.

THE END



STEEL, POWER AND PEOPLE, MOVING A CITY.

Next time: more from the Infrastructure Guard.

GOTB CONSULTING • CHICAGO

Data centers • Power • Water • Public works

AI-generated art, fictional characters