Building a Sustainable Workforce for Public Transportation . . . Now!

Final Report of APTA's Workforce Development Blue Ribbon Panel

October 2010
Workforce development is an ongoing APTA effort and was one of my initiatives as Chair. There’s a great need for training, educating and recruiting of what I like to term “new blood,” many of whom don’t realize the opportunities that await them in the transportation field. As part of our efforts to promote public transportation as a career, in 2009 we embarked upon an initiative to reach 9,000 K-12 students. We met the goal, and went past it, reaching over 18,000! This year, we have developed resources for educators and transit systems and businesses to use in continuing to encourage the youth of America to pursue a career in public transit. I acknowledge the vision and foresight of Dr. Beverly A. Scott establishing the panel to address our industry’s future workforce challenges and opportunities.” Building upon APTA’s TransitVision 2050 and our new five-year strategic plan, I am pleased with the panel’s final recommendations and efforts to advance this work.

Mattie P. “M.P.” Carter, 2009-10 APTA Chair

I have been pleased to lead APTA’s Workforce Development Blue Ribbon Panel. Workforce development has been a key issue for many years, with great programs and services in place within the industry. There have, however, been challenges with coordinating these efforts and maximizing available resources. The panel’s work has allowed our industry to better “connect the dots” and provide the long-term blueprint for workforce development. The objective of this effort was to present a comprehensive and unified work plan for the next five years.

Doran J. Barnes
Chair, APTA Workforce Development Blue Ribbon Panel and APTA Vice Chair-Human Resources
Investment in workforce development and human capital issues is critical to the continuing success of the public transportation industry and a priority for the American Public Transportation Association (APTA). Currently, this $48.4 billion industry employs more than 380,000 people, and every $1 billion invested in public transportation supports and creates 36,000 jobs. Thus, attracting, developing and retaining a diverse workforce able to deliver high-quality performance that effectively and efficiently responds to the evolving needs of public transportation customers throughout North America is key to our industry's success.

In recognition of these challenges, Dr. Beverly A. Scott, 2008-09 APTA Chair, established APTA's Workforce Development Blue Ribbon Panel, representing the public and private sectors of the industry, key stakeholders and partners, including labor, academia and the next generation of APTA leaders. Mattie P. “M.P.” Carter, 2009-10 APTA Chair continued to advance this important initiative. The panel was charged to:

- Review the research and recommendations of earlier workforce development initiatives;
- Identify gaps, new opportunities, programs and services geared to helping to create and sustain a stronger, vibrant, efficient and effective workforce; and
- Define APTA's role in providing ongoing support to members and the industry on these issues.

Over the past 18 months, the panel obtained input and insights from a broad spectrum of interested and knowledgeable individuals - both within and external to our industry. The panel was augmented by a technical resources group, composed of federal partners, labor, and organizations responsible for delivering workforce development and training programs.

APTA's Strategic Plan 2010-2014 Strategic Goal

“A Quality Workforce.”

APTA will support the development of a public transportation industry workforce capable of meeting evolving demands of the industry and the evolving expectations of public transportation customers, and support the widespread establishment of customer-oriented management cultures within public transportation agencies.

The panel developed a unified work plan for the next five years, with 32 recommendations for new programs, projects and services that address six areas. Summary recommendations covering the next 18 months to five years are outlined below:

Legislative Issues

The impact of authorization of the federal public transportation law and other legislative proposals on workforce development. Continue advocacy to achieve the best possible outcome for the public transportation industry.

APTA's authorization recommendations for workforce development call for continuing current training and creating new training programs and initiatives to support public transportation/labor-management workforce development in both the public and private sectors. These recommendations articulate the significance of workforce development for our industry:

- Provide funding sufficient to support ongoing and new programs. Increase funding for workforce development programs consistent with overall growth of the federal public transportation program.
- Continue and expand existing programs.
• Make training a permissible use of federal urbanized area 5307 formula funds and federal rural area 5311 funds at levels determined by individual public transportation systems. Funds would be eligible to develop and deliver training and development programs, or to attend off-site training programs, including related travel expenses.

• Continue and expand programs for organizations to promote and develop public transportation agency/community college/college and university consortium models.

• Provide $15 million in new funding for industry-led, directed, and managed nationwide comprehensive studies, assessments, outreach, partnerships, and development initiatives to identify critical skill gaps, development of new training resources, tools, forums, partnerships, and programs which address the needs of the current and next generation workforce at all levels.

• Provide $10 million in year one and to grow annually at the same rate as the overall public transportation program for support funding to create labor-management and regional training consortium partnerships that provide advanced public transportation specific skills training for operators and maintainers.

**Image and Branding**

Strengthen the business case for workforce development in public transportation. Develop a targeted campaign to improve the image of public transportation as a career; promote green jobs and sell the industry by creating messages that reach new generations and talent pools (e.g., returning veterans) by using social media and other technologies.

• Enhance collaboration between APTA Human Resources and Marketing and Communications Committees to promote the benefits of transit career opportunities;

• Develop a workforce development image campaign to promote public transportation careers, including green jobs; and

• Identify new social media/technology tools to effectively engage the next generation of staff in the industry.

**Higher Education**

Identify a variety of post-secondary educational options, including the role of universities, transportation research centers, community colleges and technical schools in providing the “pipeline” for public transportation careers. Leverage opportunities to develop core curricula for universities and community colleges.

• Establish a higher education subcommittee under the auspices of APTA’s Human Resources Committee. Leverage the resources of the American Public Transportation Foundation and Leadership APTA;

• Increase internship opportunities for students by linking higher education institutions with transit’s public and private sectors; and

• Establish partnerships with transit agencies and businesses to provide ongoing site visits, briefing and programs to showcase public transportation as a career.

**Youth Outreach and Awareness**

Identify strategies to prepare the next generation of leaders within the public transportation industry with an emphasis on educational activities for levels K-12.

• Develop new strategies, tools, and resources to introduce and connect K-12 students to information on public transportation careers;

• Develop electronic and printed materials, toolkits and resources for dissemination across the country to schools, transit agencies and businesses and non-profit organizations promoting public transportation careers; and

• Implement national youth outreach programs.
Partnerships and Collaborations:
Enhance training and educational opportunities for the current and future workforce, through diverse, collaborative partnerships, e.g., labor-management; regional training consortiums; and opportunities for public and private partnerships on workforce development.

- Leverage APTA’s cooperative agreements with partners to collaborate on workforce development projects and resources;
- Build upon existing partnerships with federal agencies, labor, other associations, training and research organizations, among others, to advance industry workforce development programs; and
- Align the industry’s workforce development strategies with national non-traditional partners.

Performance Metrics:
Establish industry-developed models that measure the return on investment (ROI) of workforce training. The panel developed recommendations that use performance metrics and benchmarking to measure the effectiveness and improve public transportation workforce development programs.

- Assess and promote the results of a Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP) — sponsored study examining transit training resources, practices and metrics and determine next steps;
- Develop and execute the process, methodology and system for evaluating progress on the blue ribbon panel’s recommended workforce programs and activities; and
- Establish a process to evaluate industry-developed models to measure ROI on an ongoing basis.

New Resources, Products and Services
The panel produced three resources this year that complement its work:

- APTA’s Preliminary Skill Development and Training Needs Report. The report confirms and demonstrates industry assumptions about the impact of impending baby boomer retirements; identifies the top 10 training needs for all levels of leaders and supervisors in both the public and private sectors; and provides five key conclusions and recommendations for APTA and the industry.

- Survey of Existing Resources, Practices and Metrics of Workforce Development Programs in the U.S. Transit Industry, funded by TCRP. In brief, the survey found that the overall investment in transit training continues to be low, compared with the average of all U.S. industries, particularly the leading companies, and the level of variability of training investment across agencies is high.

- Careers in Public Transportation Toolkit for grades K-5, recently launched. The toolkit and accompanying guide are designed for educators, students, youth program providers, transit agencies and businesses to assist in promoting public transportation as a career.
The panel’s report provides the long-term vision and blueprint for workforce development in the public transportation industry. The recommendations are intended to support and build upon some of the best practices in place throughout the industry, while simultaneously, offering new strategies to ensure a workforce that is fully prepared to meet the challenges of a 21st century public transportation industry. There is consensus among industry leaders, partners and stakeholders that training and career development are essential to the professional growth of the workforce, and will continue to ensure that employees at all levels are prepared with the skill sets needed to serve customers and meet emerging challenges.

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A copy of APTA’s Blue Ribbon Panel Report can be found at:
www.apta.com/resources/profdev/workforce/pages/default.aspx