

## Awareness is the Cornerstone of Safety at the St. Cloud Metropolitan Transit Commission

### The Challenge

**I**N THE SUMMER OF 2017, the St. Cloud Metropolitan Transit Commission, operating as Metro Bus, was ready to re-vamp its approach to safety training. Metro Bus operates 17 routes serving about two million riders annually in St. Cloud, including St. Cloud State, as well as the neighboring communities of Sartell, Sauk Rapids, and Waite Park. At that time, Training and Safety Manager Scott Stark wanted to “figure out how to change things” in order to reduce accidents and create a better safety culture, overall.

The challenge lay in deciding how to change the current safety training program to get the outcomes Metro Bus was looking for—not just a reduction in incidents, but also a sustainable change in operators’ behaviors. The agency found helpful guidance in TCRP Report 66: Effective Practices to Reduce Bus Accidents. The report analyzes practices in transit agencies across the country that are used to prevent accidents and promote



safe driving in three categories—human resources, management, and operations. The report’s research culminated in a directory of effective practices used to prevent bus accidents.

In particular, Stark was struck by TCRP Report 66’s summary of the Duluth Transit Authority’s safety practices. Duluth approximates Metro Bus in size and is relatively nearby, operating in an environment that handles a great deal of cold and potentially hazardous weather. The report highlighted three things in particular that Metro Bus wanted to emulate, based on Duluth’s experience. The first was

### TCRP Report 66: Effective Practices to Reduce Bus Accidents

TCRP Report 66 highlights components of a system safety program:

- full commitment and support of top management to system safety
- inclusion of all departments in the process
- designation of one individual as the responsible safety authority
- identification and definition of the safety roles and responsibilities of all departments and key individuals
- a proactive safety program that identifies and resolves hazards prior to their causing accidents.

### The Challenge (continued)

acknowledging that, as the report states, “safety practice permeates each department, including the recruiting and training of new employees, maintenance, training and retraining of bus operators,” and more. Second was the importance of “recruiting the proper individual to fill the position of bus operator.” And third was providing retraining for operators having problems or who had been away from the job for an extended period of time.

## Creating a New Safety Mindset

**W**ORKING with the agency’s Human Resources Department, Metro Bus set out to create a safety mindset that begins when a potential operator first comes in for a job interview. TCRP Report 66 emphasizes that the personal interview is an integral part of the screening process for the selection of suitable bus driver candidates. For Metro Bus, driver safety training now centers on the operator’s own outlook, awareness, and capacity to recognize how to operate a bus in a safe manner at all times. This mindset needs to be adopted by operators hired with widely different experiences, ranging from those who had no

commercial driving experience to those with 20 years or more as CDL professionals. The agency’s goal is to hire the best candidates capable of understanding that safety is the agency’s top priority, and that they are a customer-service-oriented organization. Stark notes that large-vehicle experience is a plus, but if a candidate is willing, they can coach him or her to success.

operator-employees and those who have been on the job for years. To that end, refresher training courses take place twice a year.

All of these efforts have paid off. Incident rates are down year over year between 2016 and 2018. Operator retention over the same period has risen by 4 percent across 65 new hires. Metro Bus attributes this, in part, to



“We needed to get the operators to understand that they’re professionals and they need to be aware of what’s going on around them,” Stark says. “This really is more than just driving a bus.”

Currently, Metro Bus trains between 18 and 25 operators a year. The five-week training courses maintain an instructor-trainee ratio of 1:4, on average. Overall, the training is meant to meet the needs of the newest

operators feeling confident and well trained. And although liability claims are up as well, they are up for the right reason. Operators are now reporting major and minor incidents with greater consistency, especially involving collisions with fixed objects and non-collisions. The data offer proof that operators “are taking this information to heart, and they’re making some changes,” Stark says. ●

For the latest research about public transportation safety, visit [trb.org/tcrp](http://trb.org/tcrp) and download **Report 174 - Improving Safety Culture in Public Transportation**.

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