

# Transit Workforce Study Report



*Photos courtesy of Cherriots*

December 2023

Final Report

Prepared for  
Oregon Cascades West Council of Governments  
1400 Queen Ave SE  
Albany, OR 97322

Prepared by  
Megan Tuleya  
The University of Oregon  
Institute for Policy Research & Engagement  
School of Planning, Public Policy, and Management



Institute for Policy  
Research and Engagement

# Acknowledgements

---

The Institute for Policy Research and Engagement wants to thank the following individuals for their assistance with this project:

## Oregon Cascades West Council of Government Staff

Nick Meltzer, OCWCOG

Corum Ketchum, OCWCOG, Corvallis Area MPO

Billy McGregor, OCWCOG, Albany Area MPO

Katie Trebes, OCWCOG

## Project Steering Committee

Tim Bates, Corvallis Transit

Don Clifford, Cherriots

Seth Hamlin, Cherriots

Jeramy Card, Lane Transit District (LTD)

Danielle Casey, FTA Region 10

Katie Trebes, OCWCOG

Billy McGregor, Albany Area MPO

Corum Ketchum, Corvallis Area MPO

Brad Dillingham, Corvallis Transit

Sonya Miller, MTR Western

## Institute for Policy Research and Engagement Research Team

Josh Bruce, Associate Director of Applied Research

Amanda Ferguson, Policy and Planning Lead

### Student Researchers:

Megan Tuleya, Research Associate

## About the Institute for Policy Research and Engagement



**School of Planning, Public  
Policy and Management  
Institute for Policy  
Research and Engagement**

The Institute for Policy Research & Engagement (IPRE) is a research center affiliated with the School of Planning, Public Policy, and Management at the University of Oregon. It is an interdisciplinary organization that assists Oregon communities by providing planning and technical assistance to help solve local issues and improve the quality of life for Oregon residents. The role of IPRE is to link the skills, expertise, and innovation of higher education with the transportation, economic development, and environmental needs of communities and regions in the State of Oregon, thereby providing service to Oregon and learning opportunities to the students involved.

# Table of Contents

---

<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Context: Causes of the Shortage</b>	<b>2</b>
National Trends	2
Regional Trends	3
<b>Methods</b>	<b>4</b>
Previous Research .....	4
Interviews .....	5
Focus Groups .....	5
Surveys .....	5
<b>Findings</b>	<b>6</b>
Agencies and Operators Views of the Shortage	6
Challenges Transit Operators Face	7
<b>Analysis</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>15</b>
General Recommendations	15
Recruitment.....	16
Hiring.....	18
Training.....	19
Retention.....	19
Website & Online Presence Recommendations	20
Regional Recommendations	21
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Appendix A:                 References and Resources</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Appendix B:                 Online Presence Recommendation Examples</b>	<b>30</b>

# Executive Summary

---

## Purpose of the Study

Transit systems nationwide have struggled to maintain service during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, transit operator shortages among other issues within the transit workforce existed long before the pandemic. To address the root causes of these shortages, changes must be made to improve the health and viability of the nation's transit workforce.

Shortages of transit operators are a national issue. According to the American Public Transportation Association (APTA), “ninety-six percent of agencies surveyed [for a 2022 survey] reported experiencing a workforce shortage, 84 percent of which said the shortage is affecting their ability to provide service.”<sup>1</sup> This shortage began to impact transit systems years before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, as the dual impacts of an aging workforce and fierce competition for staff caused agencies to struggle to maintain staffing levels. Locally, both the Albany Transit System (ATS) and the Corvallis Transit System (CTS) have suffered from a lack of bus drivers – resulting in service reductions and delays in planned transit expansions.

In December of 2022, the Oregon Cascades West Council of Governments (OCWCOG) reached out to the Institute for Policy Research and Engagement (IPRE) to request assistance in completing a Transit Workforce Study. **The stated purpose of the OCWCOG Transit Workforce Study is to investigate regional barriers to maintaining adequate driver numbers (e.g., job requirements, required training, pay scale, high housing costs) and recommend strategies to help reduce negative impacts on transit service associated with lack of drivers.** The study, conducted in partnership with the Albany Area MPO (AAMPO) and Corvallis Area MPO (CAMPO), includes an examination of workforce shortages impacting transit agencies, case studies of other transportation agencies, and surveys and other outreach to current bus drivers and transit agencies. As national trends suggest, the results of this study apply to transit agencies outside of this region as well.

The Cascades West Transit Workforce Study has investigated the following questions:

**Causes:** What are the primary reasons local transit organizations in the AAMPO and CAMPO struggle to find workers?

**Strategies:** What strategies can AAMPO and CAMPO employ to attract workers for transit service positions?

---

<sup>1</sup> Foursquare ITP. (2023a). Transit Workforce Shortage Synthesis Report. American Public Transportation Association. <https://www.apta.com/wp-content/uploads/APTA-Workforce-Shortage-Synthesis-Report-03.2023.pdf>

This document provides solutions focused on this region and its providers to address current and future worker recruitment and retention needs.

# Context: Causes of the Shortage

---

## National Trends

The US is facing a long-predicted, nationwide shortage of transit operators. This shortage was amplified by COVID-19 but is caused by structural issues that existed years before the pandemic. A national-level report conducted in 2022 by the APTA provided 5 main findings.<sup>2</sup> (See Appendix A for more information.) They are as follows:

1. **The transit workforce shortage is widespread and severe.**
2. **The transit workforce is aging and will experience a high retirement rate for the foreseeable future.**
3. **Transit agencies face intense competition for workers.**
4. **Work schedules, compensation, and agency responsiveness are leading reasons why workers quit and are key to retaining and attracting workers.**
5. **A complex regulatory framework is hampering agencies' ability to fill vacancies.**

These larger trends within transit agencies across the country reveal an urgent issue, likely caused by a variety of factors. National trends reveal an aging workforce with agencies struggling to hire as fast as current employees retire. The transportation sector's growth has heightened the competition for drivers and skilled workers. Despite recent employment growth in related industries, a persistent shortage exists due to increased demand for transportation services. Transit agencies face intense competition for workers, with a 35% rejection rate for job offers—more than double the average across industries. Economic challenges and the pandemic worsened the issue, causing a decline in public transportation employment. At the same time, the number of riders is continually growing, creating a pressing need for transit workers.

Inadequate information hampers agencies' ability to effectively address the workforce shortage. However, agencies perceive that work schedules, compensation, increasing harassment of operators, long hiring and training processes, and agency responsiveness are key factors in the struggle to hire and retain employees.

---

<sup>2</sup> Transit Workforce Shortage Synthesis Report. American Public Transportation Association.

## Regional Trends

Many of the national struggles with retaining a robust transit workforce are reflected within Oregon. Locally, both the Albany Transit System (ATS) and the Corvallis Transit System (CTS) have suffered from a lack of bus drivers – resulting in service reductions and delays in planned transit expansions. Some agencies, like Lane Transit District (LTD) and Benton Area Transit, have been able to maintain services but have been unable to expand due to a lack of drivers. LTD secured funding to expand but lacked drivers to operate expanded service, highlighting the need to combat workforce shortages.

Many agencies increased operator wages in recent years, hoping to draw in more applicants. Some tried creative approaches to make it as easy as possible to apply and interview. Benton Area Transit increased salaries 19% since 2019, citing wages as the “most important aspect” of luring people to the job. The hurdle that remains for Benton Area Transit (and other agencies) is getting people to interview. Cherriots, facing a shortage during the pandemic, have now reached 100% pre-pandemic levels of service and staffing. They devoted over a full year to a dedicated hiring program, removing all barriers during the hiring process with the intent of getting people to the interview stage.

Transit agencies in Oregon have taken several approaches to improve the health of their transit workforce. Recognizing that no investigation regarding the transit workforce has been conducted in Oregon, there arises a critical need for a regional transit workforce study. Localized issues are best addressed by localized solutions. These issues include obtaining commercial driver's licenses (CDL), CDL training locations, marijuana testing requirements, high houseless population, and high housing costs.

This study took a multimethod approach to gain an understanding of the challenges that transit agencies and operators face, and how to address shortages and improve hiring and training processes within the mid-Willamette Valley area. First, a review of national research on the issue was completed. Second, to understand where Oregon’s Willamette Valley fits within the national shortages, interviews with local agencies and key players, a focus group with transit operators, and surveys, one for agencies and another for operators, were conducted.

## Previous Research

### National Research

The American Public Transportation Association (APTA) conducted an in-depth [Transit Workforce Shortage Study](#) (2023)<sup>3</sup>. This study emphasized the widespread and severe nature of the workforce shortage, revealing factors like the aging transit workforce, intense competition for workers, and challenges related to work schedules, compensation, and regulatory frameworks. APTA included with their findings a comprehensive [Transit Workforce Toolkit](#)<sup>4</sup> and a series of [Mini-Guides](#)<sup>5</sup>, aiming to provide practical guidance to agencies for enhancing workforce management processes and outcomes.

TransitCenter, a nonprofit dedicated to shaping transit policy, released a report titled "[Bus Operators in Crisis](#)"<sup>6</sup> in 2022, highlighting the challenges faced by essential transit workers. The TransitCenter provides recommendations to address barriers, focusing on the need for job quality to be taken seriously by transit agencies and the transit industry. **“Operators are the backbone of the transit industry—they deserve better compensation, paths for advancement, and the opportunity to influence their working conditions.”**<sup>7</sup> Agencies must also speed up hiring processes, introduce more flexibility into the job, improve operator facilities and amenities, and implement additional health and safety measures—both to attract new entrants and retain existing employees.

[The Transit Workforce Center](#)<sup>8</sup>, established by the Federal Transit Administration, plays a pivotal role in providing technical assistance, strategic planning, collaborative partnerships, and resources. Its mission is to help urban, suburban, tribal, and rural public transportation entities recruit, hire, train, and retain the diverse workforce needed now and in the future. Their

---

<sup>3</sup> Transit Workforce Shortage Synthesis Report. American Public Transportation Association.

<sup>4</sup> Foursquare ITP. (2023b). Transit Workforce Shortage Toolkit. American Public Transportation Association. <https://www.apta.com/wp-content/uploads/APTA-Workforce-Shortage-Toolkit-Final-03.2023.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> American Public Transit Association. (n.d.). APTA Workforce Mini-Guides. APTAU Learning. <https://learning.aptagateway.com/apta-workforce-mini-guides>

<sup>6</sup> Van Eyken, C. (2022, July). Bus Operators in Crisis. TransitCenter. <https://transitcenter.org/publication/bus-operators-in-crisis/>

<sup>7</sup> APTA Workforce Mini-Guides

<sup>8</sup> Transit Workforce Center. <https://www.transitworkforce.org/>

expansive resources include toolkits, research, transition resources, peer networks, and webinar series.

Additionally, the [International Transportation Learning Center's Practitioner's Guide \(2023\)](#)<sup>9</sup> focuses on improving bus operator workforce management, addressing critical elements such as recruitment, compensation, hiring, training, retention, and safety. The Practitioner's Guide focuses on many of the same themes as found in this report.

Collectively, these diverse research efforts contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the transit workforce shortage, offering insights, tools, and strategies to propel the industry toward effective solutions.

## Interviews

Faculty from the Institute of Policy Research and Engagement (IPRE) conducted each interview virtually between June and August 2023. A total of seven interviews were conducted with local transit agencies in Oregon: Benton Area Transit, the City of Corvallis, Corvallis Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (CAMPO), Cherriots (Salem), Lane Transit District (LTD), Albany Corvallis Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (AAMPO), and MTR Western. These agencies were selected by OCWCOG. Questions centered around hiring, training, and retention.

## Focus Groups

Two focus groups were conducted by IPRE faculty. The first focus group was conducted online and involved transit operators working in Albany, OR. The second focus group, also in Albany, was conducted in person with a higher turnout rate. Questions about satisfaction with the job, the hiring and training processes, and the challenges of the job were asked. Themes and repeated ideas were collected.

## Surveys

Both surveys, one intended for transit operators and the other for transit agencies, were distributed by OWGCOG. Each short survey asked a mix of multiple-choice and open-ended questions, created in Qualtrics by IPRE faculty. Both surveys ran from August to November.

The operator survey focused on job satisfaction, inquiring about compensation, benefits, scheduling, and training. Challenges of the job and questions about the shortage were also asked. A total sample of one was surveyed.

The agency survey assessed if the agency was facing a shortage and the impacts of the shortage or service. Quantitative information about retention, hiring, and training was collected. A total sample of three were surveyed.

Although the surveys had low engagement and are not statistically significant samples, the responses were still illustrative of current opinions related to local transit employment. Findings

---

<sup>9</sup> National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2023. *Bus Operator Workforce Management: Practitioner's Guide*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/26842>.

were consistent with that of interview and focus group findings, strengthening the validity of these findings. The open response questions included in the survey in particular reflected the findings from the other forms of engagement.

# Findings

---

## Agencies and Operators Views of the Shortage

### State of the Shortage

A shortage is defined as an inability to fill vacancies and/or an inability to expand the workforce. In 2022, the American Public Transportation Survey found from a survey of 190 transit agencies that 96 percent of agencies reported experiencing a workforce shortage with 84 percent of which reporting the shortage affecting their ability to provide service.<sup>10</sup> From interviewees and our small survey sample, we found that the current state of the transit shortage is less severe in Oregon compared to the national statistics. Some local transit agencies did report previously having a shortage (especially during COVID-19) or currently having a small shortage. The agencies that are currently facing shortages are more likely to be experiencing localized factors (detailed below) that are impacting their employment success than a statewide shortage trend.

### Shortage Severity Across Oregon

There is some evidence that transit agencies in Oregon are facing a transit operator shortage. Across Oregon, the severity of the shortage varies from no shortage experienced to facing somewhat of a shortage. Two main findings exist.

*“On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the most difficult, the difficulty of finding drivers is a 6 to 7.”*

First, from the data that was collected, most agencies are not currently facing a severe shortage but may have either in the past or are at risk in the future. There is evidence that some agencies formerly faced a shortage but do not report currently facing a shortage. Others state that a shortage is somewhat affecting service or the ability to expand operations. Several agencies did

---

**While daily transit operations may not be affected, the inability to expand service, allow for more vacation or scheduling flexibility, or continue operations if an operator is out for an extended period are all signals of a shortage.**

---

<sup>10</sup> Transit Workforce Shortage Synthesis Report. American Public Transportation.

not explicitly state that they were facing a shortage but did state that they are or have been experiencing issues hiring or retaining workers.

Second, low levels of public engagement, despite extensive outreach efforts, may signify low concern from agencies about this issue. In other words, a lack of engagement may signify low motivation to combat transit operator shortages simply because they are not currently facing an operator shortage severe enough. On the contrary, agencies may not quantify their struggles as a shortage but still be at risk of a shortage.

## Challenges Transit Operators Face

### Recruitment

#### Perceptions of the Job

*The perception of transit jobs contributes to a lack of qualified and motivated candidates.* Driving buses may be perceived in a negative or difficult light. Drivers are seen to be underappreciated, harassed, not treated with respect, work irregular hours, and can lack stability. Combining the stresses of driving and customer service presents unique challenges, especially compared to other driving professions such as trucking which are seen as more lucrative. Increased media coverage on events such as the harassment of bus operators leading up to and during the COVID-19 pandemic contributes to these negative perceptions. Those interested in transportation jobs may opt for short or long-haul trucking, with more competitive pay, instead of local transit, so that they do not have to deal with the public on a daily basis. The key challenge here is how agencies can present being a transit operator as a more desirable career, providing enough motivation to not only get prospective candidates through the door but behind the wheel.

#### Struggles Attracting Young Operators

Closely tied to perceptions of the job, transit agencies struggle to attract younger applicants. This is not a locally unique phenomenon. *According to APTA, the transit workforce has a higher-than-average median age compared to other industry workforces in the United States, with forty-three percent of transit workers over 55, nearly double the percentage of the broader transportation sector.* In Oregon, the participants of the study skewed older, demonstrating this trend locally. In Albany, most drivers had years of experience driving, with an average age over 50, a few drivers nearing 70, and the youngest at 44 years old. Agencies are concerned about their aging workforce. As individuals start to retire, there are fewer younger operators to fill their empty positions. Retirements also leave agencies vulnerable to losing valuable transitional information from their operators.

#### Lack of Effective Advertising of Job Openings

*Reviewing transit agency websites and job postings, inconsistency between advertising was apparent.* Information such as location of posting, accessibility of website, descriptions of positions, and where to find further information varied wildly. More successful agencies had “We’re Hiring!” information visible on the front page of their website, detailed stories or videos of transit operators working for their agency highlighted on their page, and an easy-to-navigate

website. Successful agencies also posted job openings in multiple places (physical and online) and had accessible contact information and communication. Other agencies may not have job openings posted in places besides their website, if on their website at all. One operator reported that they attempted to apply at one agency for three years before ever hearing back. Some agencies lack the staffing and technological abilities to be able to advertise as effectively as others. It is also important to note that as many agencies have a long application form and process, some potential applicants may begin the application process and not finish it. Only one agency offered the ability to complete an application online.

### **Marijuana Testing Requirements**

*Although the possession of and medical and recreational marijuana use is legal in the state of Oregon, a drug test positive for marijuana is not acceptable for jobs that require CDLs. This conflict in state and federal regulation may cause some to be deterred from applying for jobs, such as transit operators, which require CDLs. The full impact of this issue on the applicant pool is unknown but will remain a concern for transit agencies unless the Federal Transportation Agency (FTA) changes its regulations.*

Recent news reports evidence that the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) sent a letter recommending that the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) reclassify cannabis from Schedule I of the Controlled Substances Act (CSA) to Schedule III.<sup>11</sup> Federally, the US Department of Transportation has approved a new rule to authorize commercially licensed drivers to have the option to undergo oral fluid testing as a urinalysis alternative. This decision will allow employers to have the choice to provide less intrusive testing, lower frequencies of false positives, and combat cheating on urine drug tests. As the oral fluid test (commonly referred to as a “spit test”) only looks for 3 days of usage (rather than 30 days with urinalysis), applicants could apply for a transit job (where they would be subject to a drug test) without waiting 30 days for their system to clear out after using. It could also mean that operators could use it infrequently on weekends. However, the US Department of Health and Human Services has yet to approve any laboratories to perform saliva screening.<sup>12</sup>

## **Hiring**

Challenges in hiring and retention are common. Agencies are struggling to find new candidates and hire them in a timely manner. The rate of new hires cannot keep up with the rate of retirements and resignations.

### **Long Hiring Process**

A long hiring process, including tedious applications, assessments, and interviews, creates a barrier for potential candidates. Agencies reported that even highly motivated candidates may be deterred by these hurdles and the sheer length of the application and hiring process. *Long*

---

<sup>11</sup> Malyshev, A., & Ganley, S. (2023, September 12). What Rescheduling to Schedule III Would Mean for the Cannabis Industry. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/legal/litigation/what-rescheduling-schedule-iii-would-mean-cannabis-industry-2023-09-12/>

<sup>12</sup> US Transportation Dept Finalizes Rule Authorizing Oral Fluid Drug Testing. (2023, May 4). NORML. <https://norml.org/news/2023/05/04/federal-transportation-department-finalizes-rule-authorizing-oral-fluid-drug-testing/#:~:text=The%20forthcoming%20rule%20will%20set>

hiring times were reported as the top reason agencies lose candidates. Operators reported the hiring process taking up to 6 months, “terrible”, and “in limbo the whole time”.

### **Commercial Driver's Licenses (CDL) Requirements**

*The issue of obtaining and paying for Commercial Driver's Licenses (CDL) came up several times.* In the mid-Willamette Valley, CDL licenses must be either obtained (at the operator’s expense) prior to application for a job or obtained at the beginning of training/after hire through in-house training at a transit agency. The smaller agencies in the mid-Willamette Valley do not provide CDL training nor cover the costs of this training. These agencies require applicants to come already having a CDL. CDL training and licensure is costly, with a typical training course costing the individual an average of \$3,824.<sup>13</sup> Oregon has the second most expensive CDL licensure fees in any state, costing \$135 for just the DMV license itself, not including training costs or the cost of the additional test fees.

Many operators transition to transit from other CDL-required jobs such as trucking or driving school buses. Some of these previous careers, such as school bus driving, will pay for employee CDL training costs at one of the local driving schools, in return for a commitment to drive for their agency for a designated length of time. Bus driving requires two additional certifications that truck driving does not, leaving hopeful transit employees to seek training or additional certifications on their own if they choose to transition to transit.

Several transit agencies require in-house CDL training for everyone, even those who come in with a CDL. This training is repetitive for some and adds an additional hoop to jump through before the training process can begin. When CDL training is fully done in-house, the agency must hire training staff, gather a large enough pool of trainees to justify the expense, and provide or secure training space, among other details. There are some concerns that after investing this money in new employees, the newly trained staff may “jump ship” and leave the agency for another.

### **Lack of Communication**

The investigation revealed that poor communication during the hiring process served as a significant deterrent for potential applicants. *Insufficient communication created barriers and negatively impacted the recruitment experience, potentially dissuading qualified individuals from continuing with the hiring process and pursuing transit positions.* Transit operators that reported good communication with their agency during their hiring process appreciated things like regular updates, ability to ask questions, and a reliable contact to reach out to.

## **Training**

Drivers need to complete mandatory training before hitting the road. However, after a long hiring process, training processes can be inconsistent and rushed to address the need to get drivers on the road.

---

<sup>13</sup> CDL Training in Oregon. All Trucking. <https://www.alltrucking.com/cdl-training/oregon>

## Rushed Training

Due to a shortage of operators, the current approach is to quickly train individuals on local routes and get them driving. Training is rushed after long hiring and waiting periods. Some agencies may compromise on the thoroughness of training due to the challenge of hiring and training new drivers at a pace that matches departures or retirements. Training durations vary but usually fall between 4 to 8 weeks, highlighting the need for an expedited process to address the ongoing workforce shortage.

## Training with Current Staff

The ability to train alongside current staff was underlined by operators as valuable training experience. *The longer drivers were able to participate in “ride-alongs”, the more confident they felt about getting on the road, dealing with passengers, and managing different situations.* Underlining how each day out on the routes can be different, this experience was valuable to maximize learning and critical in passing down valuable knowledge. Moreover, the limited ability to conduct ride-alongs, and the lack of formal mentoring and apprenticeship programs, hinders the transfer of knowledge and experience within the workforce.

## Lack of Specified Training: Conflict Resolution & Customer Service

The study identified a notable absence of conflict resolution or de-escalation training, as well as customer service training, for transit operators. The nature of public transportation can sometimes lead to challenging situations, requiring operators to handle conflicts with passengers calmly and effectively. Simultaneously, customer service training is necessary to equip operators with the skills needed to provide courteous and helpful assistance, fostering an environment of respect within the transit system.

### Agency Highlight: Cherriots

As a part of their hiring process overhaul, Cherriots focuses on **hiring people with customer service skills first**, then training them to drive, rather than the standard – gain driving experience and then customer service training. This allowed them to recruit from a wider pool of applicants and prioritize customer service skills as “anyone can be taught to drive but not everyone has natural customer service skills.”

## Retention

Retention of current staff poses a challenge. A variety of reasons contribute to transit agencies struggling to retain their current employees. *These include undesirable schedules, especially for those that lack levels of seniority, perception of bus drivers, customer interactions (especially during and after COVID-19), rising costs of living, limited opportunities for advancement, and growing numbers of workers reaching retirement age.*

## Advancement Opportunities

Local agencies reported that opportunities for advancement are limited by the nature of the job. With very limited turnover, open advancement positions are immediately filled. Younger employees typically value careers with advancement opportunities.

## **Agency type**

*Some counties or cities operate their own transit system while others contract out.* This creates two different types of operator jobs -- one group are all city employees, and the other are employees of the contractor. Agencies stated that employees seem to prefer the stability and benefits of the “city jobs” over those that use contractors. Employment with cities that contract out their transit services is seen as less stable, with contracts only valid for 2-3 years at a time. Corvallis contracts out their transit services while Albany maintains their own system, leading to workers finding Albany more desirable to work for. The proximity of the two cities causes Corvallis to lose workers to Albany despite Corvallis offering a higher per-hour pay.

## **Management**

Drivers reported how management styles affected their job satisfaction and likelihood of staying at an agency. Micromanagement is a negative management style that involves excessive control and supervision of employees' work and decisions. Micromanaging leadership creates stress for drivers, making them more likely to leave for another agency where drivers are trusted to make decisions and learn from their mistakes. *Those who reported positive management experiences enjoyed the trust that management put in the drivers, creating an open-door environment without judgment.* This management style creates a more positive work environment with less pressure and more learning opportunities.

## **Comparatively Low Wages**

The comparatively low wages of transit drivers emerged as a deterrent to retaining transit workers. On average, transit drivers earn \$17.91/hour with an annual salary of \$37,247. Truck drivers earn \$29/hour adding up to an annual salary of \$60,326.<sup>14</sup> *The disparity in pay, especially when compared to other driving occupations such as long or short-haul trucking, adds to the challenge of retaining skilled transit professionals.* However, it is noteworthy that some agencies offer robust benefits, serving as a compensatory measure for the lower wages. One driver reported that they took a \$2.50/hour pay cut from their previous school bus driving job for the benefits that the transit agency provided.

## **Challenging & Unruly Riders**

An increasing number of unruly passengers (noted especially after the COVID-19 pandemic) creates challenges for transit operators on the everyday job. Passengers can be violent and cause disturbances which can create a negative experience for other passengers as well as the driver (who may need to intervene in situations). Increased numbers of people experiencing homelessness in Oregon as well as rising drug use add to this issue. Drivers reported anxiety around knowing when and how to best deal with a situation on board.

## **Lack of Appreciation or Recognition**

Transit operators understand that driving buses is not seen as a glamorous job. However, they provide a critical service for the community and deserve the respect of riders, the community, and larger city/town (especially if they are city or county employees). Some transit operators do

---

<sup>14</sup> Transit Bus Driver vs. Truck Driver: What's the Difference Between Them? (2023, September 25). Zipia. <https://www.zipia.com/transit-bus-driver-jobs/transit-bus-driver-vs-truck-driver-differences/>

not feel acknowledged for their hard work and critical service to the community. Others do not feel heard (or asked) about their opinions on issues related to planning of transit.

## Regional Conditions

### High Profile Assaults on Transit Workers

In recent years, several high-profile assaults on transit workers have been seen in the media. The media coverage impacts public perception about the safety of transit and transit jobs. In November 2022, a man was assaulted on an LTD bus and died of his injuries.<sup>15</sup> Just days before, during public comment at the board meeting, a member of the Southeast Neighbors Transportation Committee spoke up about the dangers on board both drivers and riders face. They read quotes of local operators detailing the limits of driver's ability to deal with dangerous situations, such as, "there's a lot of situations where we don't have any tools... we have no ability to deal with these situations...it's dangerous to everyone."<sup>16</sup>

In Oregon, legislation is being pursued to enhance penalties for assaults on transit workers, showcasing a localized effort to protect the transit workforce. Under current Oregon law, it is a felony to assault a transit worker while the vehicle is moving. But if the driver stops, the penalty drops to a misdemeanor. A bill promulgated by Amalgamated Transit Union Local 757 (SB 787: Increase penalties for assault of on-duty transit workers) would close the loophole and make any assault that happens while a worker is on-duty a felony. The bill passed the Senate 27-2 March 9, 2023, and was referred to the House Judiciary Committee.

### Marijuana Testing Requirements

Although the possession of and medical and recreational marijuana use is legal in the state of Oregon, a drug test positive for marijuana is not acceptable for jobs that require CDLs. This conflict in state and federal regulation may cause some to be deterred from applying for jobs, such as transit operation, which require CDLs. Federal regulations regarding marijuana testing methods are changing to be more accommodating but no labs which process different methods have been approved by the US Department of Health and Human Services. The full impact of this issue on the applicant pool is unknown but will remain a concern for transit agencies.

### Rising Numbers of People Experiencing Houselessness

Housing insecurity is a crisis in Oregon. The number of people experiencing houselessness has been on the rise in Oregon. This can affect transit operations with houseless people frequenting public transportation. Some of this population may be unruly passengers, intoxicated on board, or using transit as a place of shelter rather than transportation.. This has particularly been an issue with agencies that removed bus fees, allowing all to ride the bus for no cost. It is important to note with this sensitive topic that not all individuals experiencing houselessness are using

---

<sup>15</sup> Bernstien, M. (2023, September 12). Family of Man Fatally Beaten on Eugene Bus Files Wrongful Death Suit Against Lane Transit. The Oregonian. <https://www.oregonlive.com/news/2023/09/family-of-man-fatally-beaten-on-eugene-bus-files-wrongful-death-suit-against-lane-transit.html>

<sup>16</sup> Days Before Deadly Assault, LTD was Told of Bus Operator Concerns. (2022, November 21). Whole Community News. <https://wholecommunity.news/2022/11/21/days-before-deadly-assault-ltd-was-told-of-bus-operator-concerns/>

drugs, taking advantage of transit services, or causing disturbances. Mental health needs among this population can also be significant.

### **Strength of Trucking Industry Along I-5**

Interstate 5 runs through Oregon, promoting a strong short and long-haul trucking industry in Oregon. The trucking industry interacts with the transit industry in Oregon in a number of ways. First, with more trucking jobs available in Oregon, those interested in driving may choose trucking over public transit for convenience or the higher compensation. This lowers the number of available drivers for transit in the state. Second, the strong presence of trucking brings a high number of former truckers into the transit sector (or vice versa). This is notable because of the potential transition from the largely solitary day to day of trucking to the customer service aspect of transit operating. Former truckers may need additional customer service training. However, they also may come to transit with a CDL (which eliminates the need for transit agencies to provide or pay for the CDL training).

### **Dispersed Population**

Oregon hosts a diverse population dispersion across the state. Outside of metro areas (largely clustered along the I-5 corridor), small and dispersed populations are abundant. These populations are more difficult to serve with a transit system, with infrequent ridership or areas inaccessible by transit.

## Local Issues of Concern

Local issues of concern in Oregon include:

- Perceptions of danger for drivers.
- Concerns that marijuana testing requirements may be deterring younger drivers, especially in a state where recreational marijuana is legal.
- Houseless population rising in Oregon.
- Locations for CDL training are sparse across the state and inconvenient.
- Competition with other trucking jobs.

### **Marijuana Testing Requirements**

While recreational marijuana is legal in the state of Oregon, it remains illegal at the federal level, prohibiting those with CDLs from use to ensure job safety. Agencies are concerned that these requirements may be deterring younger potential applicants. Please see the section above for more in-depth information.

### **Houselessness in Oregon**

Housing insecurity is a crisis in Oregon. The number of people experiencing houselessness has been on the rise in Oregon. This can affect transit operations with houseless people frequenting public transportation. Some of this population may be unruly passengers, intoxicated on board, or using transit as a place of shelter rather than transportation. It is important to note with this sensitive topic that not all individuals experiencing houselessness are using drugs, taking advantage of transit services, or causing disturbances. Mental health needs among this population can also be significant.

### **CDL Training Locations**

CDL training locations in Oregon are sparse and may be difficult for all prospective CDL earners to access. Obtaining a CDL itself is a significant financial cost and barriers such as the location of a driving academy could further deter prospective drivers. Across Oregon, there are under 15 driving schools through which a CDL can be earned. All but one of these is along the Interstate 5 corridor, conveniently along a major trucking route but not accessible for individuals across the state looking to get their CDL.

### **Competition**

Transit agencies face competition with other driving industries such as short or long-haul truck driving. A handful of drivers who had participated in the study focus group previously were school bus drivers. They told us that they were able to get their CDL through their school bus driving agency which paid the full cost of training. Other driving jobs may have higher pay and may not require as much face-to-face interaction with the public as required with transit jobs. Nearby agencies may also experience some competition for drivers between each other.

# Recommendations

The following recommendations aim to make finding, hiring, training, and keeping transit workers more streamlined and of higher quality. They provide practical steps for a more effective and well-rounded approach to managing the transit workforce. These recommendations can help build a healthier, more resilient transit workforce. Not all recommendations are applicable to all agencies and should be adopted. For those that do apply, the recommendations can be adapted to best fit each agency's unique needs and resources.

## General Recommendations

### Understand each agency's unique issues.

Each transit agency in the mid-Willamette Valley has unique issues and corresponding needs. Complete the [APTA Toolkit](#) to assess your agency's issues and follow specific recommendations. This can be a great starting point to self-assess challenges and find potential solutions. See an example from the toolkit below.

TABLE 1: RECRUITMENT-HIRING-RETENTION PROCESS WORKSHEET FOR AGENCIES

Recruiting		Agency Answer	Notes (potential issues, barriers within process)
PROCESS COMPONENTS	<b>Advertising:</b> How do potential applicants hear about a job? List all of the places your agency advertises job postings. These can include print, online, and in-person advertising activities.		
	<b>Partnerships and Referrals:</b> Is there anyone or any organization who helps identify potential applicants? List any partnerships your agency uses to recruit applicants.		
	<b>Application:</b> What does the employment application look like? How do potential employees submit applications? Describe the length, format, and content of an employment application.		
	<b>Requirements:</b> What are the minimum requirements for operation workers? How are they explained to applicants? List the requirements for employment and how or when they are communicated to applicants.		
METRICS	How many potential applicants see or engage with a job posting and/or engage at a recruitment event?		
	How many potential applicants begin an application?		
	How many potential applicants begin an application but do not complete an application?		
	How many applicants complete an application?		
	How many applicants are invited to an interview, accept the interview, and attend the interview?		
Hiring		Agency Answer	Notes (potential issues, barriers within process)
PROCESS COMPONENTS	<b>Applicant Screening:</b> What are the steps taken to review applications? How long does the process take, and who is involved? List the steps and parties involved in the application review process.		
	<b>Testing Requirements:</b> What testing requirements exist for employment? How long does it take for an applicant to complete testing requirements? List the specific tests (drug, physical, background, etc.). Note where or how these tests are administered and how long it takes to return results.		

# Recruitment

## Improve Job Postings

Updating and revising job postings is important to set accurate expectations for candidates but also can encourage qualified individuals to apply, contributing to a more targeted and successful recruitment process.

1. Use clear, simple language in job postings.
2. Consider allowing for an entirely online option for applying with multiple application formats. See image below from Cherriots' webpage.

### Applications

Click the links below to download an application form and save it to your computer.

[PDF APPLICATION](#)

[MICROSOFT WORD APPLICATION](#)

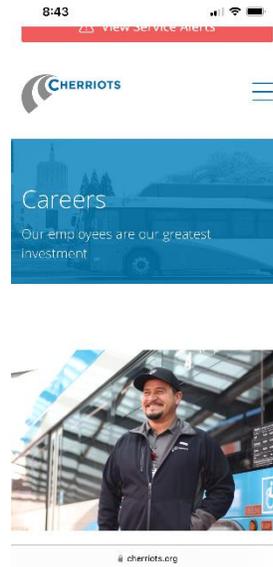
[PDF APPLICATION SUPPLEMENT FOR SAFETY SENSITIVE POSITIONS](#)

If you are completing an application on your mobile device, you may need to use the Adobe Acrobat Reader mobile app (or similar third party app) to fill and sign the documents. Click the link below to download the Adobe Acrobat Reader app for your mobile device:

[ADOBE ACROBAT READER](#)

Note: completion on a computer is recommended.

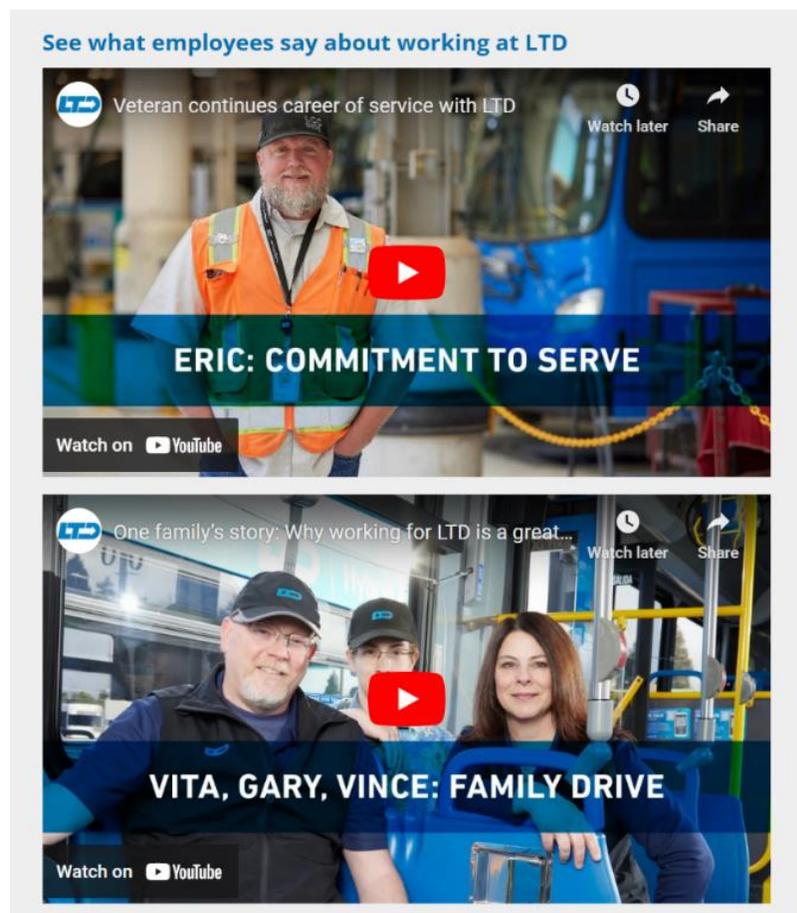
3. If online, make sure that postings are accessible in **mobile view**. See the examples below from LTD (left) and Cherriots (right).



## Marketing

The ways that potential applicants learn about available positions have changed. The TransitCenter’s survey on recruitment strategies highlight the importance of using a broad range of tools -- social media, the internet, in-events, graphic advertising on buses, etc. – to attract applicants in this competitive marketplace. (See Table 4, Transit Agency Bus Operator Recruitment Strategies, below.)

1. **Post signage and advertisements in visible physical locations**, such as on billboards and buses.<sup>17</sup>
2. **Include photos or testimonies of staff in marketing materials to help put faces to the agency.** This can also be a great way to highlight current staff members. Check out LTD’s example below.
3. **Attend local job fairs** with physical applications for direct interaction and streamlined recruitment.
4. **Emphasize unique job benefits** clearly and prominently to attract and engage potential applicants.



<sup>17</sup> National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2023. Bus Operator Workforce Management: Practitioner s Guide. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/26842>.

**Table 4. Transit agency bus operator recruitment strategies (N = 348).**

Strategy	Number of respondents	Percent of respondents
Internet ads and social media	281	81%
Employee referrals	217	62%
On-vehicle ads (e.g., bus wraps, ads in buses and railcars)	195	56%
Job fairs	175	50%
Walk-ins	160	46%
Newspaper ads	144	41%
Recruit from known contacts of existing employees	101	29%
Working with labor unions or community organizations (e.g., unemployment offices or community workforce nonprofits)	82	24%
Pre-employment or pre-apprenticeship programs (i.e., high school, higher ed, community college, and technical institute partnerships)	39	11%
Recruitment firms	23	7%
Radio ads	6	2%
Website (transit agency)	6	2%
Public banners or signs (e.g., yard signs)	3	1%
Website (city)	1	0%
Verbal bus announcements	1	0%
TV news stories	1	0%

Source: TCRP F-28 Industry Survey, Summer 2021.

## Hiring

### Streamline Hiring

The typical time frame for hiring (4-6 months) is untenable with the current level of competition for employees.

1. **Consider reversing the application and interview steps.** Invite interested applicants to interview first, on the spot, and then give them the application to fill out. By reversing the application and interview steps, less processing time is needed to review applications and schedule an interview. This works best for agencies that experience long hiring process times or are urgently hiring.

### Agency Highlight: Cherriots

Cherriots has “figured out” how to hire and sustain their bus operator workforce. Cherriots worked to **remove all barriers from the application process**, including reversing the application and interview steps. They also used Indeed resumes to identify potential applicants. Applicants are directly invited to interview based on their Indeed resume. If the interview went well, they have the potential applicant fill out the application at that time. Cherriots also **removed the customer service test** (a two-hour proctored test) and instead tailored the interview questions to be more customer service related.

### Improve Communication During Hiring Process

As some elements of the hiring process can be time-consuming, it is important that the agency have a clear communication strategy.

1. **Communicate regularly with applicants during hiring process.** This will let them know expected wait times and updates so that they know what may be taking longer and that progress on their application is being made.

2. **Clearly display reliable contact information if applicants have any questions.** Make sure that the contact email is being checked regularly.

## Training

Offering comprehensive training at the earliest stages of an employee’s career and ongoing training on emergent issues is necessary for the agency’s and the employee’s success.

1. **Prioritize and expand opportunities for practical, hands-on experience alongside current staff.**
2. **Implement conflict resolution/ de-escalation training for all staff members.** Please see additional notes on this below in Regional Recommendations.
3. **Increase opportunities for optional customer service training.** This may be especially helpful for applicants that have a trucking background and less experience with customer service.

### Agency Highlight: LTD Bus Operator Ambassador Pilot Program

Once an applicant is through the first few necessary steps (background check, etc.), they can work part-time (15-25 hours/week) as “ambassadors” on the buses. They spend this time learning the routes, assisting riders and drivers in answering questions while working on remaining hoops to get ready to start training (including CDL permit). These are temporary positions, intended to keep applicants engaged

## Retention

As hiring and initial training are expensive and time consuming, it is vital that agencies invest in robust retention efforts. Many of these are basic to good management – clear communication, feedback loops, and employee recognition. Providing opportunities for advancement and/or improvement is also vital for the long-term retention of younger employees.

1. **Facilitate open communication between management and operators.** By establishing an open-door policy, operators can feel more comfortable bringing up issues or concerns with the understanding that their voices will be heard.
2. **Provide opportunities for feedback.** Feedback can take place in a variety of ways. It can be in-person or virtual, opportunities for feedback when they arise or requested, and could be scheduled weekly or monthly.
3. **Provide opportunities to appreciate and celebrate employees.** This can look like an award system for employees or entire staff, celebrating birthdays in the office, being specific with praise, or asking employees how they would like to be shown appreciation.
4. **Clearly articulate opportunities for further training and advancement.** If training or further advancement opportunities are available, encourage employees to take advantage of these opportunities. If no advancement opportunities are available or possible, consider incorporating further training opportunities.

5. Consider offering refresher courses to enable drivers to feel more confident and keep their skills up to date. These refresher courses can be general or on specific topics staff request and ensure all staff members feel confident about their abilities on the job.

### Agency Highlight: LTD

LTD offers brief refresher courses to their drivers in a variety of training areas. They have found these courses to be a helpful confidence boost for drivers that make have taken a break from driving or experience anxiety on the job.

## Website & Online Presence Recommendations

Digital tools enhance accessibility for potential applicants and contribute to promoting the transit sector as an appealing career option. The following recommendations aim to improve online platforms and marketing strategies for more effective transit workforce recruitment and engagement.

1. **Post job postings on commonly used job search sites** such as Government Jobs, Indeed, Google Jobs, etc. Postings should also be **easily found through agency website** home pages.
2. **Ensure that the agency website is mobile-friendly.** Many users may be using their phone to navigate the website and associated links. If applications can be filled out online, ensure that the **application is also mobile friendly** as not everyone may have ready access to a computer.
3. Create a **robust, and separate, webpage that is focused on hiring and careers.** This page would act as a resource for information about careers and hiring, highlight benefits, and provide a contact for any questions.
4. An optional marketing addition is to use this page to **feature current operators and staff, with pictures and blurbs about why they became operators or enjoy their jobs.** This can help put faces to drivers, feature driver stories, and demonstrate a desirable workplace.
5. **Develop a separate website for the transit agency.** A dedicated website, outside of a city or county website, can increase usability, organization, and legitimacy. (See example from LTD to right.)



# Regional Recommendations

## Collaborative CDL Training

Create regional CDL training programs to allow multiple agencies to combine CDL training efforts, reduce individual costs, and save time and resources. Work with the local community college to provide trainers and/or locations for training. Consider different options to pay for the training: students pay for the training and then are reimbursed some or all of the cost if they are hired, grants or agency funds to cover all costs upfront with or without commitment for employment, or other payment method that works best for the agency while keeping costs low for the student.

## Influence State Legislature to Use Alternative Marijuana Testing Methods

With new federal requirements around marijuana testing, it will be up to each employer to decide to use urinary analysis or saliva tests. Currently, the Department of Transportation has approved the use of saliva tests, but no labs have been approved to be able to process these tests. These tests allow for less invasive testing, fewer false positive occurrences, less possibility of cheating, and more leeway for operators to use marijuana on their time off (over 24 hours before their next shift). Oregon transit agencies can work together to influence state legislative to move forward progress on being able to have the option to use saliva tests.

## Collaborative De-escalation Training

Work with regional agencies to create de-escalation and conflict management training for staff of multiple agencies. Finding staff and time to put on these training courses at an individual transit agency level has proven to be difficult. Instead, work with neighboring agencies to collaborate on and present a regional de-escalation training (or series of trainings). Drivers have expressed a desire for conflict management and de-escalation training. Providing this training will allow drivers to feel more confident in their ability to manage different situations. Ensure that all drivers are compensated during participation.



# Conclusion

---

The Transit Workforce Study, conducted by IPRE in conjunction with OCWCOG, investigated regional barriers to maintaining adequate driver numbers and recommended strategies to help reduce negative impacts on transit service associated with lack of drivers. Engagement with transit agencies and transit operators through a variety of methods informed the study, providing tailored recommendations for the challenges that local transit agencies are facing. The study provides valuable knowledge about the state of the local transit workforce in Oregon, contributing to a wider understanding of the transit industry in the US in the wake of COVID-19.

The study investigated the causes of worker shortages in the region and proposed solutions to help mitigate these shortages. The main findings underline challenges in recruitment, hiring, training, and retention. Local topics of concern include marijuana testing requirements, rising houseless populations in Oregon, CDL training locations and cost, the need for de-escalation training, and local competition. Recommendations addressed the same categories of recruitment, hiring, training, and retention as well as recommendations for agencies to improve their online presence. Implementation of these recommendations will vary by agency but can help lead to positive changes for the transit operators, agencies, and communities they serve.

Together, this research and recommendations offer solutions for transit agencies in Oregon to work together and build a healthier, more streamlined, and resilient transit workforce.

# Appendix A: References and Resources

---

## References

American Public Transit Association. *APTA Workforce Mini-Guides*. APTAU Learning. Retrieved December 30, 2023, from <https://learning.aptagateway.com/apta-workforce-mini-guides>.

Bernstien, M. (2023, September 12). *Family of Man Fatally Beaten on Eugene Bus Files Wrongful Death Suit Against Lane Transit*. The Oregonian. <https://www.oregonlive.com/news/2023/09/family-of-man-fatally-beaten-on-eugene-bus-files-wrongful-death-suit-against-lane-transit.html>

*CDL Training in Oregon*. (n.d.). All Trucking. Retrieved December 30, 2023, from <https://www.alltrucking.com/cdl-training/oregon>.

*Days Before Deadly Assault, LTD was Told of Bus Operator Concerns*. (2022, November 21). Whole Community News. <https://wholecommunity.news/2022/11/21/days-before-deadly-assault-ltd-was-told-of-bus-operator-concerns/>

Foursquare ITP. (2023a). *Transit Workforce Shortage Synthesis Report*. American Public Transportation Association. <https://www.apta.com/wp-content/uploads/APTA-Workforce-Shortage-Synthesis-Report-03.2023.pdf>

Foursquare ITP. (2023b). *Transit Workforce Shortage Toolkit*. American Public Transportation Association. <https://www.apta.com/wp-content/uploads/APTA-Workforce-Shortage-Toolkit-Final-03.2023.pdf>

Malyshev, A., & Ganley, S. (2023, September 12). What Rescheduling to Schedule III Would Mean for the Cannabis Industry. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/legal/litigation/what-rescheduling-schedule-iii-would-mean-cannabis-industry-2023-09-12/>

*Transit Bus Driver vs. Truck Driver: What's the Difference Between Them?* (2023, September 25). Zippa. <https://www.zippia.com/transit-bus-driver-jobs/transit-bus-driver-vs-truck-driver-differences/>

*Transit Workforce Center*. (n.d.). Transit Workforce Center. Retrieved December 30, 2023, from <https://www.transitworkforce.org/>.

*US Transportation Dept Finalizes Rule Authorizing Oral Fluid Drug Testing*. (2023, May 4). NORML. <https://norml.org/news/2023/05/04/federal-transportation-department-finalizes-rule-authorizing-oral-fluid-drug-testing/#:~:text=The%20forthcoming%20rule%20will%20set>

Van Eyken, C. (2022, July). *Bus Operators in Crisis*. TransitCenter. <https://transitcenter.org/publication/bus-operators-in-crisis/>

## Resources

### American Public Transportation Association (APTA)

*APTA Workforce Mini-Guides*

<https://learning.aptagateway.com/apta-workforce-mini-guides>

This six-part topical series is offered as part of APTAU, a “one-stop education, professional, career, and workforce development center.” This on-line training series includes industry insights and stories, case studies, lessons learned, and best practices related to workforce development gleaned from interviews with dozens of transit and industry professionals, as well as highlights from APTA’s comprehensive *Transit Workforce Readiness Guide*.

### *APTA Transit Workforce Readiness Guide*

<https://knowledgehub.apta.com/resource/apta-resources-preparing-the-workforce-of-tomorrow>

The APTA Transit Workforce Readiness Guide offers details and examples of a five-step approach to help create an outreach program for high school students. The Readiness Guide showcases 35 case studies whose programs and resources target high school students, especially those coming from underserved communities. Includes access to over 150 sample materials addressing: industry awareness and education; apprenticeships and internships; entry-level jobs, recruitment, and training.

### *APTA Public Transportation Ridership Update (Policy Brief) March 2023*

<https://www.apta.com/wp-content/uploads/APTA-POLICY-BRIEF-Transit-Ridership-09.28.2022.pdf>

Key takeaways from this policy brief, which utilizes information pulled on a quarterly basis from APTA's membership, include:

1. New variants of COVID-19, telework policies, and the related emergency stay-at-home orders have had a significant negative impact on ridership on public transportation in the United States beginning in March 2020.
2. After falling to 20 percent of pre-pandemic levels in April 2020, ridership has recovered to more than 70 percent of pre-pandemic levels.
3. Success in ridership recovery has been dependent on transit service delivery and reliability and external factors, such as the makeup of local economies.

### **TransitCenter**

The nonprofit TransitCenter aims to shape transit policy and practice to grow ridership and make cities more environmentally sustainable through advocacy, agency support, research and communications.

*Bus Operators in Crisis: The Steady Deterioration of One of Transit's Most Essential Jobs, and How Agencies can Turn Things Around*<sup>18</sup>

[https://transitcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Bus-Operators-in-Crisis\\_RGB\\_Interactive-1.pdf](https://transitcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Bus-Operators-in-Crisis_RGB_Interactive-1.pdf)

---

<sup>18</sup> Van Eyken, Chris. "Bus Operators in Crisis: The Steady Deterioration of One of Transit's Most Essential Jobs, and How Agencies can Turn Things Around." TransitCenter, July 2022, [https://transitcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Bus-Operators-in-Crisis\\_RGB\\_Interactive-1.pdf](https://transitcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Bus-Operators-in-Crisis_RGB_Interactive-1.pdf).

This brief provides an overview of how shortfalls are playing out at agencies across the country, outlines some of the structural barriers to retention and hiring, and issues recommendations for how agencies and USDOT can begin to address the transit workforce crisis.

The TransitCenter provides recommendations to address barriers, focusing upon the need for job quality to be taken seriously by transit agencies and the transit industry. “Operators are the backbone of the transit industry—they deserve better compensation, paths for advancement, and the opportunity to influence their working conditions.”<sup>19</sup> Agencies must also speed up hiring processes, introduce more flexibility into the job, improve operator facilities and amenities, and implement additional health and safety measures—both to attract new entrants and retain existing employees.

### *Operators in Crisis: Strategies for Hiring & Retaining Transit Workers*

The TransitCenter produced two webinars following the publication of *Bus Operators in Crisis*. The first focused on reasons behind shortages and how we got to where we are. The second focused on strategies for hiring and retaining workers. This webinar included representatives from the Federal Transit Authority, Transit Workforce Center, and local and regional transit providers from across the country.

Key takeaway: “We need an innovative approach, one that figures out how to leverage communities’ distinct geographical, political, and social resources to address what is the biggest mobility challenge of our time.”

## **Transit Workforce Center**

### [HOME - Transit Workforce Center](#)

The Transit Workforce Center is the Federal Transit Administration’s first ever national technical assistance center for transit workforce development. Its mission is to help urban, suburban, tribal, and rural public transportation entities recruit, hire, train, and retain the diverse workforce needed now and in the future.

The Transit Workforce Center provides:

- Technical assistance
- Workforce strategic planning and support
- Analysis of industry trends and data
- Expertise on collaborative partnerships
- Resources and best practices for the industry
- Workforce strategic planning and support
- Forums for peer-to-peer learning and exchanges on workforce development

---

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

- Targeted training development

Transit Workforce Center programs include:

### **Zero Emission Buses (ZEB) workforce transition resources**

Transit Workforce Center is producing critical resources as part of a nationally coordinated effort to help prepare frontline technicians with the training needed to meet the challenges and demands of Zero Emissions bus technology. In late 2022, TWC released a complete training course that supplies agencies with ready-to-use materials designed to familiarize technicians with the fundamentals of Battery Electric Buses (BEB) maintenance and technology. The products include classroom materials, instructional videos, hands-on exercises, and assessments that will prepare technicians for product-specific training offered by the bus manufacturers. TWC is also developing ZEB-specific national maintenance training standards for technicians.

### **ATTAIN**

ATTAIN, **the American Transit Training and Apprenticeship Innovators Network**, is a peer network created for transit agencies and labor unions to explore new apprenticeship programs or enhance existing programs for their frontline workforce. Through ATTAIN, the TWC will promote apprenticeship, advance frontline worker training, facilitate peer exchange, and provide technical assistance to agencies and unions interested in developing apprenticeship programs for their frontline workforce.

### **TWC Resource center**

TWC's Resource Center hosts a curated collection of publications and other materials to assist stakeholders engaged in transit workforce development. One portion of this center includes a compilation of state and federal funding opportunities related to transit workforce development, including information on the 2022 Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill. Some of this funding can be used to improve environments for drivers, including improvements to break rooms, restrooms, etc., and for workforce investments for partnerships with community colleges.

### **#ConnectingMyCommunity – National Transit Frontline Worker Recruitment Campaign**

To help support local transit efforts to address the recruiting and retaining challenge, TWC is developing the #ConnectingMyCommunity national frontline worker recruitment campaign, coordinated with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and industry, labor, and community partners from around the county. Their webpage features key components of the campaign, including a toolkit that contains materials agencies can use to design effective recruitment outreach.

### **Webinar: Strategic Workforce Planning in Transit: Recruiting and Developing Today's Transit Workforce**

[Strategic Workforce Planning in Transit: Recruiting and Developing Today's Transit Workforce - Transit Workforce Center](#)

This webinar focuses on how transit agencies and partner organizations are working to meet the significant recruitment challenges across the country and how to best turn these challenges into opportunities to reach, attract, and retain a diverse workforce. Two transit agencies and their labor partners discuss their innovative outreach and recruitment programs—including mentoring, pre-apprenticeships, and community college partnerships—followed by a presentation from a national organization leader who has coordinated cross-sectoral recruitment initiatives with agencies across the U.S.

## International Transportation Learning Center

*Bus Operator Workforce Management: Practitioner's Guide*

[Bus Operator Workforce Management: Practitioner's Guide | The National Academies Press](#)

The International Transportation Learning Center (ITLC) released a pre-publication draft of the “[Practitioner's Guide to Bus Operator Workforce Management](#)<sup>20</sup>” published by the [Transportation Research Board](#) in January 2023. This guide will help transit agencies better assess, plan, and implement their operator workforce management programs. The guide was written by the Eno Center for Transportation along with ITLC, and Huber and Associates, Inc.

ITLC staff gathered much of the input from industry stakeholders, public transit agencies, and labor unions that identified themes and forward-thinking approaches for the seven elements of operator workforce management addressed in the report:

- Workforce Needs Assessment
- Recruitment
- Compensation
- Hiring Processes
- Training
- Safety, Health, and Working Conditions
- Retention and Motivation

## Oregon Initiatives

This section includes examples of work that is occurring within the state of Oregon to address transit workforce issues.

### Labor-backed bill moving forward in the Oregon Legislature, 2023

*Increase penalties for assault of on-duty transit workers (SB 787):* Under current Oregon law, it's a felony to assault a transit worker while the vehicle is moving. But if the driver stops, the penalty drops to a misdemeanor. a bill promulgated by Amalgamated Transit Union Local 757

---

<sup>20</sup> National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2023. *Bus Operator Workforce Management: Practitioner's Guide*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/26842>.

would close the loophole and make any assault that happens while a worker is on-duty a felony. The bill passed the Senate 27-2 March 9, 2023, and was referred to the House Judiciary Committee.

## Additional Resources

*Improving the Health and Safety of Transit Workers with Corresponding Impacts on the Bottom Line*<sup>21</sup>

[https://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/tcrp/tcrp\\_rpt\\_217ExecutiveSummary.pdf](https://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/tcrp/tcrp_rpt_217ExecutiveSummary.pdf)

Transit workers experience more health and safety problems than the general workforce, primarily as a result of a combination of physical demands, environmental factors, and stresses related to their jobs.

The Transportation Research Board (TRB) Transit Cooperative Research Program's Research Report 217: *Improving the Health and Safety of Transit Workers with Corresponding Impacts on the Bottom Line* focuses on the prevalence of these conditions, costs associated with these conditions, and statistical analysis of data on participation in and the results of health and wellness promotion programs.

---

<sup>21</sup> National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2020. *Improving the Health and Safety of Transit Workers with Corresponding Impacts on the Bottom Line*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/26022>.

# Appendix B: Online Presence Recommendation Examples

## Employee Benefits at Cherriots

- Medical, Vision, Prescription Insurance
- Dental Insurance
- HRA VEBA – Health Savings Account
- Employee Assistance Program
- Paid Holidays
- Vacation Leave
- Sick Leave
- Universal Bus Pass
- Life Insurance, Accidental Death and Dismemberment Insurance
- Family Bus Pass
- Employee Retirement Plans
- Voluntary Supplemental Life Insurance
- Deferred Compensation Plan – MissionSquare Retirement

The screenshot displays two sections on a website. On the left, under the heading "Current Job Openings", there is a list of four job roles with their respective closing dates and right-pointing arrows: "Network Administrator: 2023-12-08", "Grant and Project Coordinator: 2023-12-07", "Assistant Transportation Manager: 2023-07-01", and "Transit Operator: 2023-07-01". On the right, under the heading "My Cherriots Career Video Series", there is a video player. The video title is "My Cherriots Career: Customer Service R...". The video shows a person wearing a mask and a name tag, sitting at a desk in a transit station. The video player includes a red play button, a "Watch later" link, and a "Share" link. At the bottom of the video player, it says "Watch on YouTube".

Example of displaying benefits on agency webpage (Sourced from Cherriots' website)

Whether you're interested in getting behind the wheel of a 40-foot-long bus or more at home with numbers and spreadsheets, Cherriots has a place for you.

Cherriots is a growing organization and needs talented people ready to serve our community. It's a big challenge. We provide services over a 76-square-mile-area in Salem-Keizer and the Mid-Willamette Valley.

**Working at Cherriots is more than a job;  
it's a career path with many opportunities.**

Skilled transit operators (bus drivers) help Cherriots riders reach their destination in all weather and road conditions. Mechanics and service technicians keep the Cherriots fleet in tip-top shape.

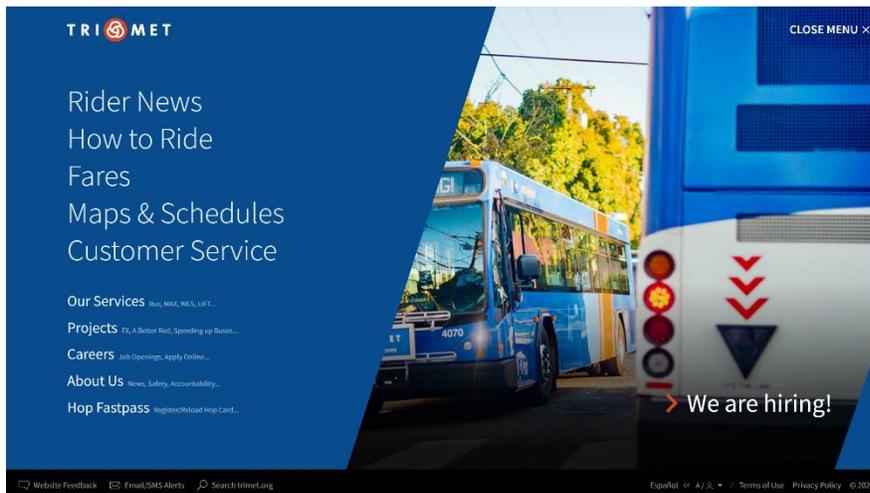


The Cherriots mission of creating community connections also requires accountants, technicians, information technology specialists, human resources staff, transit planners, and customer service representatives.

Cherriots especially values employees with people skills, who make customer service their highest priority. Cherriots emphasizes career development and employees can advance into supervisory and management positions.

Cherriots provides competitive pay and benefits, including health insurance and a retirement plan. Many of our employees find not only jobs, but a rewarding public service career with Cherriots. We invite you to join our team.

Example of providing operator perspectives on website (Sourced from Cherriots' website)



Example of including "We are hiring" on webpage (Sourced from Trimet)