

Meeting Summary

Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization Transit Working Group

April 6, 2022, Meeting

4:00 PM-5:00 PM, Zoom Video Conferencing Platform, recording:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yg2qF8ZbfJ4>

Meeting materials posted at: <https://www.ctps.org/calendar/day/20220406>

Meeting Agenda

1. **Welcome and Meeting Guidelines-Sandy Johnston and Matt Archer, MPO Staff**

Sandy Johnston welcomed attendees to the Transit Working Group Coffee Chat: Confronting the Driver Recruitment Shortfall. Matt Archer invited attendees to introduce themselves in the chat. S. Johnston introduced himself as a Senior Transportation Planner on the MPO staff and manager of the TWG. He noted that there were attendees representing transit agencies, smaller transit operators, municipalities, and other sectors, and thanked those in attendance.

S. Johnston explained that at this meeting, representatives from the Transit Workforce Center (TWC) will lead a discussion on the challenges of recruiting and retaining transit operators. Pat Greenfield and Karitsa Holdzkom opened the discussion with an overview of the function of the TWC and some of its apprenticeship and educational programs for transit operators and technicians. P. Greenfield noted that the TWC offers technical assistance and grant information for municipalities and regions looking to integrate workforce development into their transit planning efforts.

Shayna Gleason (UMass Boston Gerontology) asked the speakers about their experience navigating mandatory drug testing for transit operators as marijuana and other recreational drugs become legalized. K. Holdzkom stated that while TWC is not working on this issue specifically, its partner agencies have come across this issue as well and are looking into legislation that would allow for the hiring of people who test positive for marijuana on a drug test. P. Greenfield shared that similar concerns have been raised by transit operators in Colorado, where transit agencies are struggling to hire and retain staff with experience due to the presence of marijuana in drug tests, even when drivers are not currently under the influence.

S. Johnston shared a question about successes in targeting certain populations for outreach, such as those with disabilities or formerly incarcerated peoples. P. Greenfield responded that TWC is working to expand outreach and recruitment to those groups. One important approach they have taken is understanding what structural obstacles people with disabilities and the formerly incarcerated face when trying to enter the workforce. P. Greenfield also discussed how TWC and partner agencies have seen success in recruiting veterans and providing opportunities for high school and college age people to learn about careers in transit operations and determine a path to a career.

S. Johnston invited participants to share any successes or failures in reaching out to targeted populations. Rachel Fichtenbaum (MassMobility) offered to share any resources or contacts who would be useful.

P. Greenfield then moved to discuss signing bonuses as a hiring incentive. She stated that some agencies have found that such bonuses do make a difference in hiring; other have more mixed results, especially because an average worker can make a similar wage at Target, for example, with much less training needed. Thus, establishing some kind of apprenticeship program to continuously develop transit operators becomes more and more of a necessity. K. Holdzkom provided an example of an operator in training shadowing an experienced driver to understand the routine tasks of the job, beyond just driving the vehicle, and developing the necessary soft skills to deal with different kinds of customers and populations throughout the day.

K. Holdzkom also discussed the opportunities for mentorship and apprenticeship with labor unions and local community colleges, which can allow an operator to complete training and an apprenticeship while gaining some college credit as well.

Franny Osman (Town of Acton) asked if recruitment efforts were in sync with workforce development offices in Massachusetts. P. Greenfield replied that TWC has found that the most successful outreach has been through local workforce development boards or community career centers. F. Osman raised the question of needing a commercial driver license (CDL) to drive a bus or van and how comfortable people may feel in operating such a large vehicle.

S. Johnston offered a question, asking whether any agencies have adjusted their CDL requirement to hire staff with the expectation of training them and allowing them to get their CDL on the job. He also asked who the main competitors are for bus and transit agencies in terms of hiring. K. Holdzkom stated that since CDL requirements are laid out by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, she is unsure how and whether

those requirements can be eased. P. Greenfield stated that the CDL itself has been seen to be an obstacle to hiring, especially in communities where most people do not have access to cars such as New York City. However, she recounted a program led by a South Bronx Community Development Center which mentored a group of 18 young people through the CDL program, from learner's permit to actually getting the license. She noted that some agencies may already do this, but this particular program was successful.

Regarding competitors, K. Holdzkom stated that companies such as Uber and Lyft are certainly difficult to compete with in terms of flexibility, but transit providers almost always provide a higher overall income than rideshare companies. P. Greenfield also noted the sentiment among long-term drivers of their work as a service to the communities they travel through.

S. Johnston posed a question regarding working conditions, scheduled breaks, and layover lines. P. Greenfield stated that this is an ongoing concern among executives of transit agencies as well as worker advocacy groups. She mentioned that a common problem among drivers was the use of split shifts—that is, working a short shift in the morning and another short shift in the evening. This kind of schedule almost automatically excludes parents and people with childcare needs. K. Holdzkom added that some agencies have been looking at route runtimes and break times to ensure that operators have enough time to take a break between routes. F. Osman stated that another consideration regarding split shifts is having a dedicated space for operators to take breaks. P. Greenfield agreed and stated that none of these issues are insurmountable if agencies and transit providers listen to frontline workers and understand what works and what does not.

2. Closing and Next Steps

S. Johnston reminded attendees that the slides and contact information would be sent to attendees via email after the meeting. S. Johnston also mentioned some upcoming TWG events: a Coffee Chat on April 27, 2022, on integrating school transit with other methods of transportation, and the quarterly Transit Working Group meeting to be held on May 31, 2022. He again thanked presenters and attendees, and he shared his contact information in the chat.

Attendance

Members

Tyler Terrasi
Karitisa Holdzkom
Patricia Greenfield
Rachel Fichtenbaum
Elizabeth McCarthy
Jonahan Ahn
Lisa Weber
Jeff Bennett
Shayna Gleason
Franny Osman
Melissa Dullea
Glenn Ann Geller
Jay Flynn

Representatives and Alternates

MetroWest Regional Transportation Authority
Transit Workforce Center
Transit Workforce Center
MassMobility
MassDOT

EOHHS Human Service Transportation Office
128 Business Council
UMass Boston
Town of Acton
Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority
Brockton Area Transit Authority
Transit Matters

MPO Staff/Central Transportation Planning Staff

Matt Archer, Transportation Planner
Sandy Johnston, Senior Transportation Planner
Stella Jordan, Public Engagement Coordinator

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Title VI Specialist

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857.702.3700 (voice)

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