



## FACT SHEET

# “Under-the-Hood” CDL Waiver for Transit Bus Operators

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) is allowing State driver's licensing agencies to **waive** the “under-the-hood” portion of the vehicle inspection skills test for public transit operators seeking a commercial driver's license (CDL). “Under-the-hood” refers specifically to the engine compartment component of the vehicle inspection test, as outlined in **49 CFR §383.113(a)(1)(i)**.

**FMCSA is providing States the option to waive these components because there will be no impact to safety, and public transit agencies employ mechanics and other qualified personnel to provide roadside assistance in the case of a vehicle malfunction.**

Operators do not perform under-the-hood maintenance or repairs, and some are even contractually banned from these functions. Under-the-hood is also becoming less relevant as many agencies transition to zero-emission buses, which have electrified engine components that are locked and inaccessible to untrained personnel.

**Waiving the under-the-hood component will help address bus operator shortages while also saving public transit agencies training costs and time with no impact to safety.**

## No Impact on Safety

In issuing the waiver, FMCSA said it does “not believe that drivers issued CDLs under the exemption will experience any deterioration of safety below the level that would be achieved without the exemption.” FMCSA’s vehicle maintenance requirements for public transit agencies (**49 CFR §396**) remain fully in effect, including the requirement to systematically inspect, repair, and maintain all vehicles (§396.3), as well as prohibitions against unsafe operations (§396.7). All State or local inspection maintenance standards also continue to apply. Public transit agencies meet these safety requirements through the hiring and training of dedicated maintenance workers.

The waiver will not impact the detailed pre-trip vehicle safety inspections that operators perform. **APTA’s research** found that **all public transit agencies require operators to engage in detailed pre-trip safety inspections, often checking 70 or more items on transit passenger buses prior to operation.**

## Required Components of Vehicle Inspection Test

CDL applicants must continue to pass all remaining elements of the required pre-trip vehicle safety inspection, as described in **49 CFR §383.113(a)(1)(ii-ix)**. These inspections include checking all gauges and safety equipment (e.g., oil pressure, safety gauges, wipers, windshield, lights, and horn), and inspecting steering, suspension, brakes, wheels, side and rear of vehicle, and special features of transit buses like lifts, passenger seating, and emergency exits. **To receive a license under this waiver, operators still must fully demonstrate their ability to inspect all the safety features of a transit bus that are relevant to their work.**

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## Positive Impact on Operator Shortages

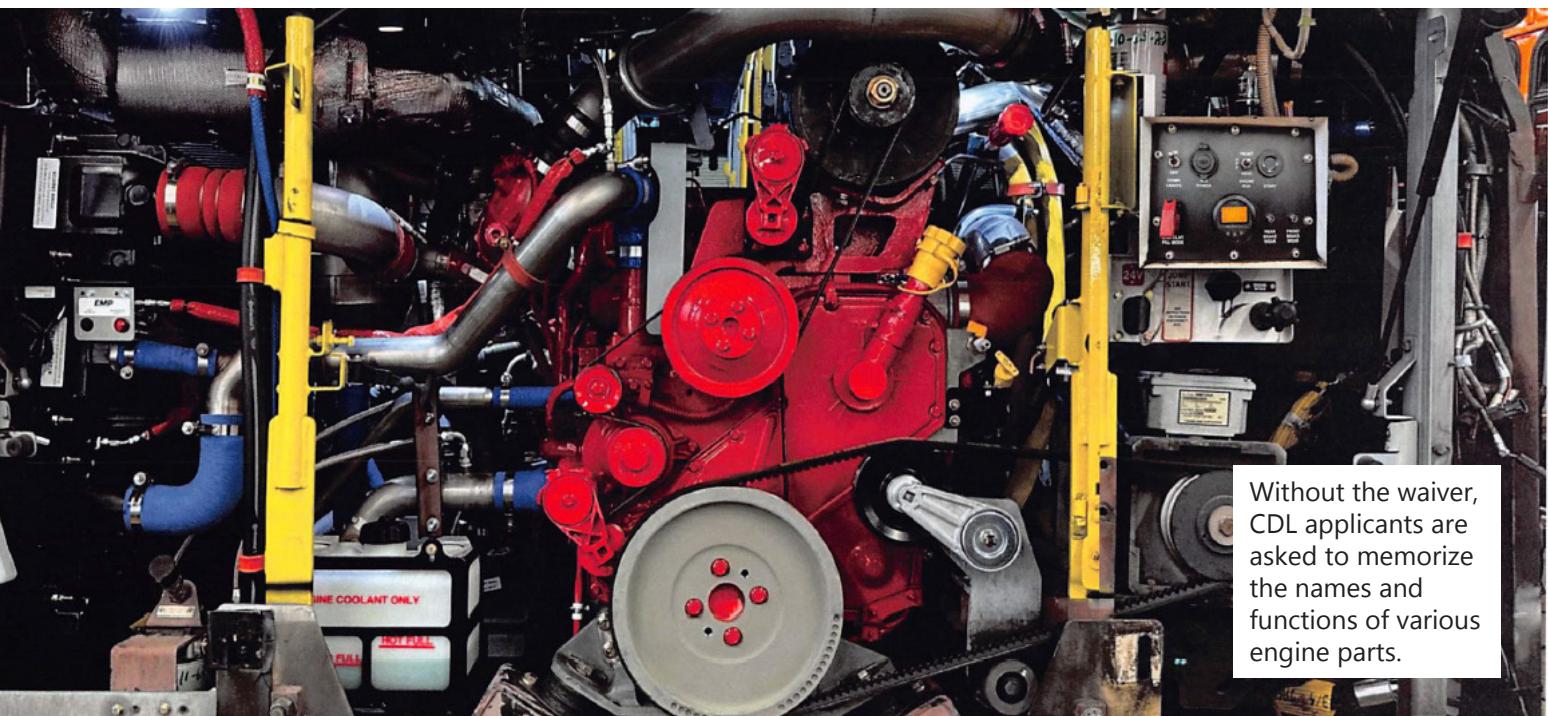
The waiver helps to address operator shortages in the transit industry. The majority of U.S. public transit agencies (84.6%) **continue to face worker shortages**, with bus operator positions particularly difficult to fill. **Public transit agencies report that CDL requirements are one of the most challenging aspects of hiring bus operators, and the under-the-hood test is the single most difficult aspect of the CDL process.** Agencies said this is where they see the most failures and retakes; about **4 in 10 agencies** have lost an operator candidate due to the under-the-hood requirement. Agencies also report that operators struggle with under-the-hood because they are being tested on skills they will not use after being fully licensed, because mechanics—not operators—are responsible for those functions.

## Similar to a Successful Waiver for School Bus Drivers

FMCSA has previously issued a similar waiver of under-the-hood CDL requirements for school bus operators, and the **school bus waiver** has been extended several times. The most recent school bus waiver, which has been implemented in 13 States, is in effect until November 2026. **The National School Transportation Association (NSTA) reports that the waiver has led to the licensing of approximately 1,200 new drivers and has successfully helped to alleviate school bus driver shortages in States including New Jersey and Texas.**

## APTA Encourages States to Adopt the Transit Bus Under-the-Hood Waiver

As part of its overall efforts to support public transit agencies and address ongoing operator shortages, APTA encourages States to adopt the under-the-hood waiver for transit operators. **Adopting the waiver will make it easier for agencies to hire new operators without impacting safety or decreasing the skills operators need to safely operate a transit bus.** ♦



Without the waiver, CDL applicants are asked to memorize the names and functions of various engine parts.