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Hello Omaha!

My name is Daniel Lawse, and I wear a lot of hats in this community. I'm a young professional, small business owner, husband, father of three, and transit rider.

In addition to using the Metro Transit bus system, I am the chair of its Board of Directors. I'm writing today with that hat on, and this is the first in what I intend to be a series of updates that I hope will shed a little light on what we do as a board and what Metro does to help keep Omaha connected.

It's an exciting time to be involved at Metro! We have more projects on the horizon than I've ever witnessed, and I don't recall an Omaha as excited about excellent public transportation as I see today.

One of our more recent happenings was the brand launch of Metro's (and the region's) first rapid transit line, ORBT. For more details about the project, check out rideORBT.com.

Now, there's no doubt that ORBT will be a great transportation option – I can't wait to ride it myself. It will provide more efficient, effective, and comfortable connections along Dodge Street – one of the city's most-used corridors. It's one step toward what we know can be a robust, reliable network of rapid and local bus routes.

We know a single rapid transit line won't move the needle toward more successful public transportation unless everything is connected, convenient, and efficient. So, not only are we investing in ORBT (funded mostly, by the way, with federal and local grants that we wouldn't have gotten without ORBT), we're also investing in our existing system. Here's how:

- **New buses:** We just replaced five buses in our aging fleet with 30-foot, clean diesel-powered buses (maybe you've seen them already). We'll keep moving toward an upgraded fleet by replacing 25% of our buses in the next year.
- **New shelters:** We approved the replacement of all bus shelters at our last board meeting – expect those next spring.
- **Real-time GPS:** We'll be providing GPS and real-time bus arrival information for every route in the system – expect to see buses moving on an online map by the end of the 1st quarter of next year and on your smartphone shortly thereafter.
- **Free onboard Wi-Fi:** We'll be providing free Wi-Fi onboard our buses, accompanying the Wi-Fi currently available at our transit centers. Expect enhanced connectivity early next year.
- **Mobile and smartcard payments:** We'll be making it easier to pay without cash using a mobile app and smartcard payment options. Expect those toward the middle of next year.
- **Customer feedback:** We're looking at ways to improve connections. We'll be conducting an onboard survey this month to assess how people use Metro, and another survey in the coming months to determine how they want to.

As you can see, we're investing not only in new transit options for our city, but in making our current system better. All of these pieces fit together to make your life easier as you do what matters most to you. Stay tuned for more exciting news each month. I look forward to seeing you on the bus!

Daniel Lawse
Board Chair, Metro Transit Authority

