



Transit Workforce Shortage

Root Causes, Potential Solutions, and the Road Ahead

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Prepared for:



AMERICAN
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Prepared by:



In association with:



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Public transit providers across North America face a shortage of operators and mechanics during a period of economic instability and reshuffling exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, agencies' ability to respond to the worker shortage has been hampered by inadequate information about its causes and effects. The **Transit Workforce Shortage Study** builds a framework for APTA, its members, and its partner organizations to better understand the workforce shortage's causes and provides best practices for recruiting, hiring, and retaining transit operations workers. The study is comprised of two phases. This document, the **Interim Findings Report**, synthesizes the findings from Phase 1, which included a survey of transit agencies and background research into the macro causes of the shortage.

CAUSES OF THE SHORTAGE

The transit workforce shortage is widespread and severe.

- Ninety-six percent of agencies surveyed reported experiencing a workforce shortage, 84 percent of which said the shortage is affecting their ability to provide service.
- Although the shortage is most acute at agencies serving large urbanized areas and agencies with greater ridership, most agencies across the country report the shortage has forced service reductions regardless of the size of an agency's ridership, service area population, or fleet.

The aging of the transit workforce suggests that agencies will experience a high rate of retirements for the foreseeable future.

- Agencies report that retirees make up 24 percent of all quitting workers; at rural agencies, 34 percent of departures are retirements.
- Forty-three percent of transit workers are over 55, nearly double the percentage of the broader transportation sector.
- The aging of the transit workforce suggests agencies should plan for an increase in the rate of retirements over the next five to 10 years.

Transit agencies face strong competition for workers.

- The post-COVID-19 economic recovery has been characterized by low-unemployment and high job churn, meaning that agencies face more competition for the same pool of potential workers.
- Agencies reported that 45 percent of departing employees left to take jobs outside the transit industry, more than those who retire or left the workforce combined.
- Transit agencies' offers of employment are rejected 35 percent of the time, at more than twice the rate for jobs across all industries.

Agencies report that concerns about work schedules and compensation are the leading reasons why workers quit.

- The survey of agencies indicates that concerns about schedule and compensation were responsible for more departures than assault and harassment or concern about contracting COVID-19.
- Most agencies said that schedule and compensation are leading to more departures today than before the pandemic.

A complex regulatory framework is hampering agencies' ability to fill vacancies.

- Rules about drug and alcohol testing, Commercial Driver's License (CDL) requirements, criminal background checks, and driving records extend the hiring process and exclude otherwise qualified applicants.
- APTA and its partners should advocate for regulation reforms at the federal and state levels while ensuring that transit operators are well-qualified.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO RELIEVE THE SHORTAGE OF TRANSIT WORKERS?

Increasing compensation is about more than increasing wages.

- Increasing compensation begins with increasing wages for new and current employees, but there is more that agencies can do to attract and retain workers.
- Agencies often provide benefits packages that are competitive with or better than what workers would get in the private sector. Agencies should calculate the average value of those benefits so that applicants and employees are aware of their total compensation when they are making employment decisions.
- Some agencies have explored other forms of compensation, such as acquiring and providing worker housing and offering student loan and tuition benefits.

Agencies need to get creative to improve worker schedules.

- Concerns about schedule were identified as one of the most important factors leading workers to quit, but most agencies report not having taken steps to improve worker schedules.
- Shift differentials can encourage and reward workers for taking tougher shifts.
- Where practicable, agencies ought to explore changing their processes for rostering to improve the schedules of newer workers.
- Collective bargaining agreements often constrain agencies' ability to change rostering procedures. Nevertheless, given the centrality of schedule to the workforce shortage, agencies should explore moving from a "cafeteria approach," where each driver picks their runs and days off in order of seniority, to a weekly rostering approach, where agencies minimize the difference between operator's workweeks by combining daily runs to create complete weeks of work for operators.

Improving workplace culture is key to attracting younger workers.

- To appeal to a new generation of transit workers, agencies must take steps to make operations positions an attractive step into a career in transit. That means, among other factors, establishing pathways for advancement and professional growth.
- Creating employee recognition programs and improving amenities at agency facilities can help boost morale and retention.

Agencies can take steps to improve their recruiting and hiring processes.

- Some of the factors driving the transit worker shortage are long term and unlikely to reverse themselves in the near future. Therefore, agencies should invest in their hiring and recruiting capacities.
- Agencies should make the application process as simple as possible—from helping applicants obtain their CDL permits, to prominently displaying a mobile-friendly employment application on their websites, to making same-day offers at hiring events.
- Conditional employment offers—when an employee begins training pending the completion of background checks and other processes—can help keep interested applicants from disengaging from the hiring process.
- Agencies should establish new workforce pipelines, such as internship programs and relationships with high schools.

Governments and partner organizations have an important role to play in addressing the transit workforce shortage.

- Federal agencies can support agencies by implementing the Government Accountability Office's recommendation for transit workforce development and exploring the creation of federal program to pay for CDL training for transit operators.
- State Departments of Transportation (state DOTs) and Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) should consider how to integrate transit-specific workforce development programs into transportation planning projects and state and local educational institutions should establish relationships with transit agencies in the interest of creating employment pipelines.
- Transit labor organizations and their members should consider how they can support workforce recruitment and retention through apprenticeship, peer mentoring, and leadership advancement programs.
- At the local and national levels, unions should rigorously evaluate seniority-based practices and compare them to alternatives that would potentially increase younger member participation in both the workforce and union activities.

INTRODUCTION

Public transit providers across North America face a shortage of operators and mechanics, a crisis that has strained budgets and forced agencies to reduce service. This shortage is occurring during a period of economic instability and reshuffling exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Agencies' ability to respond to the worker shortage has been hampered by inadequate information about its causes and effects. The **Transit Workforce Shortage Study** builds a framework for APTA, its members, and its partner organizations to better understand the workforce shortage's causes and provides best practices for recruiting, hiring, and retaining transit operations workers.

The **Transit Workforce Shortage Study** is comprised of two phases. This document, the **Interim Findings Report**, synthesizes the findings from Phase 1, which included a survey of transit agencies and background research into the macro causes of the shortage. Phase 2 will use the findings outlined in this report to shape the final two research tasks: Agency case studies and a frontline worker survey. A final report will summarize the results from both phases and make additional recommendations for how APTA and its member agencies can respond to the shortage.

Transit agency survey results indicate that the transit workforce shortage is widespread. The July 2022 APTA survey showed the ability to provide service is hampered by a shortage of transit workers at most agencies, irrespective of region, agency size, service area population, or fleet size.

The shortage is the product of multiple causes. First, the transit industry has been aging for decades, with a considerably older workforce than related industries. As a result, the rate of retirements has crept upward. At the same time, agencies have failed to maintain a pipeline of younger workers.

Second, agencies face steep competition from other employers. The post-COVID-19 economic recovery has been accompanied by record low unemployment and high job churn. As a result, agencies view competition from other employers as a central factor inhibiting hiring, with a large and growing share of quitting workers leaving the transit industry altogether. Although fear of contracting COVID-19 and increasing harassment and assault are leading some workers to quit, agencies report that those factors are less important than compensation and schedule. A complex regulatory framework hampers agencies' ability to respond to the shortage. Their ability to improve worker schedules (which is key to attracting younger workers) is constrained by labor agreements and collective bargaining agreements (CBAs).

The shortage is the product of multiple interlocking causes and successfully responding to it will involve a comprehensive approach. Agencies will need to attract younger workers by improving working conditions, providing competitive compensation, and creating a pathway for workers to grow and advance in their careers. They will need to improve workplace culture, which will involve ensuring agency leadership is responsive to and representative of workers. Additionally, agencies' efforts will need to be matched with advocacy and regulatory reform to ease the barriers to hiring transit workers.

The following sections of this report provide an account of the transit workforce shortage and evaluate possible responses.

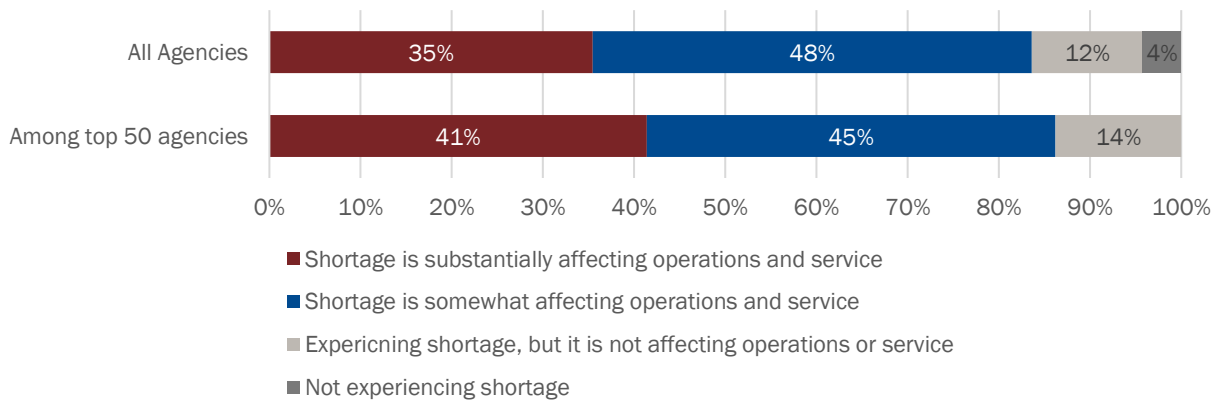
BACKDROP: MACRO TRENDS AND CAUSES

The public transit industry is struggling to recuperate from an ongoing workforce shortage heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic. Today, the industry competes for workers with greater bargaining power and different job expectations than in previous years. This shortage can be largely attributed to a simultaneous shrinking and aging workforce that was accelerated by various conditions during the pandemic. This section provides an analysis of the severity of the workforce shortage and the broad context in which it emerged.

How severe is the transit workforce shortage?

The survey of transit agencies reveals that the workforce shortage is severe and widespread: 96 percent of agencies surveyed reported they are experiencing a workforce shortage, 84 percent of which said the shortage is affecting their ability to provide service (**Figure 1**). The effects are even more pronounced for the agencies with the greatest ridership.¹

FIGURE 1: SEVERITY AND IMPACT OF TRANSIT WORKFORCE SHORTAGE BY AGENCY SIZE



Agencies with the greatest ridership and those in urbanized areas report the most severe shortage effects. Still, even in rural areas, most agencies report that a shortage of workers is affecting service (**Table 1**).

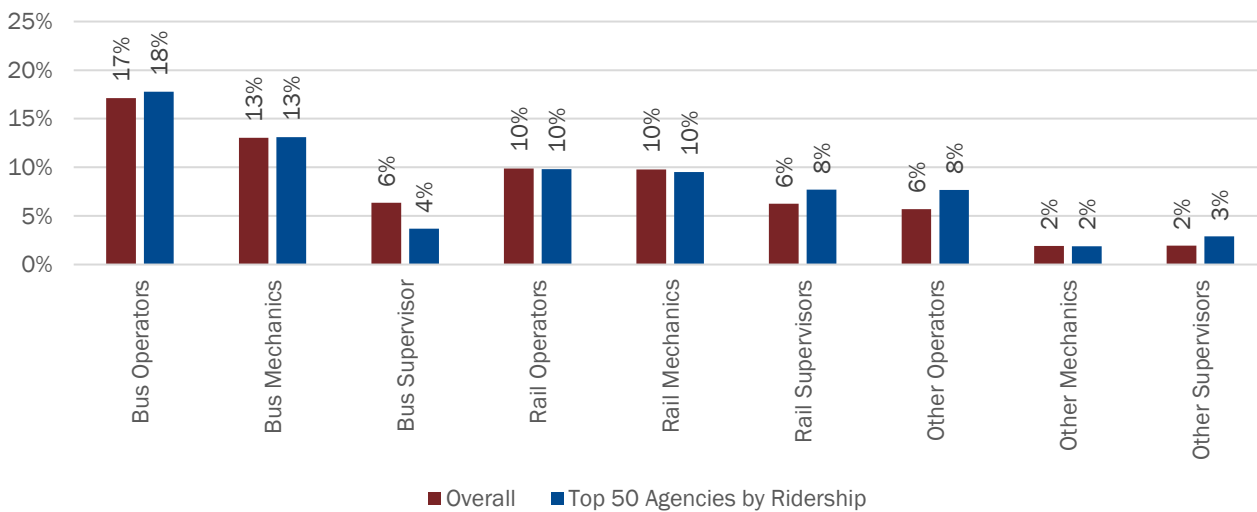
TABLE 1: SHORTAGE EXPERIENCES BY POPULATION SIZE

Impact	Rural	Small Urbanized Area	Large Urbanized Area
Shortage, substantial effects	5	16	46
Shortage, some effects	12	19	60
Shortage, no effects	7	8	8
No shortage	4	0	4
Total of Responding Agencies	28	44	118
Percentage: Any shortage effects	61%	80%	90%
Percentage: Substantial shortage effects	18%	36%	39%

¹ The research team split the results among the 50 agencies with the largest ridership nationwide and the rest of the sample across this technical memo. Of those 50 agencies, 29 completed the survey.

Agencies reported the highest level of vacant positions among bus operators and mechanics (**Figure 2**). This trend was similar regardless of transit agency size.

FIGURE 2: VACANCY RATES BY ROLE – OVERALL VERSUS TOP 50 AGENCIES



Background Context and Long-Term Causes of the Transit Workforce Shortage

COVID-19 caused a major drop in public transit ridership and, with it, a decline in service and fare revenue. Faced with protecting their long-term financial health, many agencies imposed hiring freezes.² The pandemic may have exacerbated a shortage of transit workers, but the industry has faced a long-term labor dilemma that is the product of several interconnected forces. Researchers have identified numerous underlying causes contributing to the workforce shortage in the transit industry, and the following sections detail some of those causes.

AN AGING WORKFORCE

The transit workforce is aging faster than those in other essential industries.³ In 2019, 40 percent of the transit workforce was over 55; by 2021, that figure had risen to 43 percent. For comparison, just 24 percent of the broader transportation workforce was 55 and over (**Figure 3**). The age of the industry’s workforce means it faces a “retirement cliff,” when a high percentage of its employees will retire in a short period of time, producing a surge in vacancies. COVID-19 may have accelerated the retirement effect; researchers studying the behavior of older workers in all industries found a 50 percent increase compared to the pre-pandemic rate of retirement.⁴ There are several possible explanations behind the aging workforce, from the lack of replacement among positions due to downsizing to the lack of turnover due to unionization and the stability that comes with it.⁵

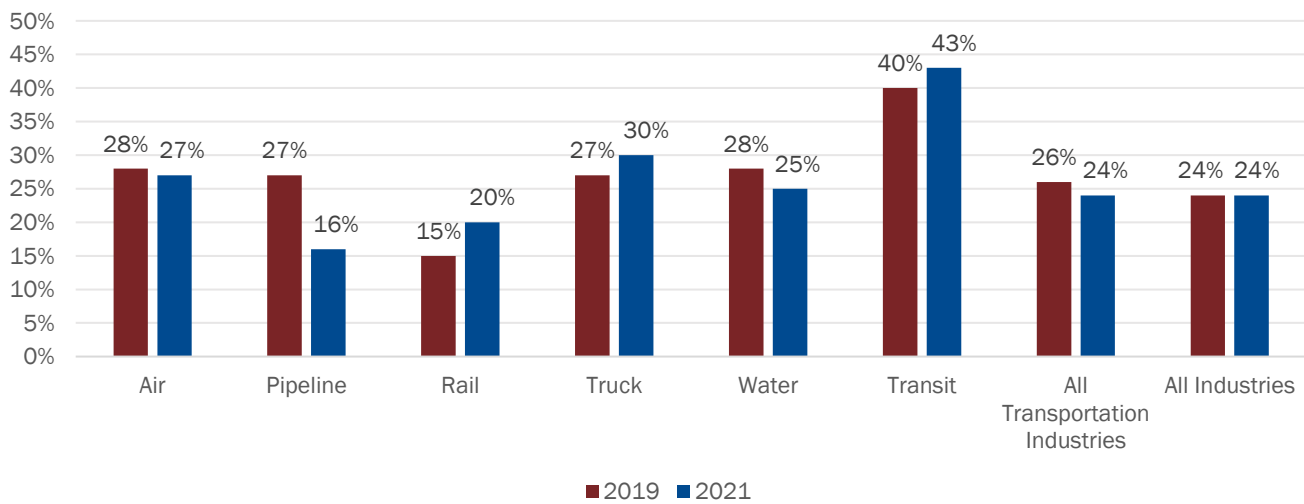
² TransitCenter. “Bus Operators in Crisis.” July 2022.

³ Bureau of Transportation Statistics, “Employment in Transportation and Related Industries.” The ‘Transit’ category represents the transit and ground passenger transportation industry (NAICS 485), which includes urban transit systems but also school bus and interurban bus transportation. It is used as a proxy for the public transit workforce.

⁴ Laura D. Quinby, Matthew S. Ruitledge, and Gal Wettenstein, “How Has COVID-19 Affected the Labor Force Participation of Older Workers?” Center for Retirement Research at Boston College. October 2021.

⁵ University Transportation Research Center, “Workforce Challenges Confronting New York City Transit.” May 2017.

FIGURE 3: SHARE OF WORKERS OVER 55 BY INDUSTRY



SOURCE: BUREAU OF TRANSPORTATION STATISTICS, “EMPLOYMENT IN TRANSPORTATION AND RELATED INDUSTRIES.” [HTTPS://DATA.BTS.GOV/STORIES/S/TRANSPORTATION-ECONOMIC-TRENDS-TRANSPORTATION-EMPL/CAXH-T8JD](https://data.bts.gov/stories/s/transportation-economic-trends-transportation-empl/caxh-t8jd) (DATA SOURCE: [HTTPS://WWW.BLS.GOV/CPS/CPSAAT18B.HTM](https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat18b.htm))

DIFFICULTY ATTRACTING YOUNGER WORKERS

Several factors likely contribute to the failure of the industry to maintain a pipeline of younger workers. First, younger workers may be less amenable to holding transit operations positions due to differences in preferences or expectations. Younger workers, particularly Generation Z, seek more flexibility and place greater importance on workplace culture.⁶ Younger workers also tend to value dynamic work environments and work-life balance just as much as competitive compensation.⁷

The importance of seniority within agency workforces may also discourage younger workers from pursuing a career in transit. New employees beginning their careers as bus and rail operators discover that they often get the last pick for runs. In addition, in some agencies, workers are ineligible for full-time work or benefits until they have logged the requisite number of hours on the job, which may take up to two years.⁸ The effect of these provisions, many of which are mandated by labor agreements, may discourage younger workers from joining transit agencies or, if they do, sticking around.

ACCESS TO CHILDCARE

Access to childcare has become an ongoing concern among workers, particularly among frontline workers, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Multiple factors contribute to these challenges, including childcare center closures, schools operating remotely, family members falling ill, and labor shortages, resulting in large numbers of women, in particular, dropping out of the workforce.⁹ Many workplaces have addressed this concern by providing or subsidizing childcare for workers, thereby decreasing employee childcare costs. Along with providing or subsidizing childcare, the transit industry could also consider flexible shift schedules to accommodate workers who may have to care for children or other family members at home.

A STRONG LABOR MARKET

Employment plummeted during the first months of the pandemic. Still, the ensuing recovery has produced record low unemployment and labor shortages across the economy, creating steep competition for the workers transit agencies need to hire. The post-pandemic period has also been characterized by accelerated job churn, with workers reporting

⁶ Alyson Krueger, “Gen Z Knows What It Wants From Employers. And Employers Want Them.” The New York Times. July 31, 2022.

⁷ Minnesota Department of Transportation, “Workforce Planning and Human Resource Development Strategies for Minnesota’s Public Transportation Agencies.” March 2021.

⁸ Transportation Research Board, “TCRP 77: Managing Transit’s Workforce in the New Millennium.” 2002.

⁹ Brookings Institution, “The critical role of workforce training in the labor market recovery.” February 2021.

they are leaving jobs over pay, opportunities for advancement, and low morale.¹⁰ (These factors were also mentioned in the survey of agencies discussed in the previous section.) As previous APTA research has revealed, these macroeconomic factors also affect the transit industry, with 66 percent of agencies saying they are struggling to retain new workers.¹¹

The public sector competes with the private sector to recruit and retain new workers. This includes ridesharing companies like Uber and Lyft, where transit workers' skills transfer easily and work schedules tend to be more flexible. Transit agencies also compete against other transportation industries, such as charter bus transportation, school and employee bus transportation, and freight transportation. E-commerce surged during the pandemic, with sales increasing by 43 percent between 2019 and 2020.¹² This has put pressure on an already tight labor market for drivers with CDLs.¹³

RECRUITING CAPACITY

The transit industry not only struggles with recruiting for operation and maintenance positions, but also struggles with recruiting for administrative positions that support its own capacity to recruit. This is largely due to the aforementioned internal factors, such as uncompetitive compensation packages and limited advancement opportunities. Though the transit industry may struggle more with recruiting for operation and maintenance positions, a Federal Transit Administration (FTA) study found that 64 percent of transit industry survey respondents found retaining human resources employees difficult, making expanding recruiting capacity more challenging.¹⁴

A COMPLEX REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

A collection of different bodies at different levels of government and law regulates how transit agencies operate, including how to hire, train, and otherwise interact with operations staff. These organizations and laws span labor, transportation planning, occupational health and safety, drug enforcement, and a host of other social services. Each of these groups also has a stake in good transit service, and therefore each has a role to play in ensuring a sufficient workforce.

Labor Representatives and Unions

Not all transit workers are represented by labor unions. However, 330,000 of an estimated 448,000 transit workers (about 74 percent) are represented by the two largest transit unions in North America.¹⁵ The Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) and Transport Workers Union of America (TWU) represent this workforce to management and bargain for safe working conditions and fair wages. However, this research indicates that provisions of union-negotiated labor contracts are perceived, by some, to be counterproductive to their work. Among these are compensation and schedule rules that favor employees with the longest tenure, which make the jobs unappealing or unworkable for younger would-be employees.

Federal Regulations and Partners

The transit industry in the United States employs hundreds of thousands of people directly, and the billions of trips taken each year across services provided by 6,800 agencies generate enormous economic benefits for the country.¹⁶ Public transit is also a critical component of a transportation policy that targets the planet's survivability.¹⁷ Considering

¹⁰ Pew Research Center, "Majority of Workers Who Quit a Job in 2021 Cite Low Pay, No Opportunities for Advancement, Feeling Disrespected." March 2022.

¹¹ American Public Transportation Association, "Workforce Shortages Impacting Public Transportation Recovery." March 2022. <https://www.apta.com/wp-content/uploads/APTA-SURVEY-BRIEF-Workforce-Shortages-March-2022.pdf>

¹² United States Census Bureau, "E-Commerce Sales Surged During the Pandemic." April 2022.

¹³ NBC News, "How E-Commerce Altered the Trucking Industry." April 2022.

¹⁴ Federal Transit Administration, "Transit Training Needs Assessment: Identifying Current and Future Training Needs of the Public Transportation Industry." March 2021.

¹⁵ Transit Workers Union of America, "America's largest transit worker unions vow 'aggressive action' if transit systems don't protect frontline workers." April 3, 2020. <https://www.twu.org/press-release-americas-largest-transit-worker-unions-vow-aggressive-action-if-transit-systems-dont-protect-frontline-workers/>

¹⁶ American Public Transportation Association, "Economic Impact of Public Transportation Investment." April 2020. <https://www.apta.com/wp-content/uploads/APTA-Economic-Impact-Public-Transit-2020.pdf>

¹⁷ For example, see: National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, "An Update on Public Transportation's Impacts on Greenhouse Gas Emissions," 2021. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press; Monbiot, George. "Capitalism Is Killing the

the economic benefits of public transportation for the entire United States, the Federal government has an interest in supporting healthy operations as well as a state of good repair. However, several Federal agencies share responsibility for managing public transportation finance and planning. Among the regulatory regimes managed by Federal agencies, two stand out in their direct influence on transit agencies' ability to maintain a sufficient workforce:

- **Drug Policy.** Several U.S. Department of Transportation administrations, including FTA, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), and the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA), have rules regarding drug use. These rules include eligibility for CDLs and regular random drug testing. However, numerous state and local governments have made certain drugs legal for medical and recreational use. As states modify their drug use laws, Federal rules and test procedures such as those found in 49 CFR 40 make public-sector employment burdensome relative to private-sector jobs in areas where Federal drug use rules conflict with more permissive local laws, specifically for marijuana. At the heart of this issue is that Federal drug test procedures for marijuana are designed to detect its presence long after impairment has ended.¹⁸ This approach has the effect of disqualifying potential employees who have used marijuana days or weeks before testing.
- **Performance Management.** FTA, FRA, and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) each provide funding to transit agencies for capital and operating purposes. In turn, agencies must track their activities through performance-based planning and implementation. FTA and other stakeholders should use that data to track workforce indicators in pursuit of their support of transit workforce development.¹⁹ This approach would assist agencies in meeting workforce development requirements under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

State and Local Governmental Partners

State and local governmental bodies, including state DOTs, local departments of transportation, MPOs, and Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs), are the frontline for transportation planning decision-making. They coexist with the transit operators: in many cases, these governments own and maintain infrastructure essential to transit service, specifically roads, bridges, and tunnels. Given that transit agencies do not own significant portions of their own infrastructure, workforce planning for transit projects may be conducted by these other actors, making coordination essential. Non-transportation governmental partners at this scale, including those responsible for secondary and continuing education, play a related role in preparing potential employees for a career in the transit workforce. Coordination among these governments' various transportation and non-transportation arms is essential for addressing workforce needs across the economy—transit is no exception.

Community Organizations

Non-governmental organizations that include education in their work also have a role in easing the transit worker shortage. Many people in the United States rely on private community groups, including professional societies, faith-based organizations, and non-public technical schools to find education and employment opportunities. These groups often lack the resources needed to thrive in achieving their objectives but represent a key touchpoint for their communities and outside actors. They often assist with preparing job applications and offer a source of accountability.

Planet – It's Time to Stop Buying into Our Own Destruction." The Guardian, October 30, 2021.

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/oct/30/capitalism-is-killing-the-planet-its-time-to-stop-buying-into-our-own-destruction>; Nichola Groom. "Wildfires Are Destroying California's Forest Carbon Credit Reserves, Study Says." Reuters, August 8, 2022. <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/wildfires-are-destroying-californias-forest-carbon-credit-reserves-study-2022-08-05/>.

¹⁸ Scott Hadland and Sharon Levy, "Objective Testing – Urine and Other Drug Tests," *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America* 25(3) (2016): 549-565, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chc.2016.02.005>

¹⁹ For additional detail, see U.S. Government Accountability Office. *Transit Workforce Development: Improved Strategic Planning Practices Could Enhance FTA Efforts*, GAO-19-290. March 14, 2019, <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-19-290>

AGENCY SELF-ASSESSMENT

In March 2022, APTA surveyed its membership to learn what agencies know about the causes of the transit workforce shortage and what responses to it have the best chance of success. The March survey of 112 agencies found that 92 percent of agencies are having difficulty with hiring, and 64 percent are having difficulty with employee retention. Agencies reported that bus operators are the most difficult position to fill. The survey also found that, in response to the shortage, most agencies have increased starting pay (52 percent), and over one-third have implemented sign-on bonuses (38 percent) or referral bonuses (39 percent).

In July 2022, APTA launched a second survey to build upon these findings. In addition to asking about the severity and impact of the shortage, the second survey investigated three questions:

1. What do agencies know about why workers leave?
2. What difficulties do agencies encounter with attracting, hiring, and onboarding new workers?
3. What barriers exist to improving the hiring and retention of transit workers?

The survey produced responses from 190 agencies, and this section presents its major findings.

What do agencies know about why workers leave?

Research into the causes of the transit workforce shortage has emphasized agencies' looming "retirement cliff" because of their aging workforce. While the high number of retirements surely contributes to the ability of agencies to fill positions, survey results suggest that, at least in the short term, competition for workers from other employers is a more significant driver of the shortage. Agencies reported that transit workers are leaving because they can find positions with better compensation and more desirable working conditions, particularly schedules. Three components of the survey results support this conclusion:

1. The *reason* workers are quitting
2. The *destination* of quitting workers (i.e., what types of jobs departing workers take)
3. The *point in their careers* when workers quit

REASON FOR QUITTING

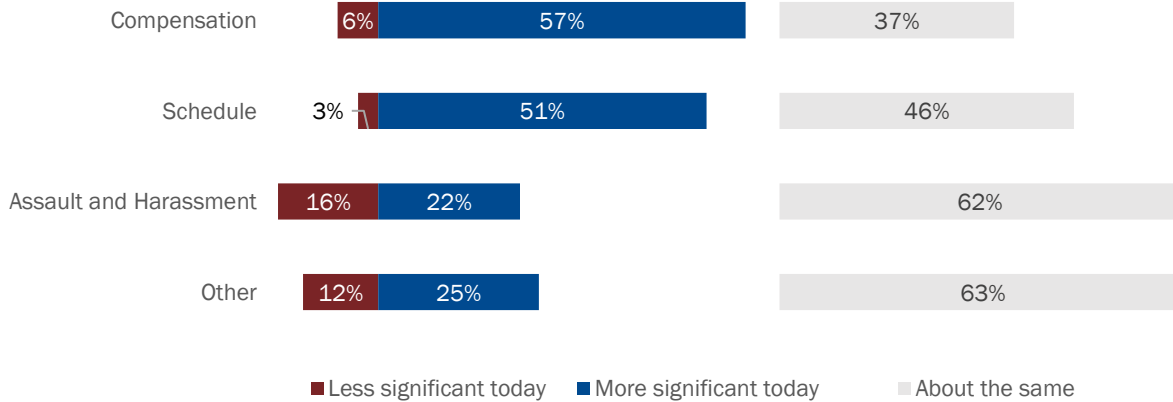
Agencies reported that compensation and schedule are the leading reasons workers quit (**Table 2**). Concern over contracting COVID-19 was ranked third most important among all respondents; harassment and assault were ranked least significant. Trends for quitting were similar among agencies regardless of size.

TABLE 2: AVERAGE RANK OF FACTORS CAUSING WORKERS TO QUIT SINCE COVID-19 (1 IS GREATEST, 5 IS LEAST)

	Compensation	Work Schedule	Harassment and Assault	Other Conditions	COVID-19
All Respondents	2.2	2.0	4.2	3.3	3.2
Top 50 Agencies	2.1	2.1	4.1	3.3	3.4

Agencies also reported how much each factor, on its own, has become responsible for more departures since the beginning of the pandemic. For over one-half of the respondents, the significance of compensation- and work-schedule-related factors has increased since the pandemic (**Figure 4**). On the other hand, assault and harassment and other reasons are comparatively as significant as before the pandemic for over 60 percent of the agencies.

FIGURE 4: AGENCIES REPORTING CHANGE IN SIGNIFICANCE OF FACTORS LEADING WORKERS TO QUIT SINCE COVID-19



DESTINATION OF QUITTING WORKERS

For compensation and work schedule to drive a significant number of resignations, workers must have other job opportunities. Indeed, agencies report that the largest share of workers leaves transit agency positions for jobs outside the transit industry (non-transportation and transportation non-transit) and that those departures exceeded the number of workers retiring or leaving the workforce altogether (Figure 5). Retirements made up a larger share of departures at agencies serving rural areas (35 percent) than large urbanized areas (27 percent). However, even among rural agencies, the proportion of workers leaving for non-transit jobs (43 percent, including 29 percent for non-transportation jobs, and 14 percent for non-transit transportation jobs) exceeded retirements (Table 3).

FIGURE 5: DESTINATION OF QUITTING WORKERS

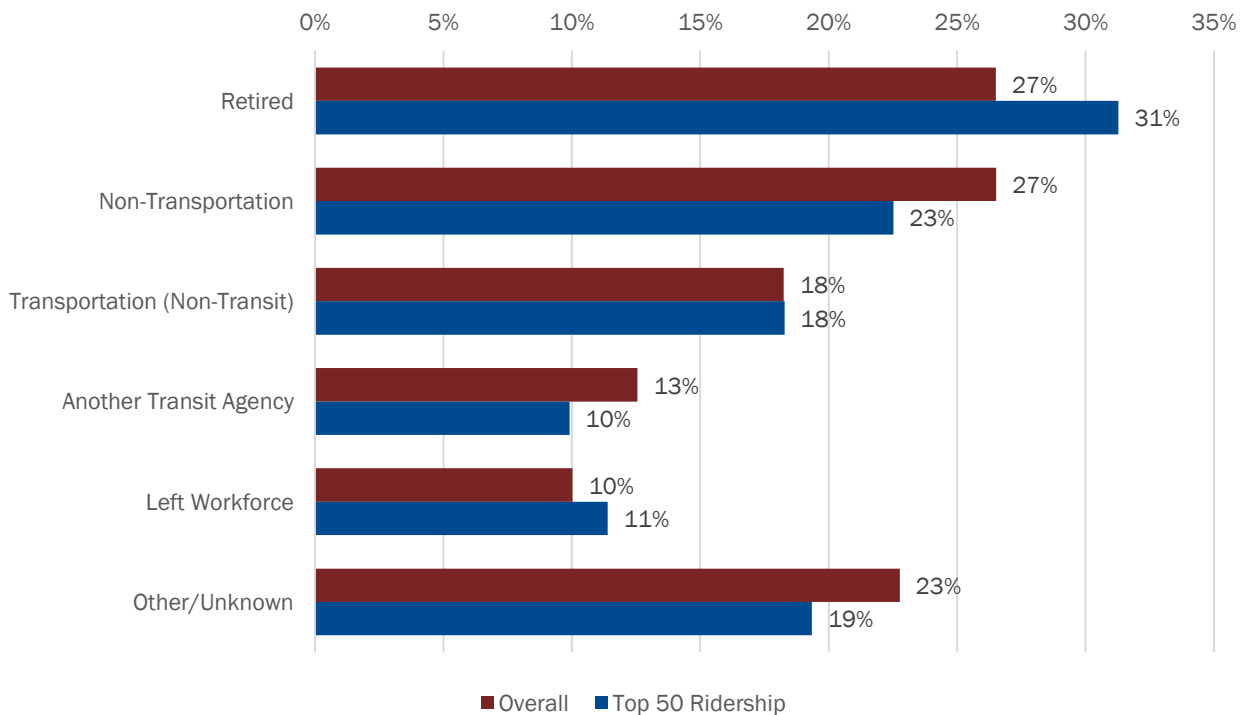
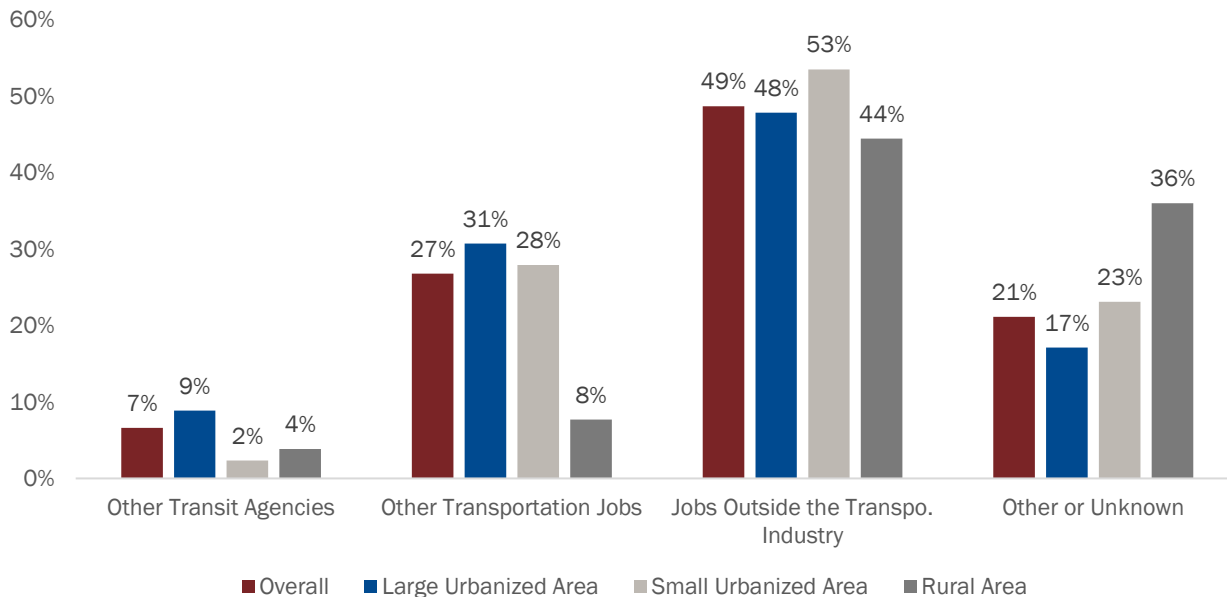


TABLE 3: DESTINATION OF QUITTING WORKERS BY SERVICE AREA POPULATION

	Retired	Non-Transportation	Transportation (Non-Transit)	Another Transit Agency	Left Workforce	Other/Unknown
Large Urbanized Areas	27%	23%	17%	15%	11%	21%
Small Urbanized Areas	19%	34%	24%	9%	8%	28%
Rural Areas	35%	29%	14%	8%	9%	21%

Competition for operations workers from employers outside the transportation industry appears to be increasing at a faster pace than in transportation-related industries (Figure 6). For roughly one-half of agencies, the number of operations workers accepting jobs outside the transportation industry has increased since COVID-19. The consistency of this finding suggests that macroeconomic factors, namely tight labor market conditions, may be more responsible for the transit workforce shortage than changes in transit-adjacent industries, such as the proliferation of delivery services and ridesharing.

FIGURE 6: PERCENTAGE OF AGENCIES REPORTING AN INCREASE OF DEPARTURES SINCE COVID-19 BY DESTINATION AND POPULATION SIZE



POINT IN CAREER WHEN WORKERS QUIT

Although retirements make up a substantial share of worker departures, nearly twice as many come in the first two years of employment regardless of agency size or service area population (Table 4). Attrition in the early periods of employment (i.e., training, probationary period, and first two years) suggests that workers are leaving for jobs that they find more appealing for various reasons.

Furthermore, the incidence of early career departures seems to be increasing:²⁰

- 66 percent of agencies say they have seen an increase in departures during training;
- 62 percent say they have seen an increase in departures during the probationary period; and
- 55 percent say they have seen a rise of departures occurring in the period after the end of the probationary period but within two years of beginning work.

²⁰ Data on departures comes from the agency survey; a more detailed summary is available in the Agency Survey Technical Report.

TABLE 4: PROPORTION OF DEPARTURES BY PERIOD IN CAREER

	During Training	During Probationary Period	Within two years	Before Retirement	Retirement
All Respondents	16%	20%	23%	23%	24%
Top 50 Agencies	16.4%	15.5%	20.7%	26.0%	26.2%
Large Urbanized Areas	16.4%	17.4%	21.6%	23.9%	24.4%
Small Urbanized Areas	16.3%	26.7%	24.8%	22.5%	17.9%
Rural Areas	13.7%	18.1%	25.0%	22.7%	34.2%

What difficulties do agencies encounter with attracting, hiring, and onboarding new workers?

The previous section discussed how the large number of workers who quit in their first two years on the job suggests that transit agencies face steep competition from other employers for potential operations workers. In addition, the increase in attrition early in workers’ careers imposes a particular burden on agencies since it leads to a high and sustained turnover. As a result, agencies need to expend more resources on recruitment and hiring over the long term:

- In the survey, agencies reported high attrition within the hiring and onboarding process.
- Agencies report that 35 percent of employment offers are rejected, nearly twice the average across all industries.²¹
- At the agencies in the top 50 for ridership, one of five new hires do not show up for the first day of work.
- Agencies report that 36 percent of departures occur before the end of their probationary period.
- All told, agencies need more than four complete applications to get one worker in the door on the first day of work.

What barriers exist to improving the hiring and retention of transit workers?

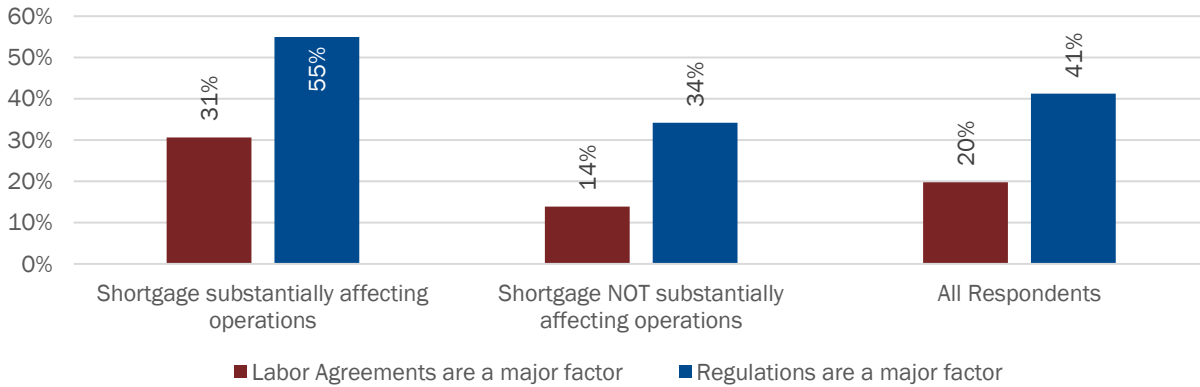
Agencies concurred with the background research findings that regulatory barriers are a substantial impediment to hiring transit workers. Survey results suggest that regulations contribute more significantly to the transit workforce shortage than labor agreement provisions (Table 5). In addition, agencies experiencing more severe labor shortages were more likely to indicate that both regulations and labor agreement provisions hamper their ability to respond to the shortage (Figure 7).

TABLE 5: SIGNIFICANCE OF REGULATIONS AND LABOR AGREEMENT PROVISIONS TO TRANSIT WORKFORCE SHORTAGE

	Regulations	Labor Agreement Provisions
Yes, they are a major factor	42%	20%
Yes, they are a minor factor	40%	22%
No, regulations do not contribute to the shortage	19%	58%

²¹ Jason Sockin and Daniel Zhao, “Why Do Candidates Reject Job Offers,” Glassdoor Economic Research. July 2022. <https://www.glassdoor.com/research/app/uploads/sites/2/2020/02/20-02-27-Glassdoor-Econ-JobRejection-Report.pdf>

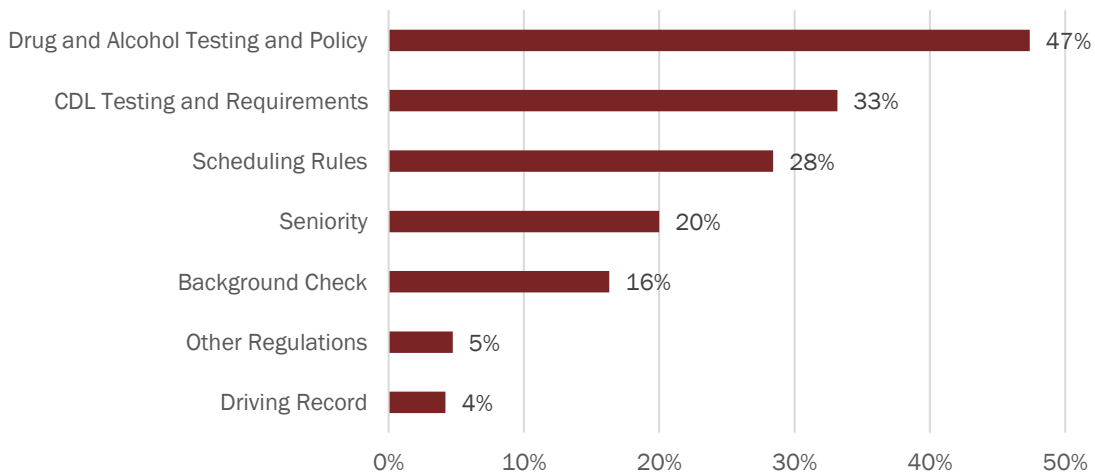
FIGURE 7: AFFECT OF REGULATIONS AND LABOR PROVISIONS BY WORKFORCE SHORTAGE SEVERITY



The analysis of the open response comments provides additional insight into the nature of the barriers imposed by labor agreements and regulations (Figure 8). The most common observations were:

1. Nearly one-half of respondents (47 percent) noted, without prompting, that many applicants are disqualified from employment or discouraged from applying for jobs because of drug and alcohol testing regulations. In addition, many respondents noted that the discrepancy between the legal status of marijuana—permitted in many states—and its prohibition for transit workers under various regulations is a source of confusion for many applicants.
2. One-third of respondents identified the time, expense, and complexity of the CDL licensure process as barriers to hiring.
3. Under CBAs at many respondents’ agencies, workers with more seniority get to pick their schedules first, meaning that newer workers must work undesirable shifts, sometimes for years. The impact of seniority on work schedules may be an especially potent impediment to resolving the transit workforce shortage, given that schedule concerns were identified as one of the major reasons for workers quitting their jobs.

FIGURE 8: PERCENTAGE OF AGENCIES MENTIONING VARIOUS FACTORS AS BARRIERS TO HIRING AND RETENTION IN OPEN-ENDED RESPONSE QUESTIONS



CDL, drug and alcohol testing, background check, and driving record regulations impede hiring in three ways:

1. Onerous rules (especially the CDL requirement) may discourage workers from applying.
2. Overly strict regulations may disqualify candidates who would be excellent employees (e.g., applicants who earned a point on their driving record many years ago).
3. Complying with regulatory requirements is time-consuming, resulting in a lengthy hiring process and increasing the chances that workers may take other positions.

AGENCY RESPONSES TO WORKFORCE SHORTAGE

This section presents the findings from the survey and research into best practices for recruiting, hiring, and retaining transit workers. Strategies for responding to the workforce shortage have been grouped into the following categories:

- Increasing compensation
- Improving worker schedules
- Creating a positive work environment
- Demonstrating a clear path to promotions or raises
- Ensuring worker safety
- Providing ongoing training
- Adopting more effective hiring practices
- Adopting more effective recruiting practices

INCREASING COMPENSATION

To attract and retain workers, agencies must provide competitive compensation.²² Increasing compensation is the most common strategy agencies have adopted to respond to the workforce shortage, according to the survey. Most agencies report having increased pay for new and existing employees; nearly as many have offered bonuses for new hires and referrals of new workers (**Figure 9**). However, a literature review suggests steps beyond pay increases agencies can take to ensure their compensation packages are attractive.

First, agencies must ensure they clearly understand the current labor market. Higher compensation elsewhere is a major reason transit employees leave for other positions—thus, providing competitive compensation is essential to employees.²³ Agencies can collect data about wages in similar industries within their metro area and state to understand what a competitive wage is and adjust wages accordingly.²⁴

Benefits, including flexible scheduling, sick and vacation time, health and life insurance, retirement programs, and wellness programs, are essential components of compensation packages.²⁵ Public-sector organizations often offer better benefits than private-sector companies. Still, applicants may not be aware of the value of non-monetary compensation when weighing different employment offers. It may be helpful to highlight and even quantify the value of these benefits to help overall compensation compete with the private sector.²⁶

Agencies may also consider offering performance-based bonuses, student loan payback programs, or tuition assistance.²⁷ ²⁸ ²⁹ Performance-based bonuses or perks provide the opportunity to recognize good work in employees.

²² Minnesota Department of Transportation, “Workforce Planning and Human Resource Development Strategies for Minnesota’s Public Transportation Agencies.” March 2021.

²³ HireRight, 2018 transportation spotlight report. 2018.

²⁴ Shared-Use Mobility Center, “Managing the Labor Shortage at Transit Agencies.” November 2021.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Christofer Harper, Susan Bogus Halter, Raghava Kommalapati, and Doeun Choe, “Recruiting, Retaining, and Promoting for Careers at Transportation Agencies.” December 2018.

²⁷ Minnesota Department of Transportation, “Workforce Planning and Human Resource Development Strategies for Minnesota’s Public Transportation Agencies.” March 2021.

²⁸ American Public Transportation Association, “Workforce Shortages Impacting Public Transportation Recovery.”

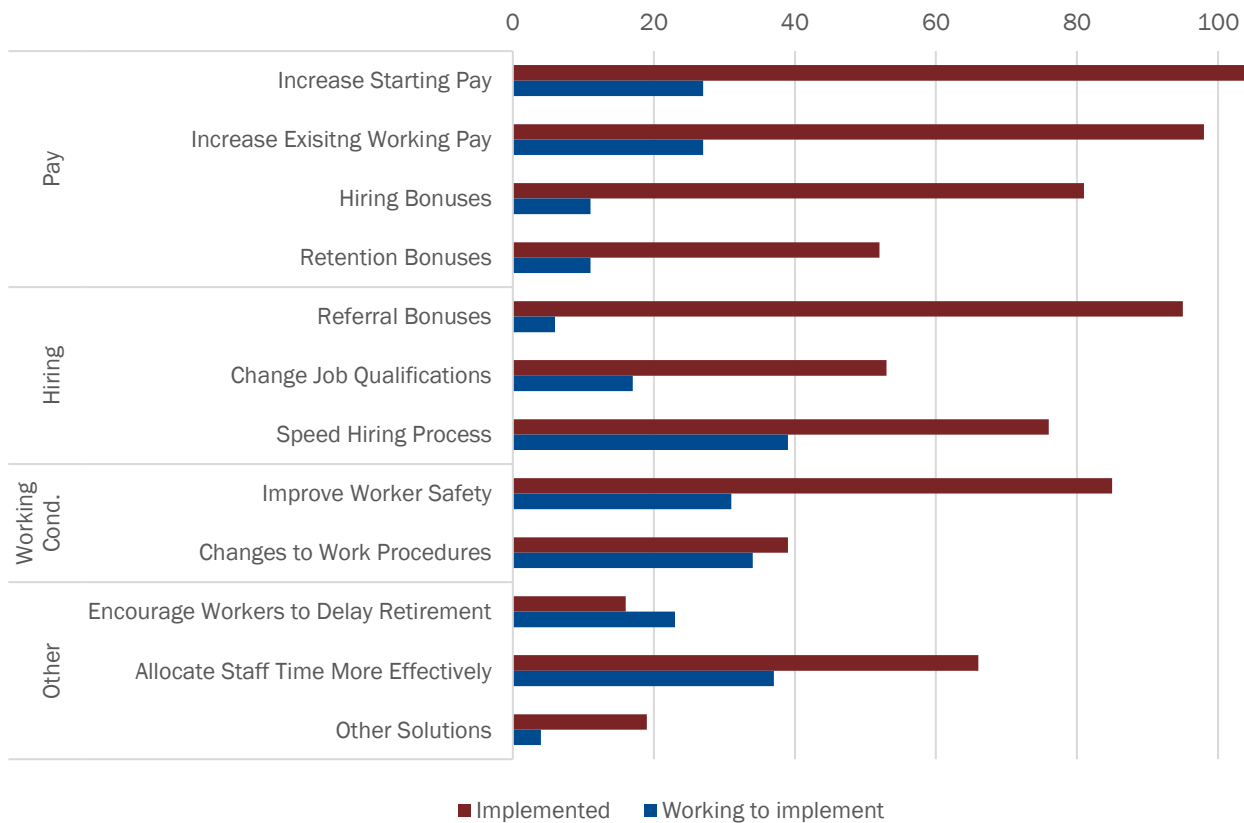
March 2022. <https://www.apta.com/wp-content/uploads/APTA-SURVEY-BRIEF-Workforce-Shortages-March-2022.pdf>

²⁹ National Transit Institute, “Transit Training Needs Assessment: Identifying Current and Future Training Needs of the Public Transportation Industry.” March 2021.

Benefits like tuition assistance or student loan payback programs may be more important to younger workers and can be used as a tool for longer retention.

Finally, having a clear and transparent policy about how and when pay increases occur can help employees know what to expect and when.³⁰ For example, pay increases have consistently been ranked one of the most important recruitment and retention practices in the trucking industry.³¹

FIGURE 9: SOLUTIONS TO WORKFORCE SHORTAGE BY IMPLEMENTATION STATUS (NUMBER OF 190 AGENCIES SURVEYED)



IMPROVING WORKER SCHEDULES

Although the survey did not explicitly ask respondents about changes to work schedules, we can infer that fewer agencies have attempted to address these concerns. Only 39 agencies said they had implemented changes to work procedures; 66 said they had made changes to allocate existing staff time more effectively (Figure 9). Even under the most generous interpretation, it seems that fewer agencies have adjusted scheduling procedures than have addressed compensation. However, those two categories had the greatest number of agencies reporting they are considering making changes, perhaps reflecting that changing work procedures is more difficult and takes longer than increasing compensation.

Nevertheless, there are strategies available to agencies who want to improve their rostering procedures. Some agencies have moved from a cafeteria approach (in which the most senior workers get their first pick of runs and days off) to a system in which workers choose between groups of runs. Agencies provide weekly rosters, grouping runs to ensure that no worker gets stuck with a schedule comprised entirely of undesirable runs and minimizing the difference between operators' workweeks. Agencies may consider offering differential pay to workers driving less desirable runs, or implementing rotating rosters groups, where different types of rosters are offered to different groups of drivers, for example, new drivers vs. veteran drivers. Collective bargaining agreements often constrain agencies' ability to change

³⁰ National Transit Institute, "Transit Training Needs Assessment: Identifying Current and Future Training Needs of the Public Transportation Industry." March 2021.

³¹ HireRight. (2018). 2018 Transportation Spotlight Report.

how shifts and routes are assigned. However, given the centrality of schedule to the workforce shortage, agencies should explore whether unions would be amenable to modifying scheduling policies. Springfield Mass Transit District, in Illinois, for example, is implementing a new CBA paratransit policy that has all operators work from Monday to Friday and rotate Saturdays, lowering overtime and allowing newer drivers more predictable work schedules.

CREATING A POSITIVE WORK ENVIRONMENT

Although the agency survey did not address the subject in detail, prior research has emphasized how positive workplace culture is important for both recruitment and retention and can help balance a lower starting salary.³² An agency with a genuine commitment to each employee and a “Hire to Retire” philosophy can help employees feel supported and encourage them to stay for a long time.³³

Creating a supportive working environment with growth opportunities is increasingly important as agencies attempt to hire a younger generation. Mentorship programs are important for retaining new hires, as mentorship provides a structure to make sure that employees are supported and integrated into the organization.³⁴ Providing opportunities for professional development is also increasingly important, as workers expect their duties to change as they gain additional skills.³⁵ Ensuring workers have adequate and attractive facilities is also important to worker morale.³⁶

A final component of creating a positive work environment involves agency staff and management interaction. Discrepancies between amenities for operators versus those available to staff may foster mistrust. In addition, a lack of representation of people of color in leadership and management roles can make it more difficult for agencies to understand and address their staff’s concerns.³⁷ Workplace culture will be an area of study in Phase 2.

DEMONSTRATING A CLEAR PATH TO PROMOTIONS OR RAISES

Even if agencies struggle to provide a competitive starting wage, it is helpful to provide a clear path to obtaining a promotion or raise. This can help applicants understand what their future compensation and career will look like at the agency.³⁸ Younger workers may be even more concerned with career growth than older generations were, making this a growing factor in recruitment and retention. Yet transit workers have fewer opportunities for advancement than in the past, as agencies have shifted to filling management and leadership roles with professionals without frontline experience.³⁹ Without the prospect of getting promoted in the future, transit workers are less likely to feel a stake in their agency and are more likely to look for employment opportunities elsewhere.

ENSURING WORKER SAFETY

Although agencies reported that harassment and assault was the least significant factor leading workers to quit, other reports indicate that safety is a major concern of operations workers and their representatives. An FTA report found a four-fold increase in assaults per unlinked passenger trip between 2009 and 2020.⁴⁰ In addition, representatives from labor organizations have sounded the alarm about the frequency of assaults against operators and their impact on their mental health.⁴¹ In the survey, 85 of 190 agencies reported they had made efforts to improve worker safety, a

³² Minnesota Department of Transportation, “Workforce Planning and Human Resource Development Strategies for Minnesota’s Public Transportation Agencies.” March 2021.

³³ National Transit Institute, “Transit Training Needs Assessment: Identifying Current and Future Training Needs of the Public Transportation Industry.” March 2021.

³⁴ Minnesota Department of Transportation, “Workforce Planning and Human Resource Development Strategies for Minnesota’s Public Transportation Agencies.” March 2021.

³⁵ National Transit Institute, “Transit Training Needs Assessment: Identifying Current and Future Training Needs of the Public Transportation Industry.” March 2021.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ TransitCenter, “Bus Operators in Crisis.” July 2022.

³⁸ Minnesota Department of Transportation, “Workforce Planning and Human Resource Development Strategies for Minnesota’s Public Transportation Agencies.” March 2021.

³⁹ Laurel Paget-Seekins, “Solving the operator ‘shortage’ by not running transit like a business.” Laurel in Transit. December 2021. <https://laurelintransit.com/2021/12/28/solving-the-operator-shortage-by-not-running-transit-like-a-business/>

⁴⁰ TransitCenter, “Bus Operators in Crisis.” July 2022.

⁴¹ Chris Teale, “Transit workers face growing rate of assaults: ‘There’s not much we can do.’” SmartCities. February 17, 2021. <https://www.smartcitiesdive.com/news/transit-workers-face-growing-rate-of-assaults-theres-not-much-we-can-do/594959/>

substantial number but fewer than those who have increased worker pay. Given the significance of safety to worker well-being and workplace morale, agencies should see what else they can do to protect their most-exposed personnel.

PROVIDING ONGOING TRAINING

A review of workforce development literature suggests that training is key for worker retention, but public transportation agencies provide, on average, less training time than private-sector agencies.⁴² As the employee's first experience with training in the organization, onboarding can be an important time to gauge how long they will stay in the position.⁴³ Throughout their careers, frontline workers need training in communicating with the public, engaging in conflict resolution, and communicating with persons with disabilities, especially those with mental health issues.⁴⁴ Vehicle operators may also need training in emergency response, as they could face any number of emergency situations. In addition, frontline workers may need training in verbal and written communication as well as leadership and supervision, which can also help them obtain future promotions.

Agencies also ought to provide training on new technologies operators are expected to use in both their current positions and along their career trajectories as they progress. Technology changes rapidly, and this includes technology that public transit agencies use and expect their employees to navigate daily.⁴⁵ Providing new equipment and the latest technologies can be a plus for employees,⁴⁶ but employees also need training on how to use new technologies as they are implemented.⁴⁷ New technologies include battery-electric buses as well as technology employees use to track time, report maintenance issues, communicate with supervisors, or track fare payments. Phase 2 will explore the training provided by agencies.

ADOPTING MORE EFFECTIVE HIRING PRACTICES

The literature suggests that transit agencies should consider modernizing and standardizing hiring practices to reach a range of applicants. This begins with the application itself. In a study of the trucking industry, 90 percent of applicants preferred to complete job applications using a phone, even though most trucking companies do not accept these types of applications.⁴⁸ For frontline workers who do not need to use a computer on the job, making the application process easy is a way to ensure interested candidates can apply.

In addition, hiring managers may need to develop new worker pipelines to attract younger workers. Hiring through internships and apprenticeships can help agencies attract younger workers who may not have much experience and train them for specific jobs.⁴⁹ For example, APTAU's "Transit Workforce Readiness Guide" is a resource for helping agencies recruit high school students.⁵⁰

About one-third of survey respondents have made efforts to speed the hiring process (**Figure 9**). On the survey, some agencies reported helping applicants with the CDL process, such as helping them to sign-up, prepare, and pay for the test. However, such support is not standard across the industry. This finding suggests improvements in hiring are likely relatively low-hanging fruit for APTA and its agencies to improve hiring practices.

⁴² National Transit Institute, "Transit Training Needs Assessment: Identifying Current and Future Training Needs of the Public Transportation Industry." March 2021.

⁴³ Minnesota Department of Transportation, "Workforce Planning and Human Resource Development Strategies for Minnesota's Public Transportation Agencies." March 2021.

⁴⁴ National Transit Institute, "Transit Training Needs Assessment: Identifying Current and Future Training Needs of the Public Transportation Industry." March 2021.

⁴⁵ Eno Center for Transportation, "Building the Public Sector Workforce Capacity to Build Transit Better." September 2021.

⁴⁶ Minnesota Department of Transportation, "Workforce Planning and Human Resource Development Strategies for Minnesota's Public Transportation Agencies." March 2021.

⁴⁷ National Transit Institute, "Transit Training Needs Assessment: Identifying Current and Future Training Needs of the Public Transportation Industry." March 2021.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

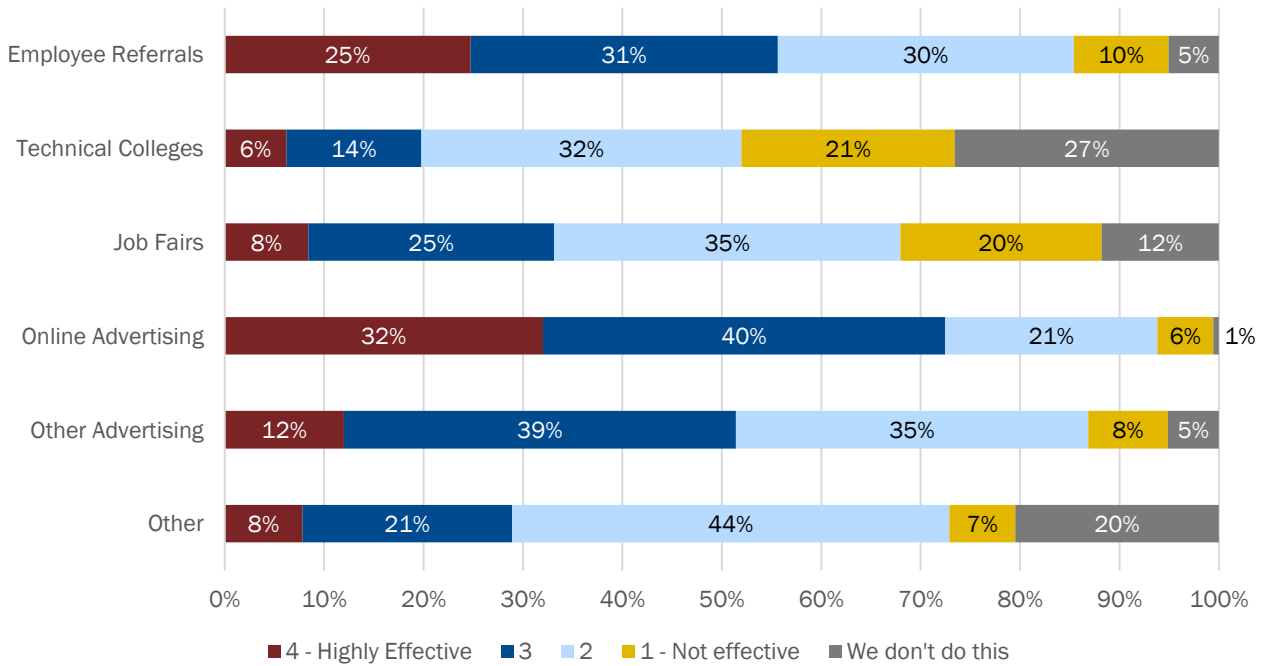
⁴⁹ Shared-Use Mobility Center, "Managing the Labor Shortage at Transit Agencies." November 2021.

⁵⁰ American Public Transportation Association, "Transit Workforce Readiness Guide." <https://www.apta.com/research-technical-resources/aptau/transit-workforce-readiness-guide/>

ADOPTING MORE EFFECTIVE RECRUITING PRACTICES

The literature review suggests that employee referrals and social media are among the two most effective means of recruiting transit workers, a finding that is supported by agencies' survey responses (**Figure 10**).

FIGURE 10: FREQUENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF OUTREACH STRATEGIES, AGENCY SURVEY



The agency survey found considerable variation between the reported effectiveness of recruitment strategies by agency size. For example, only 33 percent of agencies rated job fairs as 4 or 3 in effectiveness; among the top 50 agencies by ridership, that figure rises to 68 percent. Similarly, 40 percent of the top 50 agencies reported success from their outreach to technical colleges; among the full sample, only 20 percent reported success. Agency case studies in Phase 2 will explore whether larger agencies have developed techniques for getting more from outreach efforts like job fairs.

GAPS IN KNOWLEDGE

Together, the background research and agency survey assess the transit workforce shortage and evaluate possible responses. The research completed to date also reveals gaps in the existing literature about the shortage and suggests avenues for the project's next steps. This section identifies areas of uncertainty and key questions that the research team will explore through case studies and the survey of frontline workers in Phase 2.

About the Shortage

Do workers share agencies' understanding of the reasons workers are quitting?

The survey of frontline workers will add a crucial perspective to our understanding of the factors driving workers to quit jobs in the transit industry. For example, while the agency survey indicates that assault and harassment are not major factors leading workers to quit, the review of the literature suggests that workers may have a different view.

Why do rural agencies seem to be more insulated from the impact of the transit industry shortage than agencies in urbanized areas?

Rural agencies report having a more stable workforce than those in urbanized areas. They are less likely to report that a shortage of workers is resulting in service reductions, even when they report a significant number of position vacancies. The case studies will seek to understand why rural agencies seem to be weathering the worker shortage better than others.

About Agency Responses

What are the most important components in an effective transit recruitment program?

The background research and survey reveal that agencies engage in a wide range of recruitment activities with varying degrees of success. In Phase 2, we will ask agencies to describe their outreach programs in detail to evaluate the most effective strategies. For example, agencies in the top 50 by ridership reported more success with job fairs and technical colleges than average. In addition, agency case studies will explore if smaller agencies can learn from the experience of larger ones to make the most of those recruitment activities.

What have agencies tried to improve workforce morale, and what has been the most effective?

The review of best practices in transit and related industries emphasized the importance of workplace culture, but little research exists about which initiatives are the most successful, a question we will try to answer in the case studies.

What improvements to agencies' hiring processes have been most effective?

Agency hiring processes can be long and complex, discouraging potential applicants and using valuable agency resources. We will ask agencies about their efforts to streamline and improve the hiring process, including applicant screening, assistance with testing and licensing requirements, and upgrades to their electronic applications.

What are the most effective ways to improve worker schedules?

Scheduling is complex, and agencies' ability to improve worker schedules is constrained by the nature of transit service and labor agreements and CBAs. Nevertheless, recognizing how vital schedule is for attracting and retaining employees, many agencies have taken steps to improve worker schedules. The case studies in Phase 2 will investigate how agencies can work with unions to protect workers' interests while delivering effective service.

PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS

This interim report outlines the nature and severity of the transit workforce shortage and what agencies are doing to deal with it by combining background research and the results from the agency survey. The shortage is complex and multifaceted and is connected to changes in the broader culture and economy. In our research, we identified gaps in our knowledge that we will seek to fill in the agency case studies and frontline worker survey we will conduct in Phase 2. Nevertheless, initial findings point to steps agencies and their partners can take now to begin easing the workforce shortage in the short term and build a more resilient workforce development program in the long term. Following are initial recommendations for attracting new workers, increasing retention, and accelerating hiring and onboarding.

Recommended Actions for Agencies and Providers

Initial findings indicate several actions transit agencies can take to improve their current workforce situation. These actions will have short- and long-term benefits for workforce development and include:

1. **Increase compensation.** Where possible, agencies should increase pay and offer bonuses tied to retention and performance. Even when agencies cannot match pay offered by the private sector, they can make their offers more competitive by providing applicants with an estimated value of the employee benefits package so they can better compare employers. In addition, agencies should provide clear and transparent information to understand wage and position progressions and offer a comprehensive benefits package, including tuition assistance and student loan support.
2. **Improve worker schedules.** Given the predominance of schedule concerns to worker satisfaction, agencies should make every effort to improve worker schedules, especially for younger workers. Agencies should consider reducing split schedules and runs. They should employ alternative scheduling strategies (e.g., rostering vs. cafeteria-style schedules, rotating rosters, shift differentials). Where long-spread shifts are necessary, make them more palatable by assigning them to more desirable routes and providing consecutive days off. And when reducing service is necessary, agencies and providers should replace undesirable runs with services that require fewer operators.
3. **Create a positive work environment.** Worker morale is central to retention. Agencies should take steps to make workers feel valued and appreciated by creating employee recognition programs, holding celebrations, and offering workplace perks. Ensuring that agency management and leadership interact with and represent operations workers will ensure these are more meaningful.
4. **Demonstrate a clear path to promotions or raises.** Workers will stay with agencies longer if they feel they have started a career, not just a job. Therefore, agencies should make sure operations workers have an opportunity to grow into management and leadership roles. This objective can be accomplished through deliberate and publicized pathways for career growth alongside mentorship programs to help new workers better understand the trajectory of their careers within the agency.
5. **Ensure worker safety.** Protecting operators from assault and harassment is key to improving their well-being. Agencies should establish and enforce a robust rider code of conduct to deter the harassment and assault of operators and ban riders from the system if necessary. This code of conduct should be complemented by physical protection, like barriers between operators and riders, training in de-escalation tactics to reduce incidents of harassment and assault, and mental health services for workers who have experienced abuse.
6. **Providing ongoing training.** Providing workers with relevant training can help them be more effective at their jobs and help them feel they are growing professionally. Agencies should proactively train workers to use new technologies and offer them opportunities to gain skills in areas of interest, such as emergency response. In

conjunction with other recommendations presented here, agencies should ensure that they offer tuition support for workers seeking to advance in their careers at the transit agency.

7. **Increase hiring practice effectiveness.** A review of workforce development literature suggests agencies can take steps to improve the effectiveness of their hiring practices. Some approaches may include:
 - a. Hiring workers on a conditional basis so training can begin immediately while backgrounds and driving records are checked, and drug and alcohol test results are returned. Conditional employment could include deferrals pending rehabilitation or additional certification if resolvable issues arise during the probationary period.
 - b. While many agencies provide CDL training, respondents identified CDL training and certification as an issue. Agencies should identify the specific issues their unsuccessful applicants have faced and explore ways of supporting applicants with obtaining CDL licensure and endorsements, such as providing test preparation and paying for testing.
 - c. Make sure that an easy-to-use, mobile-friendly employment application is prominently displayed on the agency's website.
8. **Increase recruiting practice effectiveness.** Agencies should establish new workforce pipelines, such as internship programs and relationships with high schools. This may involve engaging with local high schools and workforce centers to create a relationship between the institution and agency and develop internship or apprenticeship programs that attract and employ 18–21-year-olds before they are eligible for applicable CDL licensing.

Recommended Actions for Partners

Transit agencies work with a constellation of partners that also have a stake in good transit service and, therefore, a role to play in ensuring a sufficient workforce.

Labor Representatives and Unions

Most, but not all, transit workers are represented by labor unions. We make the following recommendations to local and national labor organizations:

1. National labor organizations should rigorously evaluate the effects of common CBA provisions on recruitment, hiring, and retention. They should prioritize the examination of seniority-based practices and compare them to alternatives that would potentially increase younger member participation in both the workforce and union activities.
2. Local labor organizations should work with their agency representatives to negotiate responsibly for contracts that reflect conditions on the ground for all employees, including updating provisions that deter prospective employees from participating in the transit workforce. Provisions that deter prospective employees include those identified in the survey results, such as lengthy part-time requirements and seniority-based schedule picks.
3. Both national and local labor organizations and their members should consider how they can support workforce recruitment and retention through apprenticeship, peer mentoring, and leadership advancement programs.

Federal Partners

Considering the economic and environmental benefits of transit for the entire country, the Federal government has an interest in supporting healthy operations as well as a state of good repair. However, several Federal agencies share responsibility for managing public transportation finance and planning. Therefore, coordination is paramount, and so we make the following recommendations for Federal partners:

1. The requirements for obtaining a CDL (e.g., completing Entry-Level Driver Training, passing a skills test, passing a physical, passing a road test) are important prerequisites for operators of passenger vehicles, and APTA does not advocate the loosening of necessary safety requirements. However, agencies report losing applicants who find the CDL process too onerous and lengthy. Many agencies provide CDL training and pay for applicants to take the necessary tests, but others do not, in part because of the risk that an operators might decide to take another job, leaving agencies with nothing to show for the time and expense of training. The FMCSA should explore ways of expediting the CDL process while maintaining an equivalent or better level of safety.

2. The relevant administrations within the U.S. Department of Transportation should review and amend their drug-use rules as appropriate. In addition, these agencies should consider working with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to update 49 CFR 40 test procedures to reflect current science and social conditions.⁵¹
3. FTA should implement the recommendations of the GAO report on transit workforce development,⁵² in concert with other enacted Federal transportation workforce planning requirements. These recommendations include:
 - a. Collaborating with transit stakeholders to identify additional transit workforce data needed to assess potential future occupational shortages in the transit industry;
 - b. Developing a strategy that outlines how FTA will help address transit workforce needs beyond the work of individual Federal programs; and
 - c. Developing and documenting clearly defined performance goals and measures for its transit workforce development efforts, including for data identified in (a).
4. FTA regional offices should work to facilitate coordination for workforce development programming among state and local actors, including between transportation and non-transportation agencies.

State and Local Governmental Partners

State and local governmental bodies coexist with the transit operators: in many cases, these governments own and maintain infrastructure essential to transit service, specifically roads, bridges, and tunnels. Non-transportation governmental partners, including public schools for secondary and continuing education, play a related role in preparing potential employees for a career in the transit workforce. We recommend these organizations and governments do the following:

1. State DOTs and MPOs should consider how to integrate transit-specific workforce development programs into transportation planning projects. These programs should include those initiatives eligible for Federal funding and therefore subject to Federal workforce development provisions of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.
2. State educational organizations, including state departments of labor and education and public technical schools, should establish relationships with nearby transit and transportation agencies where these relationships do not already exist. Mutual awareness and open communication about needs and qualifications requirements will assist in developing training pipelines.

⁵¹ Scott Hadland and Sharon Levy, "Objective Testing – Urine and Other Drug Tests," *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America* 25(3) (2016): 549-565, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chc.2016.02.005>

⁵² U.S. Government Accountability Office. *Transit Workforce Development: Improved Strategic Planning Practices Could Enhance FTA Efforts*, GAO-19-290. March 14, 2019, <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-19-290>

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