

# INSIGHTS

Metro Transit's weekly employee newsletter

June 19, 2020



One of Metro Transit's biggest fans, 4-year-old Oliver, dropped off treats and was treated to a special tour of the Nicollet Garage on Friday, June 12. Accompanied by his father Anders, Oliver took the bus to get donuts every Saturday – a ritual he has missed since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the end of his tour last week, Oliver declared: "When I grow up, I'm going to be a bus driver and then you can all ride my bus!"

## Temporary shields being introduced to help protect operators

Body Shop technicians have been asked to come up with creative solutions more than once since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Their latest invention: Temporary shields, fashioned largely from recycled bus parts, that will help safeguard operators as customers pass by.

The temporary shields were installed on a few buses this week so operators can provide feedback ahead of a larger rollout.

They are being installed on buses that have not been equipped with full barriers, and will eventually be replaced by those larger, permanent barriers. Installation of the larger barriers will resume later this summer and continue over the next year.

Before this latest effort, Body Shop technicians created movable aisle barriers that encourage customers to avoid the driver's area and barriers that will be used at temperature checkpoints being set up at work sites.

The aisle barriers will be removed when front door boarding and on-board fare collection resumes in the future. No date for the resumption of front-door boarding has been set.

## Temperature screening expanding to all work sites next week

Temperature checks will be expanded to additional locations next week to help detect employees and visitors who may be experiencing symptoms of COVID-19. Fevers are among the symptoms of COVID-19, though asymptomatic carriers would not be detected. Anyone who registers more than 100 degrees will be sent home and advised to seek medical attention. Managers will help determine if and when employees are able to return to work. Temperature screenings have been occurring at the Transit Control Center and Rail Control Center since May.

## Survey shows customers are looking forward to seeing us again

From General Manager Wes Kooistra

To help slow the spread of COVID-19, we've asked riders to limit their use of transit and to take every precaution when they do so. Due to continuing precautions over the spread of the pandemic, we are not yet prepared to welcome all riders back, but we very much look forward to that time and are making plans today for when we can dial back customer restrictions.



Our ridership reflects our current emphasis on essential travel only – in May, ridership was down about 74% compared to the same month last year. We've seen the largest declines in services primarily used by commuters who have the option of working from home.

Some riders are now asking when we are going to return to normal services, and it is good to hear that some riders are eager to return. But we also know some riders are approaching the return to services more cautiously.

In late May, more than 400 Go-To Card users were asked when they thought they'd start riding again. About one in five said they'd wait until a vaccine is available, and nearly everyone else said they expected to return over the next year.

The survey is a small sampling of our ridership, reflecting only the mood of those who regularly commuted on transit before the pandemic and are currently working from home. More work is needed to ensure we are hearing from all those we are serving now and want to serve again in the future.

Still, the survey provides a glimpse of the concerns people have about riding transit and how we can begin to restore this portion of our ridership when it is safe to do so.

Unsurprisingly, widespread use of facial coverings and frequent disinfecting of vehicles are the biggest confidence boosters. Continued efforts to provide riders space on board vehicles also ranks highly.

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We have already taken several steps to ensure the safety of our customers and operators. Customers are repeatedly reminded to cover their face and to take other precautions. All our vehicles are being disinfected daily. Larger buses, expanded service on our busiest routes and passenger limits are being used to promote social distancing.

We will build on these measures as we move forward, and we will communicate openly with customers about the actions we're taking every step along the way. We are taking the right steps, but riders here and across the country are saying their level of confidence relies on us telling our story in detail.

This work is not being done in isolation.

Across the industry, agencies are asking their customers what would make them feel more comfortable riding and coming up with similar results. While we are finding innovative solutions that address local needs, we will work closely with our peers to identify and implement best practices. We will also continue to seek input from customers and employers who not just rely on us but are our partners in our recovery effort.

As we prepare to welcome customers back, I want to reiterate my appreciation for all that's being done to give current riders the best experience possible under these highly unusual circumstances.

These efforts not only serve those who need us now but put us in position to welcome more of our community back when we're ready to do so, and they're ready to ride.

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Donation drive, chalk walk this Saturday at Heywood

Employees and community members are invited to participate in a Chalk Walk and donation drive on Saturday, June 20, at the Metro Transit Campus. The event will run from 9 a.m. to noon.

In addition to decorating sidewalks on and around the campus, home goods, personal care items and non-perishable food that will be distributed throughout the community will be collected at the event.

The donations will be distributed by Metro Transit volunteers in partnership with We Push for Peace, a non-profit led by South Operator **Tray Pollard**.

Visit Metro Transit's Facebook page for more information and a list of needed items.

CUSTOMERS TELL US HOW WE'RE DOING

## "Thank you all for being there"

A St. Paul resident submitted the following comment earlier this month expressing her appreciation for all those who make transit available in the Twin Cities.

*Thank you all for being there for people who have no other way to get around. When I was young and relied on the bus for transportation it was always so wonderful to see the bus coming and to know it meant safety and a ride home. I still feel that way whenever I see a bus. Glad you are back on the road.*

*Sharon Shinomya, St Paul*

Pandemic leads new operators to get their start online

Instructor **Denny Johnson** has spent the past 20 years leading in-person classes.

This week, he's introducing another group of new bus operators to the job. But there's one big difference: Johnson is alone in his office, and the 10 new hires are watching him and guest speakers present live from their own homes.

Like schools across the country, the shift to online learning is a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which requires people to isolate and keep their distance as much as practical. This is the first time Metro Transit has offered live online instruction, and the practice is believed to be unique nationally.

For Johnson, the transition to online learning has been relatively simple. But there has been at least one surprise: the window it offers into the world of his students.

"They're not just anonymous people coming into the classroom," Johnson said. "When you see them at home, you see that they're real people with kids and spouses who are depending on this job. I've really liked that part."

While the delivery method has changed, the information that is being shared is not.

"It's the same videos, the same PowerPoints, the same guest speakers come in and present," Instruction Manager **Dan Stoffer** said. "The only thing that's changed is how students get the information."

Stoffer was inspired to give online training a shot in part because he's seen it in practice at home, where his sons finished out their school year. He even adopted one of the tactics used by Stillwater Area Public Schools, where his sons are enrolled, and had new hires pick up printed material curbside before classes began.

After completing their 56 hours of classroom instruction, the new operators will begin training on the bus. But that, too, will look different than it has in the past.

Instead of meeting in groups, students will work one-on-one with instructors. Both students and their instructors will have their temperatures taken and wear masks.



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