

INSIGHTS

Metro Transit's weekly employee newsletter

April 2, 2021



On the job and at home, mindfulness matters

Yolanda Sims doesn't get a lot of time to herself. But, as a mother and as a bus operator, she also knows how important those quiet, contemplative moments are to her mental health and to her ability to be there for those who rely on her. "If you're not able to decompress, you're no good to anyone else," she said. "You have to take that time to relax."

The belief was recently reinforced when Sims was on a call with other women from Metro Transit who participated in a mindfulness exercise – planting their feet on the floor, letting their arms hang by their sides, breathing deeply and picturing themselves in some distant, serene setting.

Now, Sims is hoping other operators will be open to seeing how mindfulness can be incorporated into their work and home lives.

With support from the Council's Wellness Coach Ashley Starr and Equity & Inclusion Specialist Sarah Berres, she helped conceive, create and distribute grounding cards with suggested mindfulness practices – naming things you can see, touch and hear, sitting in a chair and stomping your feet or gently pressing the inside of your wrist. The cards are available at dispatch at each garage.

Sims, an informal mentor and consummate helper, knows what works for her may not work for others. But she also knows her fellow operators can't afford to overlook their own needs, and that any comfort that can be offered should be.

"This has been a hard time for everybody, but you can't let anyone steal your peace, steal your joy," she said. "That's not an easy task but it can be learned."

Learn more

- Sims' idea for the grounding cards originated during a ConnectHER conference call. ConnectHER participants meet off-hours to extend and build on conversations that occur through the Advancing Women in Transit (AWT) Employee Resource Group. To learn more, contact Yolanda Sims at yolanda.sims@metrotransit.org or Connie Isler at connie.isler@metrotransit.org.
- To learn more about the Council's existing wellness resources, or to suggest an idea of your own, please contact **Ashley Starr** at ashley.starr@metc.state.mn.us.

Safely, slowly moving into the next phase of our pandemic recovery

From General Manager Wes Kooistra

Throughout the pandemic, we have relied on public health guidance to determine how to deliver service while protecting our riders and our employees.



Under this guidance, we have consistently asked customers to use transit only for essential trips and adhered to 25% vehicle capacity limits.

Now, Gov. Walz's recent "turn of the dial" is leading us into a new phase of pandemic management. For example, the capacity for bars and restaurants is increasing, larger group gatherings are being described as reasonably safe and fans are being allowed into sporting events, including up to 10,000 fans for Twin games beginning next week.

For the first time in nearly a year, Minneapolis and Saint Paul public schools are returning older students to on-site instruction in mid-April.

These changes are expected to impact the demand for transit and make it harder to maintain our "essential trips only" message and 25% capacity limit.

So last Thursday, we met with staff from the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) to seek their guidance on how transit restrictions could safely adapt to these changes.

In our meeting, MDH staff suggested our new message to riders should be "travel responsibly," and that changing transit capacity limits from 25% to 50% of seated capacity would be an appropriate, measured response to the other changes occurring around us.

Beginning Monday, April 5, we will begin allowing up to 20 passengers on 40-foot buses, up to 30 passengers on 60-foot buses, and up to 33 passengers on light rail vehicles. These limits are very similar to those in place at many other transit agencies across the nation.

We will also discontinue the essential trips only messaging and emphasize "traveling responsibly," including wear-

continued on next page

ing masks and creating as much space as possible between yourself and riders you don't know.

This is welcome news because our messaging and service approach will be better aligned with the new instruction coming from the Governor and public health officials. It important that we operate with reasonable success under the service standards we communicate to the public.

While this gives us some relief that we are beginning to manage our way out of the pandemic, we have seen that the pandemic with its variants is a dynamic event. The dial can be turned back the other way if that is what is required for public health interests.

In our discussion of these service changes, MDH staff strongly emphasized the continued importance of wearing masks which, when worn properly, significantly reduce the risk of transmission on transit and in other indoor environments.

Masks will continue to be required for the foreseeable future. And while we have observed that the vast majority of customers are wearing them and wearing them correctly, we will continue to reinforce their importance as we move forward.

We will also continue to regularly disinfect our vehicles, concentrate service on our busiest local bus routes and remind customers not to travel with us if they are ill or fear they've been exposed to COVID-19.

Maintaining this stance is also consistent with what we are hearing from public health officials and Gov. Walz, who are stressing the importance of vigilance and personal responsibility while the vaccination rollout continues.

This message is important for all of us to hear. So, I remind you: Travel responsibly, wear masks in public settings, and if you haven't already, schedule your vaccination appointment.

New Equity & Inclusion Team members introduced

Metro Transit's Equity & Inclusion Team is welcoming several new members who will support efforts to create a more inclusive work environment and support the agency's efforts to achieve equitable outcomes. The new team members are:

- Donathan Brown, Assistant Director-Bus Transportation
- Mark Granlund, Public Arts Administrator
- Erica Iguere, Operator-Heywood
- Carri Sampson, Rail Transportation Supervisor
- David Stiggers, Operator, South

CUSTOMERS TELL US HOW WE'RE DOING

"He's such a superb driver"

East Metro Garage bus operator **Vincent Wisniewski** recently received a commendation for his suburb driving and welcoming nature.

I ride the 270 from downtown Minneapolis to Maplewood Mall almost every afternoon at 4:51 p.m. My bus driver is the best! He always greets us with a smile. He's such a superb driver. I can even type this message while riding, because he's that good.

Janine

- Dan Stoffer, Manager of Training & Acting Manager Bus System Safety
- Claudius Touissant, Program Manager, Engineering & Facilities
- Traci Williamson, Fare Collections Supervisor
- Heidi Wrenson, Transit Supervisor
- Nancy Xiong, Principal Administrative Specialist, Transit Police

Employees who will continue to serve on the Equity & Inclusion Team include:

- Mickey Albert, Operator, Heywood
- Sophia Ali, Operator, Nicollet
- Jessica Cross, Marketing
- James Holt, Mechanic Technician, Overhaul Base
- Liban Ibrahim, Police Officer
- Andrew Kimbell, Operator, Ruter
- Sam O'Connell, Senior Manager, Southwest Project Office
- Beverly Rodriguez, Police Officer

Employees are invited to contact team members to share their ideas about diversity, equity and inclusion. For more information about the team, contact **Sarah Berres** at sarah.berres@metrotransit.org.

Remember to schedule your vaccination

Front-line employees who have not yet scheduled their vaccination appointment through Homeland Health are encouraged to do so as soon as possible. Additional appointments at the Mall of America clinic are being set aside for front-line essential workers. Front-line staff who have not received information about making an appointment and who would like to do so should contact a manager or supervisor.

If you have received a vaccine, please indicate that by sending an email to vaccines@metrotransit.org; this information will only be used to help determine if an on-site clinic should be organized. Questions about vaccinations can also be directed to vaccines@metrotransit.org.

Remember: If you are displaying COVID-19 symptoms or believe you've been exposed to COVID-19, you should get tested, whether or not you've been vaccinated. Free COVID-19 tests can be scheduled at the Heywood Well@Work clinic by calling 952-967-7468. Several community testing sites are also open throughout the region.



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