

INSIGHTS

Metro Transit's weekly employee newsletter

February 12, 2021



Manager **Amina Wolf** and Operator **Andrew Kimball** installed a new "Positivity Board" in the driver's room at Ruter Garage last week. The board provides a place for staff to share positive thoughts and actions and includes inspirational quotes, rotating prompts about positive actions staff can take and an area to share good things co-workers have been seen doing. The board will also feature the garage's employee of the month, who is randomly selected from nominations that can be submitted by any employee. In addition to Wolf and Kimball, the idea for the board was developed by assistant managers **Jovita Oghumah** and **Michael Reis** and Equity Coordinator **Rachel Cagle**.

What to know this week

Direct COVID-19 questions to workplace coordinators: Questions about Metro Transit's response to the COVID-19 pandemic can be directed to designated workplace coordinators for follow-up. The workplace coordinator at each facility is posted on the Safety Board. Questions that workplace coordinators cannot immediately answer will be investigated and addressed as soon as possible. If the question leads to a policy or procedural change, the change will be communicated through a bulletin and/or Council newsletters.

Renew CDL by February 28: Commercial driver's license (CDL) holders whose expiration dates were extended due to COVID-19 must renew by Sunday, Feb. 28. CDL holders whose medical certificate expired on or after Sept. 1, 2020, will need to provide an updated medical certificate and self-certification form to maintain their CDL. Licenses can be renewed online at drive.mn.gov if there is no change in name, address or license number. A face mask and a wellness check are required before entering a Driver and Vehicle Services exam station.

D Line construction contract awarded: A \$26.1 million construction contract for the METRO D Line has been awarded to Thomas and Sons Construction, Inc. The company will build 40 Bus Rapid Transit stations and install fiber communication infrastructure along the 18-mile corridor. Construction is planned to start this spring and continue through 2022. The D Line will substantially replace Route 5, which remains the Twin Cities' busiest bus route. Along this corridor, 1 in 4 households doesn't have access to a vehicle.

Staff to be recognized for efforts supporting women in transportation: Three Metro Transit staffers are being recognized by a group that seeks to expand access for women working in transportation. At a virtual awards program in April, WTS Minnesota will honor Ruter Garage Manager **Amina Wolf** with the Rosa Parks Diversity Leadership Award. Wolf became the first Black woman garage manager in 2020. **Ayantu Gameda**, Assistant Manager-Street Operations Bus Rapid Transit, will be named the chapter's 2021 Woman to Watch. Gameda is the first member of Street Operations to be dedicated to BRT services in 2019. Deputy Chief of Operations-Bus **Brian Funk** will receive the Ray LaHood award, which recognizes men who advocate for the advancement of women in transportation.

Advancing transit equity starts inside Metro Transit

From General Manager Wes Kooistra

Today, the Metro Transit Equity & Inclusion Team will begin recruiting new team members. Since this team is such an important part of our agency's efforts to advance equity, I want to share my perspective on the value it brings to this work.



While our region enjoys a strong economy, good schools and world class parks, it is also a place where an individual's ability to access jobs, education and housing are too often determined by their race.

Across many metrics, the gap in outcomes for people who identify as white and those who identify as Black, Indigenous or People of Color (BIPOC) are among the worst in the country. These gaps have only deepened since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a public service provider and a large employer, Metro Transit has the influence and the responsibility to help our region close these gaps and dismantle the systems that created them.

To fulfill our responsibility, we must understand how our service decisions limit or expand freedom of mobility, particularly in neighborhoods where there are more people of color, renters and households without access to vehicles.

But to do our part, we must ensure all employees feel safe and valued so everyone can bring their full selves to work each day. Building an inclusive organization means actively seeking out and elevating the voices of customers and staff who face unjust challenges because of their race, gender, sexual orientation or disabilities.

To help us on our path, we are expanding our Equity & Inclusion Team and asking members to continue to help us create a more equitable and inclusive organization and region.

As General Manager, I rely heavily on the team to help me see and better appreciate the inequities our employees and our customers face. I count on team members to share their experiences and their expertise with me to inform my decision making. *continued on next page*

Some time ago, I changed the Metro Transit organizational chart to have the three Equity & Inclusion staff who support the Equity & Inclusion Team report to the chief of staff, Lesley Kandaras, because this work is so important. This recognizes that advancing equity involves our entire organization, and it more closely connects me to the Equity & Inclusion Team so I can more effectively support their efforts.

Last June, following the homicide of George Floyd, I asked the Equity & Inclusion Team to lead a process to gather employee feedback about how we could become more equitable. The team received more than 280 comments and then developed 55 recommended action steps that have been a key input in developing our Strategic Framework.

Ultimately, advancing equity requires us to assess and change our policies, procedures and everyday practices so our daily work leads to equitable outcomes. I rely on the Equity & Inclusion Team's insights and recommendations to navigate this process.

Moving forward, team members will help review policies and recommend changes, contribute to our community outreach efforts and help grow our Transit Assistance Program, which allows eligible residents to ride for \$1.

The team will also play a key role in improving our internal communication efforts and help guide senior leaders as decisions are being made.

Collectively, these and other efforts will help us not only become a better service provider and a better employer but a leader in the effort to address the disparities that have defined our region for too long.

Thank you to all those who are participating in this important work.

Apply to join the Equity & Inclusion Team

Employees are invited to apply for a spot on the Equity & Inclusion Team now through Friday, March 5. Team members meet regularly for at least one hour and take on other duties as assigned. Time spent working on behalf of the Equity & Inclusion Team is paid at an employee's standard wage. New members will begin team training in March and should expect to serve a two-year term. Applications are available on MetNet; print copies are available at work sites and can be returned through interoffice mail to **Sarah Berres**, Heywood Office. For more information, email sarah.berres@metrotransit.org. **Metro Transit is also hiring a Transit Equity Senior Manager.** An initial review of applications will begin in March. Learn more at metrotransit.org/employment.

CUSTOMERS TELL US HOW WE'RE DOING

"He really cares about his customers"

South Garage bus operator **Patrick Pfundstein** recently received a commendation from a customer who witnessed them helping another customer avoid missing their stop.

Onboard, a man had fallen asleep. I watched as the driver pulled up to a bus stop, got up, and gently woke the passenger to let them know they were at his stop. This driver went above and beyond to help. It shows he really cares about his customers by remembering this man's stop.

Maintenance teams exploring ways to provide cleaner air

Light Rail Vehicle Maintenance is installing new air filters that can more efficiently capture virus-causing particles.

HVAC units that sit atop the vehicles constantly bring in fresh air and clean the air that is circulating within light rail vehicles. Nearly half of the air inside vehicles is also exchanged when doors open at stations.

While there is a lot of fresh air coming inside, the new filters will capture more smaller particles that carry viruses.

To help reduce the risk of transmitting the virus that causes COVID-19, the Centers for Disease Control suggests ventilating indoor spaces as much as possible and keeping HVAC systems well-maintained, along with the use of facial coverings and distancing.

"This is going to be the standard going forward," said **Ed Meyer**, Senior Manager of Rail Operations Analysis/QA/Training. "It's a definite improvement to the air quality inside the vehicle compared to our current filters."

The new filters have been installed on six light rail vehicles and will eventually be in place fleetwide. To extend the life of the filters, pre-filters are also being installed.

Stronger filters were installed on all Northstar passenger cars in 2020. Bus Maintenance is exploring the use of stronger filters and is also testing air purification technology that could help destroy viruses.

Congratulations to these employees who retired in January

Phillip McDowell, Electronic Overhaul Technician, 4 years

Jeffrey Thomsen, Operator, Heywood, 13 years

Carol Swenson, Operator, Heywood, 16 years

Marilyn Rembert, Operator, East Metro, 17 years

Karey Bradley, Head Stockkeeper, 17 years

Soua Moua, Operator, East Metro, 17 years

Choua Xiong, Helper, 19 years

Sgt. Peter Peterson, 21 years

Michael Antigua, Police Officer (Part Time), 21 years

Dessu Gobena, Operator, Heywood, 21 years

Timothy Marcks, Train Operator, 23 years

Terry Londroche, Operator, East Metro, 24 years

Chi Khang, Stockkeeper, 30 years

David Hopwood, Stockkeeper, 32 years

Mark Johnson, Operator, East Metro, 33 years

Kent Smith, Mechanic Technician, Ruter, 36 years