

# INSIGHTS

Metro Transit's weekly employee newsletter

June 26, 2020



In partnership with We Push For Peace, a non-profit led by South Operator **Tray Pollard**, Metro Transit staff collected and distributed household supplies, non-perishable food and masks in south Minneapolis on Saturday, June 20. At the distribution event, residents were also invited to sign up for the Transit Assistance Program, which allows qualified individuals to ride for \$1, leading to the highest single-day registration for the program this year. Plans to encourage additional volunteerism among staff in the future are being developed. Employees who have ideas about the role Metro Transit can play in advancing equity and supporting region's continued recovery efforts are encouraged to e-mail [EquityMT@metrotransit.org](mailto:EquityMT@metrotransit.org).

## Service expanding on light rail, busiest local bus routes June 27

Light rail service will be expanded and more scheduled trips will be added to several core urban local bus routes on Saturday, June 27.

Light rail trains will operate every 15 minutes between 5 a.m. and 11:30 p.m., every day of the week. Since March, light rail trains have been operating every 20 minutes between 6 a.m. and 9 p.m.

Bus routes that will see more scheduled trips include the 5, 10 and 18. To support social distancing, unscheduled trips were previously operating on these and other busy routes as operators were available.

No schedule changes will be made on the Northstar Commuter Rail Line, which has reduced weekday service and no service on weekends.

This weekend's changes follow schedule adjustments that took effect on Saturday, June 13. The additional scheduled service is made possible by the return of bus and train operators who had been on leave due to COVID-19.

Additional scheduled service changes will be made in September. Service is expected to increase to about 80% of its pre-pandemic level when those changes take effect this fall, and service will likely remain at that level through the end of 2021.

Ridership has increased slightly in recent weeks but remains about 67% below its pre-pandemic level.

A cautionary message to me and other "white progressive" employees

From General Manager Wes Kooistra



In past columns, I have shared that as a white person I am not confident speaking about race. I find myself in an appointed position of leadership facing the complex issue of systemic racism as a white male who has benefitted from systems of racial oppression.

I feel conflicted expressing this because I and other white people should not make ourselves the center of attention in these discussions. But my narcissistic struggle with my role and response is irrelevant when juxtaposed with the struggle of people who personally experience the consequences of systemic racism.

The introduction to Dr. Robin DiAngelo's book, *White Fragility*, articulates a message that is important for me to hear and that I believe is worth sharing:

"...I believe that white progressives cause the most daily damage to people of color. I define white progressives as any white person who thinks he or she is not a racist, or is less racist, or in the "choir," or already "gets it." White progressives can be the most difficult for people of color because, to the degree that we think we have arrived, we will put our energy into making sure that others see us as having arrived. None of our energy will go into what we need to be doing for the rest of our lives: engaging in ongoing self-awareness, continuing education, relationship building, and actual antiracist practices. White progressives do indeed uphold and perpetrate racism, but our defensiveness and certitude make it virtually impossible to explain to us how we do so."

What I take from this is that we must reflect, seek education, build relationships, and act—not just in this moment, but throughout our lives.

The literature about advancing equity in transit lists many recommendations that are mostly pointed toward outcomes—addressing inequities in access, developing equitable fare policies that

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include decriminalizing fare evasion, creating better access to affordable housing and using operations and capital projects to advance meaningful employment in low-income communities and communities of color.

But one process recommendation is always included, and that is engagement with communities. Listening is critical to our self-awareness, our ongoing education, the building of trusting relationships, and effective action. What we hear and do is so much more important than what we say. I want us to direct our energy toward listening and applying what we hear in our responses and in our actions.

Since the June 8 Metro Transit Virtual Town Hall, my direct reports team has spent time considering the messages we received and how we can apply these insights to our work. As part of these meetings, I have asked each of my directors and operations officers to reexamine their role and the role that their department plays in advancing equity in our organization and our region.

I am reexamining my role as well. On Wednesday, I sent my direct reports a list of initial actions we need to take to advance equity in transit this year. This is a start toward better addressing many of the recommendations for advancing equity in transit, including developing a public engagement approach that is not just project-based, but that supports an ongoing dialogue with communities. I have asked my leadership team to share these initial steps with their staff, but please know that this is just a start. There is so much more to do.

We have asked you to submit your thoughts and ideas to the Equity and Inclusion team at [EquityMT@metrotransit.org](mailto:EquityMT@metrotransit.org). An online form where ideas can be submitted anonymously has also been made available on MetNet.

Please continue to send us your thoughts. I very much look forward to seeing the ideas that have been submitted, and to the continuing dialogues that will lead to actions that advance equity in transit.

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Instructor Denny Johnson retires with nearly 41 years of service

Instructor **Denny Johnson**, right, will retire on Friday, July 3, after nearly 41 years of service. Johnson began his career at the old Snelling Garage and was among Metro Transit's first group of instructors.



One of the best parts of his work as an instructor, he said, was meeting people from all over the world who came to Metro Transit with a desire to work hard. As his career

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## **"Truly an outstanding and essential bus operator"**

Heywood Operator **William Vacura** received the following commendation from a Route 755 customer who appreciates his continued dedication during the COVID-19 pandemic.

*I want to commend an essential worker who has continued to provide essential service to me and the community by providing safe and efficient transportation. I've had the honor of riding the bus with this operator on other routes and saw him today on my 755A. It was nice to see him showing his continued commitment and service to us customers during this time of need. He is truly an outstanding and essential bus operator. Thank you William, as well as all other drivers at Metro Transit.*

*Terri, Crystal*

progressed, many of his former students would see him and remark about the impact his patient, early guidance had on their lives. "You realize you really do make a difference," Johnson said this week.

Johnson said he would miss the banter between colleagues, and commuting with fellow riders he'd befriended while commuting on the bus. In retirement, he plans to devote more time to several interests, including technology, cooking and the outdoors, and to enjoy living at a more relaxed pace. "I'm going to take each day and enjoy it, whatever it brings," he said.

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### New equipment promises cleaner, more efficient fueling

Historically, five fuelers have spent their entire eight-hour overnight shifts refueling buses at the Heywood Garage. That work promises to be done more efficiently in the future, though, thanks to new fueling equipment that was recently installed at the garage.

The new equipment allows reels and hoses to be moved further and more easily, and keeps them safely out of the way as buses are pulled in and out of the fueling area. The current setup was designed when diesel fuel went into the front of the bus, but fuel now goes in the rear.

New high-flow nozzles also dispense diesel fuel more quickly and cleanly than the models they replaced, which were similar to those found at any commercial gas station.

"It's more efficient, cleaner and safer," Maintenance Supervisor **Carlos Gutierrez** said. "It's a definite upgrade."

There are five fuel islands at the Heywood Garage, each with hoses for diesel fuel and def fluid, which helps clean up engine emissions.

The new equipment is part of a larger modernization effort wrapping up at the garage. In-ground hoists, renovated maintenance offices, LED lights and ceiling fans were also included in that work. (A new operator breakroom on the north end of the garage opened earlier this year.)

Plans to similarly upgrade fueling areas at other garages are in the works.



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