

ALAMEDA-CONTRA COSTA TRANSIT DISTRICT



STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: 1/22/2020

Staff Report No. 20-018

TO: AC Transit Board of Directors
FROM: Michael A. Hursh, General Manager
SUBJECT: Bus Operator and Mechanic Hiring Update

BRIEFING ITEM

RECOMMENDED ACTION(S):

Consider receiving status update on the recruitment and hiring effort for bus operators and mechanics.
[Requested by Director Shaw - 11/13/19]

STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE:

Goal - High-Performing Workforce
Initiative - Employee Recruitment, Training and Retention

The consistent recruitment of successfully hired and trained AC Transit talent, especially in the transportation and operations channels, is a key factor in ensuring the District is meeting its goal of convenient and reliable service.

BUDGETARY/FISCAL IMPACT:

The District allocated \$105,000 to implement the recruitment awareness campaign and the mobile recruitment lab.

BACKGROUND/RATIONALE:

The San Francisco Bay Area job market is extremely robust. In the first half of the year, the Bay Area alone added 40% of all new California jobs, and according to an article published last October in the Lake County Record-Bee, the September unemployment rate in California hovered around 4%, while the Bay Area unemployment rate was at a record-setting low of 2.2%. Coupled with additional environmental factors like a retirement rate that eclipses the hiring rate, housing shortages, and a continued interest within the current workforce in exploring the gig economy model, AC Transit, like other public transportation service providers in the Bay Area and within the US, is facing an increasing shortfall of qualified employees, particularly in the bus operators and journey-level mechanic classifications. With a significant number of anticipated bus operator and mechanic vacancies, the District saw an urgent need to identify new and innovative methodologies to promote open positions and streamlining the recruiting and hiring processes.

To that end, a multi-departmental task force comprised of the External Affairs and Marketing, Human Resources, Media, Operations and Transportation, and Service Planning departments was assembled to

strategize on best practices for adding the new operators and mechanics to the District's workforce needed and reinvigorate our recruitment efforts. From this taskforce 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
- Increased recruitment's presence in the public through open houses as well as partnerships between the Mobile Recruitment team and Legislative Affairs
- Streamline the hiring and application process to help capture the maximum number of qualified applicants.

Over the past three (3) years, the District, in a very competitive Bay Area market, has seen a downward trend of approximately 20% fewer in applications each year. To correct this trend and increase the visibility of the District's open positions and extend the brand, the Marketing team collaborated with the Human Resources team to identify the communities and industries from which the most successful operator and mechanic candidates within the last five years derived. From this initial research, the marketing team identified four key target audiences within the inner and outer reaches of our service area. The primary campaign objectives were to increase awareness about open positions, and to make it easier for job seekers to find and apply for those positions. As such, the team developed a two-pronged integrated marketing effort that included tactics and channels targeted at our key audiences identified in the initial research phase. Phase 1 concentrated on tactics to reach active job seekers, while Phase 2 tactics focused on reaching job seekers and other people who may have never considered an AC Transit career.

In implementing the Phase 2 strategy, the marketing team decided to showcase current employees who could embody the thoughts, dreams, and interests of potential job seekers by sharing their AC Transit work experiences and how their working experience successfully dovetailed with their off-work pursuits. By featuring each employee's "hobby," the District illustrated the ability to leverage a stable career at AC Transit while fueling our employees' after-work passions. Nine bus operators and mechanics were ultimately selected for the Phase 2 elements who resonate with our target audiences and potential candidates.

By implementing targeted radio, search engine marketing (SEM), social media channels, and targeted digital job board ads in Phase 1, success was immediate. In the first 3 weeks, the Human Resources team saw a 94% increase in applications. Additionally, Phase 1 of the campaign netted an average of forty-five (45) bus operator applications and seven (7) mechanic applications per week. This resulted in stabilizing the number of bus operator applications and a nineteen percent (19%) increase in mechanic applications received during the same period of the previous year. The result of Phase 1 is that the District stopped seeing a continual decrease in operator applications and a sustained increase in mechanic applications.

Phase 2 was equally impactful, adopting bus interior and exterior ads, amplified and targeted social media, cable television, and video streaming tactics. Overall, the District served approximately 3.5 million impressions through traditional and digital media channels, and the District's Careers page received twenty-thousand (20,000) views during the campaign timeframe. The Community Relations team provided recruitment material at more than 130 community events.

The marketing campaign started on March 22 and on June 1, the Human Resources team launched AC Transit's HR Mobile Recruitment Lab (MRL) as part of the department's new recruitment strategy. The MRL allows recruiters to travel to candidates and provide them with information about AC Transit careers and application

assistance while cultivating a strong presence in the local community.

Additionally, the Human Resources team hosted the first AC Transit Informational Session for job seekers at the Training & Education Center on December 14, 2019. The event resulted in seventy-one (71) bus operator interviews and fourteen (14) mechanic applicant leads.

From the combined efforts of the 6-month paid marketing campaign, continued visibility through events and the mobile recruitment lab, plus an on-going social media presence, a total of 2,409 applications (2,073 operator and 336 mechanic) have been received in the past nine months. Resultant from these applications, AC Transit has hired ninety (90) bus operators and twelve (12) mechanics from March through November 2019.

Additionally, staff has looked into other alternatives to find and develop local talent streams for employment. Most notably, through the competitive Request for Proposal (RFP) process, the District was able to reach an agreement with the Unity Council, a community-based organization, to conduct a pilot Talent Development Academy for prospective AC Transit bus operators. The Unity Council aims to have its first class of twenty-five (25) candidates complete the training in Spring 2020. Graduates of the pilot training program will be eligible to apply for a job with AC Transit.

Finally, the District has expanded the number of training slots in each class for Operators from ten (10) per class to twenty (20) per class beginning with the August 2019 recruitment class. To help accommodate the increase numbers of operator candidates being moved through new operator training, the Board approved two (2) additional trainers towards the end of summer 2019, which allowed for a higher volume of trainees per class, and also maintain all the other training required by the Training Department. This increased class size of twenty (20) candidates per operator class targets to have at least fifteen (15) new Operators graduating with each class and aims to further close the operator eligibility gap.

Consequently, the combined additional financial investments on behalf of External Affairs/Marketing/Communications and Human Resources have kept AC Transit competitive in a Bay Area hiring market.

ADVANTAGES/DISADVANTAGES:

There are no specific advantages or disadvantages associated with this briefing item; however, the District might see a continued increase in bus operator and mechanic applicants in the event that the District identifies ongoing funding sources for continued career opportunity promotion and outreach in media channels, at public events and via the mobile recruitment lab.

ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS:

There are no alternative analyses developed for this briefing item.

PRIOR RELEVANT BOARD ACTION/POLICIES:

19-170 Overview of the HR Mobile Recruitment Lab

ATTACHMENTS:

1. HR Recruitment Promotional Visuals
2. Recruitment Tactic Schedule

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