

# INSIGHTS

Metro Transit's weekly employee newsletter

December 11, 2020



Metro Transit is installing more than 13,000 custom designed plastic seats on all 91 light rail vehicles. This follows testing plastic seats on a handful of vehicles last year. For the past 16 years, vehicles had cloth seats, which proved difficult to keep clean and dry, especially during winter months. The new Green Line Extension vehicles will also feature plastic seats. Customers are invited to offer feedback on the new seats by contacting Customer Relations.

## What to know this week

**Get a COVID-19 test before year's end:** All on-site essential employees are encouraged to take a COVID-19 test at least once before the end of the year, even if they are not showing symptoms. Several free testing options are available to employees and family members. In most cases, no appointments or insurance is required. If you suspect mild symptoms or have been identified as a close contact, immediately contact your medical provider and alert your manager. To see a full list of sites and hours visit [mn.gov](http://mn.gov). To order an at-home saliva test, visit the [health.state.mn.us](http://health.state.mn.us). A manager or supervisor can help answer any questions about testing.

**Network Next survey asks public to prioritize BRT lines:** Starting this week, the community is asked to rank alignments to help prioritize future Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) lines using an online survey. The top three choices will become the METRO F, G, and H Lines. Posters and bus interior cards are being installed to help communicate the survey. Visit [metrotransit.org](http://metrotransit.org) to take the survey.

**AWT to celebrate achievements on Monday Dec. 14:** Advancing Women in Transit (AWT) hosts a virtual celebration on Monday December 14 from 12:30-1:30pm. The event celebrates women at Metro Transit who were promoted, participated in new temporary roles through internship or the Leadership Academy OJE program, and key contributors. All are welcomed to join the virtual celebration on WebEx. Call 1-855-282-6330. Meeting number (access code): 146 399 7303 Meeting password: 4DjrkcyR4v9.

**New sanitizing stations and mask requirement graphics:** Ninety-four hands-free, foot operated sanitation stations are being installed at all Metro Transit facilities. These new stations can be calibrated by maintenance and use any brand of sanitizer. New reminders for customers about the mask requirement are being installed onboard buses fleet wide. These graphics are located on the farebox and just above the wheel on the window near the entrance to the bus.

**Obituary:** On December 5, South Garage operator **David Burnett** passed away. He served 13 years and recently operated the METRO A Line. Later, the family will announce a celebration of life post pandemic.

## Rising to the budget challenges in 2021

From General Manager Wes Kooistra

Earlier this week, the Metropolitan Council approved our 2021 operating budget and Capital Improvement Plan, which guides the maintenance of our fleet and facilities.



As you can imagine, these were not our usual budget plans.

Significant losses in fare and motor vehicle sales tax revenue were offset by emergency federal aid and the use of reserve funds. Without years of good stewardship and one-time federal funding, we would be telling a much different budget story.

As it is, we will be able to keep bus service levels where they are now – about 20% lower than before the pandemic. Early in 2021, we will begin running light rail weekday service on a schedule similar to Saturday service. There will continue to be 20 Northstar trips per week, down from the 72 trips per week that were provided before the pandemic.

While operating less service than we used to, we can look forward to the opening of the METRO Orange Line and the start of construction on the METRO D Line, new Bus Rapid Transit lines that will improve service in two of our busiest corridors.

Our capital budget also allows us to make targeted improvements to bus stops, transit centers and support facilities, and to keep our assets in a state of good repair. Fully funded investments like the new Minneapolis Bus Garage and the Green Line Extension will continue moving forward as well.

We are in a better position than many of our peers, especially larger transit agencies that are more reliant on fare revenue and are having to consider potentially drastic service and staffing changes.

As an industry, we are hopeful federal lawmakers will acknowledge transit's essential role in our nation's economic recovery and help us through this difficult chapter.

But one-time federal relief and reserve funds are not a long-term solution to

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budget challenges that existed even before the onset of this pandemic.

To improve our service, we need a dedicated and reliable funding stream. While recognizing our state and regional economies are in recovery mode, we will continue making the case for just that kind of investment.

As this pandemic has shown, transit is part of the region's critical service infrastructure. Thousands of essential workers are relying on our buses and trains to access jobs, care for loved ones and tend to other essential needs. And while there are many lapsed riders who aren't currently traveling to work, school or special events, we will actively work to bring them back once it is safe to do so.

A transit network that is defined by reliable and safe service has always contributed to a more equitable and sustainable region – goals that are more urgent than ever.

So while we must acknowledge that we are facing some real financial challenges, we can also take confidence in knowing we have many supporters who are committed to finding a way forward that does not rely on one-time funding.

As we prepare for the next chapter, I want to thank all those who helped develop our 2021 budget, especially Finance Director **Ed Petrie** and his team. And I want to thank you all for your work navigating the uncertain road ahead. It won't be easy, but we will find a way.

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## On/Off the Clock: Tekoyia Brisco

Lives: St. Paul

Job: Bus Operator, South Garage

Years of Service: 7

**How did you come to work at Metro Transit and what do you do?**



After working jobs at the Mall of America as a young man, I decided I needed something more reliable. So, I went for a Commercial Driver's License (CDL). Twenty-six years later, I continue to drive buses. I started with school buses and worked for a few different companies in the region. My longest stint was 9 years with one company. Throughout, I've always had an eye on a job at Metro Transit – it took me four tries to become a bus operator here. The process is very stringent but worth it, the pay and benefits here are great.

**What is your favorite part about working for Metro Transit?**

I enjoy working a split shift and extra board. It's

CUSTOMERS TELL US HOW WE'RE DOING

**"He wished me good luck..."**

Nicollet Garage operator Tarik Ouardi recently received a commendation for his support on this customer's big day.

*The driver was very polite, greeted, and welcomed me when I boarded. It's my first day of work and he wished me good luck as I was getting off.*

Lindsey

very similar to working for a school district with morning and afternoon shifts with a break in-between. As an extra board operator, my routes change often, so I'm able to see different parts of the city and interact with different people. What I like most about the customers here is that I can reason with them a little better than children on a school bus.

**What are your favorite activities when you're not working or "Off the Clock"?**

During the shut down in April, I was on COVID leave due to my pre-existing conditions. With nothing much to do, I figured I could do something to help people out with the mask mandate. Even though I hadn't touched a sewing machine since home economics in high school, I decided to start making masks. So from sun up to sun down, I studied and tested out different methods and materials until I found out what worked. Today, I have 42 mask variations and made over 1200 masks, including masks made out of operator uniforms with their employee number on the front.

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Congratulations to these employees who retired in November

**18 years**

JoAnn Blomgren, Bus Operator, East Metro Garage

**Congratulations to these employees celebrating anniversaries in Nov.**

**40 years**

Keith Stein, Maintenance Manager, South

James Graham, Foreperson-Facilities Maintenance

**35 years**

George Durant, Mechanic Technician, Ruter

**25 years**

Elizabeth Kelly, Transit Control Center Supervisor

**20 years**

Katherine Downs, Principal Financial Analyst

Deanna Ashmead, Operator, Heywood

Joseph Flascher, Operator, Nicollet

Jessica Rose, Operator, East Metro

Nicolas Hensgens, Rail Transportation Supervisor

Larry Wilson, Operator, Heywood



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