

INSIGHTS

Metro Transit's weekly employee newsletter

September 10, 2021



Staff overcame challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic, an ongoing operator shortage and flashes of severe weather to safely get people to and from the Minnesota State Fair over the past two weeks. Nearly 100,000 express bus and regular route rides were provided to fairgoers over the 12 days of the fair, representing about 4% of attendance. Express bus service was provided from Minnetonka, Bloomington, and Cottage Grove. Metro Transit representatives also staffed the fairgrounds to share information about career opportunities and future service improvements.

What to know this week

Operator hiring events will be held September 11, 14: Job seekers are invited to attend two upcoming bus operator hiring events where they can apply and interview in one visit. The events will be held at the Instruction Center on Saturday, Sept. 11, from 9 a.m. to noon, and on Tuesday, Sept. 14, from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. Around 50 full-time bus operators have been hired this year and the goal is to hire another 100 through the end of the year. Employees who refer successful candidates can earn a \$600 referral bonus. Learn more at metrotransit.org/drive.

School bus driver shortage prompts Student Pass expansion: More high school students will be invited to use transit this fall as Saint Paul Public Schools (SPPS) responds to a shortage of school bus drivers. SPPS will offer Student Passes to students at Como Park, Harding, Central and Washington, in addition to the three schools that have historically participated in the program – Johnson, Creative Arts and Gordon Parks. The district is also encouraging students to walk, bike and carpool, and for families to help get their kids to and from school if they can do so. No additional school trips are being added at this time.

Road construction prompts new look at downtown Saint Paul routing options: Metro Transit and the City of Saint Paul are looking for feedback on where to reroute buses after construction on two busy downtown streets is finished. Next spring, routes 3, 16, 62, 67 and 75 will all travel on Minnesota Street due to road construction. In 2023, these routes will move to Robert Street while Minnesota Street is under construction. Post-construction routing options include running buses on both Minnesota and Robert Street, or only on Robert Street. An online survey is open through September 17 at surveymonkey.com/r/minnesotarobert.

Strategic Plan provides clear goals, and a path forward

From General Manager Wes Kooistra

Thanks again to all of you for your great work during this challenging time. The pandemic continues, but through your continued hard work and ingenuity we have responded successfully to the constantly changing demands on our services. I often repeat these thanks because you earn this appreciation every day.



The pandemic has been devastating to us and to transit providers across the nation. Our ridership has been reduced by more than half, and significant challenges will persist even after the pandemic is behind us. We cannot expect to just weather the storm and then return to pre-pandemic norms. A successful future requires us to reinvent ourselves as a stronger, better, and different transit service.

So, there are tremendous challenges still ahead of us, and there will be many influences that we can't control.

But we can and will continue to adapt. Over the past 18 months, we have repeatedly demonstrated our agility and resilience. Together, we have the drive and skills to make Metro Transit's future great.

But our success requires a clear vision that we share with each other and the communities we serve. This vision must be defined by the needs and expectations of our riders and stakeholders and powered by our determination to adapt and improve.

Our vision is captured in our Strategic Plan, which identifies five primary goals and the steps we'll take to achieve them in the year ahead. Our goals are:

1. We will transition from the pandemic to a stronger, better transit system
2. We provide service that is safe, welcoming, and comfortable
3. We provide service that is reliable and easy to use
4. We make our region more environmentally sustainable
5. We are a great place to work and build a career

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These goals describe the outcomes we are committed to achieving. Our Strategic Plan also recognizes that how we accomplish these outcomes can be as important as the goals themselves. In taking on this work, we must also demonstrate these core elements:

1. We meaningfully advance equity inside our organization and in the region
2. We effectively communicate and engage with customers, stakeholders, and employees
3. We evaluate our performance and foster innovation for continuous improvement
4. We are responsible stewards of a transformative and financially sustainable transit system.

Our Strategic Plan will hold us accountable to the promises that will bring success to our transit future. The four core elements uphold the standards that will overlay our work.

Thankfully, we have greatly benefited from federal relief. However, this funding is a temporary gift of time. It is not a solution for our long-term future. That solution is up to us.

We need to approach our work with a renewed sense of urgency and determination. When federal relief runs out in mid-2025, the stronger and better transit system that we have created will be held up to policymakers and funders as the proof that transit is an essential community asset and a worthwhile investment.

You have proven that we are up to this challenge, one that demands a daily commitment and effort from all of us. Each employee is called upon to contribute to our future that will be stronger, better, and different than we are today.

Where can I find the Strategic Plan?

The Strategic Plan is available on MetNet, and printed copies will be distributed to all work sites. In addition to the Strategic Plan, a detailed workplan that includes all the efforts that will be undertaken to support the plan's five goals will be available on Teams. Updates will be provided regularly through Insights, monthly manager's meetings and on MetNet. For more information, please email rachel.dungca@metrotransit.org.

Council approves three-year ATU contract

A three-year labor contract with the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 1005 was approved this week by the Metropolitan Council. ATU members, including operators, technicians, and other frontline staff, approved the agreement in August. The contract includes:

- A one-time \$1,000 payment to all eligible

CUSTOMERS TELL US HOW WE'RE DOING

"I only started riding after recently..."

Nicollet Operator **Fred Beamish** recently received a commendation from a new customer

Today, the driver was the right amount of cheery and concise, and put in a lot more effort to announce stops than my last few weeks on the bus. I only started riding recently, and he was such a great driver to experience. Thank you.

Tasha

employees in the bargaining unit;

- General wage increases of 2%, effective Aug. 1, 2020, and Aug. 1, 2021, and a 2.5% increase on Aug. 1, 2022 (employees will receive backpay);
- Increases in contributions for safety shoes;
- Expanded sick leave accrual for part-time operators;
- A section that formally addresses the use of administrative leave for operators who have been subject or witness to violent contact or threats;
- Agreements to meet and discuss the staffing process for the Green Line Extension and operator scheduling flexibility.

The starting wage for new bus operators will be increased to \$21.27 an hour and a 5% step increase will take effect on their one-year work anniversary, a fact that will be highlighted in ongoing recruitment efforts.

Congratulations to these employees who retired in August

James Leonard, Operator-East Metro, 34 years

Arthur Hayne, Operator-South, 27 years

Timothy Thao, Operator-East Metro, 17 years

Gail Towns, Operator-South, 14 years

Eldon Farb, Lead Senior Electronic Revenue Equipment Technician, 11 years

Michael Ladue, Operator-South, 5 years

Congratulations to these employees who celebrated work anniversaries in August

40 years

Mary Jo Betland, Assistant Transportation Manager-Heywood

30 years

Timothy Smith, Instructor

Laurence Crepeau, Facilities Technician

Dale Leen, Operator-South

Amy Gudmestad, Assistant Manager-Transit Information

Ellen Skog, Manager, Service Analysis

25 years

Michelle Bellfield, Electronic Repair Tech

Thomas Mohler, Operator-East Metro

Geh Thao, Operator-Heywood

Brian Sager, General Dispatcher-South