

ALAMEDA-CONTRA COSTA TRANSIT DISTRICT



STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: 4/12/2023

Staff Report No. 23-155

TO: AC Transit Board of Directors
FROM: Michael A. Hursh, General Manager/Chief Executive Officer
SUBJECT: Update on Bus Operator Recruitment

BRIEFING ITEM

AGENDA PLANNING REQUEST:

RECOMMENDED ACTION(S):

Consider receiving an update on Bus Operator recruitment, hiring and training process. [Requested by Director Walsh - 12/14/2022]

Staff Contact:
Sebron Flenaugh III, Executive Director of Human Resources

STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE:

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

Recruitment, training and retention are 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 December 14, 2022, Board of Directors meeting, staff was asked to provide an update on Bus Operator recruitment, hiring and training process. The purpose of the report is to provide an update to the improvements made to the Bus Operator recruitment process.

Improving recruitment functions is integral to achieving the District's strategic mission of delivering safe, reliable transit service that responds to the needs of our customers and communities.

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 which was presented in March 2022. Many of these efforts have continued into the first quarter of 2023 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, Juneteenth and San Francisco Fleet Week.
- Host virtual and in-person hiring events with Oakland Private Industry Council (PIC) and Alameda County.
- Continued collaboration with Marketing on print, digital, and broadcast marketing including the tagline of “Do What You Love” 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.
- Digital billboard advertisements
- Hiring and Referral Incentive Programs for Bus Operators
 - The hiring incentive has been increased to \$2,000 for the Bus Operator positions.
 - NBOs hired after 10/1/22 are eligible to receive up to \$2,000 within the first 12 months of employment with the following requirements:
 - \$500 upon graduation from the AC Transit Training & Education Center
 - \$500 upon completion of 3 months driving after graduation from new bus operator training classes
 - \$1,000 upon completion of 12 months of employment from date of hire.
 - Attachment 1 shows a marketing pamphlet for the hiring bonus
 - The number of incentives and referrals are reported out regularly in the GM report

Improved 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 updates to the process as of February 2023. Recruitment of Bus Operators is the most important function of the Talent Acquisition Unit. Currently, with the newly establish High-Volume Talent Acquisition team, and new leadership of Human Resources and Talent Acquisition, the following improvements to the Bus Operator process have been made:

- **Screening of Applications**
 - A dedicated team member has been tasked with reviewing all incoming applications daily. The screening consists of a thorough screening of each applicant to determine if they are best qualified for the Bus Operator position.
- **Request and Review K4 driving records**
 - Requests are sent via email and via text message. The candidate pool for the Bus Operator position responds well to text messages, and the response rate via text messages has increased. K4s have been received more quickly, and candidates are able to be scheduled for interviews more rapidly.
- **Interviewing candidates**
 - A dedicated team member has been trained to interview for Bus Operators. The team member was able to shadow two of the tenured team members to learn interviewing skills. Since this

training, the team has been able to interview successfully thus minimizing no shows/reschedules.

- **Fingerprinting/DOJ**
 - We have now implemented onsite fingerprinting. Candidates are scheduled to come meet with team members to discuss next steps in the process and have their fingerprints taken. Since this step has been reestablished, we have seen a rapid increase in receiving DOJ results at a much faster rate.
- **Verification of Employment**
 - Previously, this step was done at the end of the process, and it caused many delays. Now, when candidates meet the team in person for fingerprints, we are requesting that they complete their verification of employment as soon as possible. Doing so beforehand gives the candidates time to reach current and former employers, as there is usually a waiting period to receive verifications.
- **On-site PCR Testing**
 - With all NBOs, we required all new students to complete a PCR COVID test prior to Orientation. We have found that some candidates are finding it difficult to have a test administered and receive the results in time for their first day. To alleviate this, we have now partnered with City Health to provide on-site PCR Testing. Candidates will come to the General Office 3 days before the start of their class, and the PCR test will be administered onsite.
- **Proof of Vaccination**
 - All new hires must provide proof of vaccination prior to starting in a New Bus Operator Training class. This verification is obtained during pre orientation.
- **Completion of Pre-Employment Paperwork**
 - Candidates must provide some initial forms and information so that they can put into the HRIS system for badge numbers and payroll information.
- **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.

Time to Fill

Time-to-fill is a metric which measures the average number of days it takes to fill a position, from job requisition to job acceptance. Prior to the establishment of the High-Volume Talent Acquisition Team, the average time to fill Bus Operator classes was 179 days.

With the improvements (as illustrated in Attachment 2), the current average time to fill Bus Operator classes is 59 days (with minimal to no delays) and 90 days (with various delays). The team has worked tirelessly to improve this process and the candidate experience. The numbers clearly indicate that we are moving positively in the right direction. We will continue looking for opportunities to reduce days to hire.

Training Process for New Bus Operators

New Bus Operator (NBO) training is a ten-week program. With the current Training and Education Department (TED), three NBO sessions run concurrently. With a maximum seating capacity of twenty-two per class, a typical monthly production cycle entails one NBO class at the beginning, a second in mid-session, and a third, certifying to enter revenue service operations. NBO training is an organized, thorough, and managed transit career training process yielding an average 70% certification rate per class.

NBO training is multi-faceted: The program serves to propel new entrants into public transit careers as bus operators but also one that satisfies federal and state regulations and District requirements. Over the course of ten weeks, trainees upskill from usually having only attained a Commercial Learner's Permit (which doesn't require driving experience but instead passing basic DMV tests) to being fully licensed, credentialed, and experienced to enter revenue service. Ten-week certification training entails the following:

- 1) Federal Testing Requirements: Trainees prepare for the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's (FMCSA), Entry Level Driver Training (ELDT) requirements (newly enacted February 7, 2022). Noteworthy, AC Transit was one of the first agencies in the country to comply with the new federal mandate, becoming a Training Provider Registry (TPR) and having successfully implemented two compliant tests ("Passenger Theory" and "Behind-the-Wheel"). The District is recognized as an authorized Class B, behind-the-wheel (BTW), and passenger endorsement training provider on the FMCSA's TPR website.
- 2) State Testing Requirements: Trainees who pass ELDT advance to the Department of Motor Vehicle (DMV) Certificate of Driving Skill (DL 170) tests. The TED is a DMV authorized Examiner of the Employer Testing Program. In other words, the District doesn't outsource or send its employees to get tested elsewhere; certified staff conduct tests. Tests administered are vehicle inspection, basic control skills, and road tests. These are the DL 170 tests and successfully passing means NBOs upscale their documentation from a learner's permit to a Commercial Driver License (CDL), Class B, Passenger Endorsement.
- 3) Driving experiences: Defensive driving begins the second day of the NBO program and is progressive: NBOs start by learning safety and defensive driving basics in the training facility yard. By end of the first week, NBOs advance to more roadway challenges. Training moves from industrial areas to inner-city streets and freeways to tolls and bridges to transit centers such as BART stations and the Salesforce Transit Center. Additionally, prior to going into revenue service, NBOs also learn to operate each in-service route, per their assigned division, as well as how to provide/operate the many customer service requirements (including all aspects from boarding, securing to alighting).

NBOs may experience, on average, 50-60 BTW hours, prior to the last week of training. This average BTW is nearly two-and-half and often, three or more times that of the DMV required BTW (minimum 15 hours as part of the DL 1236 or California Commercial Driver Behind the Wheel Training Certification). It also exceeds the Department of Education's (DOE) BTW hours in issuing the required Verification of Transit Training Document (VTT). VTT is a mandatory verification document per California Vehicle Code § 642 (which regulates a "transit bus" operator such as AC Transit). Noteworthy, TED Training Instructors are certified by the Transportation Safety Institute specifically to qualify NBOs in the DOE regulation enabling DMV to issue VTTs to NBOs.

- 4) Driver Proficiencies: NBOs also qualify on all bus types and bus sub-components (from the dashboard to the engine compartment, from Clever or radio systems to securements). Qualifying NBOs on bus equipment/fleet usually entails the entire fleet or all bus types, not just the division an NBO is assigned. This training satisfies yet another State requirement, the California Code of Regulations (CCR), Title 13, "Driver Proficiency" which also impacts California Highway Patrol, Motor Carrier Specialists' audits (known also as terminal inspections or CHP inspections) of the District's operating divisions.
- 5) Professional Development: Testing and regulations go together of course; however, it's important to understand the overall or career learning process. For bus operators, the learning process is organized and managed in three stages of professional development. Each is unique but all are modeled as on-the-job or learning-by-doing experiences.

The first stage, or primary stage, focuses heavily on achieving the requirements described above. This sets the pace and foundation to progress toward service operations. Additionally, academics are introduced and include the Operations User Guide, material regarding work assignments and the language of transit (schedules, paddles, sub-systems, and the like), and customer service practice as applicable to staff, peers, passenger assisting, ADA regulations and working together, techniques in problem-solving, conflict avoidance, and de-escalation techniques and communicating with Operations Control Center. This first stage, the most critical building block is on average a five-week process. Transit regulations and licensing are attained, confidence grows, and NBOs are ready for the next progressive stage.

Upscaling proficiencies, NBOs move from the TED facility in Hayward to their assigned division. This second stage, usually about four weeks, immerses trainees into the service process, better known as revenue service preparation training (RSPT). RSPT is all about teaching NBOs the rhythm or pace of the bus operator. Working out of their soon-to-be division, NBOs learn to put it all together and begin reporting, pulling out and servicing routes, working with customers and customer needs, navigating and correctly interpreting schedules/assignments, communicating to Operation Control Center, and the many other variables of in-service operations. This is the stage too when bus qualifications not only continue but are connected to learning routes (working equipment specific to routes).

RSPT is intentional. It sets conditions. NBOs are also practicing many different report times, experiencing different pull-outs and traffic patterns. It's the final stage leading into the last and most critical, third stage of training known as Line Instruction. Line Instruction is a week-long process specifically designed to support the transition from training to in-service. Line Instructors (LIs) are Amalgamated Transit Union, Local 192 (ATU) bus operators qualified by TED to provide an in-service role to NBOs. LIs are assigned to an NBO but do not operate the schedule. Instead, the NBO operates the complete schedule, and the LI provides in-service coaching and often, incredible support in helping to calm nerves.

It takes special skills, training, and aptitude to safely operate large vehicles; more so, when teaching a new-to-transit candidate to operate in public transit. Observing a new employee navigate, rather awkwardly, a large bus in the training facility on the first few days, to nine weeks later, that same employee transforming into a professional, who can operate commercially and in-service, is nothing short of impressive and awe-inspiring.

Summary of NBO Training Classes and Graduation Dates

Attachment 3 provides information on NBO classes, the number of candidates who signed up for the class, the number who showed up for the first day and the number who graduated from training.

Projections for Achieving Pre-Pandemic Staffing Levels

To reach 100% of pre-pandemic levels of staffing for service, the District would need to hire at least 15 bus operators after attrition per month. With the average class in 2022 graduating 9-10 new bus operators per month, the District will reach pre-pandemic staffing levels in Spring or Summer of 2024.

New Recommendations

Although the High-Volume Acquisition team had made great strides in improving the process for the hiring of new bus operators, we must continue with additional ways to recruit and more process improvements. The following are future plans the team intends on implementing.

- **New Recruitment Campaign**
 - Marketing and Communications has worked hard to put together a new Recruitment Campaign. This campaign will be a combination of digital, print and radio advertising. One highlight of this campaign is to also advertise our Bus Operator positions at DMV locations around the Bay Area. Advertisements will be shown on their monitors daily. This new campaign is scheduled to deploy in Spring 2023.
- **Census Driven Recruitment Tool**
 - Business Sciences creating a tool using census data that will pinpoint potential candidate populations.
- **AC Transit Hiring Event**
 - Talent Acquisition team is currently in the planning phase of an AC Transit Hiring event. This event will include a variety of departments and give potential candidates a glimpse of what working at AC Transit entails.
- **NBO Orientation**
 - Human Resources along with Transportation, Training and ATU are in the beginning stages of formalizing a weeklong new bus operator orientation. The intention of this weeklong orientation is to properly orientate new Bus Operators. The District would like to introduce new employees to AC Transit and set clear expectations upfront. There are also plans for a new hire assessment, which will determine if additional support is needed for new bus operators. This orientation will be added to the current NBO.
- **Targeted Outreach**
 - Collaborate with local external agencies who are downsizing their staff. Talent Acquisition promotes open positions with intention of offering the displaced employees job opportunities. If staff deems it appropriate, conditional offers are extended on-site.
- **Veterans Career Fairs**
 - Exploring recruitment events targeted at the veteran workforce.
- **Securing an additional staff member**

- Due to all of these initiatives, the Talent Acquisition Team is initiating the hire of one temporary recruiter to assist with implementation.

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. Increased Hiring Incentive Advertising
2. Bus Operator Recruitment Process/Update
3. Summary of NBO Classes 2022

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