

# INSIGHTS

Metro Transit's weekly employee newsletter

July 23, 2021



Progress continues on the Minneapolis Bus Garage, where crews are busy installing concrete floors, sealing the rooftop and finishing interior and exterior walls. The new garage is expected to open in 2023 and will have 24 maintenance bays, room to store more than 200 buses, electric bus charging equipment, a new driver's lounge and other amenities. To date, nearly 20,000 yards of concrete (about the size of 3 Goodyear blimps) have been used, along with 1,500 tons of rebar. Future activities include hoist installation, interior finishing work and construction of an access road buses will use to enter the garage on the north end of the building. Multiple minority- and women-owned businesses that have registered as Disadvantages Business Enterprises (DBEs) are working on the project.

## What to know this week

**Uptick in COVID-19 cases a reminder to stay vigilant:** The number of new COVID-19 cases is increasing in Minnesota, a reminder to all staff of the need to continue safe workplace practices. Employees who have not been vaccinated are encouraged to wear a mask. All employees are encouraged to continue monitoring their health, to stay home if they are sick and to get tested if they are experiencing symptoms or think they've been exposed, regardless of vaccination status. COVID-19 vaccines are free and widely available. To learn more, visit [mn.gov/covid19/vaccine](https://mn.gov/covid19/vaccine).

**Bus operator hiring:** Nearly 30 job seekers who attended a one-day operator hiring event on Saturday, July 17, are moving forward to the next phases of the hiring process, and 8 new bus operators have started their training since the start of July. Efforts to recruit operators are ongoing, and another one-day hiring event is tentatively planned for late-August. To reach ideal staffing levels and maintain service reliability, the goal is to hire up to 70 full-time bus operators by the fall. Employees who refer successful bus operator candidates can receive a \$600 bonus.

**Blue Line Extension outreach continues:** Several public, in-person open houses and virtual community meetings are being held this month to get feedback on evolving plans for the Blue Line Extension, which will bring light rail from Target Field Station to Brooklyn Park. At the events, staff are asking for input on potential station locations. Plans are being redeveloped after attempts to use an existing freight rail corridor owned by BNSF could not advance. A new recommended route is expected to be put forward this winter, and the project could be completed by 2028. Learn more at [bluelineext.org](https://bluelineext.org).

## Commitment to continual improvement is more important than ever

From General Manager Wes Kooistra

Last summer, we set out the challenge to emerge from the pandemic as a stronger and better transit system.



Rather than set our sights on simply returning to pre-pandemic "normal," we committed to making improvements based on what matters most to our riders -- providing fast, reliable, clean, and safe service. We also know there are more steps to take to make our service more equitable and sustainable. These efforts must be continuous.

In the coming months, many of the region's workers and students who have traveled less since the start of the pandemic are expected to return to offices and classrooms.

As they prepare to come back, they'll have to consider how to get where they need to go.

During this critical period, when lasting travel habits will be set, we must do everything we can to make a clear and compelling case that transit is welcoming, safe, reliable, and easy to use. We cannot control all the factors that influence ridership, but we can control improvements to our services that focus on what customers want. This is our best strategy for increasing ridership.

We are planning to significantly increase our official presence on our services. This effort was announced last week and focuses on using community service officers as a new civilian presence that is welcoming and helpful to our transit customers while deterring crime and code of conduct violations. This program is based on much of what has been learned from similar programs at other large transit providers.

We are continuing to improve local services through the robust expansion of our Bus Rapid Transit network, service and stop improvements on core routes, and the expansion of transit advantages through partnerships with our cities. Our

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express service strategy focuses on developing improved services in select express corridors across our region and considers changes we are seeing in travel behavior and patterns.

Our riders will benefit from improved facilities by significantly expanding the Better Bus Stops program and growing our facilities maintenance team to achieve better upkeep of high-traffic and high-need facilities and stops.

Customer communication is improving through the recent introduction of a new fare payment app and other technology strategies, including our continued focus on real-time signs.

There will be fare promotions this fall to thank customers who continue to ride transit and welcome back customers who are returning to their schools and worksites. We hope to increase enrollment in reduced fare programs such as Transit Assistance Program and will look at how we can simplify our unnecessarily complex fare structure.

In the coming weeks and months, we will be going out of our way to communicate these improvements and the long-term vision we have for our region.

We accomplish this work through efforts across Metro Transit staff, and as a team with a shared focus on a great regional transit service. Thank you for bringing your talents, your ideas, and your commitment to this important effort.

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Bus Maintenance course focuses on hard-to-diagnose issues

A new course is helping technicians resolve difficult-to-diagnose communications issues.

Like a car, buses send error codes that help diagnose a problem. But communication codes linked to things like faulty wiring are often too vague to easily troubleshoot.

“If you don’t know what you’re looking for or where to start, you’ll rarely find what’s causing it,” Technical Trainer **Jake Maalis** said.

The course developed by the Bus Maintenance Training Team helps technicians know what to look for through classroom and hands-on training.

About 50 technicians have taken the class so far, and the curriculum is being shared with other agencies through the American Public Transportation Association.

At East Metro, technicians who completed the course fixed long-idle buses in a day. “The longer you spend on difficult wiring problems, the more you learn and reduce the amount of time it takes to troubleshoot those types of issues again,” Maalis said.

CUSTOMERS TELL US HOW WE’RE DOING

## “She was very empathetic”

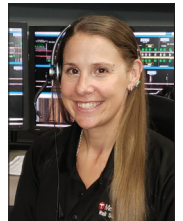
Transit Information Center Representative **Ms, Shatia Hamilton** recently received a commendation for helping a customer find their destination.

*I just wanted to say that Ms, Shatia is an asset to Metro Transit. I was totally lost, and she walked me through everything I needed to know to get me to Northtown. She was very empathetic and answered all my questions. I’m in the service sector myself and I really appreciate good customer service.*

*Michael R.*

Career Tracks: Jennifer Schultz, Rail Transit Supervisor

Many people who work at Metro Transit take on new responsibilities and roles throughout their careers. Career Tracks will highlight the paths employees have taken to their latest assignment, encouraging others to consider their own professional development.



### How did you begin your career with Metro Transit?

My mother-in-law worked for the Council’s Environmental Services division for 35 years and told me, “You have to get in.” I applied for several positions before I was offered a position as a light rail helper in May 2014. I was a helper for almost eight years when I applied and got into the Leadership Academy (OJE) program acting as a rail transit supervisor.

### What were your career goals and what steps did you take to achieve them?

My goals have always been to learn as much as possible and to take advantage of every opportunity. When I came to light rail, I was brought up to the Rail Control Center. I thought this was the place for me. I spent several years figuring out how to get in there. I went to Century College and received associate degrees in business administration, communications and liberal arts and science and certificates in communications and entrepreneurship. I chose those degrees because I knew I wanted to move up and work in the RCC, and I want to own a company one day. The people in the RCC were willing to answer my questions and help me whenever needed.

### What advice do you have for others who want to take on more or different responsibilities?

Be open and willing to learn new things, even if they’re hard. Find great supporters to help you through everything you do.

Do the Leadership Academy! It’s a perfect opportunity the Council offers so you can learn and figure out where you belong. It takes a very strong person to do what I did, to work 40-plus hours on the night shift with two kids and going to college. I had a 4.0 grade point average the whole time and was on the Dean’s List every year. I was hired in October 2020 as a rail transit supervisor and work 9 p.m. to 5 a.m. My daughters (8 and 4) and my husband are so understanding. My husband was the person who pushed me to go to finally live my dream and put myself through college.



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