

INSIGHTS

Metro Transit's weekly employee newsletter

May 21, 2021



Metro Transit buses that were recently retrofitted to serve as mobile vaccination units are now traveling across the state. Last weekend, South Garage Assistant Transportation Manager **Mary Johnson** and East Metro Bus Operator **James Yang** brought one of six specially equipped buses to Long Prairie, Clarissa, Bertha and Staples. The buses are being deployed to reach populations where vaccines are less accessible.

Capacity limits to be lifted on May 28

Capacity limits on buses and trains will be lifted beginning Friday, May 28, as the state lifts restrictions on in-person gatherings.

Customers will continue to be encouraged to keep space between themselves and others when it is possible to do so. Masks are still required on buses, trains and at waiting areas.

Ridership on local bus routes is down about 56% compared to the weeks just before the pandemic began and rail ridership is down about 67%. Despite the drop in ridership, service levels on local bus routes and light rail are at or near where they were at before the pandemic. Articulated buses are also being assigned to busier routes.

Service levels will remain about the same through the end of the summer. The next round of scheduled service changes will take effect on August 21 and will account for changes in demand.

Operators may continue to display "Face Coverings Required" on the overhead display using PR Code 17.

As COVID-19 restrictions loosen, please remember:

- Masks are still required on transit and at worksites, regardless of vaccination status.
- COVID-19 vaccinations are free and widely available.
- Employees who are showing COVID-19 symptoms or believe they've been exposed should seek testing, regardless of vaccination status.
- Employees should never ask their co-workers about private, personal medical information, including their COVID-19 vaccination status.

Our continual improvement relies on a commitment to data

From John Levin, Director-Strategic Initiatives

Not all that long ago, we monitored ridership primarily by riding buses or counting heads as buses passed by. Such observations are still important but, with the addition of new technology, we can now also see almost instantly where and when customers are riding.



Advances in our data collection and analysis efforts have been indispensable since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, allowing us to quickly understand and adapt to historic changes in demand.

There are numerous other examples of how better data and analysis yields improvements for our customer.

Working closely with Rail Operations, Engineering & Facilities, and local partners, we are pinpointing locations where delays most-often occur and making targeted signal improvements that lead to faster and more consistent travel times.

Partnering with Transit Information, we evaluated the accuracy of real-time bus arrival predictions while evaluating potential vendors – work that lead us to choose a provider based not just on cost but on their ability to demonstrate their product.

We have also used data to monitor how crowded our vehicles are, easily review where and when collisions are occurring and to gauge customer and employee sentiment.

As we begin to emerge from the pandemic and look further into the future, we will need even more reliable data to improve in a host of areas, including service delivery, shelter investments, hiring and safety.

While we are fortunate to have a team of skilled data scientists who can analyze and share takeaways from the information we collect, this is a true team effort.

Indeed, the quality of our data can rely on something as simple as having clean

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door sensors that detect when a customer gets on a bus or train. Similarly, our use of data relies on the databases and networks that hold and carry the data. Thank you to all the staff who contribute to this work.

As the general manager has said, we are committed to becoming a better, stronger, and more responsive service provider.

To fulfill that commitment, Metro Transit leadership will need to clearly define and build support for what we're trying to achieve. We must also commit to actions that lead us toward those goals and carefully monitor the progress that's being made.

This work is already occurring but, as an organization, we must become even more precise and deliberate about stating our intentions and keeping ourselves accountable in our efforts to achieve them.

As the leader of our Strategic Initiatives Department, it is also incumbent on me and my team to encourage information sharing, help staff and partners find value in the data we collect and help inspire new lines of inquiry that lead to continual improvement.

So again, thank you to all those who are supporting our work. It is only because of your help that we can collect, share, and use all the data we have at our disposal to become the better and stronger organization we aspire to be.

Reminder: Facilitated discussions continue the conversation about race, racism

A "Beginning Conversations on Race" series, facilitated by members of the Equity & Inclusion Team and Equity & Inclusion Coordinator Rachel Cagle, will kick-off on Thursday, May 27.

The series will include four, one-hour sessions, each beginning at noon, and are open to all Metro Transit staff. The series includes:

- Thursday, May 27: Setting the Stage
- Thursday, June 3: Economic Repercussions of Race
- Thursday, June 10: Whiteness as the Dominant Culture
- Thursday, June 17: Action through Allyship

For more information, email rachel.cagle@metrotransit.org.

The Equity & Inclusion Team is also planning a virtual event and other recognition of Juneteenth, which will be celebrated on Monday, June 14. Also known as Freedom Day or Emancipation Day,

CUSTOMERS TELL US HOW WE'RE DOING

"He is very knowledgeable"

Rail Safety Officer **Rick Taylor** was recently recognized by Tim Rogotzke, the light rail program manager for the Minnesota Department of Public Safety.

I appreciate him (Rick) taking me along on station checks...I learned a lot about the systems and the things Rail Safety is looking for when doing these checks. He is very knowledgeable about the overall mission and role of the Safety Department as it relates to Metro Transit's overall mission. I would also like to comment on the work he has been doing with the rail accident reports. He has done a fine job relaying the facts in a manner that state simply what actions led to the collision and describing the facts that lead to a conclusion. Rick's actions reflect the overall efforts and attitude of the Rail Safety Department.

Juneteenth is the oldest known celebration commemorating the ending of slavery in the United States. It is one of two freedom celebrations held throughout the United States; the Fourth of July is the other. More information will be shared soon.

Refer a successful candidate and earn \$600

Employees can receive \$600 for referring an individual who passes their probationary period as a bus operator. To receive the incentive, applicants must include the name and employee number of the employee who referred them on the employee referral question of their job application.

New bus operators are also eligible to receive a \$1,000 hiring bonus, \$500 after completing training, and the remaining \$500 after successfully completing the 6-month probation period.

The bonuses will show up on your paycheck.

After a pause, bus operator hiring resumed this spring. The first new class of bus operators hired since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic began in-person training at the Instruction Center this week.

2021 legislative session headed into overtime

The Minnesota House and Senate concluded the 2021 regular legislative session this week but a special session will need to be called in June to pass the negotiated budget bills. In the meantime, legislators have set budget targets for each major area, including transportation, and will spend the coming weeks negotiating budget and policy details.

A proposal that would allow Community Service Officers to issue administrative citations for fare evasion, was passed by the House but was not passed in the Senate. The proposal may be subject to further negotiation.



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