

ALAMEDA-CONTRA COSTA TRANSIT DISTRICT



STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: 3/9/2022

Staff Report No. 22-198

TO: AC Transit Board of Directors
FROM: Michael A. Hursh, General Manager
SUBJECT: Bus Operator Recruiting Efforts and Process

BRIEFING ITEM

RECOMMENDED ACTION(S):

Consider receiving an update on operator hiring efforts, including the number of applications, interviews, and hires to understand when and why applicants do not complete the hiring process. [Requested by Directors Walsh - 1/26/2022]

STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE:

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

Recruitment, training and retention is of vital importance to the District, especially in the transportation and operations channels, in order to ensure the District is meeting its goal of convenient and reliable service.

BUDGETARY/FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact for receiving this report.

BACKGROUND/RATIONALE:

At the January 26, 2022 Board of Directors meeting, staff was asked to provide an update on Bus Operator hiring efforts and an explanation of the hiring process for operators including any impediments during the hiring and training process that may affect the onboarding of Bus Operators for active service. Recruitment of qualified candidates in any position has always been a priority for Human Resources regardless, but Bus Operator positions have always required creative and innovative methods to attract candidates. Human Resources has provided over 100% of needed candidates for new Bus Operator training classes from March 2021 to present.

Efforts to Attract Bus Operator Candidates to Apply

Many of the current efforts to attract bus operator candidates were outlined in Staff Report 21-506 that was presented in December 2021. Many of these efforts have continued into the first quarter of 2022 and include:

- Refresh new postings for the bus operator position every 90 days on 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. This happens every 30-45 days.
- Attend job fairs and other community events such as San Leandro Chamber of Commerce, Cal Maritime Spring Job Fair, Silicon Valley Career Fair, Juneteeth and San Francisco Fleet Week.
- Host virtual and in-person hiring events with Oakland Private Industry Council (PIC).
- Continued collaboration with Marketing on print, digital, and broadcast marketing including the marketing tag line “Do What you Love with AC Transit” that appears in print advertising, social media, and outdoor advertising.
- Continued assistance from External Affairs in sharing hiring opportunities with elected officials and community organizations.

Additional strategies and methods to attract Bus Operator candidates that have been implemented since the January 1, 2022 include:

- Digital billboard advertisements in high traffic areas (See Attachment 1)
 - Digital billboard advertisements have recently started as of 2/21/22 and will be running for two months. More billboard advertisements are being researched and explored to provide more exposure for the District’s hiring opportunities.
- Hiring and Referral Incentive Programs for Bus Operator
 - A hiring bonus is being offered for new Bus Operators during their first year of employment. Five hundred dollars (\$500) will be provided to the new Bus Operator when three months of driving is accomplished after graduation from training. After one year of employment and active driving with the District, new Bus Operators are eligible to receive one thousand dollars (\$1000). This provides new Bus Operators with a \$1500 incentive to perform and remain at the District for the first year of employment.

Human Resources and other stakeholders within the District have been actively recruiting for applicants and the Recruitment Team has had more than enough candidates to process to fill the new Bus Operator classes (as explained in the next section of this report). Despite this success, it is important to highlight the current landscape of the job market and how it affects the District as well as other employers in the area.

When the pandemic began and throughout the first year of the pandemic, unemployment rates were high for the San Francisco Bay Area counties, hovering at a high rate of 13-15%. But as the pandemic continued, unemployment rates have dropped drastically to a current rate of 4-5%. In addition to the unemployment rate, during the pandemic, there has been a pattern of residents moving outside of the Bay Area at a much higher rate than the rest of California. This exodus of residents was precipitated by the high cost of living, the many COVID restrictions and lack of housing options. This has created extreme competition among employers for all level of talent including candidates for trade and industry such as Bus Operators.

To address this competition, private employers have been heavily adjusting their strategies to attract candidates including sign-on bonuses, increased benefits, flexible schedules, training and development opportunities and increased hourly rates. While the District has started some of these strategies, the competition for the same pool is extremely competitive, and the District does not have the value proposition that private companies can offer. Many other transit agencies in the Bay Area are facing the same challenges. With Human Resources having new strong stable leadership, Human Resources is constantly brainstorming

new and innovative ways to address these issues and continue to attract additional candidates to apply for Bus Operator.

Human Resources Selection and Hiring Process for Bus Operator

The Bus Operator selection and hiring process is an extensive process that involves many steps. These steps are explained below. Attachment 2 provides some additional detail about these steps as well as the bottlenecks and timeframes for the Bus Operator selection and hiring process.

- **Posting-** Bus Operator Job Posting is open and posted on the District's website. The posting is provided to various external sites such as Indeed and ZipRecruiter to gain exposure to candidates. Other methods of advertising the posting were outlined earlier in this report.
- **Screening Applicants-** Recruiters review applicants and pass through the best qualified.
- **Scheduling of Interviews-** Candidates who are selected from the initial application review are contacted to interview. Interviews are completed virtually at this time. Transportation provides outstanding support for interviews by supplying panel members for these interviews.
- **Driving Record Request-** Candidates who are successful in the interview, must provide their driving record. The District has strict standards for past driving experience because safety in driving is imperative to the District.
- **Employment Certification-** This is an EEO process that ensures that the District is hiring according to FTA standards.
- **Conditional Offer-** Candidate is provided a conditional offer of employment as a Bus Operator.
- **Criminal Background-** A criminal background is completed on all candidates. This background is accordance with federal and state laws and Board Policy 202.
- **DOT Physical Including Drug and Alcohol Screening-** Candidates are sent for a physical and drug and alcohol screening. The physical is needed to obtain a Class B driving permit and the drug and alcohol screening is an FTA requirements and District policy.
- **Obtaining a Class B Permit with Endorsements-** If a candidate does not already possess a Class B license, they must obtain a permit and endorsements by going to the DMV and passing the tests.
- **Verification of Employment/References-** Candidates must provide verifications of employment and/or references from previous employers. These verifications must be positive and legitimate.
- **Proof of Vaccination-** All new hires must provide proof of vaccination prior to starting in a New Bus Operator Training class. This is a new step that has been added since the middle of last year.
- **Completion of Pre-Employment Paperwork-** Candidates must provide some initial paperwork so that they can put into the HRIS system to produce items badge number and payroll information.
- **Proof of Negative COVID Test-** Candidates must provide proof of a negative PCR test for COVID prior to be placed in a new operator training class. This is a new step that can add time to this process.
- **New Bus Operator Orientation-** After all the above steps are completed, the candidate becomes a new hire when they are placed into a New Bus Operator Training class. The first day is an orientation where speakers, such as Labor, ATU Union, Payroll and Retirement, provide information to the new operator trainees.

The Bus Operator recruitment is currently posted, and remains posted at all times in order to allow as many candidates as possible to apply. Since resuming the Bus Operator recruitment in March of 2021, the Recruitment Team has received an influx of applications that have been received and processed. Some of

these statistics are outlined below.

- 373 applicants met the minimum qualifications and were screened for best qualifications.
- 147 applicants were scheduled for virtual interviews.
- 89 applicants passed the virtual interviews and advanced to the driving record review
- 72 applicants completed pre-employment requirements (fingerprinting, substance and alcohol screening, medical clearance, and reference check).
- 65 applicants qualified and were subsequently hired as new bus operators.
- As of January 2022, 194 new online bus operator applications have been submitted and are currently being processed (this would be the number of applications who have not been screened for MQ's and/or have not been interviewed).

Bottlenecks, if any, generally occur at the pre-employment stage once a conditional job offer has been made. These bottlenecks are created when there are delays in receiving information on Drug and Alcohol test results, physical examinations and result from the Department of Justice (DOJ) on criminal backgrounds. Also, some applicants have difficulty obtaining a commercial Class B driving permit with endorsements. These areas, along with the review of an applicant's driving record, tend to be where candidates drop out of the process. The Recruitment Team continually look for new ways to expedite the process especially in portions of the process that are generally out of the District's control. As recruiting has increased for Bus Operator and other District positions, it has put pressure on the Recruitment Unit. While the recruitment load is sustainable at this time, a short-term plan for increased scale is being discussed in Human Resources, and a longer term solution will be reviewed with the new Executive Director of Human Resources.

Training for New Bus Operators

After the New Bus Operator Trainees are brought on board by the Recruitment Team, the trainees report to the Training and Education Department in Hayward. While TED does not have a direct connection to the recruitment process, the TED does have a direct impact on the throughput of how many trainees can be trained and put into service. Much of this is dependent on Training Instructor staffing.

In July 2019, the Classification, Compensation and Organizational Design Unit embarked on an organizational review and workforce analysis of the Training and Education Department with the purpose of assessing the TED's current structure with a focus on staffing levels and best practices for optimal labor efficiencies. During this review, information was gathered about the TED and how the TED compared to other agencies. The review concluded that the District's TED has an extensive and comprehensive New Bus Operator training class, TED had one of the highest ratios of students to Training Instructors, and the structure of the TED was not comparable to other agencies. A recommendation to increase Training Instructors was provided in order to decrease the ratio of trainees to instructors.

The increase in Training Instructors has helped with reducing the ratio; however, the onset of COVID has required another review of the needs of the TED and Training Instructor staffing levels. Additionally, Human Resources will be looking at Training Instructor availability for the TED. Training Instructors have extensive experience as high performing Bus Operators for the District, and with that experience, Training Instructors have the benefits of seniority, which include additional vacation and sick time for injury and/or illness. It is important for Training Instructors to utilize these benefits for the health and safety of themselves and their

trainees, but in combination with COVID absences, it can have a serious effect on the availability of Training Instructors to provide training.

Human Resources plans on collaborating with the TED again to continue the organizational review and provide additional recommendations on staffing optimization for the projected needs of the District.

Bus Operator Availability

As mentioned in prior staff reports, Bus Operator availability continues to be a challenge. Operations has done an outstanding job of adjusting staff to meet service needs when Bus Operator availability decreases. With COVID continuing to mutate and the pandemic persisting in waves, as well as the impending District Vaccine Mandate, Bus Operator availability will continue to be affected. Additionally, California has passed another COVID leave law which will allow for up to 80 hours of leave for employees. This new leave will also affect Bus Operator availability and potentially service levels, especially as the District plans to continue restoring service.

With various short and long-term variables affecting Bus Operator availability, Human Resources plans to collaborate extensively with the TED, Transportation and Finance to create a comprehensive staffing model that can be scaled to the needs of the District. The model will take into account short and long term factors, such as those mentioned above.

Conclusion

Human Resources, Marketing, External Affairs, TED, and Transportation as well as many other stakeholders are integral pieces of recruiting, training and putting service out. The efforts to bring Bus Operators on board for service cannot be accomplished by a single department, and it takes a true collaboration among many departments to be successful in these endeavors. Additional innovative ideas currently under discussion include the creation of videos to promote Bus Operator as a career. Also, the re-launch of the Recruitment Bus, reinstating a version of the talent academy from pre-pandemic, reviewing and updating TED's structure and staffing, etc. New ideas and suggestions are always welcomed, and continued success is anticipated.

ADVANTAGES/DISADVANTAGES:

There are no advantages or disadvantages to receiving this report.

ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS:

There is no alternative analysis as this is an informational report.

PRIOR RELEVANT BOARD ACTION/POLICIES:

None.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Billboard Hiring Incentive Advertising
2. Bus Operator Recruitment Process
3. 3 Bus Operator Classification Specification

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