

INSIGHTS

Metro Transit's weekly employee newsletter

February 5, 2021



After completing the northern half, crews continue excavation, pile driving, and pouring footings for the southern half of the Knox Avenue Transitway. As part of the METRO Orange Line, the tunnel connects Bloomington and Richfield via I-35W underneath I-494. Its entrance is near the Knox Avenue Park & Ride by Best Buy headquarters in Richfield. The transitway will also include a bike path. The Orange Line is scheduled to begin service in late 2021.

What to know this week

Federal mask requirement in effect: Anyone using transit must wear a properly fitted face mask while waiting for and riding transit under a new federal requirement that took effect this week. The requirement is expected to remain in effect until at least May 11, 2021. Face coverings have been required on Metro Transit vehicles since last spring. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued the national requirement to provide uniformity across all modes of transportation. As noted in Bulletin 21_9, operators are asked to remind customers not wearing a mask about the federal requirement, to offer them a mask from the supply available in the garage and to inform them they will be denied a ride if they do not properly wear a mask at all times during their trip. If a customer refuses, operators should contact the Transit Control Center. Customers may be exempt from the requirement if they cannot safely wear a mask because of a disability as defined by the ADA. Questions about the federal requirement should be directed to a manager for follow-up.

Student internship applications being accepted now: Applications for internships in the Bus Rapid Transit Projects office, Engineering & Facilities, Rail Operations and other departments across the Metropolitan Council are being accepted through Friday, Feb. 26. Candidates must have completed at least one year of post-secondary education or have been enrolled in a post-secondary educational program within the past year. Internships begin in late-May and continue through mid-August. The Council is also accepting applications for the Urban Scholars program, which allows participants to intern and to participate in leadership and professional development classes. Learn more about the Council's internship program at metrotransit.org/employment/internships.

Feedback sought on Route 3 changes: As part of the Better Bus Routes program, Metro Transit seeks to improve the customer experience on Route 3. The improvements may include consolidating stops, improving accessibility, and providing more shelters. These changes are designed to make trips better, faster, and more reliable. The Better Bus Route upgrades would be implemented in August 2021. A survey will go live in February and close on March 13. For more information, visit metrotransit.org/route-3.

To get customers where they need to go, they need good information

From Bruce Howard, Director-Transit Information & Marketing

Transit Information Center representatives took nearly 600,000 calls last year, helping around 1,600 people a day.



These calls are incredibly important because, in many cases, they directly influence a caller's ability to ride with us and get where they need to go. Speaking to our customers also provides a better understanding of who we serve and what they need from us.

But the needs and expectations of our customers aren't what they used to be. Today, texting and other online tools are the predominant way people want to communicate and find the information they need.

As an agency, we are responding to these changes by making information available in new ways and improving on our existing transit information tools. As part of that shift, the TIC will close an hour earlier on weekdays and all day on Sundays so staff can spend more time supporting the variety of services we offer.

This transition is one small part of a much broader effort to communicate more efficiently and effectively with our customers.

Last year, we updated the system we use to provide real-time departure information, a change that has noticeably improved predictions. We've dedicated staff to maintaining our network of more than 200 real-time signs. And we are more seamlessly getting customers real-time information about detours, stop closures and other unexpected service impacts.

These recent advances follow improvements to our bus stop signs, shelter displays, pocket schedules and website, which customers used to plan more than 1.5 million trips last year.

To build on these efforts, we plan this year to test new signage directing customers to stops and stations and

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technology that audibly guides blind and low-vision customers to boarding areas. We are also making sure information is available in places customers look for information, like Google Maps.

These collective efforts will be an important part of our eventual campaign to invite back those customers who haven't been riding during the pandemic and will need to refamiliarize themselves with our service.

But providing accurate, timely information is always important, to all our customers. A missed trip or misunderstood direction can mean the difference between arriving at work on schedule, reaching a store before it closes or getting home in time for dinner.

As we often say, transit connects people to opportunity. We must then also appreciate that those opportunities can be missed because of bad or absent information.

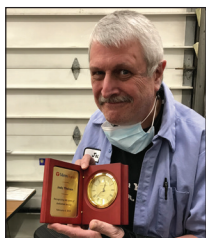
So, thank you to all those who are getting our customers the information they need, when they need it. No matter what form it takes, this work is and will always be critically important.

Transit Information Center schedule changing

The Transit Information Center (TIC) will begin operating on a new schedule starting Saturday, Feb. 6. TIC representatives will be available to help customers plan trips by phone on weekdays from 6:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. and on Saturdays from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. The TIC will be closed on Sundays and holidays.

Janitor Jody Theisen retires with 40+ years of service

Ruter Janitor **Jody Theisen** retired this week after more than 40 years of service. Theisen began his career as a vault puller at the old Northside Garage and became a janitor about three years later.



As a janitor, he worked at every garage except for East Metro, and spent more than 30 years at the Shingle Creek/Ruter Garage. Throughout his career, Theisen took pride in his work and enjoyed the company of those he met along the way. His attention to detail was seen early on, when he carefully swept up fare card punches left on the garage floor, and later when he spent a week using a power drill to restore a grime-covered bathroom sink.

In addition to his strong work ethic, Theisen was a welcoming presence at the garage. While working nights, he would often serve as a

CUSTOMERS TELL US HOW WE'RE DOING

"He was courteous and firm"

Heywood Operator **Brandon Brown** recently received a commendation for how he handled an unruly customer.

I want to commend our driver this afternoon. He deserves kudos for the way he handled an unruly passenger. He was courteous and firm, which successfully defused the individual who was running her mouth. As a passenger, I find the behavior annoying. However, I imagine it's infuriating to endure the relentless commentary as a driver. Well played, sir, well played. Thank you for the ride home!

Sarah

sounding board for operators as they pulled in. "I'd be the first one they'd see, and they'd tell me everything that was going on," Theisen said. "I know I helped a lot of people out that way."

In retirement, Theisen plans to spend more time with his family, including four grandchildren and outstate relatives, and to bring his fishing pole with him wherever he goes.

Alert Metro Transit lost and found staff and police reunite stolen bike with true owner

Some alert Metro Transit staffers are being praised for their help reuniting a man with his stolen bike.

In January, the man's bike was taken when he briefly left it unlocked while inside a Richfield store. A photo of the missing bike on the front rack of a Route 4 bus later appeared on a Facebook page dedicated to reuniting cyclists with their stolen bikes.



The post caught the eye of a Customer Relations staffer who suggested the rightful owner contact Metro Transit. The bike had been returned to the Lost & Found after being left on the bus by the suspected thieves, who later tried to claim it as their own.

While looking into the case, Richfield police saw that Metro Transit police had run a search for the bike's serial number and connected the dots. Richfield police contacted the owner, who sent Metro Transit a photo of himself with the bike and its serial number.

"I just hope you put how terribly, terribly grateful I am to get it back," the man said. "Thanks for all these honest people who helped me get it back."

Customer Relations staff return about 25% of the approximately 1,200 bikes that are brought to Lost & Found every year. Unclaimed bikes are sent to non-profit organizations and distributed to those in need.



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