

INSIGHTS

Metro Transit's weekly employee newsletter

August 19, 2022



South Garage Operator Scott Wahnoutka, above left, and Nicollet Dispatcher Daniel Stearns, above right, were recently recognized for reaching their 30-year anniversaries. With them is Amina Wolf, acting deputy director-bus operations, Michael Pal, deputy chief operating officer-bus, and Brian Funk, chief operating officer.

What to know this week

Frontline Worker Pay: Individuals whose applications for Frontline Worker Pay were denied can appeal within 15 days of notification. Denial notifications that were sent this week include instructions for submitting an appeal. If you submitted a claim, you can view the status at frontlinepay.mn.gov. About 18% of applications were denied, according to the state, mainly because officials could not verify IDs.

Veterans Partner in Transit: Two Metro Transit veterans will share their stories during a Thursday, Aug. 25, virtual event hosted by Veterans Partner in Transit (VPiT). VPiT is an Employee Resource Group for veterans. The speakers are: SCADA Communications Manager Perry Gunderson, a retired Master Sergeant in the Minnesota Army National Guard with 27 years of service, and Asset Protection Specialist Jonathan Kemp, who served in the U.S. Marine Corp from 2003 to 2007. For more information, email carri.sampson@metrotransit.org.

Replacement bus service continues: Replacement buses continue to operate between the Mall of America and Terminal 2 stations as testing of new rail systems work is completed. Light rail service has been unable to resume because contractor-led construction has taken longer than anticipated. Efforts to replace track and update technology used to guide train movements began in July. Light rail service will resume as soon as possible.

Lake Street grant: Hennepin County has received a \$12 million federal grant that will be used to make improvements along a four-mile stretch of Lake Street. The improvements will be made in coordination with construction of the METRO B Line, a Bus Rapid Transit service that is expected to substantially replace Route 21 in 2024. Planned improvements include converting general purpose lanes to bus lanes, sidewalk enhancements, signal improvements and new pavement surface. Learn more at transportation.gov.

TikTok: Creative Services is planning to start a Metro Transit TikTok account. If you regularly use the social media service and have ideas to share, or would like to help create content, please contact Social Media Specialist ryan.miller@metrotransit.org

Budget proposal keeps us on the right path

From General Manager Wes Kooistra

Talking about our budget in a compelling way isn't easy.

But it's important for staff to understand our financial outlook, so I want to take this opportunity to share some insight on the preliminary operating budget we've presented to the Metropolitan Council.

Most importantly: Our proposed spending plan supports our goal of returning to pre-pandemic service levels on bus and light rail.

Ridership continues to grow and is now more than 50% of 2019 levels. Providing a high level of service is essential to making transit useful to those who rely on us and to attracting new and lapsed riders.

Our operating budget also includes funding to operate the METRO D Line and the North Loop Garage, to continue expanding our investment in public safety initiatives, and to offer more weekday and special event service on the Northstar Commuter Rail Line.

Like any budget, there is some risk and uncertainty.

The cost of fuel and supplies is increasing. We can only make an educated guess about what ridership will look like in 2023. And we await an updated state forecast for Motor Vehicle Sales Taxes, our largest revenue source.

Much of what we are setting out to do also depends on our ability to hire operators, maintenance staff, police officers and other key positions.

We can expect our budget to change as we learn more and receive public feedback over the coming months. But this plan is a good start, and a thoughtful reflection of the goals and values found in our Strategic Plan.

More work lies ahead.

Our capital spending plan will be presented this fall, providing a six-year outlook for investments in our fleet and facilities. While details are still being worked out, we are encouraged that more



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federal funding will be available to use on important maintenance and expansion projects.

Our longer-term outlook also requires careful planning and consideration.

As we think beyond the next budget cycle, we must contend with the fact that we cannot repeatedly return to reserves and one-time federal relief funding, as we must do again this year.

Without a dedicated and stable source of tax revenues, we will face an operating budget deficit beginning in late-2026.

Grappling with our short- and long-term funding challenges is a complicated business. But our proposed budget demonstrates that we are being responsible stewards and making the most of the resources we've been given.

Thank you to the Finance Department and many others who are leading this important work, and to all of you who help carry out our plans year after year.

Join a Great Workplace Project implementation team

The next phase of the Great Workplace Project, identifying actions that will improve work culture, is now getting underway.

To support this work, all represented and non-represented staff, from all departments and all levels of the organization, are invited to express their interest in joining implementation teams.

Seven teams will be formed, representing Capital Programs, Finance, Transit Police, Operations, Safety, Service Development, and the Chief of Staff's Office.

Staff who are selected to join implementation teams will be asked to:

- Participate in a series of workshops (around five) through the end of the year
- Help identify priority issues and develop plans to establish explicit norms
- Engage co-workers in action plan development and support agencywide engagement events

Staff will be paid for the time they spend participating in this work, and schedules can be adjusted as needed.

If you are interested in participating, first speak with your manager. Then, contact Sarah Berres, who is managing the Great Workplace Project, at sarah.berres@metrotransit.org. Applications should be submitted by Friday, Aug. 26.

CUSTOMERS TELL US HOW WE'RE DOING

"I made it to work on time"

Nicollet Operator **Martin Zapon-Gomez** recently received a commendation for his customer service.

I was running a minute late and thought I was going to miss the bus but the driver waited the extra 30 seconds for me. I made to work on time. I really appreciate it!

Fallon B

Now hiring!

Applications are being accepted for several positions, including:

- Light Rail Transit Helper (apply by Friday, Aug. 26)
- Fare Collections Specialist (apply by Friday, Aug. 26)
- Train Operator (apply by Wednesday, Aug. 31)
- Transit Supervisor (Tuesday, Sept. 6)

To learn more and apply, visit metro council.org/employment

Congratulations to these employees who celebrated their work anniversaries in July

35 years

- **Tim Bell**, Mark Up Dispatcher

25 years

- **Bobby Andress**, Transportation Manager, Heywood
- **Shirmela Bernard**, Helper, Ruter
- **Daniel Wagner**, Operator, East Metro
- **Richard Anderson**, Revenue Equip Electronic Technician
- **Maria Cone**, Market Development Manager
- **Elizabeth Fife**, Operator, Nicollet
- **Marylee Heard**, Operator, East Metro

20 years

- **David Haas**, Senior Engineer, Bus Maintenance
- **Jouachao Thao**, Operator, East Metro



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