

# INSIGHTS

Metro Transit's weekly employee newsletter

August 27, 2021



Metro Transit's newest bus operators completed their training at the Instruction Center this week and will now begin carrying customers on routes throughout the region. Around two dozen applicants were interviewed during recent one-day operator hiring events as efforts to reach ideal staffing levels continue. As of this week, there were about 1,130 full- and part-time bus operators; the goal is to have around 1,200. Employees who refer successful operator candidates can receive a \$600 bonus. For more information, visit [metrotransit.org/drive](http://metrotransit.org/drive).

## Reporting for on-site work? Get vaccinated before October 11

All Council employees must be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 by Monday, Oct. 11, or get regular COVID-19 tests (and test negative) to report for on-site work. To be fully vaccinated by October 11, employees will need to get their shots by these dates:

Vaccine	Shot sequence	Full vaccination achieved	Last day for Shot 1	Last day for Shot 2
Pfizer	2 shots, 3 weeks apart	2 weeks after second shot	Monday, Sept. 6	Monday, Sept. 27
Moderna	2 shots, 4 weeks apart	2 weeks after second shot	Monday, Aug. 30	Monday, Sept. 27
Johnson & Johnson	1 shot	2 weeks after first shot	Monday, Sept. 27	—

Additional information about testing requirements and exemptions is forthcoming.

Free Pfizer vaccines are available at the Council's Well@Work clinics on Mondays and Thursdays. To make an appointment, call the scheduling line for the location you'd like to visit:

- Downtown St. Paul: 375 Jackson Street, Suite 240 (skyway level): 952-967-5474
- Heywood: 560 6th Avenue North, Minneapolis: 952-967-7468

If you've previously been to a Well@Work clinic, schedule online at [healthpartners.com](http://healthpartners.com).

Appointments can also be scheduled at [vaccineconnector.mn.gov](http://vaccineconnector.mn.gov). For more information, call the Minnesota Department of Health's COVID-19 hotline at 1-833-431-2053.

## Rise in cases underscores importance of vaccines, vigilance

From Brian Funk, Acting Chief Operating Officer

In all of June, we had two reported COVID-19 cases and it appeared the worst of the pandemic was behind us. This month, more than 30 of our co-workers have gotten COVID-19.



Our rise in cases mirrors the rise we're seeing in the communities we serve. Statewide, we are now averaging more than 1,000 cases a day, the highest level we've seen since last spring.

The takeaway from these unfortunate trends is clear: The pandemic is not over, and we must remain vigilant to avoid a worsening situation.

In practice, that means doing all the things we've talked about for more than a year – wearing masks indoors and on transit, getting tested when needed, and being cautious about prolonged close contacts.

It also means getting vaccinated if you are eligible to do so.

Recognizing how important vaccines are to creating a safe workplace, all employees must be fully vaccinated by Monday, Oct. 11, to avoid having to be regularly tested (and test negative) to report for on-site work.

Similar policies are being adopted at other large employers and public institutions, including the State of Minnesota, Hennepin County, Ramsey County, and the University of Minnesota.

Each of us must evaluate the information available about the COVID-19 vaccine and make an informed decision. But the evidence in favor of vaccinations, in the view of public health experts, is convincing.

Almost all new COVID-19 cases are occurring in unvaccinated individuals, and each of the available vaccines has been shown to be highly effective in preventing serious illness and death.

This week, after substantial review, the Federal Drug Administration granted its

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full approval of the Pfizer vaccine that is free and available at our Well@Work clinics.

Vaccines are safe, effective, and key to ending this pandemic. As important as vaccines are, though, we know our responsibility to provide a safe workplace goes beyond providing access and encouraging their use.

Our managers and supervisors continue to do an excellent job of identifying close contacts when cases are reported and managing leave time for those who are affected.

Material Management has secured all the protective equipment we need to remain fully stocked for the foreseeable future, including hundreds of thousands of masks that we can share with customers.

And our maintenance departments continue to test technologies that could help eliminate airborne viruses while maintaining rigorous cleaning standards.

Combined, these measures will help us safely navigate the pandemic while still serving those who rely on us to get where they need to go.

Thank you to all those who are supporting these and other efforts while also preparing for our post-pandemic future. Your efforts are commendable and truly appreciated

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Career Tracks: Donald Bryant, Maintenance Supervisor-East Metro

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

After three years as a bus operator, I decided to see what else I could do within the agency and started moving into different positions. I've been a skilled helper, cleaner, fueler, mechanic technician and am now a maintenance supervisor.



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

Before working at transit, I worked in corporate so I could see there were great learning opportunities here. I wanted to advance my career and take advantage of these opportunities, so I earned my associates degrees and became a full-time mechanic. After that, I joined the Leadership Academy to learn what it's like to be a supervisor. About two years ago, I applied for a supervisor role and got the job.

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

Use all the resources Metro Transit has to offer. Talk to the Instruction Center about training

CUSTOMERS TELL US HOW WE'RE DOING

## "He made me feel better and safe"

Heywood Operator **Marlon Benjamin** recently received a commendation from a customer who appreciated their dedication to safety.

*I ride Route 250 in the evening and morning from the 95th Park & Ride. It drops me off in front of the IDS Tower. Today when I got off bus, a couple of people approached me right away. The driver stayed there until they walked away and nodded to confirm everything was OK before he pulled away. He really made me feel better and safe.*

Nadine B.

opportunities and have conversations with your supervisors and managers about your goals and what you want to accomplish. They'll have good insight and experience to help guide you along.

### Leadership Academy returning in 2022

Frontline employees who want to gain supervisory experience will be invited to apply for the Leadership Academy this fall. Participants spend six months getting on the job experience working with a mentor while in acting supervisor positions. Graduates earn the equivalent of one year supervisory experience that can be used to meet minimum qualifications for future job openings. The next Leadership Academy is scheduled to begin in March 2022. To learn more, please contact **Brian Funk** or **John Humphrey**.

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Rail Transportation welcomes three new supervisors

Rail Transportation recently welcome three new supervisors. They are:

- **Alex Abay**, who started as a bus operator in 1999 and has been at light rail as an operator and relief instructor since 2012. A father of two, Abay grew up in Ethiopia and now lives in Farmington. He enjoys playing soccer and spending time with his wife and two children.
- **Latina Laramée**, who started as a bus operator in November 2011 and transferred to light rail in 2014. Laramée has worked in public and private transportation since she was 19 years old and studied entrepreneurship and business at North Hennepin Community College. She enjoys traveling and cooking and has an 18-year-old-son.
- **Brett Kohnke**, who has spent the past 16 years in law enforcement. Kohnke lives in Elk Mound, Wisc. and has two children, ages 12 and 3. Outside of work he enjoys dirt track racing, classic cars and hunting.



### Train operator applications due today, August 27

Bus operators who are interested in transferring to light rail must submit their application to become a train operator by the end of the day today, Friday, Aug. 27, to be added to an eligibility list. Operators will also need to pass agility testing and an interview. Individuals who are added to the eligibility list will be trained as positions open. To learn more an apply, visit [metro council.org/employment](http://metro council.org/employment).



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