

# INSIGHTS

Metro Transit's weekly employee newsletter

July 10, 2020



Ruter operators **Mark Ogburn**, **Troy Macon** and **Andrew Delaney** helped distribute free masks to customers last week at the Brooklyn Center Transit Center. Masks were similarly distributed at several other locations last week and again this week. So far, more than 20,000 cloth reusable masks obtained through the Federal Transit Administration have been distributed to the public by Metro Transit. Face coverings are required while riding transit and are considered a key to preventing the transmission of COVID-19, especially among those who have contracted the virus but are not showing symptoms.

## A message from Council Chair Charlie Zelle

*Staff: Earlier this week, Council Chair Charlie Zelle sent a letter to all employees acknowledging recent feedback and expanding on our commitment to advancing equity. A portion of that letter is below. As General Manager, I am part of the Metropolitan Council's executive team, and I share the Chair's call for bolder action. I want to thank the Chair for his commitment, and thank all those who have spoken up for sharing their valuable perspectives. -Wes Kooistra*

When we opened a conversation among staff following the killing of George Floyd, we expected deeply personal conversations and calls to action. Today, we are moved by and grateful for your candor, vulnerability, passion, and pragmatism.

I'm writing on behalf of the Metropolitan Council executive team to address the feedback we've heard about our equity work and commitment to being anti-racist.

We've received this feedback through town hall meetings, messages and in direct appeals to leaders, including a letter signed by about 200 current and former employees. All this input is valuable, and we are considering all of it with the care it deserves.

We've heard about how we need to re-examine how equitably we provide services to the region, and we've been challenged to foster a healthier, more transparent work culture.

We agree that we need to address systemic barriers and to create more accessible and transparent processes for our customers, stakeholders, and for you. We've tried and often failed to meet needs identified by communities of color and to be transparent about our actions.

We don't have all the answers, but we feel strongly about the responsibility we have to be responsive and accountable. Thank you for being an integral part of this ongoing conversation.

Find more about current and future actions being taken at the Council on MetNet.

## Taking a careful step forward in our response to COVID-19

From General Manager Wes Kooistra



Starting today, our buses will no longer display a message that has become familiar in the past few months – Essential Trips Only.

We are taking this message down as the state carefully turns the dial in its COVID-19 response, while continuing to emphasize the need to take recommended precautions seriously.

Our shift also represents a recognition that more of our customers are returning to work or have other reasons to ride with us. People rely on us to get where they need to go, and we are committed to providing that critical service.

We are beginning to see more riders gradually return to transit. And while we can expect additional riders to return in the coming weeks and months, we will not let up in our efforts to safeguard our employees and customers.

In practice, that means continuing to do all we can to keep our buses, trains and facilities as clean as possible, regularly reminding customers that face coverings are required and upholding passenger limits to give people sufficient room on our buses.

We are trusting that customers will determine when they need to ride, and will do their part to limit their trips so those who must take transit can do so safely.

Since late-March, we have also asked customers who can do so to board through the rear door and suspended on-board fare collection. This measure was taken out of an abundance of caution, but was never intended to be a long-term solution.

In August, we expect to ask our riders to resume boarding through the front door and to purchase or validate their fares. Many of our peer agencies have already taken this step, or are planning to, in the near future.

To create a safer boarding environment, we are putting in temporary operator shields and are installing more of the permanent barriers that will eventually

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be on all our buses.

We will also give customers time to prepare and take every opportunity to promote the use of Go-To Cards and our mobile ticketing app, which allow people to board in just a few seconds. Customers who can do so will be strongly encouraged to exit using the rear doors.

While we are confident in our next steps, we will continue to respond to the guidance of public health experts, as well as feedback from customers and staff.

As we prepare for the next chapter, I want to again thank all those who are helping our region, our customers and our workforce stay safe. While we are not yet ready to put out the welcome mat, these efforts are critical to those who need to ride with us now, and those who want to do so again in the future.

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Feedback, discussion to be focus of July 29 Equity Town Hall

Employees are invited to call into a virtual town hall about what Metro Transit can do to advance equity later this month. The town hall will run from 10 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. on Wednesday, July 29, and is being hosted by Metro Transit's Equity & Inclusion team and General Manager **Wes Kooistra**.

Staff should have received an e-mail invite with information about calling into the town hall or accessing it using WebEx. To learn more about the event or offer feedback send an e-mail to [EquityMT@metrotransit.org](mailto:EquityMT@metrotransit.org).

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In This Together: Heywood Operator Machelle "Mickey" Albert

Across the organization, Metro Transit employees' work has been changed by the COVID-19 pandemic. These "In These Together" Q&As illustrate how employees are adapting both on and off the clock. Read more interviews here.



#### How has the pandemic affected your day-to-day work?

Some of the new protocols, like wiping down a bus before beginning your shift, were easy to get used to. This was something I've been doing since I became a bus operator, so it was habit. Adding a face mask was initially difficult for me, but after a while I've gotten used to it.

#### What's it like working through a pandemic?

It got a little lonely at times because there were fewer co-workers to talk to during downtime. When we moved into the new Heywood driver's

#### CUSTOMERS TELL US HOW WE'RE DOING

#### "Acknowledged, valued and cared about"

East Metro Operator **Abdulahi Jibrell** received the following commendation after waiting for a Route 63 customer who nearly missed the bus.

*I work at CVS Pharmacy, and when I work nights, I get off at exactly 10 p.m. and have to catch the bus just a few minutes later. Sometimes a customer comes in and I miss the bus, or nearly miss it. Tonight was one of those moments. I saw the bus coming and waved at the driver, thinking full well they wouldn't see me. When they drove past, I gave up in frustration and was nearly in tears. Then the driver stopped in the middle of the road and I was able to get on, get to my connecting route, and get home on time.*

*This moment, even though it was so small, meant more to me than you could know. I felt acknowledged, valued and cared about. As a fellow customer service worker, I know how exhausting it is to be constantly available for people. I have always seen drivers exhibit genuine respect and care for me and other riders. The care this driver showed me was invaluable. Please thank them and tell them they have done an amazing service tonight!*

*Abby, St. Paul*

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room, I contacted my co-workers and helped move their belongings from their old lockers to their new ones, which helped me keep in contact with people I wasn't seeing on a daily basis.

#### How has your life changed outside of work?

I've been able to put more money toward my goal of home ownership. My oldest daughter and I live in the same apartment building and we take turns hosting dinners, which also include my son. I'd love to invite my dad, but can't due to his underlying conditions. I recently visited him to give him more masks and hand sanitizer, but will continue to limit my contact until it's safe.

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Congratulations to these employees who celebrated their retirements in June

**Ramona "Mona" Shafer**, #3193, Janitor, 40 years

**Mary Beth Christenson**, #3458, Fare Collections Supervisor, 28 years

**Jay Jensen**, #9157, Public Facilities Worker, 28 years

**Michael Dalbec**, #5867, Operator, East Metro, 22 years

**James Jackson**, #2663, Operator, South, 19 years

**Fue Vang**, #2307, Train Operator, 19 years

**Mark Turan**, #5601, Mechanic Technician, 19 years

**Charles Ruud**, Manager, SCADA Signals/Communications, 16 years

**Richard Jensen**, Sergeant, 10 years

**John Cota**, #71162, Stockkeeper, 9 years

**Andrew Carlson**, Police Officer, 6 years



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