

# ALAMEDA-CONTRA COSTA TRANSIT DISTRICT



## STAFF REPORT

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**MEETING DATE:** 10/27/2021

**Staff Report No.** 21-506

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**TO:** AC Transit Board of Directors  
**FROM:** Michael A. Hursh, General Manager  
**SUBJECT:** Bus Operator Hiring Efforts

### BRIEFING ITEM

#### RECOMMENDED ACTION(S):

Consider receiving a report on the strategies to compete with other transit agencies in hiring bus operators, the efforts in place to retain and engage the current bus operator workforce, and address operator unavailability. [Requested by Directors Walsh and Peebles 5/26/2021]

#### STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE:

Goal - High-Performing Workforce

Initiative - Employee Recruitment, Training and Retention

The ability to consistently hire, retain, and engage bus operators while addressing absenteeism is a key factor to ensure that the District meets its goal of safe, convenient, and reliable service.

#### BUDGETARY/FISCAL IMPACT:

For Fiscal Year 2021-22, \$300,000 was budgeted for expenses to compete with other transit agencies in hiring bus operators.

#### BACKGROUND/RATIONALE:

The San Francisco Bay Area job market has struggled with high unemployment rates within the last year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the Employment Development Department (EDD) website, the unemployment rate of 7.7 percent in June 2021 is nearly half of the 14.1 percent just one year ago. AC Transit, like other public transportation service providers, in the Bay Area and within the United States, is facing an increasing shortfall of qualified employees, particularly in the bus operator classification.

In addition to this deficit of qualified bus operators, the District has been addressing operator absenteeism with the creation of a Leave Management Committee (LMC) and an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Committee.

The LMC stakeholders include the following departments: Human Resources Leave Management, Workers' Compensation, Alcohol and Substance Compliance Unit, Labor Relations, and Legal. This group meets weekly to review employees on leave of absence status to determine a return-to-work plan.

Implemented on July 1, 2021, the ADR Committee assists recently injured employees in returning to work as soon as possible. Member Advocates help employees with early treatment and resolution of their industrial injury claims. The ADR Committee is designed to prevent workers' compensation litigation and lengthy disputes over claims handling which often delay employees' ability to return to work. The District is hopeful that in a few years, the ADR Committee will have a positive impact by accelerating the return-to work process for bus operators.

Many employees are starting to return to work as the District continues with efforts to expand service; however, there is still a significant number of bus operator vacancies and an urgent need to identify new and innovative methodologies to promote open positions and streamline the recruiting and hiring process.

Hiring of bus operators was placed on hold in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In March 2021, the Human Resources Department restarted the recruitment efforts to fill upcoming bus operator classes. After the Board of Directors approved an updated bus operator classification in June 2021, 563 online applications were submitted between June - August 2021. The following are highlights of those applications:

- 375 applicants met the minimum qualifications.
- 198 applicants were scheduled for virtual interviews.
- 177 applicants passed the virtual interviews and advanced to the pre-employment required phase : driving record, fingerprinting, substance and alcohol screening, medical clearance, and reference check.
- 51 applicants qualified and were subsequently hired as new bus operators.

As of September 2021, 291 new online bus operator applications have been submitted and are currently being processed. Human Resources anticipates hiring enough candidates to fill the next four new bus operator classes through February 2022.

Significant to this effort is ensuring the District has a sufficient number of technical training staff to certify new bus operators (NBOs). The current Operations staff of 13 Transportation Training Instructors is maximizing production at three NBO classes, concurrently. This throughput yields one certifying class every month of approximately 7 new hires or a net-zero sum (as it counters the historical average monthly bus operator attrition). Also, this production cycle requires, at a minimum, 10 staff (nearly a 3-to-1 staff to student ratio) to process 27 NBOs in the varying stages leading to certification (that is, with each month, a new class begins, another is in mid-session and a third is certifying). Important to note, the remaining available staff are required for non-NBO and regulatory compliance classes. Three staff are required to continue class production meeting Federal, State, and/or Collective Bargaining Agreement requirements, on a weekly basis throughout the calendar year. Therefore, adding 3 additional training staff will be necessary to sustain production of NBO classes at a pace providing surplus of newly certified bus operators which will help increase the total quantity per month.

Human Resources' current bus operator efforts include:

- Advertise new postings for the bus operator position every 90 days to AC Transit's external careers page.

- Post the bus operator position on external job boards and publications such as Pride and Paycheck, Indeed, ZipRecruiter, BAJobs, Diversityjobs, Glassdoor.
- Attend job fairs such as San Leandro Chamber of Commerce, Cal Maritime Spring Job Fair, and Silicon Valley Career Fair.
- Host virtual and in-person hiring events with Oakland Private Industry Council (PIC).

In addition to these efforts, a multi-departmental task force comprised of External Affairs, Human Resources, Training and Education, and Transportation staff strategizes on best practices for adding new operators to the District workforce. From this task force the following opportunities were identified:

- Increase the visibility of open positions and expand the reach of existing recruitment efforts.
- Extend brand awareness of AC Transit as a premier Bay Area employer.
- Increase recruitment presence at local community events
- Continuous partnership between Human Resources, Operations, Legislative Affairs, and Marketing.
- Streamline the hiring and application process to help capture the maximum number of qualified applicants.

To help compete with other agencies for hiring bus operators, the Marketing and Human Resources Team is supplementing traditional recruitment efforts with print, digital and broadcasting marketing, and communication tactics. The summer 2021 recruitment campaign showcases AC Transit bus operators giving testimonials as to why AC Transit is a career and not just a job. The marketing tag line “Do What you Love with AC Transit” appears in print advertising, social media, and outdoor advertising. Attachment 1 provides an overview of the campaign. The team developed a two-part plan based on funding allocated for short-term and long-term efforts as described below:

For short-term immediate impact:

- \$50,000 budgeted expenditure was implemented to coincide with the bus operator position on June 2021.
- Marketing tactics included exterior bus advertisements, posters at high traffic locations, radio, and digital advertisements.

For long-term impact:

- \$300,000 has been budgeted for Fiscal Year 2021-22 to sustain a long-term marketing campaign by keeping advertising materials in market for a longer period of time.
- Ongoing marketing efforts will be in step with the mitigation of COVID-19 and variant levels.

- Re-launch the use of the Human Resources Mobile Recruitment Lab.
- Continue efforts to advertise in print magazines, streaming channels such as internet radio as well as on broadcast television.
- Messaging will focus on distinct segments of the District's targeted audiences as well as underrepresented groups.
- Develop programs that introduce bus operator career opportunities at both the high school and Junior college levels.
- Emphasis on the District's robust benefits package will be included.

Furthermore, the Legislative Affairs and Community relations department continues to share information about employment opportunities with stakeholders and elected officials throughout the AC Transit service area. In addition to sharing digital versions of hiring flyers via email, staff has requested that community-based organizations and elected officials share information about AC Transit jobs with their constituents and members via their communications channels.

Although many events and festivals have been cancelled due to the pandemic, there have been some festivals and events which AC Transit staff participated in-person and shared hiring information, such as, Juneteenth in Hayward, Richmond Transit Center Re-Opening, San Francisco Fleet Week.

Hiring information is included in presentations and/or announcements at the following:

- AC Transit's Transit Talks series
- Hayward Chamber Black Business Roundtable
- Fremont Chamber
- Newark Chamber
- Oakland Chamber Councilmember Reid Townhall, and the West County Legislative Affairs Group
- Ashland/Cherryland Healthy Communities Collaborative
- My Eden Voice (MEV) General Membership meeting
- Fremont Chamber Government Affairs Committee
- Hayward Chamber Government Relations Council
- Hayward Chamber Board of Directors
- San Leandro Chamber CEO
- Newark Rotary Club
- Fremont Niles Rotary Club
- Hayward Latino Roundtable

Lastly, the District and ATU Local 192 implemented the Operator Coaching Mentorship Program in February 2018. The purpose of this program is to provide new bus operators continued support, coaching, and mentorship from seasoned and successful veteran bus operators. The goal of this program is to develop a professional bus operator workforce with excellent safety and customer service skills to improve bus operator retention, and to reduce bus operator work related stress, illness, and injury.

Operator retention data preceding the Operator Mentorship Program was analyzed and compared to data after implementation, results showed the program improved new bus operator retention rates. Prior to implementation of the Operator Mentorship Program, the bus operator retention rate was 75%. After the implementation of the Operator Mentorship Program, the bus operator retention rate increased to 88%. Currently there are 43 Mentors (veteran bus operators) and 229 Mentees (new bus operators) participating in the program.

As a result of multi-department collaboration, District staff is addressing bus operator absenteeism with the implementation of the Leave Management and Alternative Dispute Resolution Committees, as well as hiring, training, and retaining qualified bus operators to provide safe, convenient, and reliable service. Staff also remains active in committees with the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) and the California Transit Association (CTA) to network with other transit agencies and share best practices.

**ADVANTAGES/DISADVANTAGES:**

There are no specific advantages or disadvantages associated with this briefing item.

**ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS:**

There are no alternative analyses developed for this briefing item.

**PRIOR RELEVANT BOARD ACTION/POLICIES:**

Staff Report 20-018: Bus Operator and Mechanic Hiring Update

Staff Report 18-233: Addressing Operator Absenteeism

**ATTACHMENTS:**

1. HR Summer 2021 Recruitment Campaign Overview

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