

INSIGHTS

Metro Transit's weekly employee newsletter

July 30, 2021



Nearly two dozen bus operators were recently welcomed as relief instructors at the Instruction Center. Relief instructors will work with both newly hired and experienced operators at their respective garages, providing route training and other support.

What to know this week

COVID-19 vaccines now available at Well@Work clinics: Employees and dependents who are at least 12 years old can now access free COVID-19 vaccines at the Council's Well@Work clinics, located near Heywood Garage and in downtown St. Paul. The clinics are offering the Pfizer vaccine on Mondays and Thursdays. To make an appointment, call the scheduling line for the location you'd like to visit:

- St. Paul (Jackson Street): 952-967-5474
- Minneapolis (Heywood Office & Police Building): 952-967-7468

If you've been seen at a Well@Work clinic previously, you can schedule online:

- Visit healthpartners.com/appointment and log into your HealthPartners account.
- Select "Primary Care" as your visit type.
- Answer the questions about your visit – including if you want a phone or video visit.
- Your Well@Work clinic will be listed under "Search by location."

Apply to become a Transit Control Center Supervisor: Applications for Transit Control Center Supervisor are being accepted now through Monday, Aug. 9. TCC supervisors help operators navigate detours and stay on schedule and respond to unexpected incident like collisions and medical emergencies.

Two upcoming open houses will allow interested candidates to learn more about the positions. The open houses will be held at the Metro Transit Police & Office Facility at 9 a.m. on Wednesday, Aug. 4, and at 2 p.m. on Thursday, Aug. 5.

Qualified applicants will be added to a six-month eligibility list for 2021 and future TCC openings. Minimum education and experience qualifications apply. To review the job posting and apply, visit metro council.org/employment.

Rise in COVID-19 cases means we must move forward carefully

From Brian Funk, Acting Chief Operating Officer

The widespread availability of COVID-19 vaccinations has allowed us to begin thinking about getting back to more of the activities we've missed since the start of the pandemic.



But here and across the country, a highly contagious variant is leading to an increase in the number of people getting COVID-19. At Metro Transit, 13 cases have been reported since the start of July.

Whether you're working on site or at home, whether you've been vaccinated or not, the message is the same: All of us must proceed cautiously and with a full awareness that the progress we've made is not irreversible.

In practice, that means those who haven't been vaccinated should consider doing so as soon as possible. Masks should always be worn on transit and are recommended in indoor settings for those who haven't been vaccinated.

All of us should also continue to monitor our health and seek testing if we're showing symptoms, think we've been exposed or recently traveled, regardless of vaccination status.

The upward trend in COVID-19 cases also means that some of the traditions we've missed will likely need to wait a little longer.

Our annual operator awards, Ovations, and the Bus Roadeo will be put off until next year, and gatherings for retirement celebrations will remain on hold for the time being.

We are also evaluating our approach to the Minnesota State Fair, recognizing both the strain that can put on our limited resources and uncertainties about the demand for express bus service.

At this time, we continue to expect more staff to begin returning to the office in September, but we are carefully monitoring the situation and will adapt as needed.

The questions we're facing during this transition period do not have easy answers. But as we have said since the start of the pandemic, we will always put the health

continued on next page

and safety of our employees and our riders first.

We must also consider how our current actions will shape our long-term recovery efforts.

As the general manager has said, the coming weeks and months are a vital chapter in our pandemic recovery that will set the tone for what's to come.

To put ourselves in the best position, we must not only work to provide safe and reliable service but continue to look out for each other and our community so we can finally put this pandemic behind us.

Thank you for doing your part to accomplish each of these important goals.

Stay tuned for State Fair updates:

Understandably, many employees and customers are wondering what kind of express bus service Metro Transit will provide to and from the Minnesota State Fair. At this time, discussions are ongoing. When plans are finalized, more information will be shared with staff and communicated to customers. Thank you for your patience.

New schedules should lead to improvements for operators, customers

Service Development used new scheduling software to create schedules that promise to make both operators and customers happier when changes take effect on Saturday, Aug. 21.

The software, along with the expertise of ATU Schedulers, allowed the department to increase service with fewer operators. The schedules are also expected to provide more layover time and will offer more straight and 8-hour runs generally favored by operators.

"This is the next chapter in a long story of scheduling improvements aimed at not only improving efficiency but also the work experience for operators," said **Shaun Morrell**, Manager of Scheduling and Systems Support.

Comparing this year's March pick to the August pick, the team:

- Added 128 in-service trips
- Reduced split work by 9%
- Reduced street reliefs by 40%
- Reduced weekday vehicle requirement by 5 buses
- Reduced scheduled workforce requirement by 11.5 operator equivalents, including fewer unpicked trippers

The improvements should also help prevent having to cancel trips because operators aren't available. Canceled trips have become more common due to an operator shortage. "We hope that these improvements will ease some of the pressure of day-to-day service delivery," Morrell said.

CUSTOMERS TELL US HOW WE'RE DOING

"He didn't miss a beat!"

Customer Relations Specialist **Nicholas Heimer** recently received a commendation from a co-worker for his attention to detail.

I appreciate Nicholas's extra efforts to take meeting notes of the Service Advisory Team meeting with very impressive and detailed copy. He didn't miss a beat! I am honored to have him as a participant in our meetings.

Randy L. Robinson

Nicollet Garage Coordinator

Know Your Operator: Abdurzaq Ali, Ruter

Abdurzaq (Ab-dul-ra-zaq) Ali didn't intend on immigrating to the United States from Yemen, but fate made him follow his heart.

"I came here as a tourist, and to visit my sister," Ali said. "Then, I met the love of my life and we got married."

That was in 1995. Fifteen years later, after losing his job as a driver for a company that went bankrupt, he applied to Metro Transit. The career change allowed him to buy a home in Fridley and to help his two eldest children graduate college, the first in their family to do so.

"I appreciate what transit has done for me," he said. "This is a job I am proud of and will be for life."

At one point, Ali investigated returning to college to finish his own degree. He discovered, however, that after four years of tuition, he'd make just as much as a bus operator.

"That's when I decided to improve myself at transit," Ali said. "People who aren't in transit don't know what they're missing."

Eight years ago, Ali began that journey by becoming a relief dispatcher, a highly detailed job that operators depend on daily. One day, he hopes to become an assistant transportation manager.

"There's so many ways to learn and advance your career here, for free," he said. "I love my job and I do it from the heart."



Join a discussion about the costs of racism on August 2:

Employees are invited to attend a virtual session about the negative health impacts and economic costs of racism at 11 a.m. Monday, Aug. 2. The hourlong session will be led by Jamil Stamschror-Lott, a mental health consultant with Creative Kuponya, and is sponsored by the Council's employee wellness program, Fit For Life. If you did not receive an invite but would like to join, please email fitforlife@metc.state.mn.us.



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