

INSIGHTS

Metro Transit's weekly employee newsletter

October 22, 2021



A northbound Route 5 bus uses a new bus lane recently installed on Seventh Street in downtown Minneapolis. The bus lane will help buses on several busy routes bypass traffic and move through downtown quicker and more reliably. Read more on the next page.

What to know this week

I-35W & Lake Street Station: The I-35W & Lake Street Station opened on Thursday, Oct. 21, after a non-transit crash at the station delayed a planned opening earlier in the week. Inspections found only minor damage to the building, allowing service to begin on Thursday morning. The new two-level station is being served by several local and express routes and in December will become a stop on the METRO Orange Line.

Charitable Giving Campaign begins today: The Council's annual Charitable Giving Campaign begins today and will continue through November 5. During the campaign, employees are encouraged to sign up to have a portion of each paycheck directed to an eligible charity of their choice. To learn more and make an online pledge visit the Charitable Giving MetNet page. For more information about Metro Transit's fundraising events, contact julie.obedoza@metrotransit.org.

Zero Emission Bus Transition Plan: Stakeholders interested in the Zero Emissions Bus Transition Plan are invited to learn more by attending upcoming virtual summits on November 3 and November 4. Frontline staff will be invited to learn more about the Zero Emissions Bus Transition Plan at upcoming in-person outreach events. For more information, contact carrie.desmond@metrotransit.org.

Special events: Concertgoers and football fans are being reminded that no extra service will be provided after several upcoming events at U.S. Bank Stadium. Upcoming events that will let out late in the evening include Sunday's Rolling Stones concert, the Sunday, Oct. 31, Minnesota Vikings game (7:20 p.m. kickoff), and the Saturday, Nov. 13, George Strait concert. On Saturdays and Sundays, the last scheduled trips departing U.S. Bank Stadium are at approximately 11:30 p.m. Light rail frequency is also being reduced beginning Saturday, Oct. 23.

Open Enrollment begins November 1: The Metropolitan Council's annual Open Enrollment period begins Monday, Nov 1. Medical, dental, vision, and life insurance plan structures are the same for 2022, though costs for health plans are going up. Please review your coverage and choose or decline any FSA choices. For more information, call the Met Council's Benefits-One line at 651-602-1601 or email Benefits@metc.state.mn.us.

On becoming a great place to work...

From General Manager Wes Kooistra

How can Metro Transit become a great place to work? This is a critical question to ask ourselves, as together we face the many great changes and challenges ahead of us.



In September, we completed "Stronger, Better," Metro Transit's strategic plan for 2021-2022. The plan establishes our vision for emerging from the crises of 2020 as a stronger and better transit system.

Now that this plan is written, we are shifting our focus to how we are going to achieve this vision.

This week, Human Resources Director Marcy Syman and I kicked off the "Great Workplace Project" to support our strategic plan goal to make Metro Transit a great place to work and build a career. This goal underlies all others because our success in every area relies on the leadership, commitment, and hard work of our employees.

But to be a great place to work – or an even better place to work – we need to begin by understanding where we are now.

The last year and a half have demanded so much of people here, both in our work lives and in our personal lives. We have been affected by the additional stress and changes caused by the pandemic as well as by other tragic events, including the murder of George Floyd.

Even before these life-altering times, we knew that not everyone's work experience at Metro Transit has been a positive one. And while the events of the past couple of years made some issues even more visible, we recognize that many of the tensions and needs we have in this organization are more deeply rooted and longer standing.

As we work towards our vision of being a great place to work, the first phase of the Great Workplace Project is assessing our organization's culture. This means asking staff to tell us more about their experiences working here. This requires taking an honest look at our workplace behaviors, including how we treat each other and what we expect from each other.

continued on next page

The initial phase will begin with targeted interviews and focus groups and will grow to include feedback through the upcoming employee engagement survey of all employees. But listening is just the first step.

The next phases of the Great Workplace Project will take action to address gaps we uncover between our vision for creating a great workplace and the lived experiences of our current employees. We must respond to what we hear with purposeful actions, clear communication, and a genuine commitment to building a culture we all want to be a part of.

This will include making clear and visible strides towards valuing differences and building an organization that is inclusive and equitable. This also includes strengthening our fundamental focus on serving customers and community.

Ultimately, this work is about creating a culture that not only helps us reach our goals but allows all of us to take pride in the important work we're doing. Above all, this work is about instilling trust and creating a workplace that is not only effective and high performing, but also caring, transparent, and accountable.

Thank you for being a part of this conversation and in the actions steps that will follow.

Bus lanes come to Seventh Street in downtown Minneapolis

A splash of red paint will help buses move a little easier through a busy downtown Minneapolis corridor.

Crews from the City of Minneapolis this month began marking the city's newest bus lane by applying red paint to a nine-block stretch of Seventh Street, between Chicago and Hennepin avenues, where buses are frequently held up by traffic.

Several busy routes are now using the bus lane, including the 5, 14, 22 and METRO C Line. The METRO D line will use this bus lane when it opens next year.

This will be the third installment of bus lanes in the City of Minneapolis.

Bus lanes are in use on Hennepin Avenue, between the Uptown Transit Station and Franklin Avenue, during weekday peak periods, and on a small portion of southbound Chicago Avenue near the Chicago-Lake Transit Station. On Hennepin Avenue, travel times have been reduced by more than 15% since bus lanes went in.

"Bus lanes are a cost-effective and proven way to improve the transit experience," said Michael Mechtenberg, manager of speed and reliability.

CUSTOMERS TELL US HOW WE'RE DOING

"Exactly what I hope all our bus drivers aspire to be"

Community Outreach Coordinator **Yumi Nagaoka** had nothing but kind words for Nicollet Operator **Abdikarim Jama** after a recent trip on Route 21.

This was my first time back on an in-service bus or train since the pandemic started, but I have a pretty good idea of how much everything that's happened over the last 19 months, including the operator shortage, has made an already difficult job even more challenging. This operator is an excellent example of great driving. He is exactly what I hope all our bus drivers aspire to be. He pulls right to stops where customers want to get on and off and is very attentive to make sure he doesn't miss anyone waiting. He is very friendly and kind to every customer. Extremely professional and respectful, too. A passenger was boarding the bus without a mask on, and the operator kindly reminded the customer of the mask policy by asking the customer if he needed a mask. The customer accepted, thanked the driver, put on his mask, and sat down. He reminded passengers to keep their mask above their nose without incident. Lastly, he was very patient and helpful with a group of students and their three teacher chaperones. He showed no sign of concern that it was taking them a little bit of time to board the bus. He even cleared up some confusion that one of the chaperones experienced with a transfer. He reminded them again when they were alighting to make sure they have a seamless ride next time. What a fantastic operator! He has the best attitude and the skills to make Metro Transit really proud. Way to go!

Plans to bring bus lanes to other congested corridors are in the works. Decisions about where to put bus lanes are being informed not just by the degree of delays but by the ability to improve service on routes where customers are more likely to be people of color or low-income.

Portions of Hennepin and Lyndale avenues, 6th Street, 8th Street, and Franklin Avenue are among the options being considered.



In memoriam: John Rubesch, Operator, South Garage

John Rubesch, a 20-year operator who worked at the South Garage, passed away on Saturday, Oct. 9.

Born in St. Paul, Rubesch was remembered as a friendly and hard worker who was always willing to take on extra work and hoped to someday retire from Metro Transit. Outside of work, Rubesch enjoyed carpentry and riding his motorcycle.

"He was really a great human being and always looked after his fellow union men and women," South Operator Hussein "King" Mohamed said.

Mohamed started the same month as Rubesch, and the two became fast friends. Over the years, Rubesch helped Mohamed with several home improvement projects, and got to know his entire family.

Rubesch is survived by his fiancé, stepdaughter, two brothers, and several nieces and nephews. Memorial services will be announced at a later date.



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