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## NATO summit security looks at suspending rail service

By Paul Merrion     March 28, 2012

(Crain's) — NATO summit security precautions could force the shutdown of several rail lines running from the South Side into downtown Chicago, potentially disrupting upward of 25,000 morning rush-hour commuters.

In addition to rail lines that run under the McCormick Place summit site, Lake Shore Drive and the Stevenson Expressway, which run right next to the convention hall, might be restricted or closed during the two-day summit, just as an interstate highway adjacent to the 2004 Democratic National Convention site in Boston was shut down.

As City Hall and protest groups argue over where protesters will be permitted to march, local officials and the public are waiting for a detailed plan from the U.S. Secret Service, which is in charge of overall security because the summit has been designated a National Special Security Event, like a presidential inauguration or the Super Bowl.

Less than two months before some 50 heads of state and thousands of dignitaries meet May 20-21 (Sunday-Monday) at McCormick Place, the NATO summit has generated controversy in Chicago over the potential disruption from protests and violence, but security put in place to handle demonstrations and protect VIPs could create its own disruption and controversy.

“You mean the NATO nightmare? There is a desire for total perimeter control. It could mean the cessation of rail service,” said Gerald Hanas, general manager of the Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District, whose South Shore Line carries about 7,000 passengers each weekday on rail lines running under McCormick Place into downtown Chicago. The train originates in South Bend, Ind. Weekend ridership averages 3,000 people a day.

While shutting down the rail lines has been put forth as a “worst-case scenario,” Mr. Hanas said, “they are still discussing that. All options are open.”

In addition to the South Shore line, Metra, Amtrak and the Canadian National Railway operate trains that run under McCormick Place. The Metra Electric Line carries an average of 36,300 riders (in and out of the Loop) each weekday on 172 trains running under the convention hall, and Amtrak has six trains a day on that route. Average weekend ridership is 13,600 a day.

Spokesmen for Amtrak, Metra and CN declined to say what options are under consideration but said they have been meeting with the Secret Service. “We’ve not been told we can’t operate,” an Amtrak spokesman said.

The Chicago Department of Transportation did not respond to requests for comment on whether Lake Shore Drive and the Stevenson Expressway might be shut down during the summit, which is scheduled to run from 2 p.m. on Sunday to 2 p.m. on Monday.

A spokesman for the Illinois Department of Transportation could not confirm that closure of the highways is under discussion, saying that the state is “still in talks with federal and local authorities and it’s a bit premature to speculate about which roads would be impacted, if at all.”

Earlier this month, the [Coast Guard signaled](#) that it would shut boat traffic on parts of the Chicago River and Lake Michigan during the summit as a precaution.

During the Democratic convention in Boston, local officials rerouted traffic on I-93 starting at 4 p.m. every day in order to have it totally clear next to the Fleet Center convention site by 7 p.m. Local authorities took advantage of

the nightly closures over four days to make road and bridge repairs, according to [a review of the shutdown](#) by the Department of Transportation.

The Secret Service is expected to issue a detailed security plan about two to four weeks before the summit.

A spokesman for the Secret Service said he couldn't get into specifics about the security planning, but "the process is ongoing; things change constantly." While inconvenience to the public is one of many factors considered, he noted, "security is paramount."

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