

INSIGHTS

Metro Transit's weekly employee newsletter

November 19, 2021



Five new bus operators completed their training last week at the Instruction Center. From left to right, they are: **Ben Clark, Chris Fuller, Robert Forte, Delmarcus Joseph** and **Adrian Larson**. Nearly two-dozen individuals are currently training at the Instruction Center as hiring efforts continue. As a reminder, employees who refer successful operator candidates will earn a \$600 referral bonus. Additionally, operators who would like to mentor new hires are invited to apply now; paper forms can be found in driver's rooms. For more information, email lee.estis@metrotransit.org.

Stay safe amid a rise in COVID-19 cases

Minnesota's new COVID-19 case counts are among the highest in the nation, prompting a leading public health official to say the state is in the midst of a "COVID blizzard." All employees can help maintain a safe workplace by staying home if you're ill, getting tested if you're showing symptoms, wearing a mask, and following public health guidance on vaccines and vaccine boosters. Of note:

- **State public health officials said this week that COVID-19 booster shots will soon be available to all adults.**
 - Initial and booster Pfizer vaccinations can be scheduled at either of the Council's Well@Work clinics on Mondays or Thursdays. Schedule online at healthpartners.com or call 952-967-5474 (St Paul) or 952-967-7468 (Heywood).
- **Employees who have their proof of COVID-19 vaccination verified by Friday, Nov. 26, will receive \$150 on their December 10 paycheck.**
 - Information should be uploaded using Employee Self Service.
 - Please do not attempt to upload booster information into Employee Self-Service (ESS) until further notice.
 - To date, nearly 80% of Metro Transit employees have had their proof of vaccination verified.
- **If you are planning to travel or gather over the coming months, review the Minnesota Department of Health's testing recommendations.**
 - Whether or not you're fully vaccinated, the MDH recommends getting tested 5-7 days after attending any large gathering.
 - Free testing can be scheduled at many locations at healthpartners.com.
 - Only schedule an appointment at a Well@Work Clinic if you are not experiencing symptoms.

Thank you for joining the conversation about transit safety

From Lesley Kandaras, Chief of Staff

In the wake of George Floyd's murder, police agencies across the country were called to examine how they could maintain and build trust in the communities they serve.



At Metro Transit, Council Chair **Charlie Zelle** responded by calling for a comprehensive review of the Metro Transit Police Department.

Today, that review is being informed by important, ongoing conversations being led by a group of Metropolitan Council members serving on the Metro Transit Police Work Group. This group has been meeting regularly over the past several months and will bring recommendations to the full board next February.

Central to their work is hearing the experiences and voices of customers and employees.

Earlier this year, community partners collected input from more than 1,000 people who participated in interviews, public meetings and in-person surveys. Through this community engagement process, customers were asked not just how safe they feel on transit, but what safety on transit looks like to them.

People responded that safety is found in clean facilities and vehicles. Safety means riding without experiencing racial profiling or gender-based harassment. Safety means the visible presence of Metro Transit officials who have the authority to help prevent and address problematic behaviors.

In addition to listening to community members, the work group is hearing directly from Metro Transit employees.

They are reviewing feedback gathered this summer from about 100 frontline employees across several in-person visits to facilities and through surveys. They commissioned a survey of Metro Transit Police Department employees to better understand their perspectives. And, earlier this month, work group members heard from a range of employees, including operators, public facilities workers, transit supervisors, police officers, and others.

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While this work continues, some themes have emerged.

Employees who need police assistance feel response times can be slow, and that there is too little presence on the system to effectively support them. Police officers are concerned about colleagues leaving the department, as fewer officers make their already-difficult jobs even harder.

Through this process, employees have shared many ideas for improvements, such as reviewing approaches to fare enforcement, providing more security presence on vehicles and at facilities, adding security monitors to buses, and using the Council's leverage to build regional partnerships to address systemic issues, including people experiencing homelessness, addiction, and mental health crises.

While the work group's efforts continue, Metro Transit continues to take steps now to meaningfully improve safety on our system.

We're recruiting more police officers and Community Service Officers. We're expanding our use of real-time cameras. And we are advocating for a change in state law that would provide an alternative to having police officers issue citations for fare evasion, giving them more time to address other concerns.

These initiatives are key elements of our Strategic Plan and are reflected in our proposed budget for the coming year.

So, thank you to all those who have shared your thoughts with the Council's work group, to all our officers and police support staff, and to all the employees who know the safety challenges we're facing firsthand.

And, it's not too late to share your perspectives. As the staff liaison to this work group, I invite employees who would like their ideas to be shared with Council Members to contact me directly.

While the work group will complete its work early next year, our commitment to listen and respond to your concerns will not end.

To offer your feedback, please email lesley.kandaras@metrotransit.org.

Police Chief nominated to serve as U.S. Marshal

Metro Transit Police Chief Eddie Frizell has been nominated to serve as U.S. marshal for the District of Minnesota. Frizell's nomination now goes to the U.S. Senate for approval. If approved, a search for a new police chief would begin. Frizell joined Metro Transit in August 2019, following a 26-year career with the Minneapolis Police Department. He is also a 30-year veteran of the Minnesota Army National Guard, and currently holds the rank of Colonel.

CUSTOMERS TELL US HOW WE'RE DOING

"Very healing"

Heywood Operator **Timothy Stewlow** received the following commendation from a Route 10 customer who was struck by a small act of kindness.

I was just at a medical appointment and received devastating news about my health assessment. I've been extremely emotional over this. I boarded a bus and discovered I didn't have a dollar on me. I got up and told the driver I'd have to get off the bus and walk because I couldn't pay for the ride. The driver said it was OK and I felt much relief. Just the smallest act of kindness lifted what felt like a thousand pounds off my chest. I was happy...and just a little hopeful. Thanks, Tim, for your kindness because it was very healing.

Congratulations to **Annette Hammerlund**, who will serve as manager of bus safety. Hammerlund joined Metro Transit in 2012 as a bus operator and has served as an assistant transportation manager for the past seven years, most recently at the East Metro Garage. She is a two-time Bus Rodeo Garage Champion. Before joining Metro Transit, Hammerlund served as a school bus driver and ran a charter bus company for 13 years.



Adopt-A-Stop program invites community to partner on stop upkeep

A program that invites people to partner with Metro Transit to keep stops tidy is being revived.

Through the Adopt-A-Stop program, individuals, businesses, community organizations or schools can volunteer to keep an eye on a bus stop or rail station, reporting damage or snow clearance concerns that need to be addressed. Adopters can also help by regularly picking up litter at the stop.

Nearly all stops are available for adoption.

To acknowledge their support, adopters can choose to be recognized through signage at the stop and will receive a Go-To Card that is automatically loaded with 10 fares per month.

For more information, email pam.steffen@metrotransit.org.

Congratulations to these employees who retired in October

Gregory Malo, Service Garage Supervisor, South, 5 years

Gwendolyn DeGroff-Gunter, Juvenile Outreach Coordinator, 6 years

Wayne Uden, Mechanic, Commuter Rail, 12 years

Gregory Slaby, Electro Mechanical Technician, 13 years

Darryl Hall, Service Garage Supervisor, Ruter, 17 years

John MacQueen, Manager, Rail System Safety, 18 years

Michael Maanum, Traction Power Supervisor, 18 years

Matthew Walker, Senior Rail Transit Supervisor, 20 years

Katherine Downs, Principal Financial Analyst, 20 years

Matthew Longtin, Operator, East Metro, 21 years

Kent Knutson, Operator, South, 28 years

Michael Modahl, Mechanic Technician, 37 years

Greg Vaughn, Mechanic Technician, 47 years