



INSIDE METRO: THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE TRANSIT

Meet Bonnie: A Bus Operator with a Poet's Soul and a Rider's Heart

Bonnie brings heart, creativity, and adventure to every shift at Santa Cruz METRO. Whether she's sharing stories, writing poetry, or connecting with riders, she turns everyday routes into meaningful moments across Santa Cruz County.

Tell us a little about yourself, Bonnie

Hi, my name is Bonnie. I am Bus Operator 783 here at Santa Cruz METRO, and I've been with the agency for about a year and a half. Most people know me by Bonnie, but I go by Bonsai or Bonbon as well.

What is your favorite song—or song of the summer?

Sheryl Crow's *Soak Up the Sun*. It sends such a positive message, and I'd love for everyone to feel as good as I do when it starts warming up. I also have this passenger who shares my love of punk rock and heavy metal. That energy gets us both going first thing in the morning—especially if I'm on Route 35. That's when *These Are My People* plays in my head. That whole "small town, where I come from" vibe—it's the theme music in my head, even though it's not on the bus.

Have you gone to any recent concerts or shows?

Yes! The most recent one I went to was *Southern Culture on the Skids*—and it was fantastic. Great crowd, tons of interaction with the band, and just a super fun time overall.

What is your favorite movie?

My favorite movie is *Zoolander*. It's honestly the theme of our lives. I love the ridiculous. It relishes in the absurd and puts a funny spin on everything that gets too serious.

Do you like to travel?

I love to travel—and I'll go just about anywhere if it sounds like a good idea. Motorcycle trips to Mexico are probably my favorite. If someone says, "Hey, you want to join us?" I'm that person. I'm all about adventure.

Do you have a most memorable travel experience?

One of my most memorable trips was my first cruise to Mexico. I went with the Gilroy Chamber of Commerce—I was a member—and we all got to be regular people, not just working people. That feeling of just existing and enjoying the moment was pretty unforgettable.

What are your hobbies?

Oh, I've got a bunch. I love riding motorcycles and horses, camping, fishing, hunting, heading to the beach, and doing art. Anything outdoors or hands-on—I'm in.

What kind of art do you enjoy most?

I enjoy arts and crafts and making things—but poetry is my forever art. Just this morning I was working on another poem. I mean, look at where we live—it's poetry in motion. I come from an artist family. My dad did a lot of the signs for Santa Cruz County parks back in the '70s and '80s. I didn't inherit the drawing gene (I think it skips a generation), but my kids are amazing artists. My art lives in words—in poetry—and in trying to express the world as I see it.

Is there something about you people would be surprised to learn?

I think most people know me pretty well. But one thing they'd be surprised to learn is the poetry thing. Also, how eclectic I am—I can go from a mosh pit at a punk show to riding in a rodeo. That kind of range tends to catch people off guard.

What did you do before working at METRO?

I've worn a lot of hats: service writer at an auto repair shop, educator with PVUSD, and even managed a dressage barn in Watsonville. All those roles helped shape me as an operator. It's like all the puzzle pieces finally fit together—and I don't see myself leaving anytime soon.

What do you like to do on your time off?

Even on my time off, I love hanging out with coworkers. Some are musicians, so we go out to hear them play. We're also planning a group trip to see Sweeney Todd, and sometimes we'll just grab lunch or walk on the beach. It's chill, fun, and spontaneous.

Why should people ride METRO?

METRO's public transit system is vital. It gives people an environmentally friendly way to move around—and with all the traffic we've got, it helps folks skip the stress. I've been riding the bus since I was five, and I still do, any chance I get. I believe METRO matters because it gives access—to people who don't have a vehicle, and to those trying to reduce their carbon footprint and avoid the parking hassle. It's about freedom, sustainability, and community.

What's your favorite part of working at METRO?

All of it. Honestly. I love walking through the door. I want to come to work every single day. The coworkers are amazing, the scenery is unbeatable, and I get to interact with people I've known my whole life—or just met yesterday.

I also enjoy getting to know our riders as people. Not just names or stops, but real stories. Sometimes it's directions, sometimes it's helping someone feel a little better—it's like a mini therapy session on wheels. I also notice when someone's missing. If Todd doesn't show up, I'm thinking, "Should I wait? Where's Todd?" These folks become part of your routine, part of your rhythm. It's the full package.

What's your typical work schedule?

Our schedules change every three months, which makes it super flexible. People start as early as 4 a.m. or work as late as 1 a.m. I usually choose early mornings—I like helping people start their day. I've got Sundays and Mondays off.

Can you walk us through a typical workday?

I show up at the dispatch counter, check in, grab my pouch with coach info, and head out to do a safety check on my bus. Then I roll out to my start point—could be downtown, Watsonville, Boulder Creek. We run the routes, riders hop on, and off we go. We're professional drivers, certified by the DOT, and METRO takes safety seriously. It's a routine, but it's one with real responsibility.

What's been your favorite project at METRO?

The senior dinner that METRO and SMART Local 23 put on—that was special. We got to celebrate some of our older riders and show appreciation for their continued support. It was something the union used to do, and I volunteered to help bring it back. That kind of outreach is exactly what I want to do more of.

What are your favorite day-to-day rider interactions?

I love knowing my regulars are waiting. Seeing kids getting around on their own—finding independence. That's powerful. People really love METRO. They recognize the logo, the drivers, and the role we play in their lives. Even if they're not riding the bus, they know we're part of the community.

What routes do you usually drive?

I like to keep things fresh—every three months I mix it up. Every route has its own perks:

- Route 35 through the mountains to Boulder Creek: Peaceful and foggy.
- Route 40 up the coast to Davenport: Gorgeous ocean views.
- Route 41 to Bonny Doon: It shows the landscape healing after fires.
- Watsonville Routes: Those ones are personal—so many memories tied to them, and the view coming over the hill is something else.

Do you have a favorite bus route?

Route 40 to Davenport. It changed my life growing up—it gave us the freedom to get to school without having to trek through sprout fields just to reach Woodrow. That bus line gave us access. That kind of freedom sticks with you.

Do you have a favorite One Ride at a Time bus wrap?

Definitely the dolphin wrap. It feels like a little vacation—it's majestic, tropical, and takes you somewhere else for a second. But honestly—they're all amazing. Each wrap has its own kind of magic.

Whether she's cruising past the coast or chatting with riders on a foggy morning, Bonnie brings a sense of joy, connection, and creativity to every mile. Her passion for people and love for the road make her an unforgettable part of the METRO family—and a true reflection of the vibrant community she serves.

"Bonnie embodies the spirit of what makes METRO thrive—dedication, compassion, and a deep commitment to community. As a bus operator, she consistently goes above and beyond, supporting her fellow drivers and creating a welcoming environment for everyone she encounters. Her leadership shone brightly during the senior luncheon in June, a joint effort between SMART and METRO. Bonnie led the charge, organizing donations, securing the venue, designing centerpieces, and planning the meal—all with care and creativity. The event was a resounding success, and she's already laying the groundwork for next year. From day one, Bonnie has stood out as someone who brings heart, hard work, and a genuine desire to make a positive impact at METRO."

- Margo Ross, METRO Chief Operations Officer