

# INSIGHTS

Metro Transit's weekly employee newsletter

April 9, 2021



After 31 years of service, Ruter Operator **Margaret Stephens** completed her final trip on Wednesday, March 31. Stephens was surprised by Assistant Transportation Manager **Robert Brevig** and Director of Maple Grove Transit **Mike Opatz**, who rode with her on her final journey. Stephens will be included in Metro Transit's Hall of Fame, which recognizes employees who retire with more than 30 years of service.

## What to know this week

**Remember to schedule your vaccination appointment:** Employees who have not yet done so are encouraged to schedule their vaccination appointment as soon as possible. If you are a front-line employee and have not yet been contacted about making an appointment, please speak with a manager or supervisor. All residents who are at least 16 years old are now eligible to receive a vaccine. To receive updates, sign up for the state's Vaccine Connector at [vaccineconnector.mn.gov](https://vaccineconnector.mn.gov). If you have received a vaccine or do not plan to do so, please email [vaccines@metrotransit.org](mailto:vaccines@metrotransit.org). This information will only be used to determine whether an on-site vaccination clinic may be needed.

**Aerosol recertification underway:** Operators who need to be recertified to carry approved aerosol devices should connect with their supervisor to be recertified this month. To remain eligible to carry or possess an aerosol device while on duty, operators must recertify every two years. In-person classes for initial certification are not being scheduled at this time.

**Generational trauma, race-related stress support available:** The Council's Employee Assistance Provider, Sand Creek, can connect staff with professional counselors who have training in generational trauma, race-related stress and traumatic stress, multicultural concerns and systemic racism. For more information, call Sand Creek at 1-888-243-5744 or visit [sandcreekeap.com](https://sandcreekeap.com). To create a new account, click the "My Life Expert Login" button on the home page and use the company code metcouncil.

**Free financial counseling services now available:** Employees can now access free financial counseling sessions provided by Financial Choice from Lutheran Social Services. Up to six free counseling sessions covering topics like budgeting, debt management and purchasing a home, are available to employees and household members. To learn more and schedule a phone session, call 800-528-2926 or visit [lssmn.org](https://lssmn.org). Several free webinars will also be offered in April and May. To learn more about those events, email [fitforlife@metc.state.mn.us](mailto:fitforlife@metc.state.mn.us).

## Moving the Blue Line Extension forward at the speed of trust

From Sam O'Connell, Blue Line Extension Project Lead



It is a busy and exciting time for the Blue Line Extension project, which will connect with the Blue Line at Target Field Station and travel north west to serve the communities of Minneapolis, Robbinsdale, Crystal and Brooklyn Park.

Initially, the light rail alignment was to be co-located for 8 miles with freight railway. But last August, project leaders transitioned the project to a new pathway after negotiations with the railroad fell through. We are now identifying alternate route options that can be community supported while preserving as much of the original alignment as possible.

Earlier this year, project staff spoke with community members, held virtual town halls, and re-established advisory committees to better understand the community's desires and challenges. A community survey was launched with our project partners at Hennepin County and the response was overwhelming. While there were some concerns about the project, the community is engaged, excited and eager to move the project forward.

In early March, we shared potential revised route options that serve as a starting point to move the conversation with the community forward. It is important to remember that these routes very well may change after gathering additional feedback. In addition to releasing the revised routes, the project's website was updated with an interactive map of the entire alignment, allowing people to view and comment on the route options.

With the release of the revised route options, the project entered a new and more intense phase of community engagement. Already, several well-attended virtual town halls have taken place. To ensure we are centered in equity and inclusion, 14 organizations will help elevate community voices throughout the decision-making process.

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While it has already been a busy year, it is only going to get busier. We are beginning to evaluate potential station locations and to provide more context about how light rail can serve communities. Project staff hope to have a community-supported route identified by the end of the year. This is going to require a massive effort.

This is truly a community-driven project. One of the project's guiding principles is that we move at the speed of trust. We will not move forward until we have meaningful community buy-in. Our engagement efforts must be robust, inclusive and flexible to ensure we have an alignment that provides maximum benefit for the community.

Light rail transit projects are transformative, and I'm happy to lead a talented team working on this regional project. The Blue Line Extension will create exciting opportunities to advance community visions for investment and economic development that help residents and businesses build wealth in place and improve quality of life.

We will have more news to share in the coming weeks, but in the mean time I encourage you to learn more by visiting the project's website at [bluelineext.org](http://bluelineext.org). And please, if you have any questions or ideas, please let us know.

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Buses being converted into mobile vaccine units

The first of six Metro Transit buses that will serve as mobile vaccine units will soon hit the road.

Eventually, the specially equipped buses will be sent across the state to help providers serve people who may have difficulties accessing vaccines, including those who are undocumented, unsheltered or homebound. Up to two people can be vaccinated at a time inside the bus.

"When we were approached about this idea, Metro Transit was ready to roll up our sleeves and do our part to help bring this pandemic to a close," said Matt Dake, director of Bus Maintenance. "Through the ingenuity of our maintenance team, working in partnership with health experts, we're proud to say that we're about to deliver a mobile solution that will help lower barriers to vaccine access statewide."

To prepare the bus, staff removed seats, added plexiglass dividers, created equipment storage and made changes that allow it to be plugged into an external power supply.

The retrofits were made by electricians from Engineering & Facilities and technicians from the Radioshop, Unit Overhaul and Body Shop. Experience with the first bus will inform future

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## "My bus driver is the best!"

East Metro 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

work on another five buses. Two retired Metro Mobility buses will also be retrofitted as vaccine units.

Once deployed, Metro Transit operators will be assigned to operate the buses. Blue Cross Blue Shield will staff the units with clinicians, translators and receptionists. The Minnesota Department of Health has been involved with the project from the start and will determine where they are most needed.

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Congratulations to these employees who retired in March

- Bryson Powers, Operator-South, 29 years
- Thomas Crooks, Dispatcher-Heywood, 27 years
- Gayle Gilman, Operator-Nicollet, 27 years
- John Vang, Operator-Nicollet, 20 years
- John Torgeson, Operator-Nicollet, 14 years
- Sergio Vallejo, Operator-Ruter, 14 years
- Douglas Hannem, Mechanic Technician-Overhaul, 12 years
- Bruce Von Drashek, Electronic Overhaul Technician, 11 years
- Loren Heine, Electronic Repair Tech, 11 years
- David Walker, Mechanic Technician-Nicollet, 8 years
- Victor Payne, Mechanic Technician-South, 5 years

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Free rides offered to new vaccination site at fairgrounds

Individuals who are traveling to and from appointments at a new COVID-19 vaccination site being established at the Minnesota State Fairgrounds will be allowed to ride free with a downloadable pass and an appointment confirmation. The passes and confirmation can be shown on a mobile device or printed. Vaccinations will be given in the parking lot immediately south of the fairgrounds (where the Bus Rodeo is held) beginning Wednesday, April 14; a temporary bus stop for those who take transit will be located nearby on Como Avenue. The site will be open every day for up to 8 weeks and is expected to draw up to 3,000 people a day. The site is primarily intended to serve Hennepin County and Ramsey County residents who may have difficulty accessing vaccines through a health care provider.



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