

# INSIGHTS

Metro Transit's weekly employee newsletter

June 18, 2021



## Chief Operating Officer Vince Pellegrin retires after 40+ years in transit

Growing up in southern California, Vince Pellegrin was a self-described “surfer kid” with a thing for hot rods. His first job? Pumping gas. His first car? A 1967 Ford Fairlane. But after attending the University of Southern California and gaining experience as a mechanic and

union steward, Pellegrin responded to a newspaper ad for a job that would steer him away from an automotive career. In 1980, Pellegrin began at the Southern California Rapid Transit District, the precursor to Los Angeles Metro, where he joined the mechanical training department.

Over the next four decades, Pellegrin would become an industry leader in bus maintenance, advancing technologies in Los Angeles, New York, and the Twin Cities. More than half of that career, 24 years, was spent at Metro Transit, where he retires this week after serving as the agency's first Chief Operating Officer.

In Los Angeles, Pellegrin's accomplishments included helping the agency bring on hundreds of new buses ahead of the 1984 Olympics and putting the country's first 40-foot bus powered by natural gas into service. At the New York City Transit Authority, he served as the chief officer for research and development and helped put the country's first hybrid-electric buses into service and led the agency's bus procurement efforts.

Former LA Metro CEO Art Leahy recruited Pellegrin to the Twin Cities, where he helped improve the fleet's performance and appearance. As chief operating officer, Pellegrin helped lead the agency through several major events, including 9/11, the collapse of the Interstate 35W bridge, a 44-day strike, a Super Bowl and the COVID-19 pandemic.

In retirement, Pellegrin plans to spend more time with family and winter with his wife somewhere warm. “It's been my privilege to be a part of this outstanding transit agency,” he said. “As much as I would like to think I'm leaving a positive legacy, the truth is I'm taking away so much more than I could ever give.”

Read more at [MetroTransit.org/ridersalmanac](https://metrotransit.org/ridersalmanac)

## Acting assignments in Bus Transportation announced

**Brian Funk**, deputy chief of operations-bus, will serve as acting chief operating officer until the position is permanently filled. Additionally, **Steve McLaird** will serve as acting director of bus transportation, **Amina Wolf** will serve as acting deputy director of bus transportation, and **Kim Fleming** will serve as acting transportation manager at Ruter Garage until the director role is filled.

## Working together to become a better, stronger service provider



From Adam Harrington,  
Director of Service Development

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, our ridership has remained incredibly consistent, with about 50,000 to 70,000 local bus rides and around 25,000 light rail rides per day.

In May, we saw small increases in these numbers, a welcome sign that more riders are starting to return to transit. Recovering from the pandemic will take time, though.

Today, our primary objective is to ensure those who are riding and coming back have the kind of experiences that lead them to regularly use transit, and that we show prospective customers everything we're doing to improve our service.

These have always been important objectives, but they are even more critical now because the habits people fall into after the pandemic will become harder to change as time goes by.

To help us put our best foot forward, I am leading a new cross-departmental team that will spend the coming months working together to address some of our most pressing and immediate issues.

This team is part of the broader Strategic Framework that will provide a cohesive, agency-wide set of priorities that will help us become a stronger and better organization. This plan is now in the final stages of development.

Among our immediate focuses is finding the bus operators, maintenance staff and security personnel we need to provide reliable service and to keep our fleet clean and safe.

This group will also help guide important decisions about how our service and customer facilities can be adapted as we learn more about the pandemic's lasting impacts on travel behavior.

While we have more work to do, progress is already being made.

Recruitment and hiring efforts are in full swing. Newly installed cameras that

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allow staff to see what's happening inside light rail vehicles are being monitored in real time. Maintenance staff are putting forward impressive fleet and facility cleaning efforts.

Targeted service improvements are on the horizon, too. In August, we'll bring back or add more trips to several key express bus routes. Our newest Bus Rapid Transit line, the METRO Orange Line, will open on the I-35W corridor in December.

This group's charge – and the charge we all share – is to not only keep up this good work, but to find even more opportunities to work together and to share our story with customers, partners, and the communities we serve.

The challenges we're facing are significant. But we can also view this moment as a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reset, refocus and reintroduce ourselves. After nearly 30 years of working in transportation, I am energized by this opportunity and optimistic about what lies ahead.

I am also truly, deeply impressed by the work everyone is doing to keep us on steady footing amid so many challenges. Thank you to all those who have persevered to get us to this moment.

The world around us has changed and will continue to change. But if we work together, we can continue to evolve into a stronger, better and more responsive service provider.

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Welcome to these new employees hired in May

**Deborah Early**, Customer Relations Specialist

**Tyler Lewis**, LRT Helper

**Arnold Diaz**, LRT Helper

**Victor Durham**, Signals Technician

**Kyle Sheppard**, Principal Contract Admin,  
Engineering & Facilities

**Craig Lamothe**, Project Manager, BRT Projects

**Connor Hicks**, Community Service Officer

**Gao Ia Vue**, Community Service Officer

**Caleb Kittock**, Community Service Officer

**Tommy Fickett**, Community Service Officer

**Vy Vang**, Community Service Officer

**Tshuxue Cha**, Community Service Officer

**Marisa Thompson**, Intern, Facility & Asset  
Security

**Morgan Loga**, Intern, Rail Transportation

**Felicia Peterson**, Intern, Rail Transportation

#### CUSTOMERS TELL US HOW WE'RE DOING

**"It was a small thing, but super sweet..."**

Ruter Garage Bus Operator **Angelique Brousseau** recently received a commendation for waiting the extra minute to help a customer get where they needed to go.

*The driver waited for me even though they didn't have to! I was quite far away coming from the Route 3 bus stop. It was a small thing but super sweet and saved me a LOT of hassle of being late to a medical appointment. Hope you see this. Thank you!*

*Naomi B.*

## Father-son duo train to become bus operators together

In 1977, German Gonzalez Sr. immigrated to Minnesota from Mascota, Mexico seeking opportunity. He found multiple part-time jobs as a school bus driver and carpenter.



As the years progressed, however, work became intermittent and sparse. "There were many hard years where you'd show up to a job site looking for work and told there isn't any," Gonzalez Sr. said.

This year, as Metro Transit returned to hiring bus operators for the first time since the pandemic, his son, German Gonzalez Jr., inspired him to apply. "I was working as a helper in light rail maintenance and when I saw the opening, I decided it was time for a change," German Gonzalez Jr. said. "It's a different schedule and has different opportunities."

Together, they join the first class of new operators since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the fall, Metro Transit hopes to hire up to 70 operators.

In college, Gonzalez Jr. worked as a part-time Metro Transit operator. Today, he finds himself helping his father learn this trade. "Every day, we ride to and from training together," Gonzalez Jr. said. "It's a great time to talk about what's coming or talk about the day to help refresh me and help my dad with buses he's never operated before."

Both men value Metro Transit for its stability and room for growth. Even though Gonzalez Jr. earned a teaching degree, he decided to stay here after 14 years of service. For Gonzalez Sr., a job here represents his first stable career.

"It's exciting and challenging, especially looking towards my first day on the road," said Gonzalez Sr., who will work out of the Nicollet Garage. "And whatever happens, I know that if I just remember my training, everything will work out."

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Bus operator hiring events will be held June 23, June 26

The events, held at the Instruction Center will provide applicants an opportunity to apply and interview in one day.

Applicants can visit the Instruction Center from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Wednesday, June 23, and Saturday, June 26.

For more information visit [metrotransit.org/drive](https://metrotransit.org/drive).



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