

# INSIGHTS

Metro Transit's weekly employee newsletter

January 5, 2024



## Metro Transit cleaners ensure your bus looks its best

Inside Metro Transit garages, cleaners like Sarah Olson take pride in cleaning our buses.

"Our buses get used by lots of people, so you know they're gonna get dirty," Olson said. "But when that bus goes out for service, it's clean because people like me take care of it."

Olson is a cleaner who returned to the workforce after years of being a stay-at-home mother. After her twins grew up, she looked for a good job and found one at Metro Transit.

"I looked at a lot of different jobs," she said. "And Metro Transit had better benefits and pay than others."

Her career at Metro Transit began 5 years ago when she accepted a role as an overnight janitor for Heywood Campus. Two months later, she quickly moved to day hours as a cleaner in Bus Maintenance. For Olson, the change in hours was a no-brainer.

"I could get my kids to school and pick them up if I needed to," Olson said.

Beyond the hours and pay, Olson enjoys the variety of work and the autonomy being a cleaner affords her.

"I like being independent and I'm pretty much by myself when I'm cleaning," Olson said. "If I need help, however, there's always someone around I can reach out to."

On the job at Heywood Garage, Olson leaves no nook or cranny uninspected and unclean.

Every day Olson cleans buses for customers, but she also wants to remind them that cleanliness isn't just her job. There are little things you can do to help keep buses looking their best.

"Keep your liquids covered and hold on to them, please," she said. "Coffee and pop spills are one of the most common messes I clean up."

She also asks customers to inform operators when they see issues and to keep in mind that what you're seeing may just have occurred.

"A spill or bit of trash onboard is a snapshot in time," Olson said. "Just know that a cleaner will eventually take care of your bus."

Metro Transit Bus Maintenance continues to clean buses regularly and increases staff counts as service requires. Visit our website to see available roles and apply.

## Resolving to ride will help set the course for 2024 and beyond

From General Manager  
Lesley Kandaras



Next week, I and other leaders will visit several light rail stations, so riders can tell us how we can better serve them.

The following week, all employees are invited to participate in our monthly series of Great Day in Transit events that get staff out of the office and onto transit to connect with riders and report issues that need to be addressed.

My personal commitment to riding every route we operate will continue until I reach my one-year mark as general manager this summer.

And, in 2024, a group of around 50 non-represented senior leaders are now also expected to take at least 40 transit rides before the end of October (an average four rides per month), and their ride totals will be tied to annual performance reviews. This expands a minimum ride requirement among Operations managers that's previously been in place.

This renewed focus on spending time on our system is for good reason: it helps ground us in what our riders and staff say are most important to them. We can't rely solely on what we hear through calls, emails, or social media – we need to have direct experience using transit.

This is especially true for organizational leaders who have the greatest influence over where, when, and how our resources are used.

The value of spending time on transit has been reinforced many times in my own recent travels. To provide just a few examples:

- Riding Route 61, I heard from high school students who wished we could more proactively patrol stops in downtown St. Paul.

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- On Route 755, I heard how people felt limited by the current schedule (three trips to and from downtown Minneapolis each weekday).
- On Route 17, I was reminded of the importance of promptly clearing snow from all bus stops.
- During my regular visits to the Lake Street/ Midtown Station, I've witnessed the positive impact security officers have had, as well as the persistent challenges that need to be addressed in coordination with neighborhood partners.

Experiences like these are a reminder of the vital role transit plays in our community and of just how meaningful even small changes can be to riders and employees who spend the most time on our system.

As we set the course for 2024 and beyond, I want to thank staff across the organization for resolving to spend time on transit and to drawing on these experiences as we work to make the experience on transit better for everyone.

Briefly: This week's news and notes

**Employee Town Halls continue in 2024:** Join the next Employee Town Hall virtually or in-person at North Loop Garage, room 104 at 11 a.m. on Wednesday, Jan. 10. The virtual link was sent to Transit-all, and can be found on the calendar at the bottom of the Metro Transit MetNet homepage. The event will kick-off a series of in-person only town halls at each facility. For more information on Town Halls, contact Lindsey Geyer at [lindsey.geyer@metrotransit.org](mailto:lindsey.geyer@metrotransit.org).

**January is Human Trafficking Prevention Month:** This January, Metro Transit Equity & Inclusion (E&I) is working with the Minnesota Department of Health's Safe Harbor division to display messaging on approximately 1000 buses and trains on what to do if riders are experiencing exploitation or trafficking. There are four different messages in English, Somali and Spanish. More information can be found on the E&I bulletin boards, or by contacting Rachel Cagle at [rachel.cagle@metrotransit.org](mailto:rachel.cagle@metrotransit.org).

**Leadership inviting feedback at light rail listening sessions:** Riders are invited to attend a series of listening sessions to provide feedback on our continued efforts to improve conditions on transit. The sessions will be attended by Met Council Chair Charlie Zelle, General Manager Lesley Kandaras, Police Chief Ernest Morales III, and Transportation Committee Chair Deb Barber, among others. The first listening session is scheduled for Tuesday, Jan. 9. For more information, visit [metrotransit.org/news](https://metrotransit.org/news).

CUSTOMERS TELL US HOW WE'RE DOING

## "Courteous, personable, and easy to talk to"

Heywood Operator Stanton VanValkenburg recently received a commendation for their customer service.

*I want to commend this driver for offering very good customer service. I was still struggling to get my bus card out of my bag and pay my fare when the bus arrived. The driver waited for me instead of pulling off. When I boarded, the driver thanked me for paying for my ride. I wasn't on the bus for very long, but my driver was very courteous, personable, and easy to talk to. I know how difficult customer service jobs can be. I want to recognize this driver for being really nice and great at their job.*

-Lyndsey R

**Participate in the next Great Day in Transit:** All employees are invited to participate in the next Great Day in Transit on Wednesday, Jan. 17. Throughout the day, participants ride trains and buses with fellow staff to connect with riders and staff in the field. For more information, or to sign up for a shift, contact Jeremiah Cox at [jeremiah.cox@metrotransit.org](mailto:jeremiah.cox@metrotransit.org) or speak to your manager.

**Attend the WTS fireside chat:** Metro Transit and WTS Minnesota are hosting a fireside chat with General Manager Lesley Kandaras on Thursday, Jan. 18, from 4:30 to 6 p.m. at the North Loop Garage. The event is open to WTS members, which includes all Metro Transit employees. For more information, email Carrie Desmond at [carrie.desmond@metrotransit.org](mailto:carrie.desmond@metrotransit.org).



### Saluting these employee milestones

**Left:** Congratulations to Nicollet Operator Mursal Mire on eight years of safe driving. Mire is pictured here with Assistant Transportation Manager Bob Brevig.

**Right:** Nicollet Operator Hassan Nur celebrated retirement on Wednesday, Jan. 3. Nur is retiring with 15 years of service, and is pictured here with Assistant Transportation Manager Mary Johnson.

**Reminder:** East Metro Operator Tom Vang is retiring with 34 years of service. Celebrate with Tom at 1 p.m. on Friday, Jan. 12 at East Metro Garage (not pictured).



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