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TRB Webinar: Bus Operators—New Strategies for Maintaining the Workforce

March 27, 2023

1:30 – 3:00 PM



AICP Credit Information

1.5 American Institute of Certified Planners Certification Maintenance Credits

You must attend the entire webinar

Log into the American Planning Association website to claim your credits

Contact AICP, not TRB, with questions

Purpose Statement

Shortages of bus operators are affecting the frequency and quality of transit services across the country. Transit agencies may need to reevaluate their current practices for maintaining their workforce. This webinar will offer new ideas, best practices, and resources that will enable transit agencies to better plan, implement, and assess their operator workforce management programs. Presenters will discuss workforce needs assessment, recruitment, selection and on-boarding, training, mentoring, and retention and motivation.

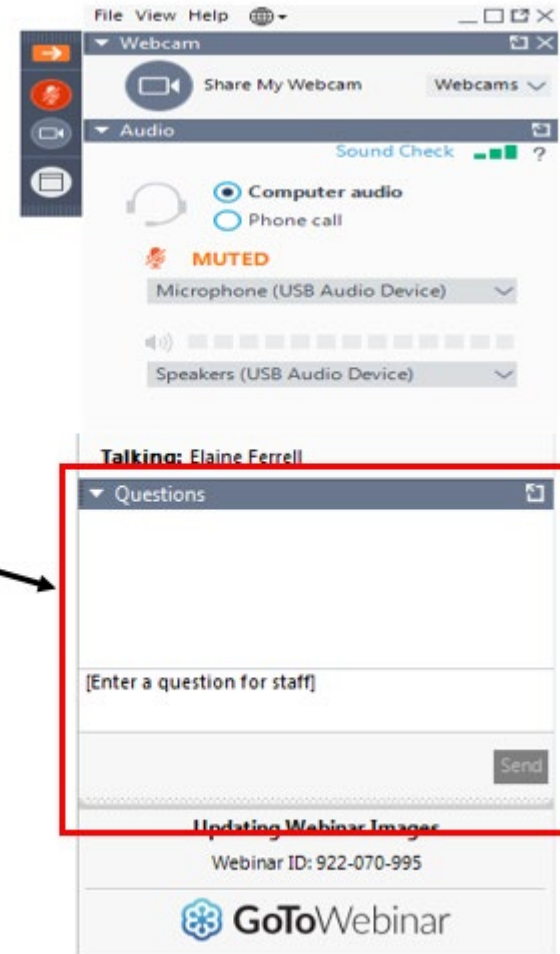
Learning Objectives

At the end of this webinar, you will be able to:

- Assess new recruiting strategies that will help transit agencies hire more bus operators
- Review bus operator training programs that will improve safety and service
- Identify bus operator retention measures that will save money and enhance transit services

Questions and Answers

- Please type your questions into your webinar control panel
- We will read your questions out loud, and answer as many as time allows



Today's Presenters



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Introduction

- Bus operators are 60% of the public transit workforce
- Many agencies are experiencing difficulties recruiting and retaining qualified operators
- 50% of bus operators are over 55
- ~23,300 transit bus driver jobs need to be filled annually between 2021 and 2031
- COVID-19 exacerbated workforce management and development challenges

Key Elements of Bus Operator Workforce Management



Research Methods

- Literature review
- Stakeholder interviews
- Focus group
- Industry survey
- Case studies

Case Studies

- Dallas Area Rapid Transit, TX (DART)
- Fairmont-Marion County Transit Authority, WV (FMCTA)
- Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority, OH (GCRTA)
- New Jersey Transit (NJT)
- Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority, FL (PSTA)
- River Cities Public Transit, SD (RCPT)
- Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority, CA (VTA)

Forward-thinking Approaches



- Comprehensive analysis to determine staffing needs (AC Transit, Metro Transit)
- Historical experience to develop staffing models (San Diego Transit and Utah Transit Authority)
- Forecasting to determine the optimal workforce size (DART)

Forward-thinking Approaches



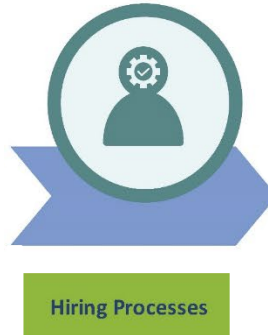
- Target younger candidates (VTA)
- Offer part-time opportunities on both fixed-route and demand-responsive (Link Transit)
- Outreach to non-English speaking places (DART, Metro Transit)
- Sign-on bonuses & special incentives for applicants with CDL (NJT)

Forward-thinking Approaches



- Share savings with operators (VTA and FMCTA)
- Provide higher wage scales for undesirable shifts
- Shorter wage progression periods (SFMTA, VTA, PSTA)

Forward-thinking Approaches



- Pre-hire assessments & additional screening (NJ Transit, GCRTA)
- Communications tech support (NJT)
- CDL permit study sessions (Metro Transit)
- Shorter, flexible application process (Metro Transit, NJT)
- Provide mentor to prepare new employees for first assignments (Sound Transit)

Forward-thinking Approaches



- Formal and informal mentorship programs (GCRTA, PSTA, FMCTA, RCPT)
- Offering opportunities to learn at own pace (NJT)
- Unions can play a needed role in training (VTA, DART)

Forward-thinking Approaches



- Using shields for bus operator compartment
- Allow bus operator input in bus procurement (DART)
- Work with unions to restructure incentives
- Provide comfortable, clean portable restrooms / contract with local business owners for on-route facility access (Metro Transit)

Forward-thinking Approaches



- Industry events and competitions (APTA, Eno)
- Transit Driver Appreciation Day (King County)
- Registered apprenticeship programs (VTA)
- Career ladder programs (NY MTA, VTA, LA Metro)
- Consider scheduling changes (GCRTA and DART)

Strategies Identified in Case Studies

- Dallas Area Rapid Transit, TX (DART)
 - Provides digital skills training
 - Numerous opportunities for operator input and feedback
- Fairmont-Marion County Transit Authority, WV (FMCTA)
 - Transitional housing
- New Jersey Transit (NJT)
 - Direct advertisement of openings to all CDL holders in state
 - Court advocate for operators

Strategies Identified in Case Studies

- River Cities Public Transit, SD (RCPT)
 - Ride along with an operator prior to hiring
- Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority, CA (VTA)
 - Operator apprenticeship
 - Increased starting wage

Practitioner's Guide to Bus Operator Workforce Management

Prepared for TCRP F-28, Transportation Research Board of
The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine

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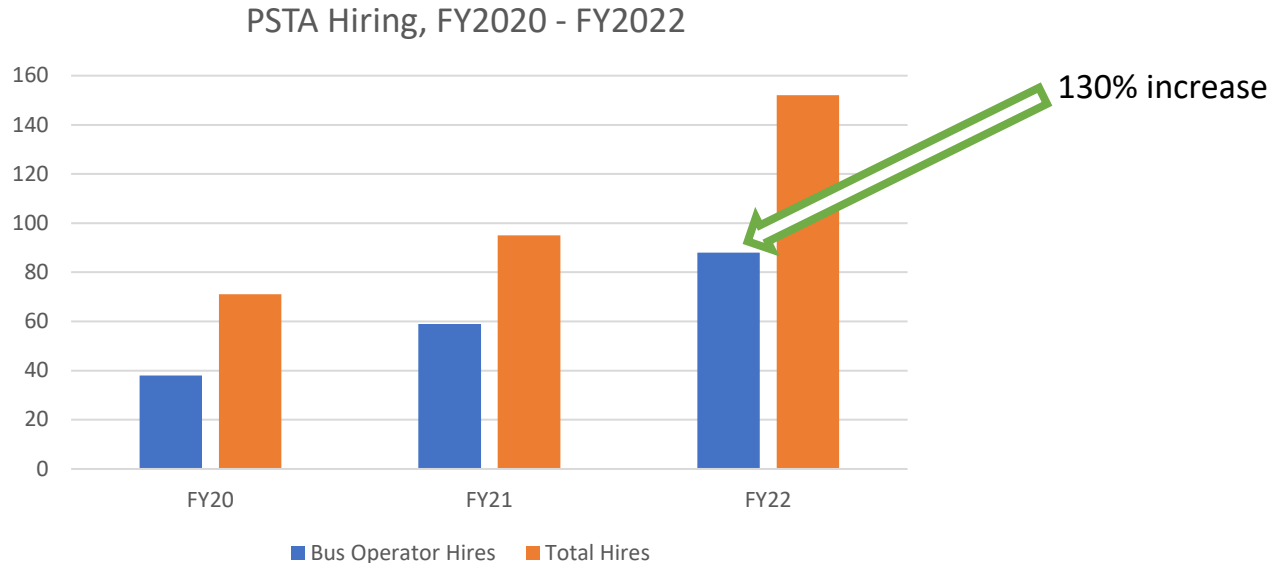
Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority

- **Pinellas County, Florida**
 - Population 959,000
- **673 Employees, Including 400 Bus Operators**
- **9.4 million fixed-route rides annually**
- **Manage paratransit services**



Our Challenge

- Ended FY20 with 100% bus operator headcount
- October 2021, 9% below headcount (33 operators down) due to turnover and service increases



Existing Advantages

- **Strong Interdepartmental Communication**
- **CDL Training In-House**
- **Volume Hiring Model**
 - Compare applicants to standards, not each other
 - Streamlined requisition approvals
 - Smaller, more flexible interview team structure
- **Headcount Forecasting**
- **Nimble Organization**

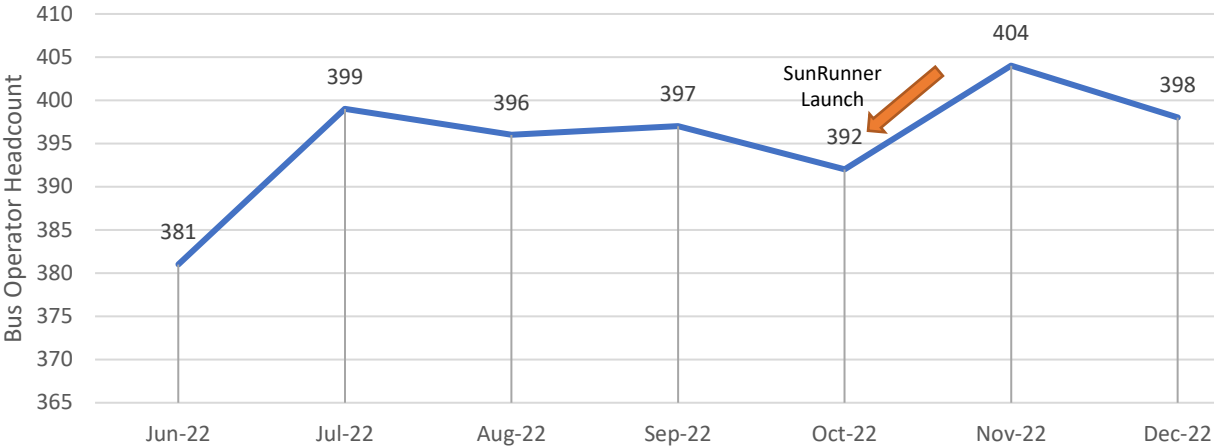


Workforce Lifecycle



Workforce Needs & Position Requirements

- Created a hiring and training plan using workforce data and turnover trends
- Reduced number of years driving experience required, from seven to four



Recruiting Advertising

- **Free or Low Cost**
 - Media Day Onsite
 - “Day in the Life” Recruiting Video
 - Updated marketing collateral
 - Social Media Strategy
 - Coordination with community partners
 - Leverage our own “real estate” - Bus wrap, interior cards, bus shelters, banner on our headquarters property
 - Intentional employment branding



PSTA

work at
PSTA

BUS OPERATORS

No CDL Required – We Train You!

Make \$60,000+ a year providing safe, affordable transportation in Pinellas County

APPLY ONLINE!
www.psta.net/careers

Scan this QR code with your phone's camera to go straight to our careers website

Minimum Qualifications:

- Ability to obtain Class B CDL Learners Permit with Passenger Endorsement, or current CDL B License holder
- Good driving record, with 4 years' experience driving (even driving a regular car qualifies)
- See job posting online for details: www.psta.net/careers

PSTA is a Drug-Free/Smoke-Free Workplace. PSTA is an Equal Employment Opportunity Employer.

Pay:
\$18/hr after paid training, with annual raises increasing to \$29.43 over 4 years

Hours:
Hours may include early mornings, late evenings, split shifts, weekends, and holidays

Benefits:
Guaranteed 40 hour weeks, affordable insurance, Florida Retirement System enrollment, paid holidays

Essential Functions:

- Safely drive PSTA vehicles
- Assist passengers with excellent customer service

safely connecting people to places.



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PSTA Celebrating Women's History Month 2023

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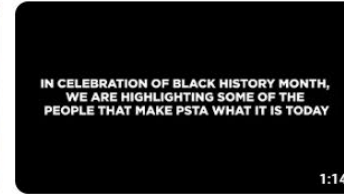
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Enjoy Spring Break in Clearwater with PSTA

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MLK Parade 2023

183 views • 1 month ago



Veterans Day 2022

83 views • 4 months ago

Recruiting Advertising

- **Investment**

- \$250 employee referral bonus
- Increased Purchased Job Postings (Monster, Sponsored Indeed, etc)
- Purchased Google Ads and Digital Streaming Ads (YouTube, ESPN, Hulu, Paramount Plus)
- Targeted email campaign to 50,000 local job seekers
- Morning News Show Appearance



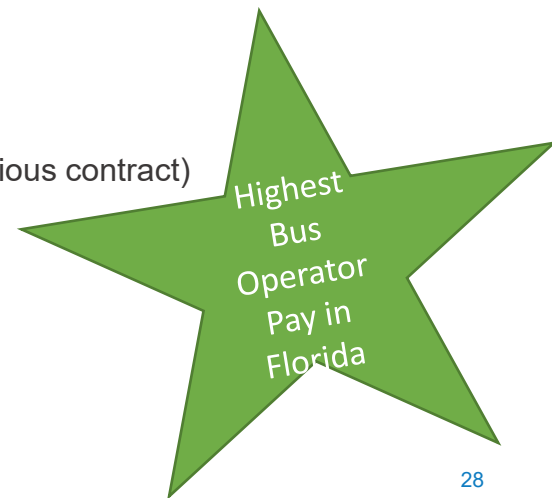
Compensation

- **10/1/2021 – Negotiated New Labor Contract**

- Increased Bus Operator starting pay from \$15.00 to \$16.00
- Increased Bus Operator top pay from \$25.03 to \$25.84
- Increased pay for all steps in between

- **February 2022 – Wage Agreement with Union**

- Additional bargaining employee wage increases
 - Increased Bus Operator Starting Pay to \$18.00 (20% higher than previous contract)
 - Increased Bus Operator Top Pay to \$27.60
 - Shortened wage progression to top pay from 55 months to 49 months
 - Increased pay for all steps in between



Hiring Process

- **Increased HR staff support**
 - All hands on deck
 - Added 1 temporary Recruiter
 - Added 1 FTE Recruiter devoted exclusively to Bus Operators
- **Streamlined & Improved Interview Process**
 - Leveraged technology to communicate with and schedule interviews more efficiently
 - Trained additional Operations staff to act as interview panelists
 - Scheduled interview blocks on staff calendars up to 3 months in advance
 - Reduced the number of interview questions
- **Tripled our capacity from 3 interviews/day to 10/day**
- **Began accepting existing DOT medical certificates**



Training

- Increased training classes from 10 students to 20+
- Condensed instructor-led training period to 6 weeks
- Extended OJT (On The Job) training from 1 week to 2 weeks
- Launched “Early Start” program to reduce drop-outs
- Utilized experienced Transportation Supervisors for training
- Added 1 additional training staff member
- Monitored turnover



Safety, Health, and Working Conditions

- **Driver protection barriers in all buses**
- **Employee wellness resources**
 - On-site fitness center & blood pressure machine, wellness challenges and prizes
 - Biometric Health & Financial Wellness Fairs
- **COVID Response**
 - Reduced working hours with guaranteed 40 hrs pay
 - Extended FFCRA-style paid sick leave for COVID until December 2022
 - Vaccines on site with \$200 reward for proof of vaccination

PSTA

**STEP INTO
THE NEW YEAR**

CHALLENGE
ARE YOU READY??

PRIZES:
Will be awarded weekly to the top 5 steppers and to the top 5 overall steppers at the end of the challenge.

YOU'LL NEED:
To be part of PSTA's Fitbit group, or you'll need to email a pic of your daily steps to benefits@psta.net

CONTEST FROM: 02.06.2023 - 03.04.2023

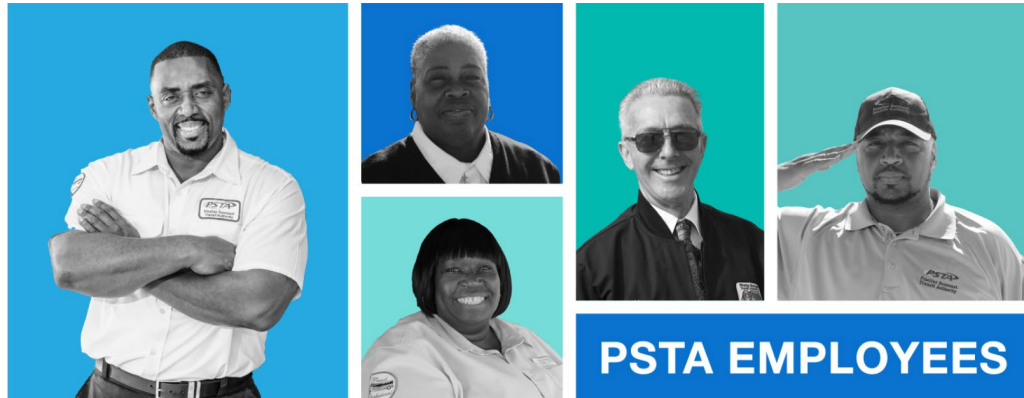
Retention and Motivation

- **Strong Relationship with Labor Partners**
- **Bus Operator Training Graduation and Mentors**
- **Employee Recognition Programs, “Driver of the Quarter/Year”**
- **Longevity Pay**
 - Annual lump sum beginning at 20 years service, \$450 to \$675 based on tenure
- **Employee Resource Groups**
- **Professional Development Programs**
 - Internal Internships and Job Shadowing, Tuition Assistance



Lessons Learned

- Involve all stakeholders
- Be clear about the goals and the “why”
- Craft your employment brand
- Plan into the future
- Look for opportunities in the entire life cycle
- CASE Study



Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority Bus Operator Workforce Management

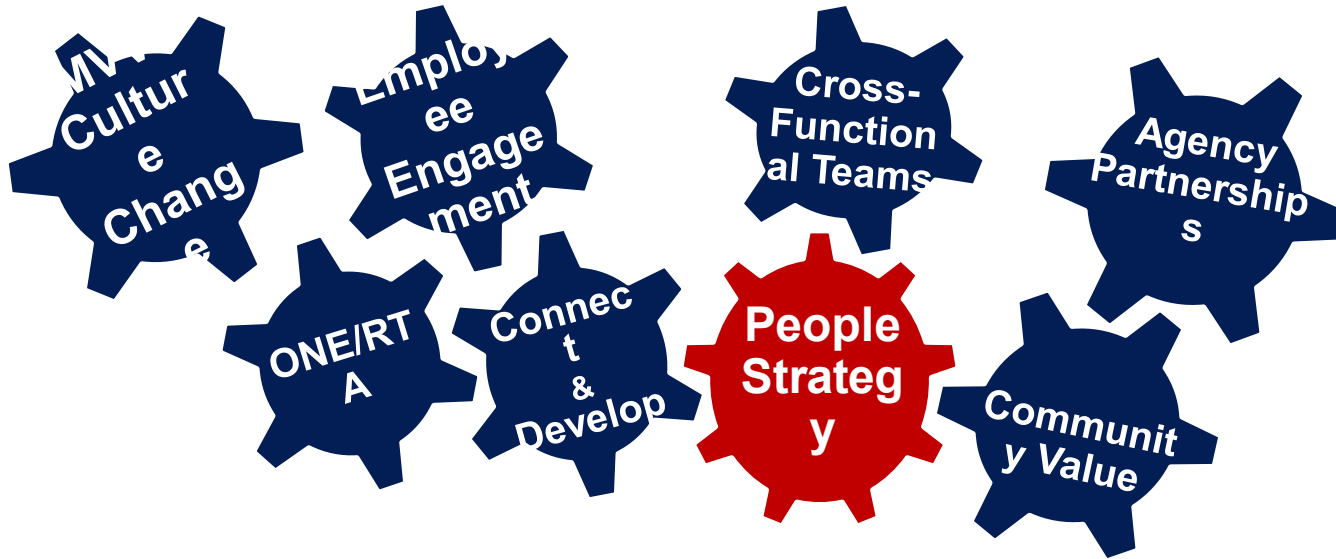
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Connecting the Community – Begins Within



People Strategy Is Everyone's Responsibility



New Mission is Improving Culture

- **Job Fairs Hosted by Cross-Departmental Teams**
 - HR, Training & Development, Bus & Rail Operations, Accounting, OEO, Marketing, Public Relations, IT, ITS, and Service Quality (All Departments/Divisions)
- **New Hire Orientation**
 - RTA Immersion Experience



Increasing Employee Engagement

Cross-functional People Strategies

- Mission, Vision, and Values Team (Monthly)
- Workforce Planning Meetings (Bi-weekly)
- Root Causes of Operator Turnover (Bi-weekly)

Increasing Employee Engagement

Cross-functional People Strategies

- Positive Impact Program (Operator Mentoring)



POSITIVE IMPACT PROGRAM

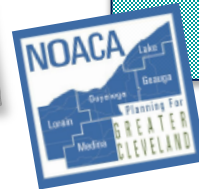
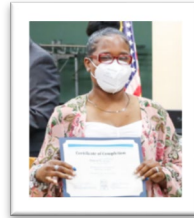
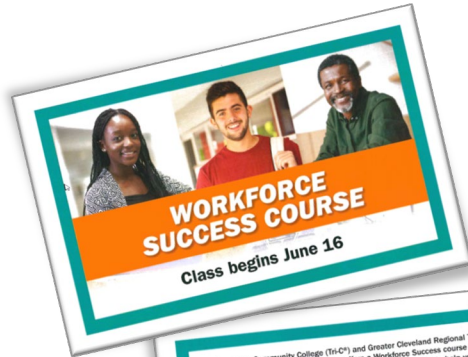
- Agency Partnerships (Bi-Weekly)
- Job Fairs (Community and RTA Hosted)

Increasing Employee Engagement

Cross-functional People Strategies

- Temporary CDL Training
 - 65% of our student operator hires
- Continuous Improvement/Kaizen Events
- Increased Wages/Step Progression

Tri-C Job Hub & Access Centers



Mechanics Apprenticeships
Rail and Bus
CDL – Temporary Permit Classes
Workforce Success program
Frontline Supervisor Program
Multiple Cohorts

Partnership with NOACA and
Ohio Turnpike
100+ RTA Graduates (est. 2017)

ODJFS & Ohio Means Jobs

The screenshot shows the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services website. The header includes the Ohio logo and the text "Department of Job and Family Services". Below the header is a navigation bar with links for "JOB SERVICES", "UNEMPLOYMENT", "MEDICAL", "FOOD ASSISTANCE", "CASH ASSISTANCE", "CHILD SUPPORT", "PROTECTIVE SERVICES", "FOSTER CARE & ADOPTION", and "CHALLENGE". A secondary navigation bar lists "A-Z Index of Services" with letters A through Z. The main content area is titled "Welcome to the Office of Workforce Development" and features a large photo of a diverse group of people. To the left is a sidebar with various links, and to the right are three columns of service categories: "Individuals", "Employers", and "Workforce Professionals".



A graphic with a grid background containing text about bi-weekly meetings, future employees, transparency, strategy sessions, and community outcomes. The text is arranged in a diagonal line from top-left to bottom-right. The words are: "Bi-weekly meetings" (orange), "Future Employees" (red), "Transparency" (green), "Strategy Sessions" (pink), and "Community Outcomes" (purple).

Increasing Employee Engagement

Creating and engaging employee resource groups in change efforts

- Elevating Women Together – EWT
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Council – DEI
- District Councils
- Conference of Minority Transportation Officials – COMTO

Increasing Employee Engagement

On the Rise → Certificates, Associates, Bachelors, and Masters degree programs

- Workforce Success Program
- Public Management Academy
- Leadership Academy
- Tuition Reimbursement

Increasing Employee Engagement

Engaging more employees at all levels

- Frontline Supervisor Program
- Lean Six Sigma - Black Belt and Boot Camp
-
- LeadDiversity
- Women's Leadership Workshops Series
- LinkedIn Learning

Bus Operator Workforce – Holistic Strategy

	OPERATOR WORKFORCE GOALS			
AS OF APRIL 2022	Hayden	Triskett	Fixed Route	Paratransit
OPERATOR WORKFORCE GOALS	409	314	723	128
Number of Operators required to improve work schedules, increase retention, sense of belonging, establish trust, and commitment.				

- Continuous Recruitment
- Engaging Agency Partners
- Training
- Mitigating Turnover Risks

Bus Operator Workforce Progression

	OPERATOR WORKFORCE GOALS	
AS OF APRIL 2022	Fixed Route	Paratransit
Operators for Optimal Service	723	128
Total Employed/ACTIVE Operators	648	107
Total #Operators Short	75	21
AS OF APRIL 2022	Fixed Route	Paratransit
Operators in Training	31	10

Bus Operator Workforce Progression

	OPERATOR WORKFORCE GOALS	
AS OF MARCH 2023	Fixed Route	Paratransit
Operators for Optimal Service	710	119
Total EMPLOYED/ACTIVE Operators	592	104
Total #Operators Short	118	15
AS OF MARCH 2023	Fixed Route	Paratransit
OPERATORS IN TRAINING	22	7

Recruitment & Retention Evolving

- Continued Community & RTA Hosted Job Fairs
- Expanding Agency Partnerships (Tri-C, OMJ, Churches, Veterans, Retirees, Trucking)
- Positive Impact Program (Operator Mentoring) Increasing
- Implementing AM/PM Extra Board (Improving Schedules)

Recruitment & Retention Continues to Evolve

- RFP to add Childcare and Adult Daycare Benefits
- Employee Referral Implementation
- Exploring Healthcare Benefits for Part-timers
- Exploring wage progression changes

Today's Presenters



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Upcoming events for you

May 9-10, 2023

TRB's International Conference on
Road Weather and Winter
Maintenance

July 8-11, 2023

TRB's National Conference on
Transportation Asset Management

[https://www.nationalacademies.org/trb/
events](https://www.nationalacademies.org/trb/events)

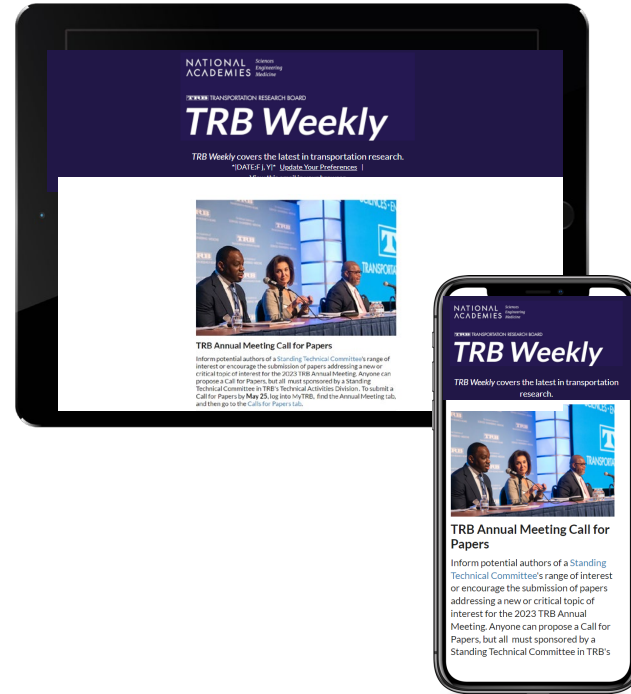


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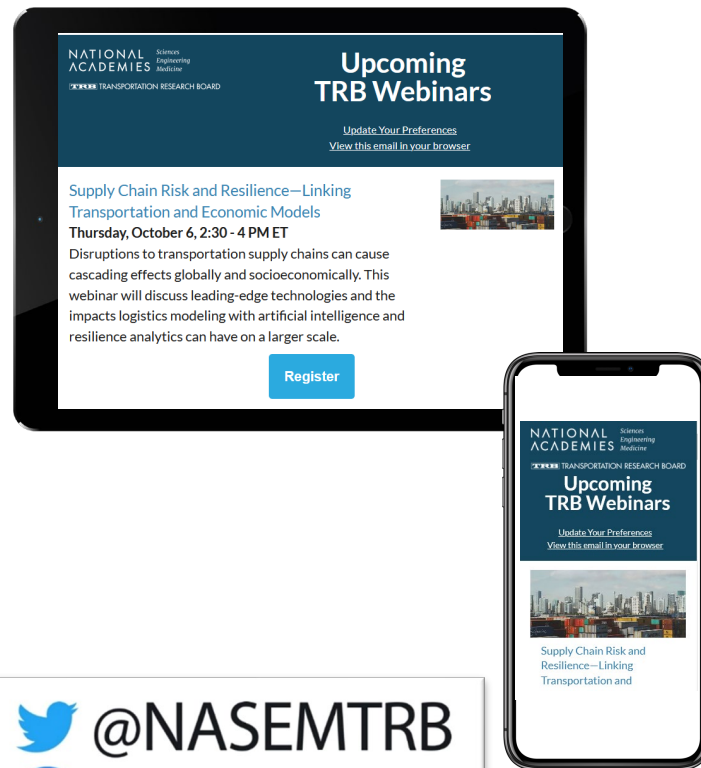
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Get involved

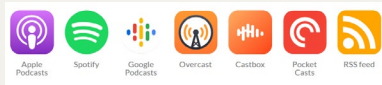
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- **Become a Friend of a Standing Technical Committee**

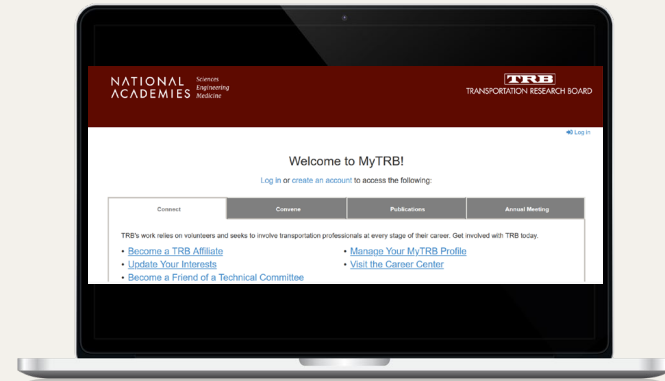
Network and pursue a path to Standing Committee membership

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- **Listen to our podcast**



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