

ALAMEDA-CONTRA COSTA TRANSIT DISTRICT



STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: 11/19/2025

Staff Report No. 25-254b

TO: AC Transit Board of Directors
FROM: Salvador Llamas, General Manager/Chief Executive Officer
SUBJECT: Update on Long-term Leave Challenges

BRIEFING ITEM

AGENDA PLANNING REQUEST: ☐

RECOMMENDED ACTION(S):

Consider receiving an update to the report presented to the Board on May 28, 2025, regarding the Human Resources Department's ongoing long-term leave challenges and their impact on Bus Operator availability.

Staff Contact:
James Arcellana, Executive Director of Human Resources

STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE:

Goal - High-Performing Workforce

This initiative directly supports service continuity and workforce optimization, by improving hiring and retention efforts, and minimizing disruptions through the effective control of extended leaves.

BUDGETARY/FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no budgetary or fiscal impact associated with receipt of this report.

BACKGROUND/RATIONALE:

This report is an update based on the Board's request at the May 28, 2025, meeting (Report 25-254a) to return in six months with an update on long-term leave (LTL).

Long-term leave (LTL) continues to present ongoing challenges that affect service delivery, staffing levels, and day-to-day operations. As a reminder, District leaves are currently managed across multiple departments:

- **Office of the General Counsel** - Responsible for work-related injuries.
- **Office of Civil Rights & Compliance** - Responsible for DOT violations, and the Substance Abuse Program.
- **Human Resources** - Responsible for managing non-occupational leaves.

RECAP OF PRIOR REPORT

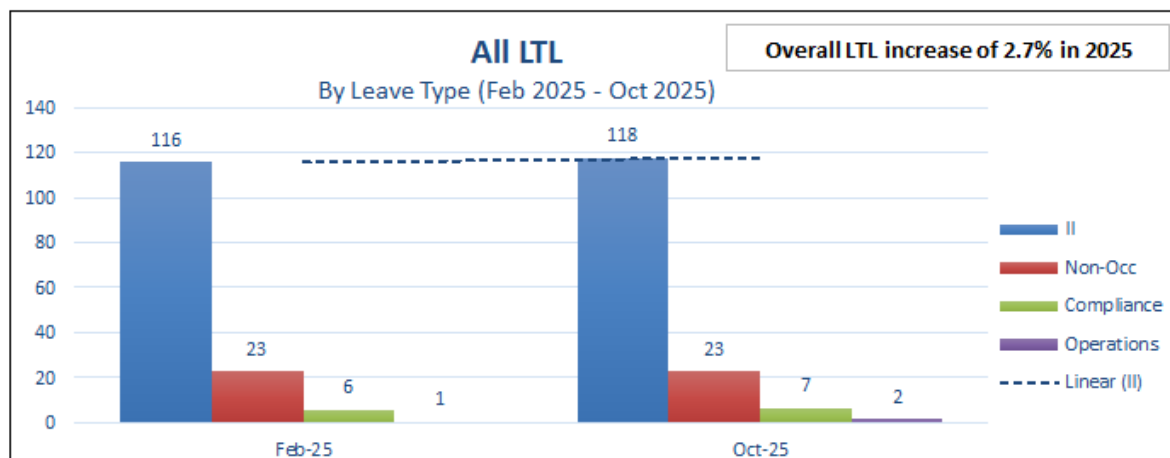
A snapshot of LTL cases from 2023 to early 2025 showed an increase of 28%, driven primarily by work-related injuries (i.e., Industrial Injuries or II). The sustained LTL growth over this period indicates a persistent upward trend rather than a temporary fluctuation.

UPDATED FINDINGS

Leave data from October 2025 reveals the following:

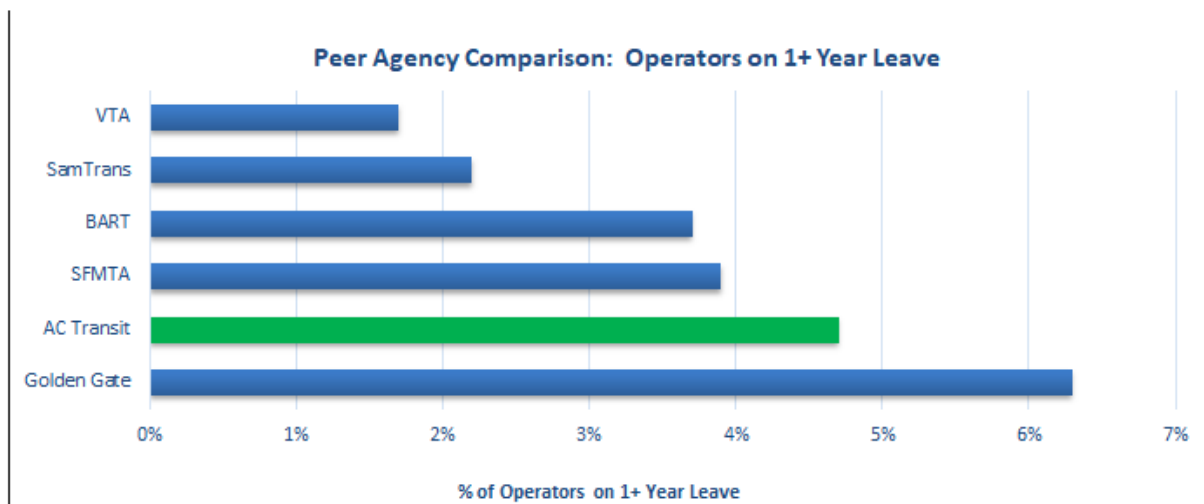
- There are 150 employees on long term leave (LTL), representing an increase of 4 from the 146 reported in May 2025.
- Industrial injury-related leaves continue to represent 80% of all LTL.
- All 47 employees on leave for 1.5 years or longer continue to be Industrial Injury (II) cases.

While the number of LTL cases has largely stabilized since February 2025, there is a 2.7% year-to-date increase. The data shows minimal weekly fluctuations, at times dipping slightly below or above current levels. This reflects a steady and consistent pattern rather than a concerning trend in the past 6 months.



PEER AGENCY UPDATE

The District has reviewed updated statistics across peer agencies. While some agencies have seen slight changes similar to ours, none have experienced major shifts in long-term leave during this period. Across the region, peer agencies continue to struggle with LTL among Operators, underscoring that this issue is not unique to AC Transit. The District continues to sustain the second highest percentage of Operators on long term leave of 1+ years at 4.7%. No agency has yet gained control of this ongoing challenge.



FINANCIAL IMPACT

Expenditures associated with employees on long-term leave (LTL), from January to September, have increased when compared to the same period last year. The District's LTL related costs increased from \$1,893,158 in 2024 to \$2,262,106 in 2025, reflecting an upward trend. These figures include the costs for benefits, compensatory time such as sick pay, and workers' compensation.



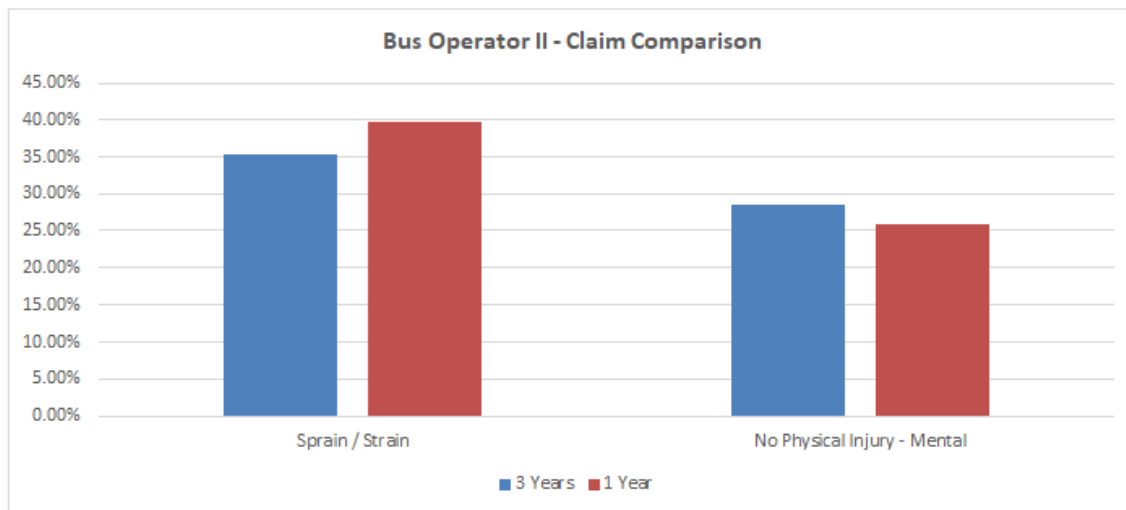
As previously noted, some costs are difficult to fully quantify such as backfill, overtime, or project pay incurred to cover employees on LTL. However, we are beginning an in-depth review to better understand costs and identify cost savings opportunities.

LEAVE DATA AUTOMATION INSIGHTS:

With the implementation of integrated leave data, we have started identifying key patterns. Over a three-year period, the majority of Bus Operator injuries are concentrated in two categories: Sprains/Strains and Mental

Health (Non-physical injuries). These insights are helping the District learn from emerging trends to establish targeted prevention and wellness activities.

As highlighted in the Wellness presentation to the Board on 10/08/25, this is a collaborative, cross-departmental effort, using data to guide strategies and next steps.



Sprains/Strains

Recent measures

- Onsite stretching and mobility programs:
 - Group sessions offered at various facilities by the Wellness unit, averaging 10 employees per location, may reduce strain related injuries.
- Targeted training:
 - One-on-one coaching for new Operators and returning employees, focusing on safe lifting, posture and body mechanics, may reduce risk of sprain/strains.
- Visual reinforcements:
 - Promoting ergonomic best practices through posters, handouts, and workplace messaging enables injury prevention.

Proposed measures

- Prevention partnerships:
 - Strengthening collaboration between the Safety, Workers' Compensation and Wellness units, using injury trend analysis to align prevention strategies, will aid in reducing repeat injuries.
- Ergonomic certification:
- Explore certification of Wellness Coordinator as an ergonomist to conduct ongoing ergonomic evaluations and support injury prevention.

Mental Health

Recent measures

- Counseling and referrals:

- Claremont EAP provides confidential counseling and referral services. Employees accessed these services 382 times, representing a utilization above industry benchmark.
- Wellness Website:
 - Wellbeing site is now available with resources on stress management, housing, financial health and nutrition.

Proposed measures

- Preventative opportunities:
 - Service expansion of on-site counseling, grief support and Mental Health Fairs.
 - Podcast development, in collaboration with the Learning and Development unit, on injury prevention and mental health.

NEGOTIATIONS:

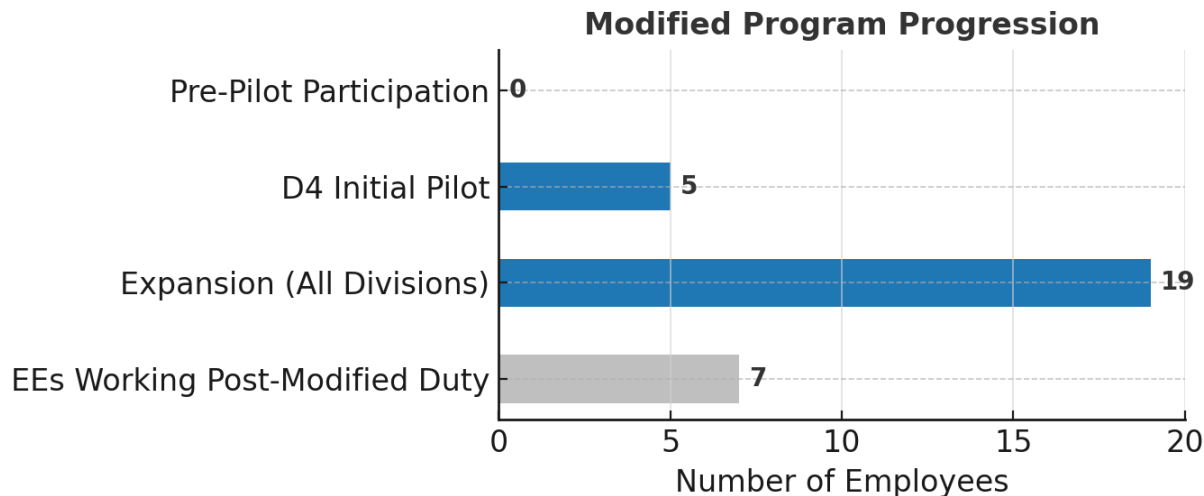
Provisions that may impact leave were reviewed in collaboration with Labor Relations during recent negotiations with ATU.

- Section 6: Attendance - Effective January 1, 2026
 - The disciplinary process will start one occurrence earlier than the previous Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA). It is hoped that this will encourage employees to proactively seek wellness, or support resources, preventing absences from turning into unmanaged longer-term absences.
- Section 47: Earlier relief times for Bus Operators
 - Earlier relief times ensures that a Bus Operator is being relieved by another Bus Operator earlier in the evening, which is safer for both operators.
- Section 69: The Drivers' and Safety Committees
 - These committees will meet to address reports of unsafe relief points, improving safety and operator availability through the reduction of risk of injury.

MODIFIED DUTY EXPANSION:

This initiative has shown promising results by providing work opportunities for employees. The District expanded its modified duty program to all major work locations following the successful pilot at Division 4.

Working in collaboration with Operations, temporary modified duty assignments have been provided to 19 employees. From this group, 7 employees successfully transitioned back to regular work duties, after modified duty participation, without the need to go back on leave.

**WORKERS' COMPENSATION INVESTIGATIONS AND EARLY INTERVENTIONS:**

The District continues to collaborate closely with its third-party administrator (TPA), Athens, to strengthen claims reviews. The focus remains on ensuring medical validity and expediting authorization to ensure employees receive timely treatment

- Authorization and Investigations: The Workers' Compensation unit actively partners with Athens to ensure investigations lead to timely claim decisions through facilitation of videos, police reports and other evidence.
- Coordinated claims management: Ongoing bi-weekly claims reviews with our TPA addresses delayed or denied claims, and audits for accuracy. These efforts will contribute to faster claim resolution.

ADVANTAGES/DISADVANTAGES:

Staff found no advantages or disadvantages to receiving this report.

ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS:

Staff found no practical alternatives. This report is informational only and does not propose changes to policy, budget, or operations.

PRIOR RELEVANT BOARD ACTION/POLICIES:

Staff found no prior relevant board action or policies.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Att.1. LTL Presentation

Prepared by:

Eric Gonzalez, Human Resources Manager

Approved/Reviewed by:

James Arcellana, Executive Director of Human Resources