

INSIGHTS

Metro Transit's weekly employee newsletter

July 31, 2020



Repairs finished up this week at the Chicago-Lake Transit Center, which was damaged during demonstrations that followed the killing of George Floyd. Glass that was broken at the Lake Street-Midtown Station was also recently replaced, and many of the shelters that were damaged have been repaired. Plans to solicit feedback on the future of the Chicago-Lake Transit Center are temporarily on hold, but may move forward later this year, depending on community interest.

COVID-19 Developments: July 27 through July 31

Free COVID-19 testing available: Employees are reminded that free COVID-19 tests are available. Tests can be administered at the Council's Well@Work clinics or at HealthPartners and Park Nicollet drive-up sites throughout the region. To make a drive-up appointment, call 952-853-8690 and tell the scheduler you are a "transit essential worker." To make an appointment at the Well@Work Clinic, call 952-967-7468. Employees may be tested regardless of whether or not they are showing symptoms. Symptoms include cough, shortness of breath, a fever, muscle or body aches, vomiting, diarrhea, or new loss of taste or smell. To date, 51 Metro Transit employees have tested positive for COVID-19, and 44 have returned to work.

Front-door boarding resumes August 1: Customers will resume boarding through the front door on Saturday, Aug. 1, when onboard fare collection will also resume. All in-service buses will be equipped with temporary shields or permanent barriers before front-door boarding resumes, and customers are being encouraged to pay their fares with a Go-To Card or the Metro Transit App. Beginning next week, floor decals will be installed to direct customers who can do so to exit out the back door. Recorded messages reminding people to exit out the rear door are also available.

Outreach, surveys will help gauge COVID-19 impacts: Throughout August, Metro Transit staff will be asking customers for feedback to learn how they've been impacted by COVID-19, George Floyd's homicide and the aftermath that resulted in the destruction of community resources. Feedback collected through surveys and meetings will help inform near-term decisions and future public engagement efforts. Employees who are interested in gathering feedback can contact their manager or Jae Halverson at jae.halverson@metrotransit.org. In addition to gathering input, the outreach events will be used as an opportunity to share information about the Transit Assistance Program (TAP) and to distribute masks. Around 50,000 masks will have been distributed by the time scheduled outreach activities conclude.

Equity goals must be addressed with intention

From General Manager Wes Kooistra

The horrific killing of George Floyd led many organizations, companies and civic leaders to make bold statements about the urgent need to confront longstanding inequities in our region.



We have pledged to critically assess what we are doing and what more we can do to address racism and barriers faced by our customers and employees. We know that we need to be more deliberate and intentional in how we advance equity in our service delivery and in our organization.

I asked employees to tell us how we can do better and tasked our Equity & Inclusion team with summarizing what we heard. The input we received was presented during an Equity Town Hall on Wednesday and can be reviewed on MetNet.

Thank you to all the hundreds of employees across the organization who raised their voices and who want to see us hold ourselves to a higher standard.

As I told those who participated in this week's town hall, it is clear that while we have had good intentions, we have also been too passive in our approach to equity and we must do more. More means more actions, not more words.

This work does not have a beginning or an end. In fact, we must make equity a deeply ingrained part of our culture, reflected in our budgets, work plans and hiring practices.

While the conversation must continue, I have also made it known that we cannot wait to act. To that end, we are taking several steps that will have an immediate and meaningful impact on what we do and how we do it. Some examples include:

- Expanding our Transit Assistance Program (TAP) so individuals who are receiving unemployment benefits or have been declared refugees or asylum seekers can access reduced-cost fares.
- Changing the Better Bus Stops project

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into a program that will be an on-going component of our Capital Budget development.

- Inviting community feedback on an ongoing basis and independent of any particular project, an effort that will begin in earnest this month.
- Developing metrics to evaluate our progress in advancing equity in transit.
- Formally assessing how quarterly service changes impact low-income communities, beginning with changes that will be made this September.
- Continuing to advocate for a change in state law that would reduce the penalties associated with fare evasion, and finding ways to increase the presence of non-sworn personnel on transit.

This is just a start. Feedback received before and during this week's Town Hall will shape additional recommendations that will be presented by the Equity & Inclusion team this September.

Those recommendations are intended to provide more specific direction on the steps we can take to support more equitable outcomes, and will reflect input from frontline staff and management in every department.

I encourage employees to continue sharing feedback as this work continues. Comments can be submitted through e-mail, an anonymous online form, or through any of the representatives who serve on the Equity & Inclusion team. As General Manager, I have committed Metro Transit's leadership team to this work and we should be held to our actions, and not our words.

The same is true for you. This isn't just a challenge to leadership, it is a challenge to each of you who must also feel personally responsible for this work. Saying more needs to be done is the simple part. Identifying what to do and committing to action is the hard work that we all share.

Operator's herniated disk a reminder to focus on back health

A Fit For Life Wellness Champion at Nicollet Garage, Gayle Gilman walks to and from work, eats farm fresh vegetables and exercises regularly.



So it was a surprise when, in June, Gilman found herself at the hospital after excruciating pain led to a sleepless night. Diagnosed with a herniated disk, she spent three days pacing the hallways with a walker and facing the prospect of surgery before being released and instructed to enter physical therapy.

CUSTOMERS TELL US HOW WE'RE DOING

"Patience and restraint"

Heywood Operator Brian Maertens recently received the following commendation from a customer who appreciated the way he handled a difficult passenger.

"I appreciate the driver not letting too many people on the bus and seeing how many got off before letting anyone else on. There was a fellow holding the back door open while talking and not exiting during a stop. The driver asked him to please exit the bus as he explained people were waiting to get on. The guy wanted to argue but eventually got off. The driver displayed patience, restraint and was admirably firm"

"I was really surprised by what happened," Gilman said this week. "But looking back, I realized I'd done a lot of gardening, wasn't bending over the right way and was probably feeling a little too invincible."

Gilman believes her nearly 21 years as a bus operator may also have contributed to her recent back problems. "We're out there stopping and starting constantly, and if you're not using the right body mechanics that creates a lot of stress on your body," she said.

After a month at home, Gilman recently returned to work and only occasionally feels soreness or jabs of pain. While she has been cleared to drive, she spends most of her time preparing instruction materials at the garage.

She continues to go to physical therapy, stretches and walks several times a day and is following advice in Stuart McGill's book, "Back Mechanic."

Gilman is sharing her story as an example of how focusing on your health can help when there's a need to focus on recovery. "Most people don't seem to want to change until something dramatic happens, but by then it's a whole lot harder because you may be handicapped in a way," she said.

Participate in the Better Back Campaign

Employees are invited to participate in a four-week Fit For Life program focused on back mechanics and posture. Participants in the Better Back Campaign, which begins on August 3, will receive educational e-mails and help setting goals. To learn more, contact Wellness Coach Ashley Starr.

Complete Health Assessment by August 31 to earn a \$40 gift card

Employees who have HealthPartners medical or dental coverage through the Met Council can earn a \$40 gift card by completing the HealthPartners Health Assessment in August.

The online assessment poses general questions about nutrition, exercise, and sleep, as well as optional questions about emotional health and life satisfaction. The assessment will help participants get a better understanding of their overall physical and mental health, and inform future wellness programming at the Council.

To complete the assessment, visit healthpartners.com/wellbeing and login with your HealthPartners account. For assistance, call 800-311-1052.



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