

INSIGHTS

Metro Transit's weekly employee newsletter

March 26, 2021

Pandemic landscape is changing, but we must remain careful

From Brian Funk, Deputy Chief of Operations-Bus, and Adam Harrington, Director-Service Development



More than 200 employees received their second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine at a clinic hosted at the Metro Transit Police & Office Facility on Saturday, March 20. Metro Transit hosted the clinic after receiving an unexpected allotment of vaccines from the City of Minneapolis. Front-line employees are also being invited to make appointments at a state-run clinic at the Mall of America. Lt. **Mario Ruberto**, center, top left, was recognized at Saturday's clinic for his role in securing vaccine supply for front-line workers and other efforts he's made to support Metro Transit's COVID-19 response.

What to know this week

Bus Transportation seeking relief instructors: Full-time bus operators who would like to provide supplemental or substitute operator training are invited to apply for a role as a relief instructor by Thursday, April 8. This posting will fill multiple current openings at all garages and establish an eligibility list for future openings. Bus operator applications are also being accepted now. About 50 new operators will need to be hired before August. Learn more and apply at metro council.org/employment (click 'Menu' and 'Internal Job Openings' to find the relief instructor posting).

Act now to keep your Metro Transit email account: Employees who cannot access their Metro Transit email accounts but would like to use them in the future are encouraged to contact Information Services. Employees who have not accessed their accounts in the past 60 days will soon lose access to these accounts, though they can be restarted upon request at any time. To contact Information Services, call 651-602-1498 or email servicedesk@metc.state.mn.us.

AWT concludes Women's Month events with bus panel: Advancing Women in Transit (AWT) will conclude its Women's Month symposium with a panel of female-identifying staff from Bus Transportation on Monday, March 29. The online event will begin at noon and is open to all who are interested in attending. Panelists will provide brief remarks and allow time for questions. For more information, email jennifer.kochaverer@metrotransit.org.

Last Saturday, more than 200 employees received their second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine at an on-site clinic. As of today, all front-line workers should have been invited to make vaccination appointments at a state-run clinic at the Mall of America. Hundreds of employees have received shots through other health care providers.

If all goes according to plan, every adult in Minnesota will have the chance to receive vaccines by the end of May.

We are encouraged and grateful that more of our employees and customers are getting the opportunity to be vaccinated, and that so many of them are choosing to do so. Vaccinations are key to inviting more of our employees back to the workplace and more customers back to transit.

Moving forward, we must also consider how prevalent COVID-19 is in our community and continue to follow public health guidance. And the reality is this: Just a quarter of Minnesotans have received at least one vaccine dose, the number of reported cases is at its highest level in months and variants are presenting the risk of another surge.

As eager as we are to invite workers and customers back, we're simply not there yet.

Passenger limits will remain in place and all of us must continue to wear masks and be careful about traveling and gathering with others. Those who are currently working from home should plan to continue doing so until at least June, when we could begin a phased return to worksites for teleworking employees.

While we are proceeding cautiously, we are also aware that the world around us is evolving.

Next month, high school students will be invited back to the classroom in Minneapolis and Saint Paul, the Twins will begin hosting up to 10,000 fans at Target Field and restrictions on bars and restaurants will be relaxed. The Minnesota State Fair's general manager said last week

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that he is “cautiously optimistic” the fair will be held this August.

We can also expect more people to gradually begin returning to their workplaces over the coming months.

We will be paying close attention to how these changes impact when, where and how people want to use transit, and we will do our best to adjust our services to meet those demands while allowing for a level of social distancing.

Scheduled service changes in June and August will continue to prioritize service on higher ridership routes and those serving neighborhoods where fewer people have access to vehicles. Service will also be improved on select routes, including Route 63 and multiple routes that will connect to the METRO Orange Line when it opens later this year.

In the immediate future, we will continue to remind customers, employers and stakeholders of all the steps we’re taking to provide a safe and comfortable experience.

Eventually, we hope conditions will allow us to move to the next phase and begin inviting those who haven’t been riding to come back.

We want to thank all those who are helping us create a safe environment for those who are riding today, and who are positioning us for what lies ahead. We still have a way to go, but we’re getting closer every day.

“Just try to be accepting”: Operator offers advice on Transgender Day of Visibility

Twenty years ago, **Marissa Higgins** got a round-trip plane ticket to Minneapolis hoping to access the resources she was seeking to become her true self. Higgins found what she was looking for and, with help from the University of Minnesota’s Gender Care program, completed her transition five years ago. The move from Missouri to Minnesota also led Higgins to Metro Transit, where she has served as an operator since 2018.



To commemorate International Transgender Day of Visibility, Higgins shared her story and offered advice on being a supportive ally.

How did you begin your transition?

In 2001, I moved from Missouri to Minneapolis to utilize resources available through the University of Minnesota’s Gender Care program. I had a round-trip ticket, and said if I didn’t like it, I’d come back. I started counseling, found a place to stay, a place to work, changed my legal name and

CUSTOMERS TELL US HOW WE’RE DOING

“He waited for me”

Nicollet Operator **Lamar Childs** recently received a commendation for his attentiveness to this customer’s needs.

I have a bad leg and was trying to make it to my bus stop in time to catch the bus. The driver noticed, waited for me to board and also waited for me to find a seat before taking off. I want to thank him and for his great service.

Lara

started taking hormones. I still have a long way to go, but it feels great.

How have people responded?

Some people look at you like you’re crazy, there are bathroom issues, I haven’t always had managers who understand, though that’s gotten better. There aren’t any other transgender people at Metro Transit that I’m aware of. With this job, there’s always a concern something could go wrong, and there’s even more of a concern about discrimination and violence for me. But I’ve conversed with a few transgender people who appreciate seeing me and have said I make them feel comfortable and safe.

So, how did you come to work in transit?

I’ve driven most of my life, whether it was a school bus, a party bus, a city bus or transporting people who have disabilities. Some people will ask, ‘How do you do it and why are you working there?’ My answer is, I like to drive, and I like to deal with people. It’s fun to help people get where they need to go, and it gives me a real sense of accomplishment.

What can people do to be more supportive?

If you don’t want to use the correct pronouns, just use names and that’s it. Don’t stare and don’t ask a lot of silly questions. If people want to tell you something, they’ll tell you. Most of all, just try to be accepting.

International Transgender Day of Visibility is March 31. Learn more at transequality.org.

Join the Pride Employee Resource Group

All employees are invited to join an Employee Resource Group (ERG) for LGBTQ employees and allies. The group hosts monthly discussions and serves as a support network. For more information, email david.hanson@metrotransit.org.

D Line construction begins in April

Crews will soon begin working on the METRO D Line, a new Bus Rapid Transit service that will largely replace Route 5. New stations will be built at 34 intersections along the existing Route 5 corridor between the Brooklyn Center Transit Center and the Mall of America. Construction at each intersection will generally include new road and sidewalk sections, changes to traffic signals, and installation of new BRT shelters. Intersections may be fully closed to traffic for up to a month with additional lane restrictions for longer time periods. The D Line is scheduled to open in late 2022. Learn more at metrotransit.org/d-line-project.



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