

INSIGHTS

Metro Transit's weekly employee newsletter

August 20, 2021



A new mural featuring historic photos and two recovered destination scrolls – the precursor to electronic overhead displays – was installed last week in an atrium at the Heywood Garage. Graphic Designer **Missy Dodge**, Public Arts Administrator **Mark Granlund** and Principal Project Coordinator **Molly Ellis** led the project. A history display in the entryway of the Metro Transit Police and Office Facility remains under development. Employees who have historical photos or items to share are invited to email drew.kerr@metrotransit.org.

What to know this week

Mask requirement extended through Jan. 18, 2022: A federal order requiring masks on transit will remain in effect through Jan. 18, 2022. Under the order, operators must continue to wear masks, even if the barrier is closed, while passengers are on board. To encourage compliance, operators are asked to bring extra masks that can be offered to customers, use PR-17 to display “Face Masks Required” and to play recorded audio reminders as needed.

Vaccine incentive available: Anyone who got or will receive their first COVID-19 vaccine dose between July 30 and August 22 can receive a \$100 Visa gift card. To learn more about the incentive and claim your reward, visit mn.gov/covid19/100. Free Pfizer vaccines are available at the Council’s Well@Work clinics on Mondays and Thursdays. To make an appointment, call 952-967-5474 (St. Paul) or 952-967-7468 (Minneapolis). If you’ve previously been to a Well@Work clinic, schedule an appointment online at healthpartners.com. To date, 70% of eligible Minnesotans have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. More than 74% of Council employees have received at least one dose.

Boosters likely needed: The Minnesota Department of Health said this week that booster doses “likely will be needed in the near future,” and that boosters should become available beginning the week of September 20. Booster timing is expected to be eight months after the second dose of Pfizer or Moderna vaccine. State public health officials said “there is plenty of vaccine available,” and that they’d work to provide equitable access to boosters when needed.

Many of our employees come from parts of the world that have experienced conflict, and the situation in Afghanistan may be an unsettling reminder of these traumas. Please be mindful and empathetic during this difficult time. For guidance on how to be supportive, please email Equity & Inclusion Senior Manager Celina Martina at celina.martina@metrotransit.org. Free counseling is available through Sand Creek. For more information, call 888-243-5744 or visit sandcreekcap.com.

Orange Line’s opening is a milestone to look forward to

From Nick Thompson, Deputy General Manager of Capital Projects

In just over 100 days, we’ll open the region’s next Bus Rapid Transit line – the METRO Orange Line on Interstate 35W.



This is an incredibly important and exciting milestone to look forward to, and I want to thank all those who are already doing their part to make sure opening day and all the days that will follow are a success.

There’s a lot that needs to happen between now and December 4, too.

Bus Operations will soon begin showing operators how to safely navigate the new Lake Street Station and a transit-only ramp from downtown Minneapolis to I-35W.

Bus Maintenance is receiving and preparing a fleet of specially equipped 60-foot buses that will be housed at the Heywood Garage while Service Development is finalizing schedules for the Orange Line and all the connecting services customers can use to get to and from its stations.

Staff in Engineering & Facilities, Street Operations, Revenue Operations, Marketing, Outreach and at the Metro Transit Police Department will also remain deeply engaged in the lead-up to opening day.

Supporting all this work is our BRT Projects office, which has helped lead this project from start to finish and coordinated not just with internal partners but many other stakeholders, including the Minnesota Department of Transportation and cities throughout the I-35W corridor.

Watching all this work come together is impressive. It’s also a reminder of everything it’s taken to get to this point.

In the 1970s, some of the country’s first express buses began operating on the newly opened I-35W. Decades later, the I-35W & 46th Street Station, MnPASS lanes and Marq2 combined to make transit a more attractive option in the corridor.

continued on next page

In recent years, transit has been a reliable way to avoid the hassles of significant construction as MnDOT has rebuilt bridges, access ramps and sections of the interstate.

The Orange Line builds on this tradition and serves a symbol of transit's future in our region.

That future, as we have seen since the start of the pandemic, is one that compels us to make all-day, all-purpose service more widely available throughout our region.

The Orange Line and other BRT and light rail investments provide exactly this kind of service, along with boarding areas and buses that are more accessible and inviting.

So again, as we prepare for opening day, I want to thank all those who have helped get us to this point and whose hard work over the coming months will get us ready us for opening day and beyond.

We are on the brink of another important moment for our organization and our region, and I couldn't be more excited to see what happens next.

Route 3 changes will simplify, improve service

Simpler is better. That's the mantra behind route and schedule changes that will take effect this weekend on Route 3.

To help prevent customer confusion, more trips will run the full length of the corridor and a new route, Route 33, will replace the handful of Route 3 trips that traveled south of Como Avenue.

In downtown Minneapolis, Route 3 will be extended further north and be moved from 3rd and 4th streets to Washington Avenue, improving transit access in the North Loop neighborhood.

To make service faster and more reliable, stops will be spaced further apart and, in some cases, moved to new locations so buses can get through intersections before stopping to pick people up. Schedules have been adjusted to better match actual travel times.

The changes were coordinated through the Better Bus Routes program, which aims to make local routes more reliable and easier to use. The program's next focus will be Route 22.

Several express routes serving downtown Minneapolis, downtown St. Paul, and the University of Minnesota will also be restored or expanded as part of the scheduled service changes that take effect on Saturday, Aug. 21.

CUSTOMERS TELL US HOW WE'RE DOING

"He was like Google Maps but so much more"

South Operator **Scott Stone** recently received a commendation for helping a customer get to their destination.

He was so detailed regarding the information I needed to get to my transfer and destination. He was like Google Maps but so much more. His level of professionalism, genuine kindness, and positive attitude set the tone for my day. He didn't balk at my question, nor tell me to use my phone to look it up. He reminded me of bus drivers from my childhood days. It was like I had bumped into a family friend.

Alexi S.

Congratulations to these retired operators with 30+ years of service

Two long-serving operators are joining Metro Transit's Wall of Fame, which celebrates employees who retire with more than 30 years of service.

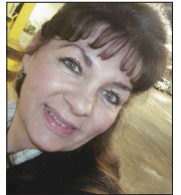
- East Metro Operator **James Leonard** retires this week with 34 years of service. Leonard grew up in St. Paul taking routes 16 and 21 to and from school and to the roller rink. His brother-in-law, an operator, encouraged him to apply at Metro Transit.



"I really enjoyed being onboard with customers and seeing a variety of different people," Leonard said. "And building relationships with those customers who rode with me five days a week."

In retirement, he plans to leave winter behind, moving to Las Vegas and eventually abroad to southeast Asia.

- South Operator **Ann Marie Deneen**, another St. Paul native who grew up riding Route 21, retired last January after 40 years of service. Deneen became a bus operator after working as a hairdresser and delivery driver for Sherwin Williams.



She started at the old Snelling Garage, when there were very few female operators, and worked out of South Garage from 1980, the year it opened, until her retirement. At South, she was known for organizing festive retirement parties with custom transit cards and balloons.

While Ann Marie was always giving, she said the job also had its own rewards and provided stability during life's difficult times. "This work kept me happy when it wasn't so easy," she said.

In retirement, she is enjoying time with her husband, beloved cat, family, and friends she and helping to care for her father.

Read more about Leonard, Deneen and other employees who have retired with 30+ years of service at metrotransit.org/greatpeople.



The Insights newsletter is published weekly. For more information, visit Insights on MetNet. A link can be found on the homepage. Feedback and story ideas can be sent to insights@metrotransit.org.