

2021 Equity Progress Report

June 2021

Background

In 2014, the Metropolitan Council identified equity as one of five key [regional outcomes from Thrive MSP 2040](#), alongside stewardship, prosperity, livability, and sustainability. The long-range plan and the [Met Council's Equity Policy](#) commits the Council to using equity as a lens to evaluate operations, planning, and investments, and to using Council resources to address racial, ethnic, and income-based disparities.

To support the Council's vision, Metro Transit dedicated staff to focus on equity beginning in 2015. Today, efforts are led by a team of full-time Equity & Inclusion employees and an Equity & Inclusion Team with representatives from across the agency, including bus operators, police officers and maintenance staff.

In 2020, General Manager Wes Kooistra directed his direct reports to further embed equity in the agency's work by advancing ten priority actions, including using equity metrics to demonstrate performance and inform decision making. All employees were also invited to provide feedback and recommendations, an invitation that yielded nearly 300 comments.

Moving forward, equity will be a core element of Metro Transit's forthcoming Strategic Framework, which will provide a cohesive, agency-wide set of priorities that will help the agency become a stronger and better organization. As of June 2021, the plan was in the final stages of development.

For detailed information about Equity & Inclusion initiatives, visit the Equity & Inclusion page on [MetNet](#).

Resources

- [Equity & Inclusion](#) (metrotransit.org)
- [Equity at the Council](#)
- [Equity Advisory Committee](#)
- [Diversity, Equity & Inclusion](#) (mn.gov)
- [Metro Transit 2020 Facts](#)
- [Council Workforce Data](#) (MetNet)

Expanding access to opportunities through transit service

During the COVID-19 pandemic, service was adjusted to match rapid changes in demand. Generally, express bus services were reduced or suspended while local bus, Bus Rapid Transit and light rail service remained at or near their pre-pandemic levels, despite a drop in ridership. Moving forward, Metro Transit will advance plans for frequent, all-day service in key corridors. Central to this vision is an expanded network of BRT lines, including the METRO D Line, which will significantly improve Metro Transit's busiest local bus route, Route 5. D Line construction began in early-2021. Future arterial BRT lines will improve service in corridors where there are more Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC), low-income households and more households without access to vehicles than the regional average.

At a glance

- Black residents have twice the access to high-frequency service compared to white residents, based on September 2020 service.
- Within a 45-minute journey on transit, the average Black resident can reach more job locations by transit (approx. 140,000) than the average white resident (approximately 80,000), based on September 2020 service. ([source](#))
- 70% of transit trips are for something other than a peak commute.

Equity in Action

In February 2021, feedback from more than 4,000 people helped determine which corridors should be prioritized for arterial BRT investments. Equity was identified as a top priority and equity-related measures (race, employment, renter status and income) are now key considerations when prioritizing BRT investments. The Council subsequently approved the F (Central Avenue), G (Robert/Rice streets) and H (Como/Maryland) lines as the next arterial BRT lines. Collectively, these three BRT lines will serve corridors where 47% of the population within a half-mile are BIPOC, 41% of corridor households have very low income (less than \$24,000 for an individual or less than \$50,000 for a family of four), and 18% of households do not own a car.

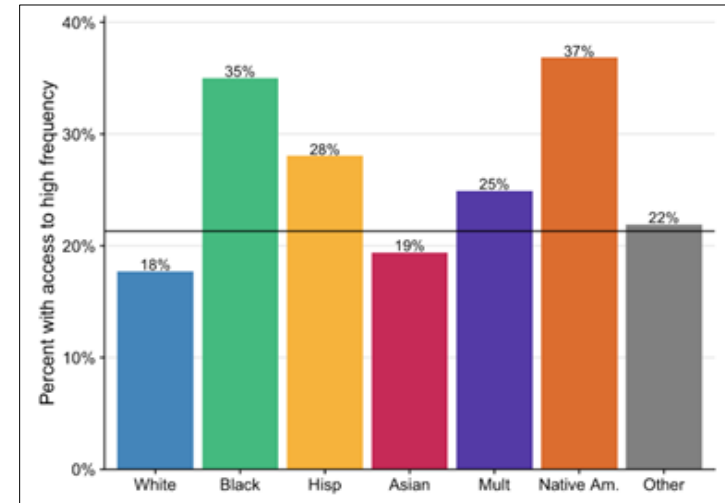


Figure 1 Source: Based on September 2020 service levels

2020-21 progress report: Expanding access to opportunities through transit service

Project	Lead Depts.	Desired outcome	2020-21 milestones	Next step(s)
Service Equity Evaluation	Service Development, Strategic Initiatives	Further embed equity considerations into decisions about scheduled, quarterly service changes and raise awareness of Metro Transit’s decision-making process.	A Service Equity Evaluation was presented to the Council in April 2021. This data will be publicly shared in Metro Transit’s first annual Service Equity Evaluation report in mid-2021.	Equity considerations will be internally tracked during each quarterly service change and reported publicly on an annual basis.
Network Next	BRT Projects, Service Development, Community Outreach and Engagement	Advance 20-year vision for arterial BRT network and other bus service improvements through Network Next, bringing high-frequency service to areas where there are more BIPOC and people of lower incomes.	Construction on the METRO D Line began in early 2021. The Council adopted the recommended F, G and H line corridors.	Corridor plan for the B Line will be released for comment in July 2021. Network Next engagement will continue in early 2022 with a focus on local bus service improvements. D Line is scheduled to open in 2022. E Line construction is scheduled to begin in 2024, pending full funding.
Open METRO Orange Line and improve connecting bus service	BRT Projects, Service Development, Community Outreach and Engagement	Expand and improve transit options in the I-35W corridor, providing stronger connections to jobs, housing and other opportunities in downtown Minneapolis and other communities.	Orange Line construction continued. Following extensive customer outreach, connecting bus service recommendations advanced to Council.	The Orange Line is scheduled to open in late 2021 and related local bus service improvements will follow.

2020-21 progress report: Expanding access to opportunities through transit service

Project	Lead Depts.	Desired outcome	2020-21 milestones	Next step(s)
Better Bus Routes	Service Development, Community Outreach and Engagement, Engineering & Facilities	Improve speed and reliability, expand service levels, and improve the waiting experience on core local bus routes that are more likely to be delayed and used by BIPOC customers.	Bus stop improvements made along Route 63 corridor in fall 2020. Service improvements to Route 63 were implemented in June 2021.	Implement service and bus stop improvements to Route 3 in August 2021.
Microtransit pilot in North Minneapolis	Strategic Initiatives, Service Development, MTS Operations	Increase mobility choices and connections to the fixed route network in low-income areas and BIPOC communities.	Completed service, fare collection, branding and operations plans.	RFPs for operations are expected to be released in late-2021. Following a period of public engagement, service is expected to begin in early 2022.

BRT corridor demographics

Within a half-mile	D Line (Chicago/F remont)	B Line (Lake/ Marshall)	E Line (Hennepin /France)	F Line (Central)	G Line (Robert/ Rice)	H Line (Como)	Region
% BIPOC	55%	41%	25%	34%	54%	53%	27%
% "very low income" *	41%	36%	29%	32%	43%	46%	20%
% do not own a vehicle	20%	18%	17%	20%	17%	19%	8%

* less than \$24,000 for an individual or less than \$50,000 for a family of four

Improving transit accessibility and quality

To ensure Metro Transit is addressing customers' priorities and needs, the agency is conducting a variety of outreach activities, including in-person and online surveys and regular meetings with the Transit Accessibility Advisory Committee (TAAC). In 2020, an extensive Listening & Learning survey was conducted to learn more about the pandemic's impacts on transit use and priorities, an effort that will be repeated in 2021. Metro Transit's outreach team has also been expanded and restructured to gather feedback more consistently and effectively, while Customer Relations is using new procedures and message documents to offer quick, consistent, and complete responses.

Efforts to make transit more accessible include the expansion of discounted fare programs, continued bus stop improvements and improved trip planning tools that meet the needs of people of all abilities and whose primary language is not English.



At a glance

- 41% of customers earn less than \$35,000 a year and more than 10,000 individuals are regularly using Transit Assistance Program (TAP) cards, which allow qualified individuals to ride for \$1.
- 10% of customers report having a disability.
- 38% of customers do not have access to a vehicle.

Equity in Action

In June 2021, Metro Transit began piloting an app that connects blind and low-vision customers with representatives who can provide live directions and plan trips through an app called Aira. Services are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and will be provided for free throughout the pilot period. The pilot program will allow staff and users, including volunteers from the State Services for the Blind and the American Council of the Blind of Minnesota, to evaluate the service before determining next steps.

2020-21 progress report: Improving transit accessibility and quality

Project	Lead Depts.	Desired outcome	2020-21 milestones	Next step(s)
Better Bus Stops	Engineering & Facilities, Customer Relations & Outreach	Provide shelters at stops with the highest number of boardings, in neighborhoods where more households don't have access to a vehicle and in locations that serve people with disabilities, older adults and others with special needs.	<p>In 2020, Metro Transit installed 15 new waiting shelters and replaced 22 aged shelters. Investments made between 2014 and 2020 mean that BIPOC communities now have similar or higher than average availability of shelters, light and heat.</p> <p>Created an SOP for addressing shelters with recurring issues and created a cross departmental Shelter Champion working team</p>	<p>Over the next five years, Metro Transit will invest \$6M in new and replacement shelters, heat and light and, accessible boarding pads. This is about \$2M more than the agency invested in such improvements between 2014 and the end of 2020.</p> <p>Maintain equitable shelter access according to race and ensure all bus stops with shelters are accessible for people with disabilities.</p>
Residential Bulk Pass Program	TOD, Finance, Marketing	Launch program that allows bulk, unlimited ride passes to be purchased and made available to residents of large multi-family developments along high-frequency transitways.	Internal resolution of all potential policy issues. Program scheduled to launch in July 2021.	Expand to as many multi-family developments along high-frequency transit corridors as possible.

2020-21 progress report: Improving transit accessibility and quality (cont.)

Project	Lead Depts.	Desired outcome	2020-21 milestones	Next step(s)
Improve the accessibility of transit information and engagement opportunities	Community Outreach and Engagement, Marketing & Transit Information	Ensure all individuals have access to transit information and meaningful opportunities to provide feedback on service improvements.	<p>More than 70 employees completed accessible document training and a resource page was created on MetNet, called the Accessibility Hub.</p> <p>Presented 16 projects and information items to TAAC for feedback; made changes to the projects such as Gold Line based on feedback.</p>	<p>Marketing is establishing translation guidelines to ensure essential information is available to all customers.</p> <p>Continue monthly presentations to the Transit Accessibility Advisory Committee (TAAC).</p>
Transit Assistance Program (TAP)	Finance, Marketing & Transit Information	Remove cost as a barrier to transit for qualified, low-income individuals in the region.	<p>In August 2020, TAP eligibility expanded to include individuals receiving unemployment insurance. Unemployment insurance is now a leading way to gain TAP eligibility; when the change was made, half of Black workers had applied for unemployment over the past five months, in part due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Currently, active TAP users ride about 30 times/month, the same as before the pandemic. In 2021, more than 900,000 TAP rides were provided.*</p>	<p>Continue working with 60+ community partners and staff to raise awareness and enroll more eligible residents. Future outreach will include working with organizations who support individuals seeking asylum status and became eligible for the TAP program due to a 2020 policy change. More than 450,000 people are believed to be eligible regionwide.</p>

*Total does not account for period during which fare collection was suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic (March 25-Aug. 1, 2020).

Building and leveraging institutional strength to support regional equity

Advancing equity means building organizational capacity to effectively engage and partner with the communities we serve. Metro Transit can exert its influence – as a purchaser, landowner and regional mobility leader – to help advance regional equity goals. In practice, this means intentionally applying an equity lens to our decisions and strengthening our public engagement, so we make decisions with people, not for people. This also means proactively seeking out and working with local businesses that are owned by women, people who identify as BIPOC and veterans, and working closely with partners to address regional challenges like access to affordable housing, social services and healthcare. Moving forward, the agency is developing an equity metrics program that includes internal and external reporting to strengthen accountability and transparency.



At a glance

- Metro Transit's approved 2020 operating budget included more than \$473 million in spending, and the agency's approved 2021-2026 Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) calls for nearly \$3.6 billion million in spending.
- \$13.8B in development has been approved along high-frequency transitways between 2013 and 2019, and another \$8.9B in development is planned, representing 68% of the region's planned development. New residential developments will bring more than 35,000 multifamily units to high-frequency transitways.

Equity in Action

Metro Transit's Homeless Action Team (HAT) has expanded and gained new resources since its creation in 2018. Since 2019, HAT officers have partnered with the Council's Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA) to provide individuals seeking shelter on transit access to federal housing vouchers they can use to secure permanent, affordable housing. To date, more than 400 people from 161 households have received vouchers through the HAT/HRA partnership. The HRA has received additional vouchers to distribute with HAT moving forward. Additionally, HAT officers now have a Mobile Assessment Vehicle that can be used to provide IDs, complete health exams and offer other services to unsheltered individuals. The team has also gained a civilian outreach coordinator and a contracted case manager to help transition unsheltered individuals into permanent housing.

2020-21 progress report: Building and leveraging institutional strength to support regional equity

Project	Lead Department(s)	Purpose/desired outcome	2020-21 milestones	Next step(s)
Budget equity analyses	Finance	Align budget priorities with regional equity goals.	Evaluation method designed and applied to portion of budget in 2021.	Will be integrated into 2022 operating and capital budget development.
Metro Transit equity metrics program	Strategic Initiatives	Develop core equity measures to better track progress and outcomes.	Metrics created for service quality, accessibility and availability. Initial metrics presented to Senior Staff in September 2020.	Develop metrics for police, procurement, transit information, workforce and Human Resources and establish unified equity metrics program that includes regular internal and external reporting.
Expand staff capacity for public engagement	Outreach and Engagement	Ensure Metro Transit is building and sustaining meaningful relationships with stakeholders that transcend single projects and offer meaningful opportunities to provide feedback.	Engagement capacity strengthened through organizational changes, including assigning staff to geographic areas and creating a new Assistant Director for Community Affairs position. Created standardized engagement plans to ID target audience, set goals and develop strategies based on the target audience.	Continue to build relationships and employ lessons learned through Listening & Learning 2020 to future engagement efforts; Conduct Listening and Learning 2.0 in July/August 2021.

2020-21 progress report: Building and leveraging institutional strength to support regional equity (cont.)

Project	Lead Department(s)	Purpose/desired outcome	2020-21 milestones	Next step(s)
Increase presence of non-sworn personnel on transit and reduce penalties for fare evasion	Executive, MTPD, Finance	Provide a more inviting on-board environment and better align fare evasion penalties with level of infraction.	Administrative citation bill passed by the House during the 2021 session but was not passed by the Senate.	Continue to advocate for administrative citation bill in future legislative sessions until successful passage. Complete Council-led review of Metro Transit Police Departments' policies and procedures.
Vaccine bus	Bus Maintenance, Bus Transportation	Expand access to COVID-19 vaccines by equipping buses to travel the state as mobile vaccination units.	Six buses were modified to serve as vaccination centers. Through the end of June, the buses had made 147 stops across the state, serving nearly 6,000 people.	Vaccine buses will remain in use through late-2021.
Provide more opportunities to local, underutilized businesses	All departments	Contribute to the Council goal of directing at least 10% of the Council's annual spending on goods and services and 14% of annual spending on construction, professional technical services to businesses in the Met Council's Underutilized Business (MCUB) program.	In 2020, Metro Transit spent \$3.4M with MCUB businesses, 25% of the agency's spending on construction, goods and services. Procurement policy amended to allow project managers to directly spend with MCUB businesses on purchases of less than \$25,000.	Continue to track and report MCUB utilization. Promote the use of MCUB businesses internally and highlight successful partnerships with Metro Transit through a 2021 marketing campaign (Marketing is researching BIPOC media habits to inform this and other efforts).

2020-21 progress report: Leveraging institutional strength to support regional equity (cont.)

Project	Lead Department(s)	Purpose/desired outcome	2020-21 milestones	Next step(s)
Promote anti-displacement policies/programs	Capital Programs, Transit Oriented Development	Work with partners to support residents, businesses vulnerable to displacement due to transit investments – including the Blue Line Extension – by promoting, developing anti-displacement policies and programs.	An anti-displacement working group will be convened in fall 2021 and continue to meet for 12-18 months.	Develop a market analysis and summarize community assets at risk of displacement.
Expanding Multicultural Marketing Reach and Frequency	Marketing	Strengthen Metro Transit marketing activities and approaches to more effectively reach and connect with diverse communities.	In April 2021, Marketing received a \$150,000 general purpose levy appropriation from the Metropolitan Council.	2021 work funded by the Council will include multicultural focus groups, year-long contracts with multicultural media, Creative Service Collaboration Fund, and MCUB Vendor Recruitment Campaign

Fostering an equitable workplace

Metro Transit employees expect equity and inclusion to be central to the service the agency provides and a defining feature of the organization's internal policies, procedures, and work culture. In 2020, staff called for racial equity training, greater diversity on hiring panels and in leadership positions, improved internal communication and efforts to better measure and report back on progress toward equity-related goals, among many other recommendations.

At a glance

- Nearly a third of Metro Transit's workforce will reach retirement age by 2024
- About 42% of Metro Transit's workforce, and 57% of operators, have identified themselves as BIPOC. Around 21% of management positions are filled by BIPOC
- 20.4% of non-bus operators identified as women, 21.6% of bus operators identified as women and 22.6% of managers identified as women
- 2% of employees self-reported having a disability (efforts to encourage applicants and employees to self-ID will be expanded in 2021)



Equity in Action

The COVID-19 pandemic led to a quick rise in virtual events, which provided new opportunities for staff to connect and learn. Human Resources hosted multiple Ask HR events, covering topics like benefits and the department's efforts to support diversity, equity and inclusion. To help job seekers understand the pathway to open positions, the Equity & Inclusion Team hosted online sessions with hiring managers, a practice that will be continued by Human Resources with support from the E&I Team. Other online events organized by the E&I Team and internal partners provided staff opportunities to learn more about Juneteenth and Pride. Advancing Women in Transit, an Employee Resource Group, also hosted several agencywide events, including a monthlong series for Women's Month.

2020-21 progress report: Fostering an equitable workplace

Project	Lead Department(s)	Purpose/desired outcome	2020-21 milestones	Next step(s)
Expand and support Metro Transit Equity & Inclusion Team	Equity & Inclusion	The expanded team leads and supports workplace culture that motivates and empowers all employees to participate in Metro Transit’s efforts to achieve equitable outcomes and create an inclusive workplace and transit system.	<p>E&I Team collected nearly 300 comments from staff, developed recommended action steps to advance equity based on this feedback, and presented recommendations to the GM’s Direct Reports in October 2020. These recommendations are actively informing the Strategic Framework and other work.</p> <p>E&I Team expanded to 18 members in 2021 and E&I workgroups created in several departments.</p>	Recruitment for 2022-2023 term will kick off in late 2021.
Technician Pathway Program	Bus Maintenance, Rail Maintenance, Human Resources	Promote diversity and reduce barriers for individuals, including current staff, seeking to advance their careers as bus, rail and signals technicians through extended job training and academic programs that culminate in full-time job offers.	Building on past experience with the Metro Transit Technician program (MTT), staff redeveloped Technician Pathway Programs for bus and rail maintenance. In April 2021, the Council appropriated \$200,000 in general purpose levy funds to support the Bus Technician Pathway Program. As of mid-2021, this program was in the final stages of development.	Finalize, promote and launch programs.

2020-21 progress report: Fostering an equitable workplace (cont.)

Project	Lead Department(s)	Purpose/desired outcome	2020-21 milestones	Next step(s)
Expand intercultural development and racial equity training	Equity & Inclusion, Human Resources, Office of Equal Opportunity	Ensure staff understand the impacts of racial disparities and unconscious biases and provide ongoing opportunities for continued discussions and learning.	<p>Training on intercultural competency and intercultural conflict styles provided to 340+ managers and supervisors (97% completion rate).</p> <p>Direct Reports completed collective coaching session following their Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) assessment and committed to ongoing intercultural development actions as a leadership team.</p> <p>All staff (except for operators) assigned to take unconscious bias training (86% completion rate).</p> <p>“Beginning Conversations on Race” discussion series offered to all staff. Four one-hour sessions offered, virtually, each attended by 70-120 people.</p>	<p>Expand on intercultural training at 2021 Leadership Forum, for managers and supervisors.</p> <p>Offer unconscious bias training to operators through POD program.</p> <p>Survey employees who attended “Beginning Conversations on Race” series to find opportunities for next steps.</p>

2020-21 progress report: Fostering an equitable workplace (cont.)

Project	Lead Department(s)	Purpose/desired outcome	2020-21 milestones	Next step(s)
Support and expand Employee Resources Groups (ERGs)	Equity & Inclusion	Provide staff more opportunities to network, learn and support one another.	<p>Advancing Women in Transit (AWT), Metro Transit’s first ERG, organized 17 meetings and events for staff, including George Floyd round-table discussions and chalk walk donation events.</p> <p>AWT created a “harassment lens” to assist in the review and updating of policies and procedures, which was presented to Metro Transit and Council leadership.</p>	<p>Formalize Pride ERG (LGBTQ+ focus).</p> <p>Continue to grow ERG awareness and participation, in part by making information available during new employee orientation.</p>
Great Place to Work Working Group	Administration, Human Resources, Equity & Inclusion, Communications	Continually identify opportunities to improve the workplace using employee feedback.	<p>Created working group to ID opportunities, strategies, resources, and metrics.</p> <p>Supported implementation and communication of two new resources – Policy Central, a searchable online database of Council policies, and Ethics Point, which allows employees to anonymously report suspected wrongdoing at any time.</p>	<p>Continue working to implement the suggestions of the working group, including a Recruitment and Selection Score Card that will help determine whether sufficient efforts were made to attract diverse applicants.</p> <p>Work with HR and OEO to update key policies and procedures related to the workplace.</p>