Executive Summary

APTA’s Preliminary Skill Development and Training Needs Survey for the transit industry, conducted in the summer and early fall of 2009, was used to capture data on APTA members’ perspectives of the public transportation industry’s current and projected workforce skill-building needs. The survey collected data on members’ work experience, training and skill needs, as well as their expectations of APTA to address overall workforce needs.

The survey was sent to a targeted list of 680 individuals, with the instructions to distribute the survey across management within their organizations. The distribution strategy led to responses from various levels of management including: front line supervisors, managers, and executive leadership from both the public and private sector. Three-quarters of the individuals that responded to the survey identified themselves as middle or frontline managers. A total of 258 people completed the survey. Transit agency staff accounted for 219 of the responses; 39 responses were from business members, government agencies, institutes or non-profit organizations.

The survey established that the industry has an experienced but aging workforce, with a significant amount of expected retirements over the next 10 years. The most commonly expressed need was for the development and implementation of programs to prepare the next generation of workers in the industry, with supervisory and leadership training at all levels of the organization being the dominant training need for the industry.

Survey responses indicated that professional certifications play a significant role in workforce development. Over one-third of those who responded to the survey have earned a professional certification. Two-thirds of those who responded are interested in currently available professional certifications or would like new certifications developed.

The survey results also established that APTA should have strong involvement in workforce development through facilitating information sharing among members. Members are also looking to APTA to help address skill gap needs by determining common workforce needs and identifying funding opportunities for training. Defining skills needed, developing training programs, and promoting skills standards are high priorities among members. Survey results indicated that many members are aware of APTA’s contributions toward workforce development issues but specific information and data pertaining to these initiatives is not consistently distributed throughout member organizations. Many of those who responded to the survey indicated that they do not directly participate in APTA or APTA-sponsored activities.

This report also describes the impact the aging workforce is expected to have on the industry, specific industry workforce development needs, and APTA’s role in workforce development within the industry.
Three significant themes were prevalent throughout the data:

1) Supervisory and leadership training are a top priority for transit agency and business members of APTA.

2) APTA should do more to communicate and publicize their current workforce development programs and activities.

3) Transit agency and business members have indicated the need for APTA to be involved in workforce development activities by creating opportunities for managers at all levels to share knowledge and experiences with their peers.

The conclusions and recommendations presented in Section IV of the report summarize the major findings from the survey and present actionable recommendations to enhance the industry wide workforce development discussion. Survey results concluded that:

- Worker retirements are a priority industry concern.
- Skill gaps exist throughout all management and supervisory levels in the industry.
- Certifications are an important tool in the transit industry.
- Transit agency and business members want APTA to be focused on workforce development.
- Future studies, surveys and data analysis are needed to help determine workforce development solutions for the industry.

It is the intent that this report will give APTA, its member organizations, and the industry useful data to better plan, identify and address workforce development needs and provide a preliminary benchmark for short-term and long-term planning.