

# INSIGHTS

Metro Transit's weekly employee newsletter

August 13, 2021



Tanya Young tells people she was raised to be a train operator on the METRO Blue Line. As a child, she lived just east of Hiawatha Avenue, at the time a one-lane highway with apple trees. Her mom ran a business in downtown Minneapolis, and her grandfather lies in rest at Fort Snelling National Cemetery. "So, there are these landmarks of my life along the way," Young said. Young, who began as a part-time bus operator in the late 1980s, is featured this week on the Riders' Almanac blog ([metrotransit.org/ridersalmanac](https://metrotransit.org/ridersalmanac)).

Bus operators who are interested in transferring to light rail are invited to apply to become a train operator through Friday, Aug. 27. Operators who pass agility testing and an interview will go on an eligibility list according to seniority. Individuals on the eligibility list will be trained as positions open. To learn more and apply, visit [metrocouncil.org/employment](https://metrocouncil.org/employment).

## Limited express bus service will be provided to the Minnesota State Fair

After considerable discussion, we are moving ahead with plans to provide State Fair express bus service from three Park & Rides – I-394 & County Road 73, 28th Avenue in Bloomington and Cottage Grove. Buses will serve these sites every half hour, every day of the fair.

Those who are familiar with our traditional State Fair service know we have historically served many more sites than this. The decision to scale back is a reflection of the fact that we are still about 50 operators shy of our ideal staffing level.

Additionally, customer demand is uncertain as the state experiences a rise in COVID-19 cases. Like regular route service, masks will be required on State Fair express buses and will be made available to those who arrive without one.

This news is another reminder that we are actively recruiting bus operators, and that we need everyone's help to find and hire talented candidates. If you know anyone who would make a great operator, please encourage them to apply.

Two operator hiring events will be held later this month, providing job seekers a chance to apply and interview in one visit. These events will run from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. on Tuesday, Aug. 17, and from 9 a.m. to noon on Saturday, Aug. 21, at the Instruction Center (725 North 7th Street, Minneapolis). Employees who refer successful candidates will receive a \$600 bonus. To learn more, visit [metrotransit.org/drive](https://metrotransit.org/drive).

Thank you for your patience, understanding and continued support.

– Brian Funk, Acting Chief Operating Officer

## To care for our community, we must care for ourselves

From General Manager Wes Kooistra

We are now 18 months into the pandemic, and I want to again express my wholehearted appreciation to all Metro Transit employees for the critical work of providing transit services to our region under nearly impossible circumstances.



We have worked together through the continuing challenges of the pandemic and its far-reaching impact on our services. Our services and schedules have significantly and frequently changed. Our security, customer support, and maintenance needs have grown with underserved social needs and unaddressed crime in our communities. We are constantly adapting public and customer messaging to changes in public health interests and the transit service environment. And now we are managing through an operator shortage. These are just some examples. The work of every transit employee has been changed and challenged in some way.

Your remarkable work is not taken for granted. I am proud of your heroic efforts; I admire the daily commitment of every worker that is essential to our success. And you have earned the admiration of the Metropolitan Council members and leaders, community leaders, and others who have asked me to pass along their thanks.

But it is also important to acknowledge that sustaining this effort over this long period of challenge, with no certain end, often requires us to work through frustration and fatigue.

It is a difficult time! This has lasted too long. There is so much we can't control. We feel helpless to end the pandemic and all its unwelcome influences on our work and personal lives. It can cause us to become anxious and tired.

Burnout can happen to any of us, and impatience and intolerance can easily become the product of our response. It is human nature, and in this difficult and constantly changing work environment, these feelings and responses can be contagious.

We cannot dismiss these feelings, but

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rather we must be self-aware so that we can manage our anxiety and fatigue in healthy ways.

We can all be part of the solution. We can be self-aware and seek help and support to take care of our own needs. We can also help each other with encouragement and support. Empathy expressed in positive, constructive ways can be exactly what our colleagues may need.

Know that your work is important, appreciated and admired. Your efforts are heroic because they provide a service that is essential to meeting the daily needs of so many people in our region. This is why it is important to take care of yourself and to support your colleagues when you see a need and have an opportunity.

If you are one who is struggling and needing assistance, there are these resources that are also available to you:

- **Sand Creek:** Counseling services available in person, online or over the phone. For more information call 888-243-5744 or visit [sandcreekeap.com](http://sandcreekeap.com) (use the code metcouncil to create a new account).
- **Well@Work clinics:** Virtual appointments, including those for mental health services, are available. For more information call 952-967-5474 (downtown St. Paul clinic) or 952-967-7468 (Heywood clinic) or visit the Well@Work page on MetNet.
- **Fit For Life:** Email [fitforlife@metc.state.mn.us](mailto:fitforlife@metc.state.mn.us) or contact the Wellness Champion at your worksite to learn more about the Council's wellness program.
- **National Alliance on Mental Illness:** Find COVID-19 information and resources at [nami.org](http://nami.org) or call NAMI's HelpLine at 1-800-950-6264

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## Bus barrier installations nearing completion

To date, technicians at the Overhaul Base have equipped 572 buses with the Ben Tech barriers. Another 100 barriers will be installed by the end of the year. All future Gillig and New Flyer buses, including those that will be used on the METRO Orange Line, will come equipped with barriers.

Operators who prefer not to use the barrier can pin them behind their seat. Buses without permanent barriers were equipped with temporary dividers as a COVID-19 precaution.

## CUSTOMERS TELL US HOW WE'RE DOING

### "He is fabulous."

South Garage Bus Operator **John Decarlo** recently received a commendation for his reliable and courteous service on this customer's commute.

*I ride the northbound Red Line bus from Apple Valley to the Mall of America every weekday. He is kind, courteous and one of the most reliable drivers I have had in my 30 plus years of riding the bus. He is on time and a very safe driver. Thank you for having him on this route - he is fabulous.*

Ann H.

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## Garages exceeding reliability goals

Maintenance teams at each garage exceeded their reliability goals in July, collectively averaging 8,431 miles between road calls. All garages also exceeded their reliability goals in April and May. To date, buses have traveled an average of 7,606 miles between road calls. The annual goal is 7,500 miles.

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## Congratulations to these employees who retired in July

Vivian Larson, Operator, South, 6 years  
Kelli Marroquin, Operator, South, 7 years  
Alan Hinrichs, Operator, Heywood, 9 years  
Douglas Grandy, Operator, Ruter, 11 years  
Robert Poore, Welder, 13 years  
James Mittelstedt, Operator, East Metro, 20 years  
Daniel Langenfeld, Operator, East Metro, 23 years  
Judith Bushey, Operator, South, 23 years  
Steven Lee, Data Collector, 24 years  
James Juettner, Mark Up Dispatcher, Ruter, 29 years

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## Congratulations to these employees who celebrated work anniversaries in July

### 45 years

Dennis Conley, Mechanic Technician, Ruter

### 25 years

Lue Xiong, Helper, Overhaul Base  
Janice Brumlow, Electronic Revenue Equipment Administrator  
Bonnie Ripple, Operator, Ruter  
Bob Brevig, Assist. Transportation Manager, Nicollet  
Stephen Karanja, Transit Supervisor  
Trinity Jensen, Coordinator, Material Management

### 20 years

Henry Bridges, Operator, Heywood  
Robin Cauffman, Director, Administration



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