

INSIGHTS

Metro Transit's weekly employee newsletter

September 3, 2021



Earlier this week, bus operator **Antonio Castro** brought a vaccine bus north to International Falls, just shy of Canada, where it stopped at the Packaging Corporation of America and the Rainy River Community College. Since April, six specially equipped vaccine buses have been used at nearly 300 clinics in 98 zip codes and 35 counties throughout Minnesota. The vaccine buses will continue traveling the state through the fall and are currently being staged at a vaccination clinic on the Minnesota State Fairgrounds.

Continue testing to stop the spread of COVID-19

As children go back to school and higher levels of COVID-19 cases in the community, everyone – regardless of vaccination status – is encouraged to review their COVID-19 testing options. Please seek testing if you've been exposed to someone with COVID-19, recently traveled or attended a large group gathering. Employees whose children are returning to school may consider getting tested more regularly, even if they are not experiencing symptoms. Remember:

While most COVID-19 tests are free, you may be asked to provide proof of health insurance. Results are typically available within 2-4 days. If you are experiencing symptoms, contact your medical provider before seeking testing.

As a reminder, beginning October 11, employees who are not fully vaccinated must test weekly (and test negative) to report for onsite work. The testing options and information below are for general COVID-19 testing. Details about meeting the Council's testing requirement will be provided soon.

Testing option	Recommended for	Testing type	Hours	Location(s)	How to schedule
Vault mail-in kits	Asymptomatic testing, employees only	Saliva	N/A	N/A	Contact a manager or supervisor
Well@Work	Asymptomatic testing, employees only	Nasal swab	Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, 6 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Tuesday and Thursday, 9:30 a.m. to 6 p.m.	Heywood Office, 560 N Sixth Ave, Minneapolis St. Paul Skyway, 375 Jackson Street, Suite 240, St. Paul	healthpartners.com; 952-967-5474 (St. Paul) 952-967-7468 (Minneapolis)
Community testing sites	Asymptomatic and symptomatic testing, employees and family	Saliva	Visit mn.gov/covid19/get-tested	Multiple sites, including Bloomington, Brooklyn Park, St. Paul, MSP Airport	mncovidtestingappt.as.me ; walk-ins accepted, but appointments are recommended
HealthPartners in-clinic lab testing	Asymptomatic and symptomatic testing, employees and family	Nasal swab	Monday - Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.	39 sites, including Bloomington, Eagan, Eden Prairie, Maple Grove, Minneapolis, St. Paul, and Woodbury	healthpartners.com/covid-19/testing

In an uncertain time, budget reflects a clear commitment to our customers

From General Manager Wes Kooistra

Last week, during a U.S. Senate hearing held here at Metro Transit, a rider from Brooklyn Park talked about the practical impact of infrequent transit service.



"Without access to reliable transportation," she said, "simple tasks like shopping and receiving a haircut can occupy significant portions of someone's day."

There's an inherent sense of unfairness in the idea that it could take several hours to run a few basic errands using transit, while those who have access to a vehicle could accomplish the same tasks in far less time.

To help our riders get where they want to go in a reasonable amount of time, we must continue to provide as much service as we can while working to make faster, more frequent transit more widely available in our region.

Our commitment to maintaining and expanding service has persisted through this pandemic and is reflected in our proposed 2022 operating budget. The Metropolitan Council will adopt a final budget in December following a public comment period. As currently proposed, this budget:

- Offer nearly the same amount of bus and light rail service as we did before the pandemic through the end of next year.
- Open and operate two new Bus Rapid Transit lines, the METRO Orange Line and METRO D Line.
- Make critical investments in safety and security, including plans to have an expanded civilian presence on transit.

Maintaining service and improving the customer experience are foundational elements for our pandemic recovery and of our promise to help address racial and economic disparities in our region.

But this work, as always, comes with a cost. Next year's proposed operating budget is just over \$491 million.

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Our largest source of revenue, the Motor Vehicle Sales Tax, is projected to increase slightly and we expect to collect more fares as riders continue returning to transit.

Still, we will need to balance the budget by using our reserves and one-time federal relief funding, limited resources that do not present long-term solutions. Without a dedicated and stable source of tax revenues, we face an operating deficit beginning in mid-2025.

Our capital budget, which will also be adopted later this year, must similarly reflect our resolve to emerge from the pandemic as a stronger, better service provider. The five-year plan includes funding to maintain our fleet and infrastructure, improve our shelter network and continue building out our BRT and light rail network.

While not yet approved, a proposed infrastructure bill could support and expand on these efforts by bringing significant federal funding to the region in the coming years.

Drafting and managing our complex operating and capital budgets has never been an easy task, and the responsibility has only gotten more challenging since the start of the pandemic.

But new federal and state investments demonstrate that political leaders and policy makers recognize that transit is an essential community service. And through the benefit of these significant investments, we have proposed a budget that shows our commitment to service, supports the needs of our customers and reflects the values and priorities of our region.

Know Your Operator: Veronica Carter

A little over two decades and after living in a few states, Veronica Carter found her career path. "Getting a job with Metro Transit helped ground me," Carter said. "It helped me choose to live and make a career in Minnesota."



As a young mother of two in the 90s, she drove school buses in Illinois and Indiana. After arriving in Minnesota, she completed her associates degree while starting as a bus operator at Nicollet in 2015. "I wanted to finish the degrees I started," she said. "After finding transit, my path changed."

At transit, Carter mostly works on Express bus service, which she likes most. "They call it Express, but I call it 'easy-flowin' service," she said. "The routes and the people are great."

CUSTOMERS TELL Us HOW WE'RE DOING

"I'd give him an A+"

Customer Relations representative **Jeremy Hop** recently received a commendation for his helpful information.

I just wanted to tell you Jeremy was such a big help to me this morning. He told me things I had never heard before. I'm an 82-year-old retired teacher and I told him I'd give him an A+.

Patty R.

As school returns to in-class learning, she looks forward to operating Route 114, serving the University of Minnesota for the first time in over a year. "I enjoy hearing customers tell me how happy they are that I'm there to get them to and from work or school on time, as well as safe," Carter said.

As Carter returns to Express, she'll celebrate six years at transit and looks forward to many more years here until retirement. "When you weigh all your options, it's better to be here than anywhere else," she said. "You can grow more."

Upcoming hiring events

Metro Transit still needs bus operators and continues to host hiring events at the Instruction Center. The next events will be on Saturday, Sept. 11, from 9 a.m. to noon and on Tuesday, Sept. 14 from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. New operators will have a starting wage of over \$20, including paid training. New hires who successfully complete training are eligible for a \$1,000 bonus. Employees who refer successful candidates will receive a \$600 bonus. Learn more at MetroTransit.org/drive.

In memoriam Paul Walker: Condolences to friends, family members and union brothers and sisters mourning the loss of Paul Walker #6006, who passed away on Monday, August 23. Paul was with Metro Transit for over 31 years. A funeral service was held on September 2 at the Christian Life Center in Golden Valley. As always, free grief support is available through Sand Creek. For more information, call 888-243-5744.



Share your transit story on the 20th Anniversary of 9/11: Metro Transit is asking staff to share their story and memories of working on September 11, 2001. On that fateful day, Metro Transit quickly pulled together mid-day service to get people out of downtown and home again. Collected reflections would appear in Insights on Friday, Sept. 10. If you worked that day and wish to be included in this effort, contact the editor at Insights@metrotransit.org.

September-October is Hispanic Heritage Month: From September 15 to October 15, Insights will include staff profiles to help celebrate the generations of Hispanic Americans who have positively influenced and enriched our nation and society. More information about this celebration, visit HispanicHeritageMonth.gov. If you are Hispanic/Latino and wish to be included in this effort, contact the editor at Insights@metrotransit.org.