

Building an Effective Transit Workforce

Creating the Conditions for Excellent Transit Service

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Executive Summary

Public transportation systems across the United States move millions of Americans every day. But since the COVID-19 pandemic, many transit agencies have struggled to provide adequate service. The financial difficulties some agencies face have restricted service and have limited some agencies' ability to meet riders' needs. Contributing to waning service provision are the challenges many agencies have had recruiting and retaining sufficient workers, namely bus and rail operators,[1] frontline staff members,[2] and maintenance employees.[3] Barring intervention, this workforce shortage may persist or worsen, as employees in the transit industry are nearing retirement at a faster rate than workers in most other industries (Paget-Seekins 2023).

Transit agencies must respond to this situation to provide service at a high enough quality to retain current riders, attract new riders, ensure adequate access to opportunity for all, and help meet climate and roadway safety goals by shifting people out of cars. The nation's transit services provide up to 20 million rides a day.[4] They notably help serve the estimated 36 percent of the nation's residents older than 10—including people with disabilities, older people, children, and people with low incomes—who do not rely on a personal vehicle to meet travel needs.[5] Transit is a key generator of economic growth and social mobility.[6] An effective workforce is essential to keeping transit agencies running.

Why has the transit workforce shortage—that is, the challenges transit agencies have experienced hiring enough workers to provide adequate service—occurred since the onset of the pandemic? Most transit agencies have experienced this problem, which has been exacerbated by a high number of vehicle operator and maintenance job offers being declined. Hiring is impeded, most significantly, by job entry requirements, health and safety conditions, scheduling rules, and a lack of career advancement pathways. Agencies have responded by improving compensation, shortening hiring timelines, and changing qualification requirements, but many continue to struggle to attract workers.

In this report, we examine current conditions in the transit workforce and estimate how the workforce is likely to change in the coming years. We compare the details of transit jobs with those in comparable industries to understand what might make transit jobs more appealing. And we conclude with recommendations for transit agencies, helping identify how they can show that their jobs can help bring thousands of Americans into the middle class.

Our Findings

About half a million Americans are employed in the transit workforce, occupations related to providing public transportation. More than half of these work directly for the nation's 3,000 public transit agencies, or general-purpose public bus and train providers. The rest largely work as school bus drivers. Most transit workers are vehicle operators or maintenance workers. The transit workforce has grown over the past two decades, though not steadily. In some regions, such as the Atlanta and Boston metropolitan areas, the workforce has thinned out, even as it has consistently grown in, for example, the Dallas and Washington, DC, metropolitan areas. **In most large regions, the transit workforce has grown more slowly than overall employment. The slow growth is undermining the ability of cities and towns nationwide to provide mobility to the millions of people who need it.**

Transit workers are disproportionately male, especially those working as mechanics and train operators. They are also more likely than the typical worker to be Black, Hispanic, or 55 or older and have no college degree. **Transit worker wages are similar to those of similar workers in other industries—with substantial region-by-region variation—though people working in management jobs within transit agencies make substantially less than their peers elsewhere.** Transit workers make higher wages than the workforce overall in some metropolitan areas, such as Los Angeles and New York City, but this is not true in other areas, such as Boston and Philadelphia, which may help explain why agencies there have struggled to attract employees. We also find that transit employees receive similar or better-than-average nonwage job benefits, except for schedule flexibility.

Under baseline trends, transit agencies will add roughly 23,000 employees by 2033, an almost 10 percent increase. This increase is lower than our estimated increase in transit agencies' expenses over that time because over the past two decades, nonlabor costs have grown more quickly than labor costs, reducing transit systems' productivity. This could result in declining service levels, even though the population is growing. Declining service levels would be exacerbated if the federal government reduced or eliminated transit funding, a situation that would reduce service levels about 15 percent compared with the baseline and require cutting roughly 35,000 jobs. Rural transit agencies, which rely on the federal government to fund about half their operations costs, would be particularly negatively affected. On the other hand, doubling transit service in urban areas—which would provide enormous benefits to the nation's residents through improved accessibility—could add hundreds of thousands of new jobs.

Finally, our analysis of job postings shows how agencies' advertised positions compare with their competitors' positions. Although previous research identified compensation and job entry requirements as general barriers, our analysis reveals the ways these barriers manifest. **We find that transit agencies**

are strongest when recruiting for operational positions, typically offering competitive pay and unique benefits, such as transportation subsidies and union membership. Transit agencies, however, frequently impose more stringent qualification requirements than other employers—including drug testing, background checks, and education minimums—and in some cases offer lower pay, creating a double disadvantage that likely deters potential applicants. Additionally, although many transit agencies offer valuable benefits beyond standard insurance packages, the communication of these benefits varies widely across job postings, potentially causing agencies to lose competitive ground when applicants compare opportunities.

Recommendations for Transit Agencies

We recommend that transit agencies adopt a multifaceted approach to address both immediate recruitment barriers and long-term structural issues. Agencies should enhance job postings to fully communicate available benefits and paid training opportunities, review qualification requirements to reduce unnecessary barriers to entry, and strengthen compensation structures, particularly for roles where shortages are most acute. Given the aging workforce and demographic composition of transit workers, agencies should prioritize outreach and support for diverse candidates (including those without college degrees and those with limited English proficiency) and expand supports such as child care assistance that help workers with nontraditional schedules. When possible, agencies should consider providing some employees (e.g., those in administration) the ability to work from home. Agencies should also evaluate the use of artificial intelligence to replace aspects of employment that may be less appealing to job candidates, such as excessive paperwork. Automated technologies are unlikely to replace people anytime soon for most transit jobs, given the need to provide a human connection to riders, a desire to provide safe riding conditions, and the challenges of on-the-ground bus and train maintenance.

The transit workforce shortage represents not just an operational challenge for individual agencies but a systemic threat to public transportation's role in shaping healthy communities, spurring economic development, and providing good jobs. The industry's ability to recover from the pandemic and serve growing populations depends on successfully resolving these workforce challenges through coordinated, strategic action informed by rigorous research and evaluation. Only through comprehensive work can the transit industry develop sustainable solutions to this critical challenge.

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally altered the landscape of public transportation, creating unprecedented challenges for transit agencies across the United States. Initial pandemic-responsive research focused on declines in ridership and fare revenue, but an equally persistent crisis involving workforce shortages—the challenges transit agencies have experienced hiring enough workers to provide adequate service—has emerged, warranting research attention. These lingering shortages negatively affect transit agencies, which could undermine public confidence in transit reliability, creating a self-reinforcing cycle of reduced ridership, intensified financial pressures, and ultimately reduced mobility options for millions of Americans. Understanding the labor-related forces shaping this cycle is vital if transit is to move away from a vicious cycle of service reduction, ridership loss, and financial precarity toward a virtuous cycle of increased service, boosted ridership, and strengthened and diversified funding support—leading to good jobs (Freemark and Rennert 2023).

In this chapter, we examine the scale of transit industry workforce shortages, a problem that has been magnified by the pandemic and workers' expectations about what types of jobs they want to hold. We then identify contributing factors, compare transit's workforce challenges with those of other industries, gather improvement strategies that industry workers offer to transit agencies, and describe agency responses. We close the chapter identifying knowledge gaps in the field.

Description and Scale of the Transit Workforce Shortage

The magnitude of transit industry workforce shortages may be unprecedented in scope and severity. Research conducted by the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) reveals that 96 percent of the 190 transit agencies the authors surveyed report experiencing workforce shortages, with 84 percent indicating that these shortages have directly affected their ability to provide service (APTA 2023). Additional survey research found that 71 percent of transit agencies reported service delays or cancellations attributable to labor shortages in 2023, a 6 percent increase from 2021 levels.[7] These worsening impacts are unsurprising, as the crisis is particularly acute among operators and mechanics, positions that are critical to maintaining service delivery (TransitCenter 2022).

The workforce shortage manifests beyond job vacancy. For instance, transit agencies face a rejection rate of 35 percent for offers they extend to potential hires.[8] This rate is twice as high as the

rejection rate across all industries (17 percent).[9] This indicates that the challenges facing the transit industry are related to attracting applicants and to converting interest into employment.

The Essential Role of Transit Workers

Public transportation moves millions of Americans every day. In 2023, transit agencies provided 6.9 billion trips, moving passengers 35 billion miles nationwide (OBP 2023). Although much attention is paid to transit infrastructure—buses, trains, maintenance facilities, and stations—the people who make these systems run are less visible but equally critical. Transit workers are not merely operators of infrastructure; they are essential infrastructure themselves. The half million workers in transit-related industries nationwide (more than half of whom work for transit agencies) compose a workforce that enables economic activity, provides access to opportunity, and keeps communities connected. According to the American Community Survey, approximately 5.7 million US workers commuted via public transportation in 2023, and millions of others used transit to get to school, recreation, or medical appointments. Transit use is much higher among certain worker groups, including those in health care, retail, and service industries.[10] Moreover, the transit sector provides stable jobs to hundreds of thousands of people.

Yet workforce planning in the transit sector has historically lagged behind infrastructure planning. Although transit agencies develop long-term capital improvement plans, their hiring decisions often operate on shorter time horizons (GAO 2019). This mismatch creates a vulnerability: Even the most modern fleet and sophisticated rail system cannot provide reliable service without adequate staffing.[11]

Could autonomous vehicle technology resolve transit workforce challenges by reducing the need for human operators? Although automation will transform certain aspects of transit work, it will not eliminate the need for a robust human workforce. Even where automated systems are deployed, human workers remain essential for system monitoring, maintenance, customer service, safety oversight, and managing unexpected situations that automated systems cannot handle (Martelaro et al. 2022). Rather than eliminating transit jobs, automation is expected to create new categories of employment requiring technical skills in fleet management, remote vehicle supervision, and system maintenance. Perhaps most importantly, transit service delivery requires human judgment, customer service, and crisis response that automated systems cannot replicate. Transit workers perform essential human jobs, providing essential assistance to elderly and disabled riders, responding to medical emergencies, managing conflicts, and making real-time operational decisions during service disruptions, such as road closures or severe weather.

Contributing Factors

The transit workforce's woes are attributable to several interconnected factors. The pandemic was a catalyst for new challenges and an accelerant for existing challenges.

1. **An aging workforce:** The average age of transit workers is increasing quickly, with baby boomer retirements creating staffing gaps as the rate of new hires has declined (Peterson and Molina 2023).[12] The average age of frontline transit workers is about 10 years older than the national average worker age.
2. **Health and safety concerns:** Transit workers faced heightened health risks during the pandemic and were more likely to contract COVID-19 compared with nonessential workers (Rice et al. 2022). This exposure created safety concerns that contributed to departures (Navarrete-Hernandez et al. 2023). Additionally, assaults on transit workers more than tripled between 2008 and 2023.[13] The perception of frontline transit work as high-risk employment, a flame fanned by sensationalist media coverage,[14] may be negatively affecting worker retention and recruitment.
3. **Economic and labor market dynamics:** Transit's workforce shortage is not occurring in a vacuum. Pandemic-exacerbated labor market disruptions created opportunities in nontransit sectors, drawing workers away (APTA 2023). The "Great Resignation" has likely affected transit agencies as it has other employers (Lambert 2023). More recently, as the overall economy has transitioned to labor market conditions characterized by lower hiring and turnover rates, transportation and related industries have, broadly, followed suit.[15]
4. **An employment market for similarly skilled workers:** Transit agencies report that many departing workers land in other transportation roles (Transit Workforce Center 2023). This may be because other mobility-related jobs offer better compensation, conditions, schedule balance or flexibility, or career advancement opportunities (Paget-Seekins 2023).
5. **Long-standing affordability issues:** Transit industry wages have stagnated over the past decade, serving as a barrier to a happy and healthy workforce (Wasserman et al. 2024). The places where transit workers typically live, urbanized metropolitan areas, have seen housing costs climb quickly (Puentes et al. 2023).

Comparisons with Experiences in Other Industries

Transit workforce shortages reflect a broad pattern affecting multiple industries. The current labor market is experiencing staffing challenges that share common underlying causes while manifesting

differently based on industry-specific factors. Nationwide, the health care industry may need 100,000 additional workers to meet demands by 2028.[16] Like transit, health care faces both immediate operational challenges and long-term demographic pressures from an aging workforce. The same is true of nontransit transportation and logistics fields. The trucking industry faced a shortage of about 78,000 drivers as of 2024, a shortage that researchers also heavily attribute to a high number of retiring workers, a problem expected to worsen (Nelms et al. 2024).

Manufacturing has experienced similar struggles, partly because of shifting skill requirements resulting from automation and partly because of misperceptions about modern manufacturing career pathways and trajectories.[17] Hospitality and food service are similar. The restaurant industry added 500,000 new jobs in 2023 and 2024, yet many establishments still report being understaffed.[18] Hotel and restaurant workers cite unsociable hours as a major factor contributing to staffing shortages, reflecting work-life balance concerns that also affect transit operators working irregular schedules.[19]

Shared demographic pressures, postpandemic labor market shifts, inadequate compensation, and scheduling difficulties mean that transit agencies are not facing unique challenges but rather manifestations of systemic labor market conditions. Solving the problem may require coordination across sectors to address root causes of workforce dissatisfaction. Understanding this broader context is crucial for transit agencies developing workforce strategies, as agencies compete for workers with other sectors interested in implementing improved retention and recruitment themselves.

Potential Solutions

Industry research, advocates, academics, transit worker unions, and others have offered tools and recommendations to transit agencies for reducing workforce shortages and improving employee job satisfaction. These generally fall into two categories: hiring improvement strategies and retention improvement strategies.

Commonly cited **hiring- and recruitment-related recommendations** include the following:

- **Improve compensation packages.** Increasing starting pay would likely increase the number of job applicants. Agencies may want to focus on sign-on bonuses as the more cost-effective and attractive offer to would-be applicants (TransitCenter 2024).
- **More clearly advertise existing benefits and offer benefits employees want.** Agencies could better describe their benefits, including medical coverage, retirement programs, and paid time off. Child care support could attract more hires.[20]

- **Provide incentives for current workers to recruit potential applicants.** Recruiting new employees using referrals from the existing employee base can be highly effective. Agencies can give bonuses to employees who recruit applicants, especially those that lead to hires.[21]

- **Focus on barrier reduction.** The Transit Workforce Center (2023) encourages agencies to partner with educational institutions to include people with histories of incarceration and people with disabilities in recruitment (Godfrey 2024; Shanley et al. 2023).[22]

- **Use plain language, and align qualification requirements to roles.** Complicated posting language can deter applications; plain language may improve outcomes (Paget-Seekins 2023). Favoring applicants high school diplomas and college degrees may be limiting.[23]

- **Decrease hiring time.** Civil service requirements extend hiring times. Extensive paperwork, background checks, and exams extend the time applicants wait to receive job offers.[24] Officials can reform requirements, making transit agencies nimbler and more responsive in hiring.

- **Demonstrate what transit jobs entail.** There may be misconceptions about what transit industry jobs entail. Agencies could create job preview videos featuring current employees describing what their jobs are like and why they do it.[25] Agencies should then share these videos across their advertising and marketing platforms and with partner organizations.

Retention-related recommendations include the following:

- **Improve health and safety conditions.** Transit agencies could meet with employees and union representatives to discuss health and safety interventions.[26] Enforcement duties—which can place operators and ambassadors in unsafe situations that they are ill equipped to deal with—should be removed from frontline workers' responsibilities (TransitCenter 2022). Insufficient restroom access can put a strain on operators and lead to adverse health outcomes. Increasing bathroom access—be that via facility upgrades, partnering with businesses, shift and schedule changes, or some other method—should be a priority for agencies (Paget-Seekins 2023).

- **Establish training and development programs with clear pathways for career advancement.** Agencies must invest in enhanced training programs and career development pathways to attract new workers and retain employees. This includes reskilling and upskilling the workforce as new technologies and policies change the nature of some jobs.[27] Some research identifies strong correlation between ongoing mentor support and employee retention across various roles.[28]

- **Commit to culture change.** In addition to rewarding employees, transit agencies can improve facilities.[29] Pride in one's work is associated with retention (Kraemer et al. 2017). Agencies could adopt more inclusive decisionmaking practices to make employees feel valued.[30] These combined efforts can help improve employee satisfaction (Godfrey 2024).

Beyond these two categories of solutions, overall labor efficiency improvements can support job satisfaction. Given the pace of artificial intelligence and machine learning adoption across many industries, labor efficiency improvements have largely centered around technological innovation. The deployment of automated systems, improved scheduling software, and digital training platforms represent emerging trends in workforce management both within and outside the transit industry, though transit's adoption of these potential efficiencies may need to be greater to address workforce shortages.[31]

Agency Responses to Staffing Shortages

Transit agencies have received many recommendations. But how often have agencies implemented these ideas? Unlike private-sector employers, transit agencies often operate under civil service regulations, collective bargaining agreements, and budget constraints that limit their flexibility in adjusting compensation and working conditions. The specialized nature of transit operations, particularly for vehicle operators who require extensive training, creates barriers to rapid workforce replacement. Furthermore, the essential nature of transit service, combined with high public visibility, creates pressure on agencies to maintain service levels even with reduced workforce capacity.

Despite these constraints, some transit agencies have risen to meet the moment. Many agencies have streamlined their application and hiring processes. The Maryland Transit Administration Police Department implemented walk-in testing for entry-level recruits, allowing interested candidates to complete tests, oral interviews, and pre–background screening in a single session, eliminating the need for multiple appointments.[32] The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority has implemented creative approaches to fast-track hiring for police officers, bus operators, and mechanics by hosting large-scale events during which eligible applicants can receive contingent offers on-site.[33]

Other agencies have focused on broadening their recruitment strategies. For instance, the Sacramento Regional Transit District turned to its riders as a recruitment pool by advertising free rides for anyone attending agency hiring events.[34] Some agencies have applied a "job piloting" approach. At a hiring event, Des Moines Area Regional Transit invited anyone interested to test drive a 40-foot-long bus through an obstacle course at the Iowa State Fairgrounds.[35] This gave people the opportunity to

gauge their level of comfort behind the wheel before applying. This innovative recruitment approach could make jobs more accessible and less intimidating.

Some agencies have adjusted qualification requirements. In the Indianapolis metropolitan area, IndyGo staff members realized they were losing out on applicants with nonviolent criminal records because of overly exclusionary background checks. Many applicants with these records are well prepared but were blocked by automated processes. IndyGo created the Second Chance hiring initiative to help applicants who may be qualified but have had a criminal conviction.[36]

Where financial resources and regulatory frameworks permit, some agencies have implemented wage increases, signing bonuses, and shortened promotion cadences. Mountain Line, serving Missoula, Montana, implemented a 15 percent pay increase across most jobs in 2021.[37] New Jersey Transit, Pierce Transit, TriMet, Metro Transit, the Chicago Transit Authority, and others introduced sign-on bonuses of up to $6,000 for several roles. At one point in 2023, the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) offered $10,000 sign-on bonuses to new hires stepping into sorely needed dispatcher roles.[38] Through negotiations with union representatives, some agencies have decreased the time it takes for workers to get raises and advance to higher pay tiers.[39]

Some agencies have invested in enhanced training programs, career development pathways, and partnerships with educational institutions to build a pipeline of qualified workers. Hampton Roads Transit in Virginia, for example, boosted its recruitment numbers by partnering with Tidewater Community College to create the DriveNOW program. DriveNOW provides free training to prospective transit operators that includes a commercial driver's license (CDL), a Virginia Career Readiness Certificate, and customer service and workplace skills.[40]

Gaps in the Research on Transit Workforce Shortages

Perhaps the most critical knowledge gap regarding transit workforce shortages is the limited evidence regarding the effectiveness of various intervention strategies. This gap may, in part, reflect the recent timing of many of these interventions. But as the amount of time for which these changes are in place lengthens, the opportunity for evaluation expands and should be seized.

There is also a dearth of readily available, comprehensive workforce data. The National Transit Database (NTD) makes available aggregated counts of employees and hours worked by job classification per agency, but demographic data on transit workers are sparse, and the job classifications available are few in number and broad in category. For example, the NTD classifies administrative assistants, service planners, and agency general managers all as "administrative workers." Though

researchers and others seeking detailed workforce data can request them from agencies, agencies vary in their willingness to engage with researchers, and agencies may wisely be protective of worker data privacy.[41]

Additional knowledge gaps take the form of insufficient analysis of variations in workforce challenges, conditions, and intervention choices. Current research provides limited insight into how workforce shortages vary by geographic region, system size, or service type. Although overall statistics paint a picture of industry-wide challenges, the research provides insufficient analysis of whether rural versus urban systems, or small versus large agencies, face fundamentally different challenges requiring tailored solutions. Further gaps exist related to the broader economic implications of transit workforce shortages. Questions remain about what the long-term economic costs of service reductions might be for communities and regions. As policymakers and legislators have cited economic impacts in their resource allocation decisionmaking, research of this nature could be distinctly impactful for ensuring transit's future fiscal health and service quality. Finally, the literature is scant on work that centers roles outside the frontline and maintenance workforce.

Our Research Contribution

The transit workforce shortage represents not only an operational challenge for individual agencies but a systemic threat to public transportation's role in shaping happy and healthy communities and economic development across the country. Only through comprehensive investigation can the transit industry develop sustainable solutions to this critical challenge.

With that in mind, we close some existing knowledge gaps pertinent to improving workforce shortage issues by highlighting regional variation in workforce challenges, examining recent trends, and exploring potential future scenarios. We expand analysis of the workforce crisis beyond its focus on operators and maintenance workers, and we compare how workplace issues relate to the information made available to potential future employees.

In this report, we analyze three sets of questions about the transit workforce. These questions structure the remainder of the report. First, we seek to understand the existing workforce:

- In what ways—size, demographics, and wages—does the transit workforce of 2023 compare with those of 2013 and 2003, and how do these temporal comparisons vary by region?

- How do the jobs of transit industry workers employed by transit agencies compare with those working in transit but not employed by transit agencies?
- Where do workers go when they leave the transit industry?

Second, we assess transit industry trends under three potential future conditions:

- Assuming that recent trends in workforce size and composition continue, what service levels are achievable, what operating budgets are necessary, and what employees are required?
- How would those elements change if the federal government stopped funding transit, and how would they change if transit system operations significantly expanded?

Third, we examine hiring-related barriers in the transit industry:

- How do the positions transit agencies offer compare with those offered by organizations that are competing for those workers?

We conclude by providing recommendations for transit agencies and others to expand the transit workforce and ensure effective transit services nationwide.

Data

To understand the existing transit workforce, we collected and reviewed NTD data, which provide detailed information about almost every urban and rural transit provider in the United States from 2002 through 2023, as of this writing. To contextualize the data about transit agencies within the broader workforce, we reviewed data from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS) database. The OEWS database provides information about wages and employment across industries, making it possible for us to examine how transit jobs compare with others. We also used data from the US Census Bureau's American Community Survey to describe key characteristics of the transit workforce and to examine job options in the context of different metropolitan areas. We also draw on Job-to-Job Flows statistics from the Census Bureau's Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics program to examine the destination industries of workers leaving the transit workforce. And we use data from the BLS's National Compensation Survey to compare the provision of selected nonwage benefits between transit and other occupations.

To project industry trends under different future scenarios, we developed assumptions about the future using NTD outputs and projected them forward. Our baseline assessment is built on the

assumption that trends among service levels, operating budgets, and required workers across five major job classifications would continue into the coming decade. We then model how those conditions would change if the federal government stopped funding transit agencies, before modeling what workforce would be necessary if transit agencies nationwide doubled service.

Finally, to understand hiring-related barriers, we built on recent analysis from APTA (2023) and reviewed 74 job postings across five metropolitan areas and five job categories to understand how transit agencies compare with nontransit public- and private-sector competitors with respect to factors shaping their likelihood of attracting workers. We focused on vehicle operator, mechanic, police officer, administrative assistant, and project manager roles, comparing pay, benefits, and other job-related conditions between transit agency–offered jobs and those advertised by organizations competing for similar workers.

2. The State of the Transit Workforce

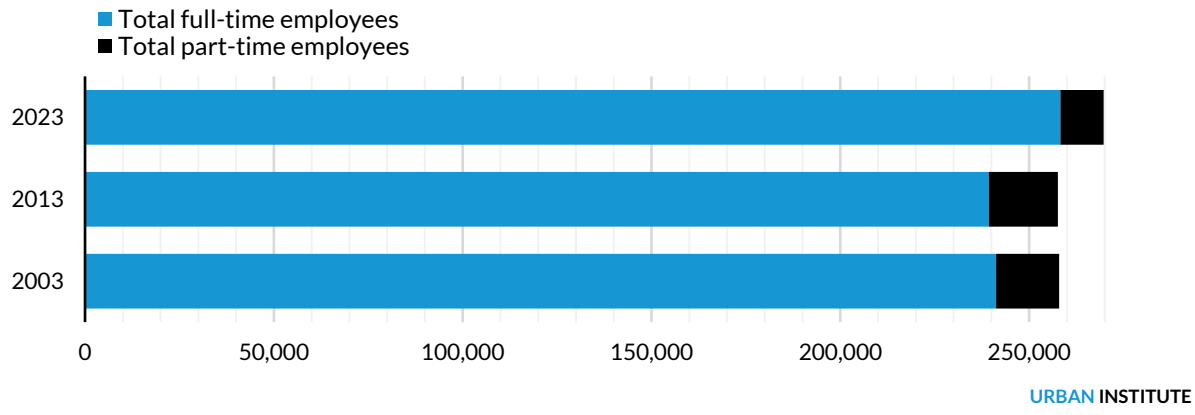
In this chapter, we examine data about who works in the transit industry. We review employment trends and explore worker demographics and wages. We also investigate job flows to and from transit-related jobs to understand the comparative position of work in the transit industry versus other industries and compare the provision of nonwage benefits between transit and other occupations.

According to one US Department of Transportation estimate, at the end of 2023, roughly 388,000 people in the United States worked in jobs directly in public transportation, and an additional 200,000 or so work as school bus drivers or engage in similar work (OBP 2023). These employees, whom we define broadly as encompassing those working in the transit industry, filled roles in operations, maintenance, and administration. Among these workers, 269,722 people were employed by the roughly 3,000 public transit agencies that report to the NTD (figure 1; in this section we first provide details from the NTD, because it provides more accurate information about public transit agencies, and then examine federal data from the BLS, because those data are more comprehensive). Others work for the private sector and other nonurban transit governmental agencies. These workers included people working for Amtrak, private bus lines, and school bus providers, among other services.

FIGURE 1

Total Count of Employees at NTD-Reporting Transit Agencies

Nationwide transit agency employee counts



Sources: 2003 data from the NTD for employee work hours and counts and 2013 and 2023 data from the NTD for transit agency employees. See "NTD Data," Federal Transit Administration, accessed March 6, 2026, https://www.transit.dot.gov/ntd/ntd-data?field_product_type_target_id=All&year=all&combine=employees.

Notes: NTD = National Transit Database. Agencies operating fewer than 30 vehicles are excluded from NTD reporting requirements. Almost all US transit agencies report to the NTD.

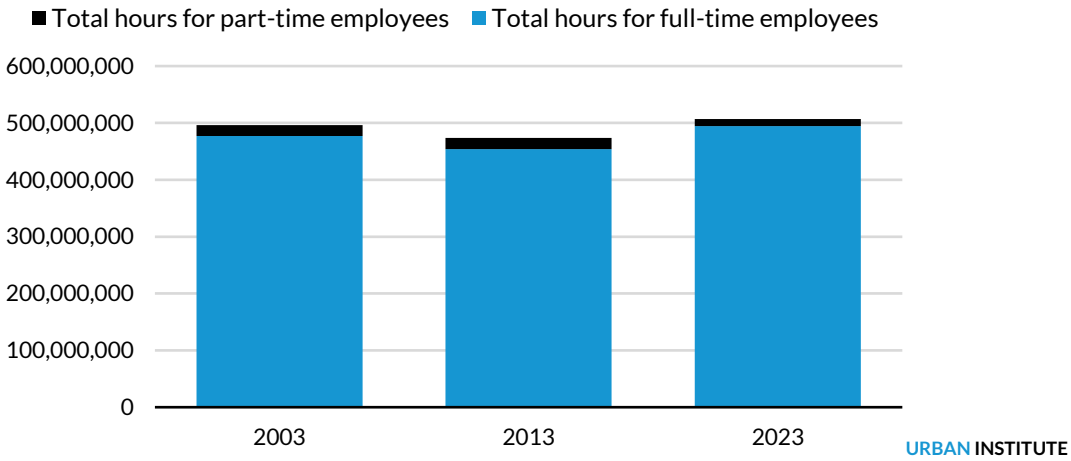
Amid cooling national labor markets, the growth rate for transit industry jobs has, by some measures, exceeded that of other occupations.[42] From 2022 to 2023, the number of public transit jobs grew 5 percent, while job growth across all occupations was about 2 percent over that period.[43] This rate of growth for transit was also faster than for related industries, such as state and local government, whose employment rose nearly 3 percent over the same period, and trucking, whose employment fell by about 1 percent.[44] Between 2013 and 2023, however, transit agencies generated more than 12,000 additional jobs, but growth was not annually consistent. From 2013 to 2016, the transit workforce grew 5 percent before declining between 2019 and 2022 and increasing after that. Service reductions—largely pandemic related—were associated with decreasing employee counts (OBP 2023).

Change can also be found in the distribution of transit agency jobs classified as full-time versus part-time. In 2003, 6.4 percent of transit agency work hours were undertaken by part-time workers. This share increased to 7.1 percent in 2013 and then decreased to 4.2 percent by 2023 (figure 2). This shift may reflect a successful push from transit worker unions, which have advocated a move away from part-time work toward more full-time positions as a key component of their contract negotiations.[45]

FIGURE 2

Total Hours Worked Among Employees at NTD-Reporting Transit Agencies

Nationwide transit agency employee hours worked



Sources: 2003 data from the NTD for employee work hours and counts and 2013 and 2023 data from the NTD for transit agency employees. See "NTD Data," Federal Transit Administration, accessed March 6, 2026, https://www.transit.dot.gov/ntd/ntd-data?field_product_type_target_id=All&year=all&combine=employees.
Notes: NTD = National Transit Database. Agencies operating fewer than 30 vehicles are excluded from NTD reporting requirements.

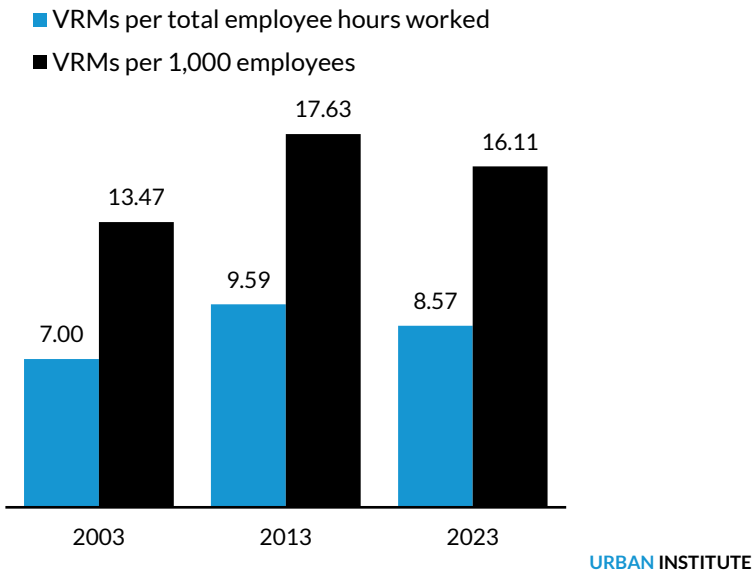
Transit agency employees have also altered working patterns. In 2003, employees of NTD-reporting transit agencies worked a total of 496 million hours, supporting 3.5 billion vehicle revenue

miles (i.e., the total miles of transit service open to riders). In 2013, total hours worked dropped 4.5 percent, even as national transit vehicle revenue miles increased to 4.5 billion (figure 3). This upward trend in labor efficiency did not continue into the subsequent decade. By 2023, there was a 7.0 percent increase in labor hours worked, even as agencies reduced service 4.3 percent. This may be the result of agencies retaining employees even as they cut service postpandemic or the result of increases in costs to provide service attributable to high inflation during that period.

FIGURE 3

Nationwide Transit Workforce Efficiency, Defined as Vehicle Revenue Miles per Hours Worked and Employees

Transit agency efficiency has been relatively flat over the past decade



Sources: 2003 and 2013 data from the NTD for transit operating statistics, service supplied and consumed (table 19) and 2023 data from the NTD for service data and operating expenses time series by system (TS2.2).
Notes: NTD = National Transit Database; VRMs = vehicle revenue miles.

Breaking Down the Transit Workforce by Job Type

Though data on specific occupations within the transit industry are limited, some delineation of information by occupation is possible. The NTD requires reporting agencies to provide information about anyone employed by a transit agency "who is involved in any aspect of an agency's public transit operation."[46] The NTD categorizes transit agency employees into the following classifications: operations, maintenance, administration, and capital workers. Examples of jobs by classification include the following:[47]

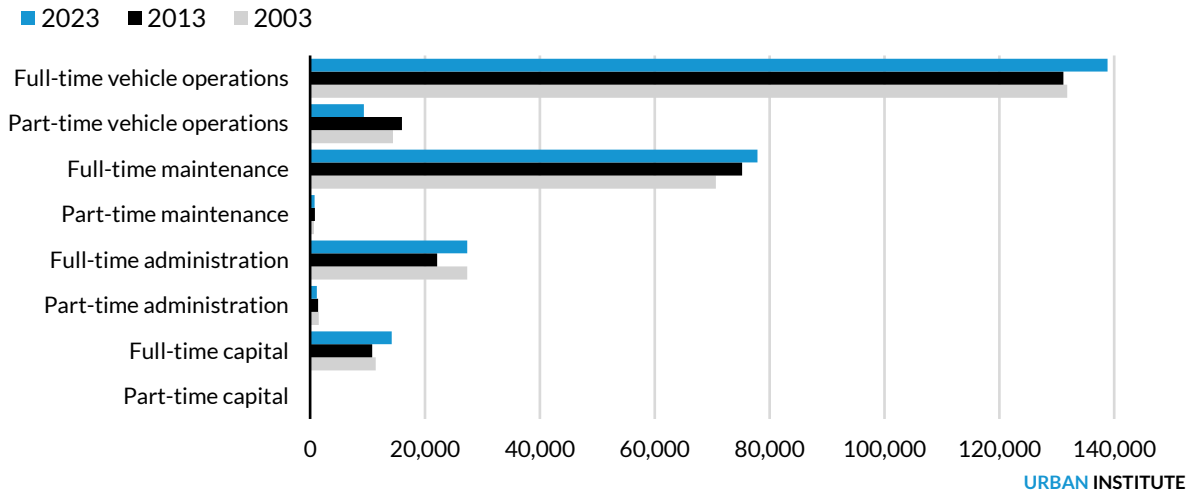
- **Vehicle operations**: Bus and train operators and those providing ticketing services.
- **Maintenance**: People who evaluate infrastructure performance, machinists, facility cleaners, equipment inspectors; those who provide technical training; and people who install cameras throughout transit systems.
- **Administration**: Executives, planners, legal teams, and customer service representatives.
- **Capital**: People involved in procurement and real estate. We do not include data related to workers constructing new transit lines, which is a different type of work that varies depending on whether transit agencies are undertaking the project.

Across all four job classification types, the number of full-time employees was higher in 2023 than in either 2013 or 2003. This increase was particularly higher among vehicle operators (figure 4). Part-time work accounted for a small share of overall workers, and their share has declined over the past decade, particularly among part-time vehicle operations employees. The distribution of workers by number of employees was similar to their hours worked (not shown).

FIGURE 4

Nationwide Transit Agency Employee Counts, by Employment Type

Most transit agency work is in operations and maintenance



Sources: 2003 data from the NTD for employee work hours and employee counts (table 18) and 2013 and 2023 data from the NTD for 2023 transit agency employees.
Notes: NTD = National Transit Database.

The Transit Workforce Beyond Public Transit Agencies

Not all workers involved in public transportation are employed by NTD-reporting public transit agencies. We thus complement the tabulations above, which are based on transit agency reporting, with labor force statistics capturing the broader transit industry workforce. Table 1 presents employment in selected transit industries, broken out by selected occupations. These data do not align directly with the NTD data. NTD data on transit agencies includes information about workers for independent urban transit agencies but also federal, state, and local agencies that operate transit themselves. These data are calculated separately by the BLS.

TABLE 1

Employment in Transit Industries, by Occupation

Employment in private-sector transit industry and public-sector transit occupations, 2023

	Urban transit systems	Intercity and rural bus	School bus	Charter bus	Other transit	Federal, state, and local	Total
Operators							
Bus drivers, transit and intercity	23,240	7,290	2,360	11,690	6,580	124,460	175,620
Subway and streetcar operators	640					14,080	14,720
Other	6,470	2,670	145,600	4,310	66,850		225,900
Maintenance							
Bus and truck mechanics	2,620	840	6,030	1,350	1,200	36,100	48,140
Rail car repairers						3,350	3,350
Other	1,660	330	1,000	420	890		4,300
Administration							
Office and administrative	3,650	2,120	6,800	2,040	14,910		29,520
Management occupations	1,350	480	3,000	930	3,400		9,160
Other	2,160	810	32,760	1,430	4,870		42,030
Industry total	**41,790**	**14,540**	**197,550**	**22,170**	**98,700**	**177,990**	**552,740**

Sources: Authors' calculations, US Bureau of Labor Statistics, and 2023 OEWS data.
Notes: NAICS = North American Industry Classification System; OEWS = Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics; SOC = Standard Occupational Classification. The table shows total employment in transit industries across key occupations in 2023, organized into broad occupational categories of operator, maintenance, and administrative employment. Industries tabulated are as follows: urban transit systems (NAICS 4851), interurban and rural bus transportation (4852), school and employee bus transportation (4854), charter bus industry (4855), and other transit and ground passenger transportation (4859), in addition to transit occupations identified within federal, state, and local government (OEWS sector 99), which include bus drivers, transit and intercity (SOC 53-3052); subway and streetcar operators (53-4041); bus and truck mechanics and diesel engine specialists (49-3031); and rail car repairers (49-3043).

This look at the size and composition of the wider transit workforce, using data from the OEWS series, places the transit agency workforce in additional context.[48] These tabulations focus on

employment in the transit and ground passenger transportation industry, which includes urban transit systems, interurban and rural bus transportation, school and employee bus transportation, and the charter bus industry. We exclude people who work for taxi and limousine services. To capture employment in transit systems that state and local governments operate, we also include public-sector employees in transit occupations, such as bus drivers. We collect occupations into the same broad categories as the transit agency data: operations, maintenance, and administration.

This broader industry employed more than half a million workers in 2023. These figures have steadily increased since 2003. The increase in workers is occurring among vehicle operators, maintenance employees, and administrative workers. State and local governments employ most of the workforce. These governments often manage transit agencies directly. Across the broader industry, the bus driver workforce, for example—in addition to urban transit and public-sector drivers—includes more than 10,000 charter bus drivers and encompasses most of the nearly 150,000 operators in the school bus and employee bus industry workforce. Finally, across occupational categories, the general ratio of operator to maintenance to administrative workers observed in the NTD is broadly mirrored across other transit and ground transportation industries.

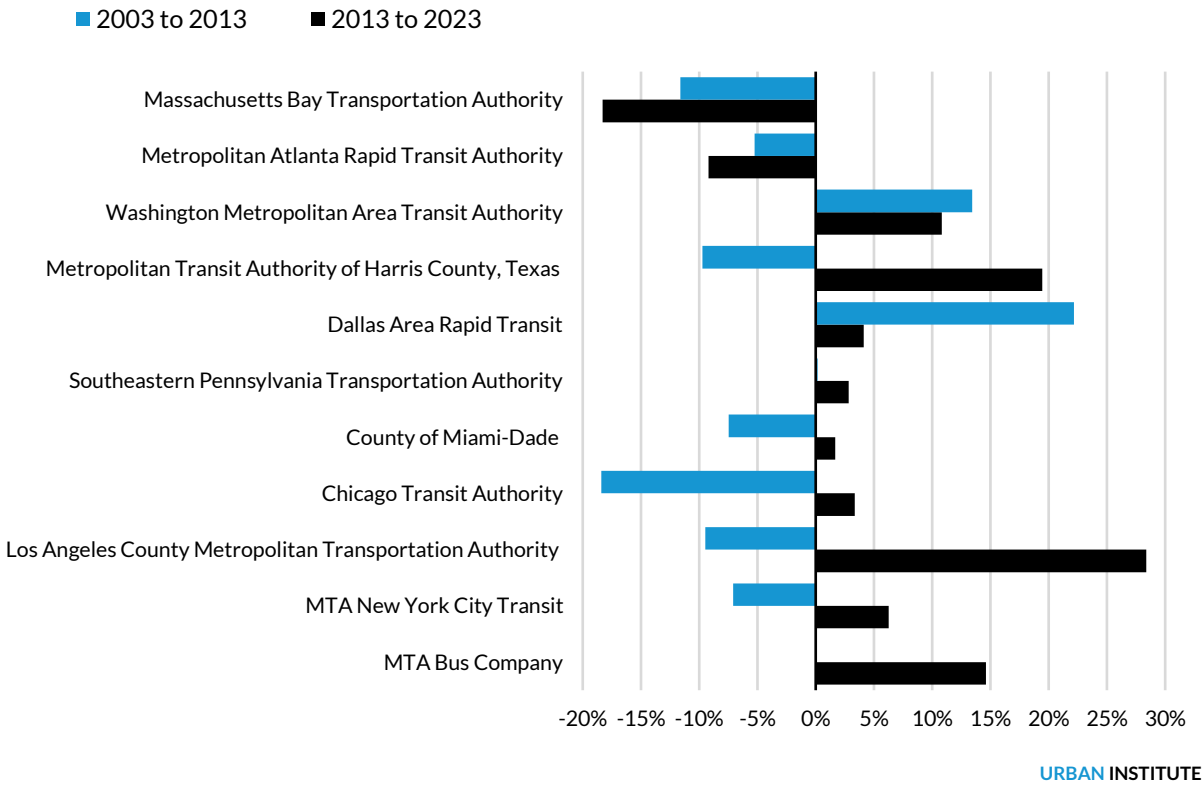
Regional Trends

To further evaluate national trends, we examined how workforce size has changed among specific agencies. We examined NTD data for the 10 highest-ridership urban transit agencies from 2003 to 2013 and from 2013 to 2023 (figure 5). These data show that 7 of these agencies reduced working hours among employees over the first period, while 8 of 10 increased working hours over the second period. Only agencies in the Dallas and Washington, DC, metropolitan areas increased employee work over both periods, while those in Atlanta and Boston reduced hours over both periods.

FIGURE 5

Percentage Change in Total Employee Hours Worked, 2003 to 2023, in the 10 Largest Transit Agencies

Among large agencies, most increased their workforce over the past decade



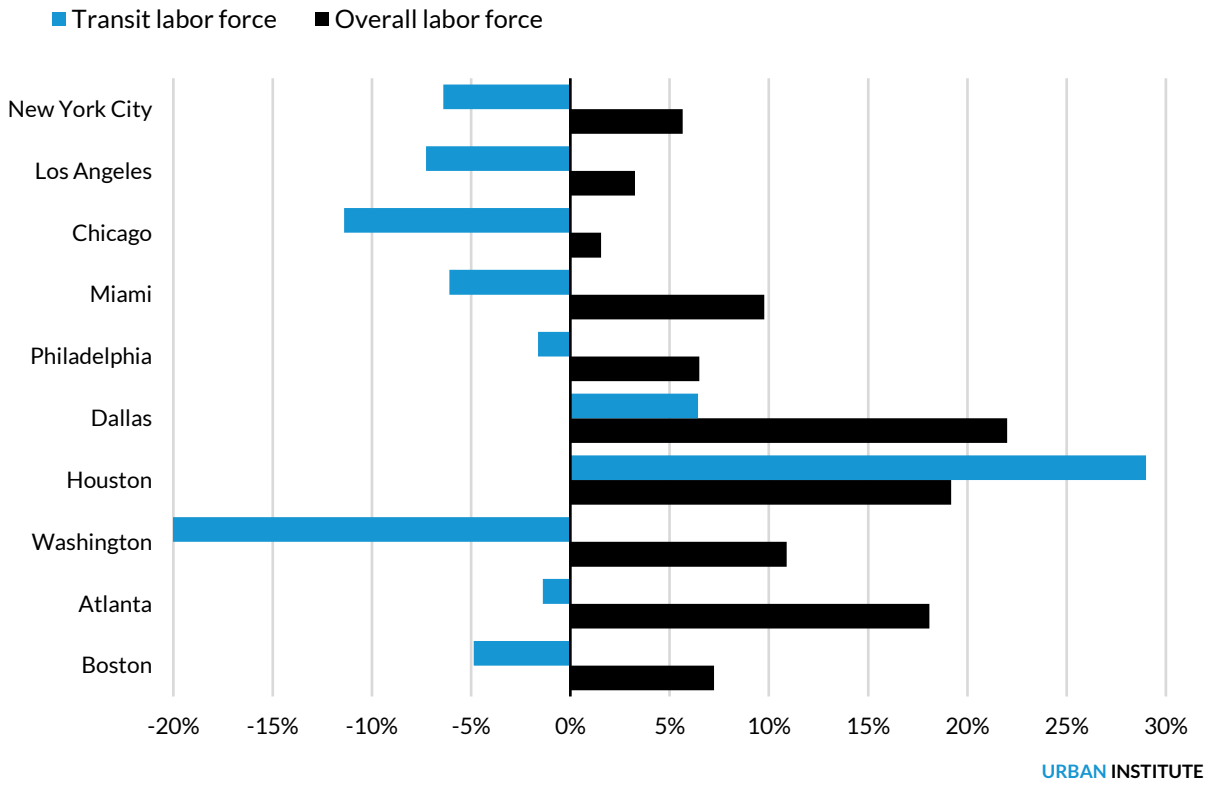
Source: Authors' analysis of National Transit Database data.
Note: No data for MTA Bus Company are available from 2003 to 2013.

We can also contextualize trends for transit agencies by comparing them with the broader labor force. We compare overall labor force growth between 2013 and 2023 in the metropolitan areas corresponding to the agencies in figure 5 (some of the metropolitan areas have multiple transit agencies) with the labor force working in transit more broadly than just the transit agencies (defined as individuals whose industry of employment is transit and ground passenger transportation, except taxi and limousine service), using American Community Survey data.[49] Figure 6 illustrates the growth in the overall labor force and transit labor force for each metropolitan area over this period.

FIGURE 6

Percentage Change in the Size of the Transit Labor Force and the Overall Labor Force, 2013 to 2023

While the overall labor force grew in each city, the transit labor force declined in all metropolitan areas except Dallas and Houston



Sources: Authors' calculations, 2013 and 2023 American Community Survey data (five-year estimates), and US Bureau of Labor Statistics data. American Community Survey data are retrieved from IPUMS (Stephen Ruggles et al. IPUMS USA: Version 16.0 American Community Survey. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2025. https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V16.0).
Notes: The figure shows percentage changes between 2013 and 2023 in the size of both the overall labor force and the transit labor force in each city. The labor force includes all workers in the labor force, regardless of employment status. The transit labor force is identified as individuals with census industry code 6180, transit and ground passenger transportation, except taxi and limousine service. Individuals are assigned to cities based on respondent metropolitan statistical area.

Figure 6 shows growth in the overall labor force for each metropolitan area but a shrinking *transit* labor force in all but Dallas and Houston. There is substantial variation in transit labor force size across these metropolitan areas. In New York City in 2023, the transit labor force totaled more than 100,000 workers, but in Dallas and Houston, this workforce was about 9,000 workers total in each. One source of differences between figures 5 and 6 may be that the latter trends reflect broad transit industry employment, which may move differently from public transit agency employment (transit agencies may have offset declines in, for example, the school bus driver workforce).

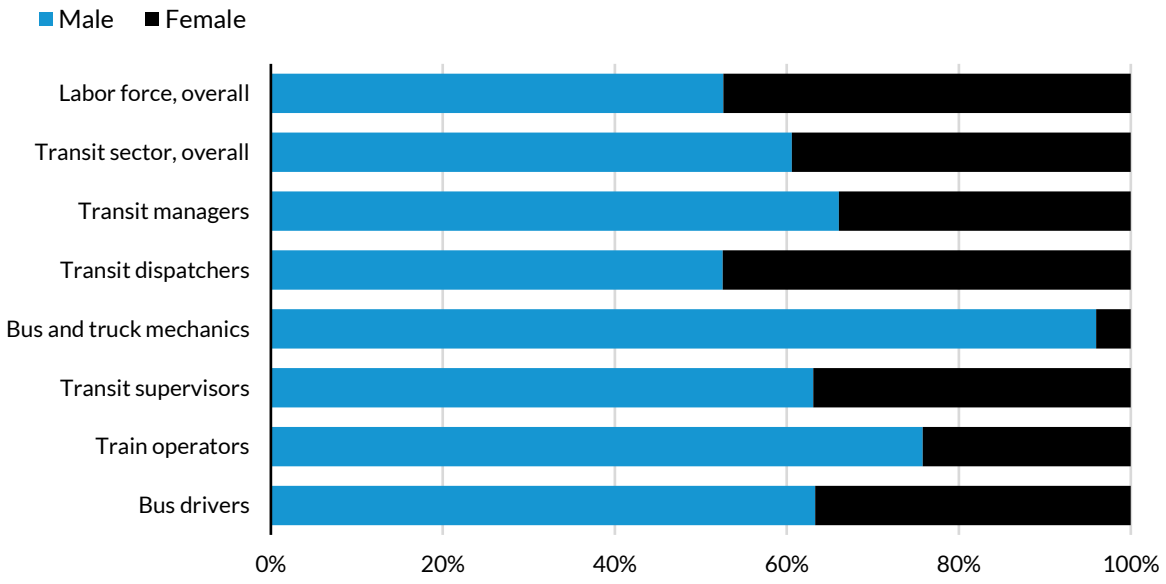
Demographics of Transit Workers

Another important dimension of the transit labor force is its demographic composition. Figure 7 presents demographics by gender. The transit labor force overall is slightly more male than the general labor force, though there is substantial variation across occupational categories. People holding some transit occupations, such as bus and truck mechanics, are almost entirely men (96 percent). Others, such as transit dispatchers, have a gender composition that closely mirrors that of the overall labor force.

FIGURE 7

Gender Composition of the Overall Labor Force and the Transit Labor Force, by Occupation Type, 2023

The transit sector is slightly more male than the overall labor force



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Sources: Authors' calculations and 2023 American Community Survey data (one-year estimates), retrieved from IPUMS (Stephen Ruggles et al. IPUMS USA: Version 16.0 American Community Survey. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2025. https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V16.0).

Notes: The figure shows the gender composition of the transit labor force overall, by major occupation, and as compared with the labor force as a whole in 2023 at the national level. The labor force includes all workers in the labor force, regardless of employment status. The transit labor force is identified as individuals with census industry code 6180, transit and ground passenger transportation, except taxi and limousine service. Within the transit industry, occupation categories are identified as follows: bus drivers (533052: bus drivers, transit and intercity), train operators (534010: locomotive engineers and operators; 5340XX: other transportation workers), transit supervisors (531000: supervisors of transportation and material moving workers), bus and truck mechanics (493031: bus and truck mechanics and diesel engine specialists), transit dispatchers (dispatchers, except police, fire, and ambulance), and transit managers (111021: general and operations managers; 113071: transportation, storage, and distribution managers; 1191XX: other managers).

Figure 8A shows the racial and ethnic composition of the transit labor force. The transit labor force is less white than the overall workforce, with a larger share of Black workers (28 percent in transit versus 12 percent overall). Operator occupations, in particular, have a relatively large share of Black workers. For example, 34 percent of bus drivers are Black. Other occupations are more Hispanic than the labor force as a whole. For example, 25 percent of mechanics are Hispanic, compared with about 19 percent of the labor force overall.

The transit labor force has a high share of older workers (figure 8B). Nearly half the transit workforce is 55 or older, compared with less than one-quarter of the labor force overall. This is driven in part by the age distribution of operators but is broadly true across occupations. Few transit occupations have large shares of younger workers. Transit dispatchers and bus and truck mechanics have workers between 24 and 35 in rough proportion to the broader labor force.

FIGURE 8A

Racial and Ethnic Composition of the Transit Labor Force, Overall and by Occupation Type, 2023

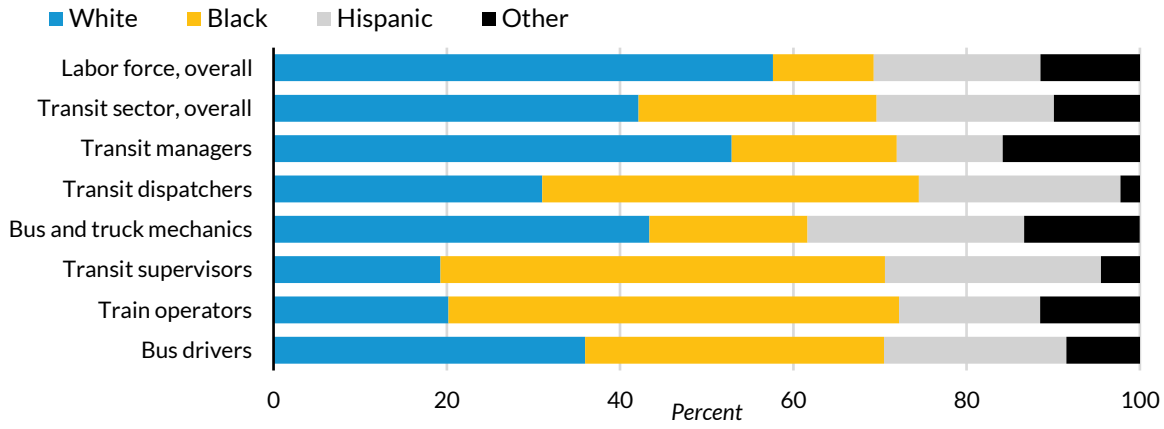
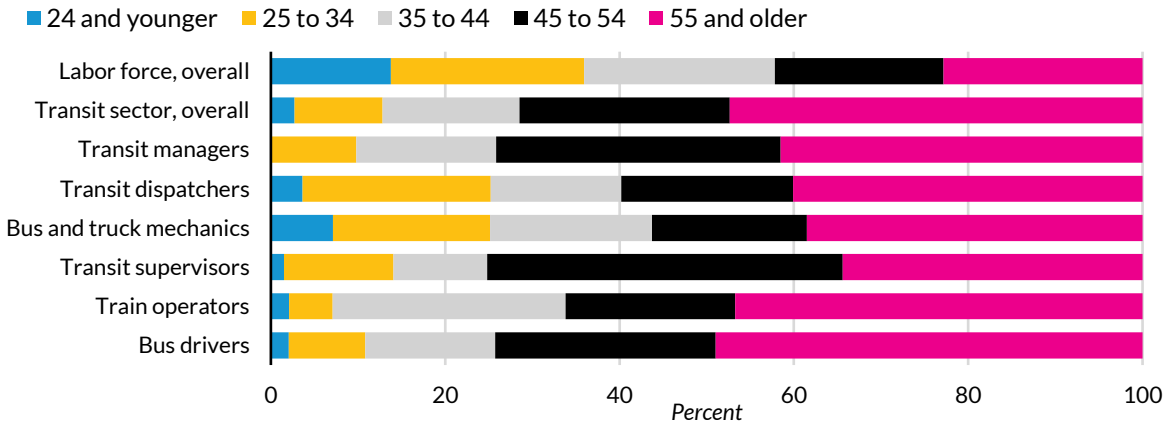


FIGURE 8B

Age Distribution of the Transit Labor Force, Overall and by Occupation Type, 2023



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Sources: Authors' calculations and 2023 American Community Survey data (one-year estimates), retrieved from IPUMS (Stephen Ruggles et al. IPUMS USA: Version 16.0 American Community Survey. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2025. https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V16.0).

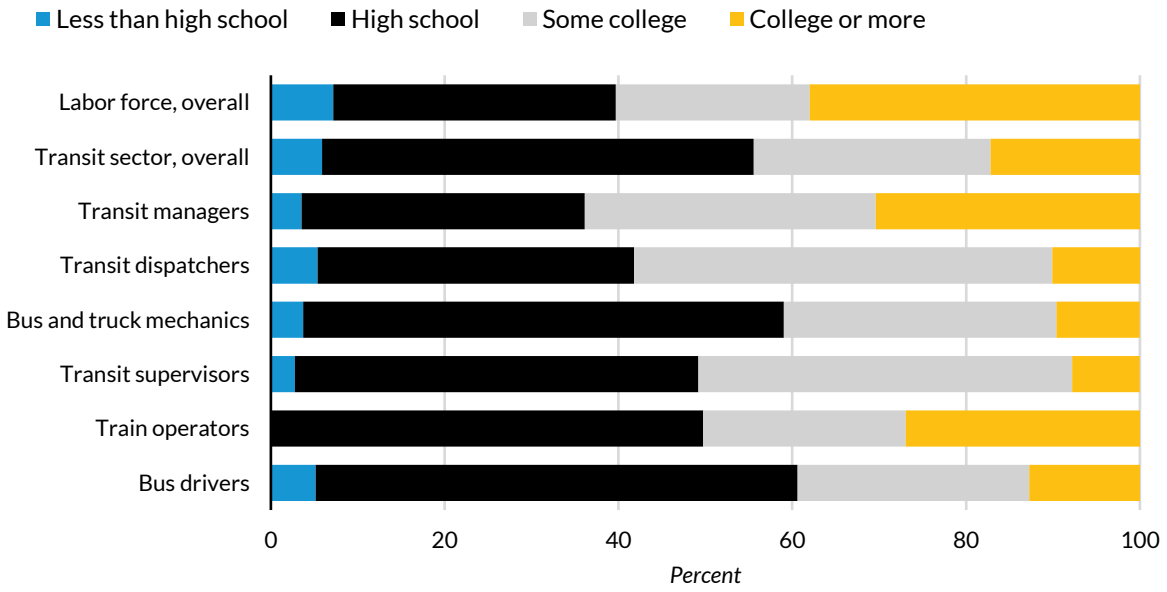
Notes: The figure shows the demographic composition of the transit labor force overall, by major occupation, and as compared with the labor force as a whole in 2023 at the national level. Race and ethnicity are recoded to mutually exclusive categories of non-Hispanic white, non-Hispanic Black, Hispanic, and all other workers. The labor force includes all workers in the labor force, regardless of employment status. The transit labor force is identified as individuals with census industry code 6180, transit and ground passenger transportation, except taxi and limousine service. Within the transit industry, occupation categories are identified as follows: bus drivers (533052: bus drivers, transit and intercity), train operators (534010: locomotive engineers and operators; 5340XX: other transportation workers), transit supervisors (531000: supervisors of transportation and material moving workers), bus and truck mechanics (493031: bus and truck mechanics and diesel engine specialists), transit dispatchers (dispatchers, except police, fire, and ambulance), and transit managers (111021: general and operations managers; 113071: transportation, storage, and distribution managers; 1191XX: other managers).

The transit labor force, finally, has a high share of workers whose highest educational attainment is a high school diploma (figure 9). This category encompasses about half of all transit workers, compared with about one-third of the overall labor force. Operator occupations and mechanics are predominantly workers with high school diplomas. Having attended at least some college is more common for dispatchers and manager occupations. Figure 9 does not account for other credentials (e.g., CDLs) often required for jobs in the transit industry.

FIGURE 9

Educational Attainment, by Share of the Transit Labor Force, Overall and by Occupation Type, 2023

Transit has a larger share of workers with only high school diplomas



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Sources: Authors' calculations and 2023 American Community Survey data (one-year estimates), retrieved from IPUMS (Stephen Ruggles et al. IPUMS USA: Version 16.0 American Community Survey. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2025. https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V16.0).

Notes: The figure shows the educational attainment of the transit labor force overall, by major occupation, and as compared with the labor force as a whole in 2023 at the national level. Educational attainment is categorized as less than high school for workers with attainment of less than grade 12, high school with a highest attainment of grade 12, some college with a highest attainment of less than four years of college, and college or more with a highest attainment of four or more years of college. The labor force includes all workers in the labor force, regardless of employment status. The transit labor force is identified as individuals with census industry code 6180, transit and ground passenger transportation, except taxi and limousine service. Within the transit industry, occupation categories are identified as follows: bus drivers (533052: bus drivers, transit and intercity), train operators (534010: locomotive engineers and operators; 5360XX: other transportation workers), transit supervisors (531000: supervisors of transportation and material moving workers), bus and truck mechanics (493031: bus and truck mechanics and diesel engine specialists), transit dispatchers (dispatchers, except police, fire, and ambulance), and transit managers (111021: general and operations managers; 113071: transportation, storage, and distribution managers; 1191XX: other managers).

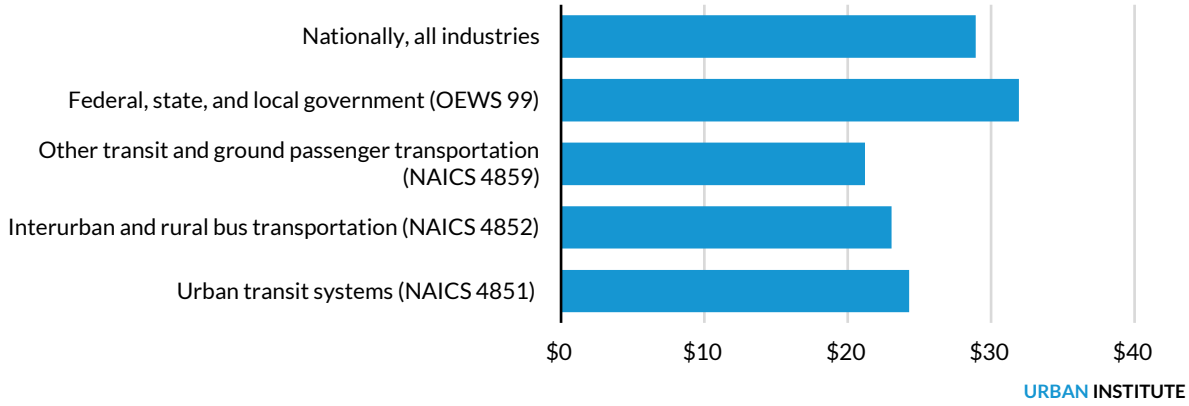
Transit Industry Wages

To characterize transit workers' earnings, we examine wages for jobs in transit industries and for selected occupations using the OEWS database. Figure 10 shows median wages for bus drivers by industry of occupation. Across all industries, the median wage for bus drivers is about $29 an hour. Bus drivers employed by state and local governments tend to earn higher wages than drivers employed by urban transit systems ($32 versus $24, respectively). This difference may result from different locations where governments operate transit directly versus where transit agencies are independent.

FIGURE 10

Wages for Bus Drivers across Selected Transit Sectors, 2023

Bus drivers employed by state and local governments tend to earn higher wages than those working in other industries



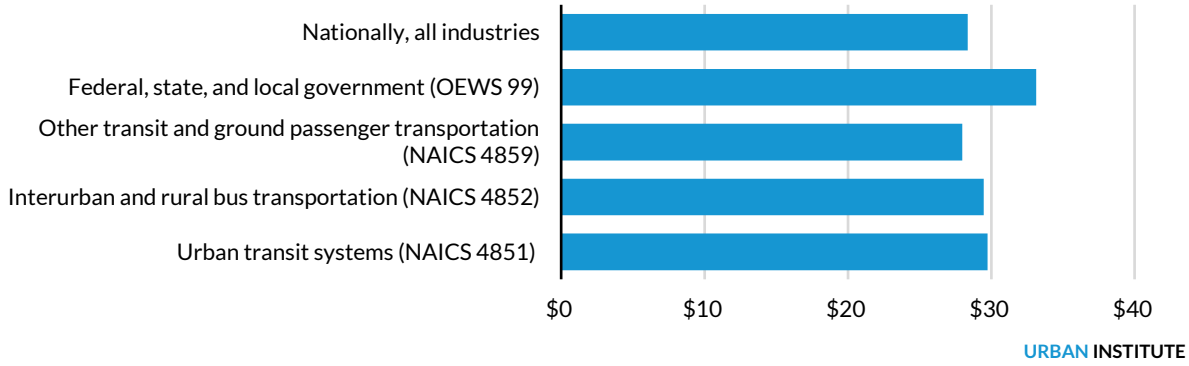
Sources: Authors' calculations, US Bureau of Labor Statistics data, and OEWS data.
Notes: NAICS = North American Industry Classification System; OEWS = Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics; SOC = Standard Occupational Classification. The figure shows median wages for bus drivers, transit and intercity (SOC 53-3052) in 2023 across selected transit industries. Industries tabulated are as follows: urban transit systems (NAICS 4851), interurban and rural bus transportation (4852), and other transit and ground passenger transportation (4859), in addition to bus drivers, transit and intercity (SOC 53-3052) employed within federal, state, and local government (OEWS sector 99).

Figure 11 shows median wages for mechanics. Pay for mechanics varies somewhat less across transit industries than other occupations but is again highest for state and local government employees.

FIGURE 11

Median Wages for Bus and Truck Mechanics across Selected Transit Sectors, 2023

Mechanics employed by state and local governments earn higher wages than those working in other industries



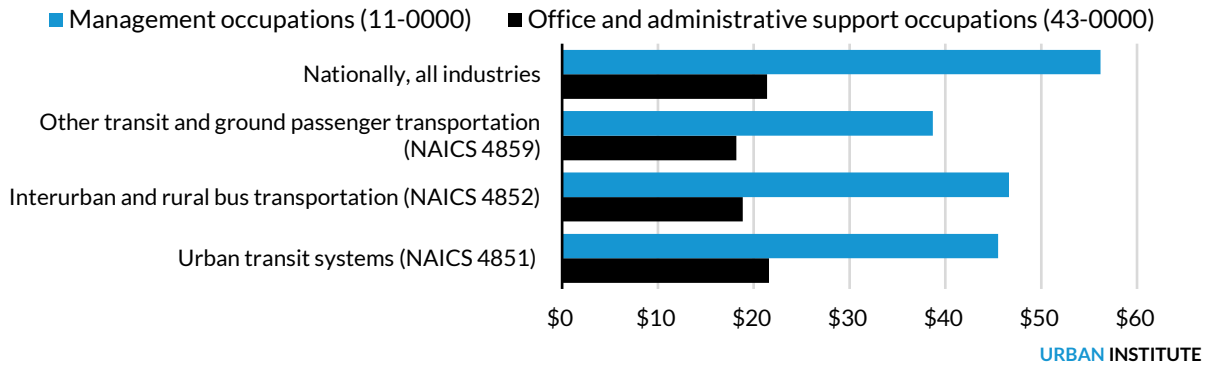
Sources: Authors' calculations, US Bureau of Labor Statistics data, and OEWS data.
Notes: NAICS = North American Industry Classification System; OEWS = Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics; SOC = Standard Occupational Classification. The figure shows median wages for bus and truck mechanics and diesel engine specialists (49-3031). Industries tabulated are as follows: urban transit systems (NAICS 4851), interurban and rural bus transportation (4852), and other transit and ground passenger transportation (4859), in addition to bus drivers, transit and intercity (SOC 53-3052) employed within federal, state, and local government (OEWS sector 99).

Finally, figure 12 shows median wages for transit-sector management and administrative occupations for selected transit industries. Office and administrative support occupations in transit industries earn similar wages to workers in these occupations across the workforce, but management workers in transit have lower median wages than managers across the economy overall.

FIGURE 12

Median Wages for Management Occupations across Selected Transit Sectors, 2023

Workers in transit management make less than peers elsewhere



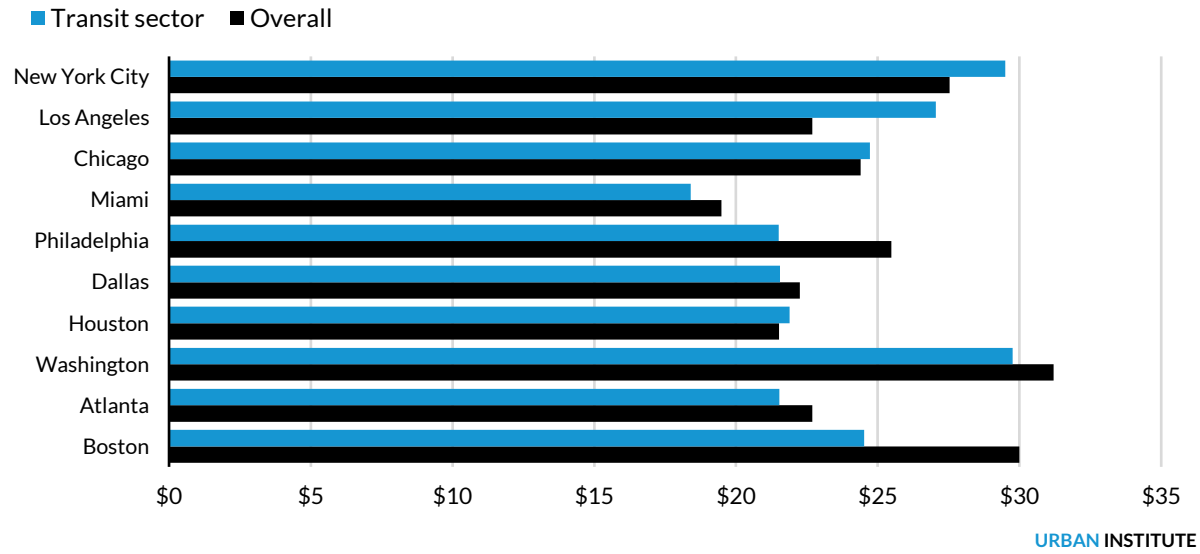
Sources: Authors' calculations, US Bureau of Labor Statistics data, and 2023 OEWS data.
Notes: NAICS = North American Industry Classification System; OEWS = Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics; SOC = Standard Occupational Classification. The figure shows median wages for management occupations (11-0000) and office and administrative support occupations (43-0000) in 2023 across selected transit industries. Industries tabulated are as follows: urban transit systems (NAICS 4851), interurban and rural bus transportation (4852), and other transit and ground passenger transportation (4859).

Because these differences may be attributable to differences in wages based on the locations where agencies are concentrated, it is important to consider how pay compares with that of other jobs within the same region. Figure 13 shows median wages in the broad transit sector and overall median wage in each large metropolitan area considered above. In some regions, such as Boston, transit wages are lower than for the area overall (even though Boston's transit wages are substantially higher than those in, for example, Houston or Miami). But the Los Angeles region transit sector wages are somewhat above the overall median. In several metropolitan areas, such as Chicago, the transit sector and overall median wages are comparable.

FIGURE 13

Median Wages, by Metropolitan Area, for the Transit Sector and Overall, 2023

Transit-sector wage premiums vary by metropolitan area



Sources: Authors' calculations and 2023 American Community Survey data (five-year estimates), retrieved from IPUMS (Stephen Ruggles et al. IPUMS USA: Version 16.0 American Community Survey. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2025. https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V16.0).

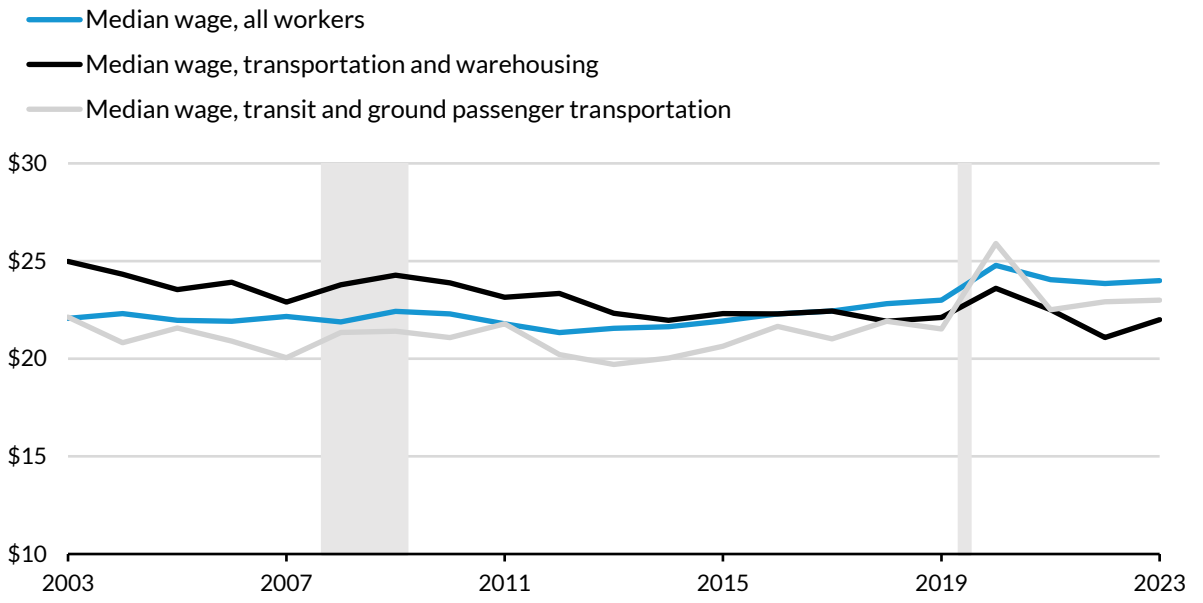
Notes: The figure shows the median wage in 2023 for the overall labor force and the transit labor force in each city. Effective hourly wages are computed as annual earnings divided by usual weekly hours times weeks worked. The transit labor force is identified as individuals with census industry code 6180, transit and ground passenger transportation, except taxi and limousine service. Individuals are assigned to cities based on respondent metropolitan statistical area.

Finally, to characterize transit-sector wages, we explore trends over time. In figure 14, we plot the median wage in the broad transit industry, compared with the whole transportation and warehousing sector, and for workers in the economy overall, from 2003 to 2023. The median wage for transit occupations has generally remained slightly below the overall median wage but has increased compared with the transportation sector overall. To examine wages over time in this way, we draw on Current Population Survey data, which allow us to observe general wage trends over this period but with less precision year to year when isolating industries.

FIGURE 14

Median Wages in the Transit Industry, in the Transportation Sector, and among All Workers, 2003–23

Median wages in transit industries have held up in recent decades as wages in the broader transportation sector declined



Sources: Authors' calculations and US Bureau of Labor Statistics and Economic Policy Institute data. Median wages are calculated using Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group data: Economic Policy Institute, Current Population Survey Extracts, Version 1.0.48, 2024, https://microdata.epi.org. Consumer Price Index data retrieved from "Consumer Price Index: R-CPI-U-RS Homepage," US Bureau of Labor Statistics, last updated March 21, 2025, https://www.bls.gov/cpi/research-series/r-cpi-u-rs-home.htm.

Notes: The figure shows trends in median wages, inflation adjusted using the Consumer Price Index retroactive series using current methods, from 2003 to 2023. Wage series are for all workers in the transportation and warehousing sector and census industry code 6180, respectively. Gray bars indicate recessions, according to the National Bureau of Economic Research.

Nonwage Job Benefits

Nonwage benefits—such as employer-sponsored health insurance, workplace retirement plans, paid leave, hour or location flexibility, or other aspects of compensation and working conditions—are key to understanding job quality (Congdon et al. 2020). Although data on these aspects of work are less detailed than for employment and wages, available sources provide some indications of job quality in this sector along this broader set of dimensions.

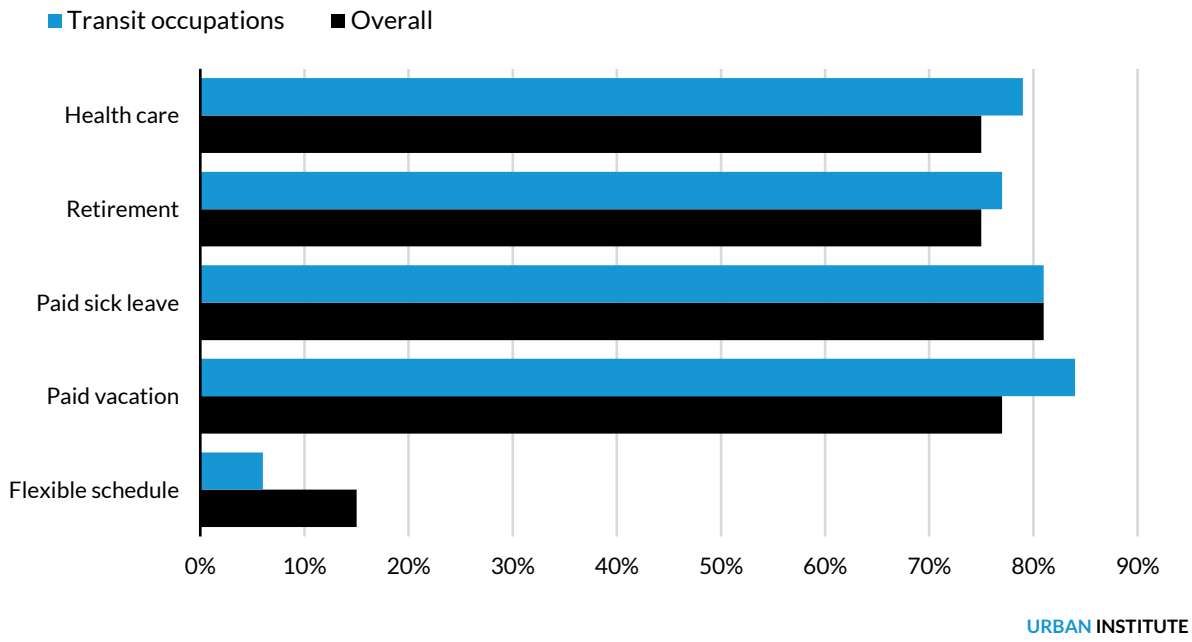
One source of detailed data on workplace benefits is the National Compensation Survey, conducted by the BLS, which reports the rate at which workers in different industries and occupations in both

private-sector and government employment are offered workplace benefits, such as health insurance or retirement plans. The National Compensation Survey provides more detailed benefit information than other sources but with more limited ability to identify the transit workforce. In these data, we can isolate and compare benefits provision for workers in the occupation group of transportation and material moving occupations, which includes the occupations characterized above along with, for example, drivers in nontransit industries. Figure 15 compares the rate at which workers in transportation occupations are offered benefits, including health care, retirement, paid vacation, sick leave, and flexible schedules, as compared with workers overall.

FIGURE 15

Percentage of Workers with Access to Nonwage Elements, for Transit Occupations and Overall, 2024, by Nonwage Element

Worker access to nonwage elements of job quality



Sources: Authors' calculations using 2024 National Compensation Survey data.
Notes: The figure shows the share of workers with access to indicated job elements for workers overall and workers in transportation occupations. Transportation occupations are identified as the Standard Occupational Classification category 530000, transportation and material moving occupations.

For major benefit categories, including health care, retirement, paid sick leave, and paid vacation, workers in transportation occupations have access rates generally equal to or better than workers overall. A notable exception is that 15 percent of workers overall have access to flexible work

schedules, but the share of workers in transportation occupations for whom this aspect of work is available is only 6 percent.

We can also understand job quality in transit work by drawing on results from other research. One recent study surveyed workers about elements of work such as pay and benefits, finding that transportation workers report somewhat lower levels of respect and autonomy on the job than workers in other industries, and they are somewhat more likely to report working longer hours than planned.[50] Although these results map imperfectly to the transit sector, they suggest potential dimensions along which similar jobs report challenges with job quality.

We can also draw on recent research that synthesizes across data to get a sense of overall job quality. In work that categorizes job quality across occupations based on multiple dimensions—including pay, hours, health care and retirement benefits, job security, and working conditions—Biu and coauthors (2023) develop a scoring system. For all occupations, they find scores range from 1 to 10, with an average score of 5.8. For motor vehicle operators (SOC 53-3000), which includes transit and intercity bus drivers, the authors calculate a job quality score of 4, or slightly worse than average. For rail transportation workers (SOC 53-4000), which includes subway and streetcar operators, they calculate a job quality score of 7, or slightly better than average. These results are best read as suggestive of job quality in transit occupations more specifically but are also broadly consistent with data and findings on, for example, wages.

Job Flows into and out of Transit Jobs

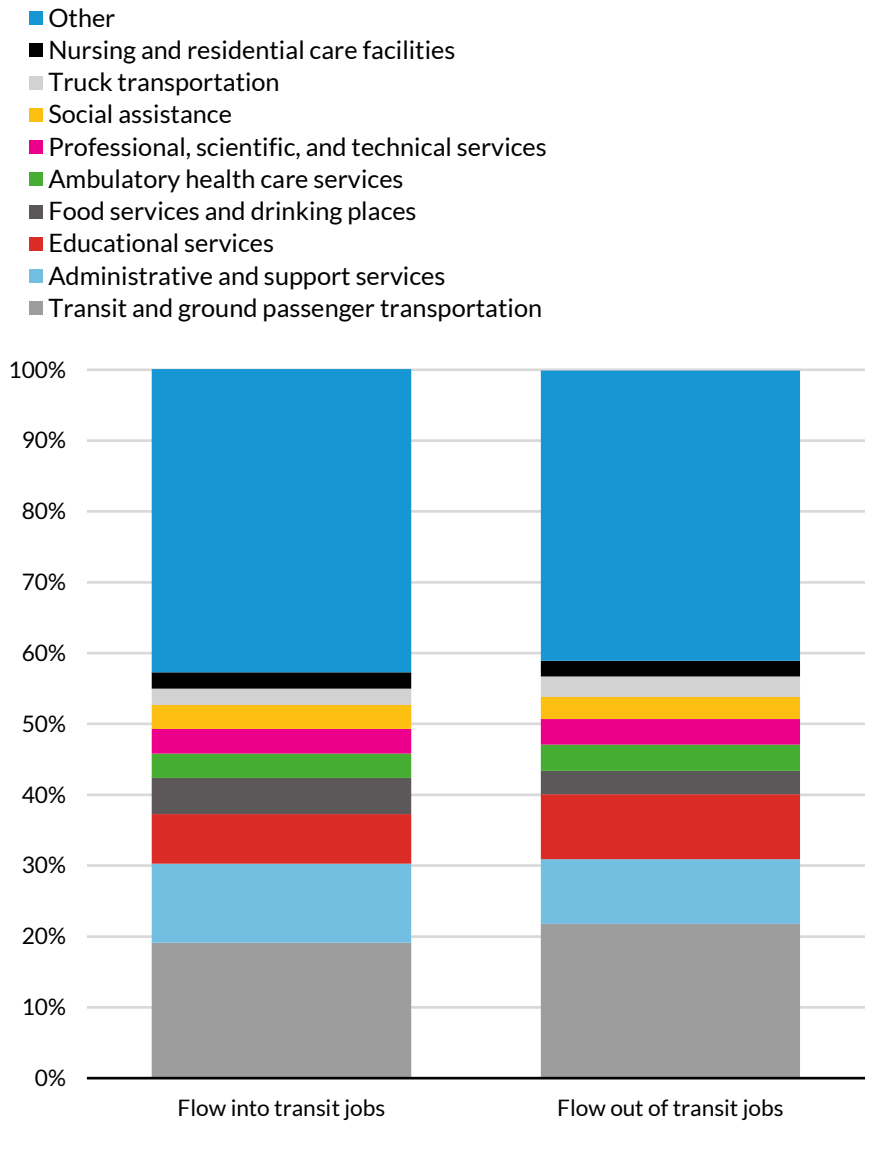
Another way of characterizing labor market dynamics for the transit workforce is to examine the kinds of jobs workers take when they leave the transit workforce. We explore the flow of workers into and out of transit jobs (figure 16). The single most common origin industry for new transit workers—the job they held previously—is from within the transit and ground passenger transportation industry, meaning they are staying in place. The same is true for workers leaving transit industry jobs.

Nonetheless, this flow within the transit industry accounts for only about one-fifth of all workforce flows. Transit industry workers are more likely to move from administrative and support service or food service jobs into transit jobs than they are to move from transit jobs into those other industries. On the other hand, transit workers are more likely to move from transit jobs into educational service, truck transportation, and health care jobs than they are to move from those industries into transit jobs.

FIGURE 16

Job-to-Job Flows into and out of the Transit and Ground Passenger Transportation Industry

Share job flows into and out of transit industry



Source: Authors' calculations of Job-to-Job Flows statistics, from the US Census Bureau's Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics program. See "Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics," US Census Bureau, accessed March 6, 2026, https://lehd.ces.census.gov/data/#j2j.

Notes: NAICS = North American Industry Classification System. The figure shows the distributions of the industry of origin for workers starting transit industry jobs (NAICS 485, transit and ground passenger transportation) and destination industries for workers separating from transit jobs, respectively, in 2022.

3. Projected Changes to the Transit Workforce

Patterns in transit employment are likely to change in the coming years. Even so, the changes may take various potential avenues, with some expanding the workforce and others cutting it substantially. To explore these trends, we evaluate outcomes that could result from three scenarios:

- **Baseline:** We extrapolate from trends over the past decade, assuming these trends will continue, with operations maintained as is postpandemic.
- **Major cuts:** We estimate the impacts of a major investment reduction in public transportation maintenance and operations resulting from cuts in federal aid.
- **Ambitious service:** We estimate the workforce needed to double the transit service provided in urban areas.

We describe our approaches to evaluating each of these scenarios, as well as our findings, below.

We do not account for how automation might change how transit service is delivered. Transit agencies around the world have been implementing automated metro lines, and autonomous vehicles are being rolled out in US cities. Such technological changes will affect the transit workforce. We do not estimate these effects here because of a lack of clear evidence about what outcomes we might expect and because people will continue to play essential roles in transit service, though potentially in a different way.

Baseline Scenario

We begin by developing a baseline scenario, assuming trends that occurred between 2013 and 2023 will continue over the next decade, nationally. Overall, there was a 10 percent increase in total annual labor hours over the previous decade. This increase was lower than the national increase of about 15 percent and was concentrated in higher levels of nonvehicle maintenance, administration, and capital hours, while vehicle operations and vehicle maintenance grew at a lower rate (increasing about 5 percent each).

We leverage urban area data to calculate changes over the past decade in labor hours, operating expenses, service levels, and operating efficiency, again using the NTD and the Transit Workforce Data

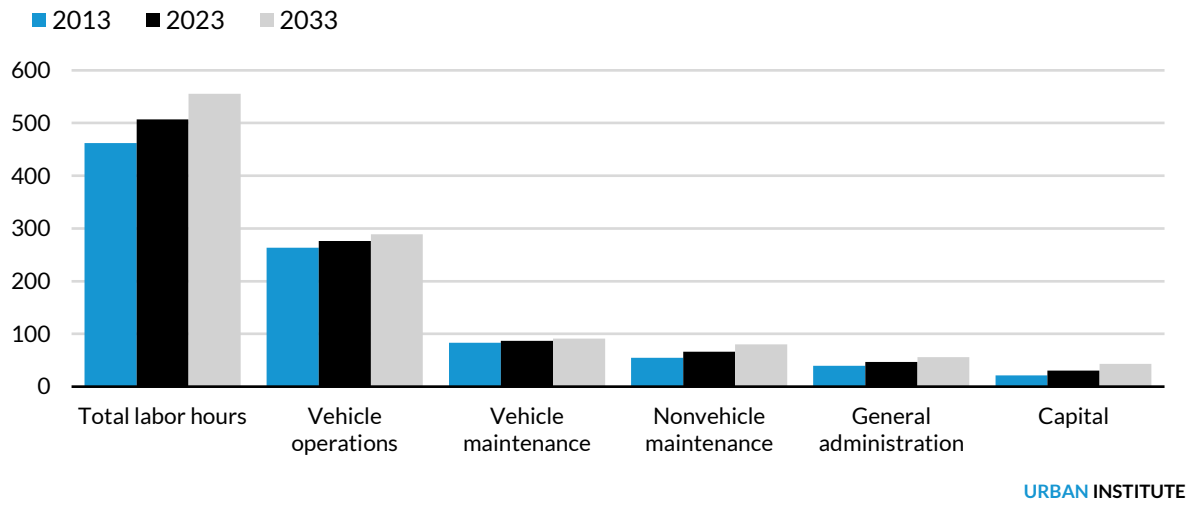
Dashboard.[51] We then assume these trends will continue at the same rate between 2023 and 2033. Finally, we sum these indicators to the national level to provide evidence about overall trends. We exclude spending on new lines or line expansions from our data on the capital workforce because this spending subject to different budgetary processes.

Given baseline conditions, we expect total labor hours among transit workers to increase by 2033 across all occupations (figure 17). Assuming a full-time job is associated with roughly 2,000 hours a year, our central estimate is that the transit workforce will increase by more than 23,000 employees over this period. Because the number of staff members working in vehicle operations has been growing more slowly than other job categories, we expect that vehicle operations staff members would account for only about 27 percent of new jobs, even though they accounted for 55 percent of transit jobs in 2023.

FIGURE 17

Baseline Scenario for Annual Labor Hours, by Labor Category

Millions of hours



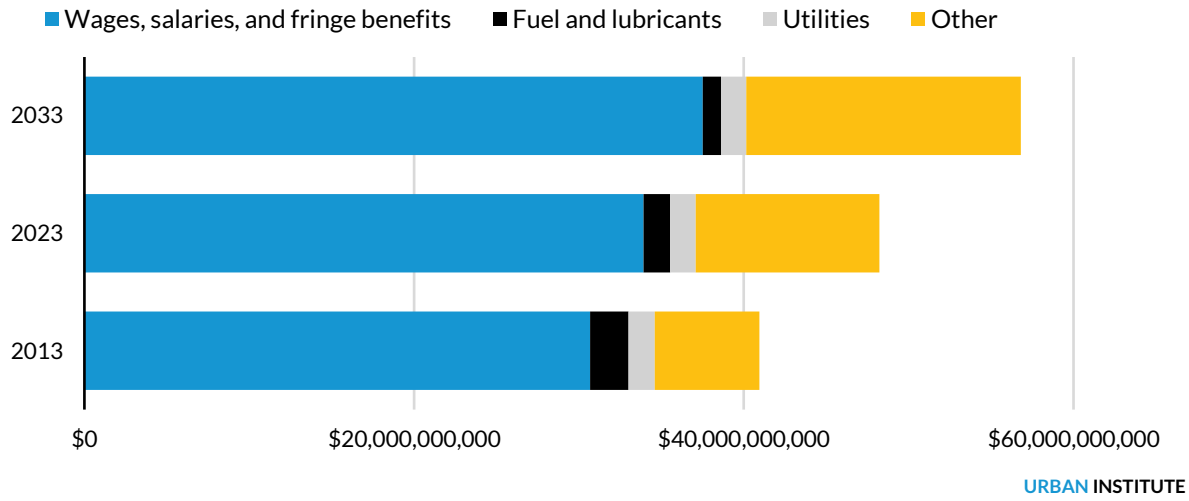
Source: The authors, based on data from the National Transit Database.

Next, we estimate how operating expenses may change, given baseline trends (figure 18). Mirroring the past decade, we expect that total operating expenses will increase 18 percent over the next decade. This increase would be dominated by nonlabor expenses. The share of total operating expenses nationwide spent on wages, salaries, and fringe benefits would drop from 70 percent in 2023 to 66 percent in 2033. We also expect a declining share of spending on fuel, lubricants, and utilities. At the same time, we expect that other types of expenses, including purchased transportation services and insurance, would increase at the greatest rate, as many agencies pay third-party operators to provide services that were once offered in house.

FIGURE 18

Baseline Scenario for Operating Expenses, by Cost Type

Annual operating expenses in 2023 dollars



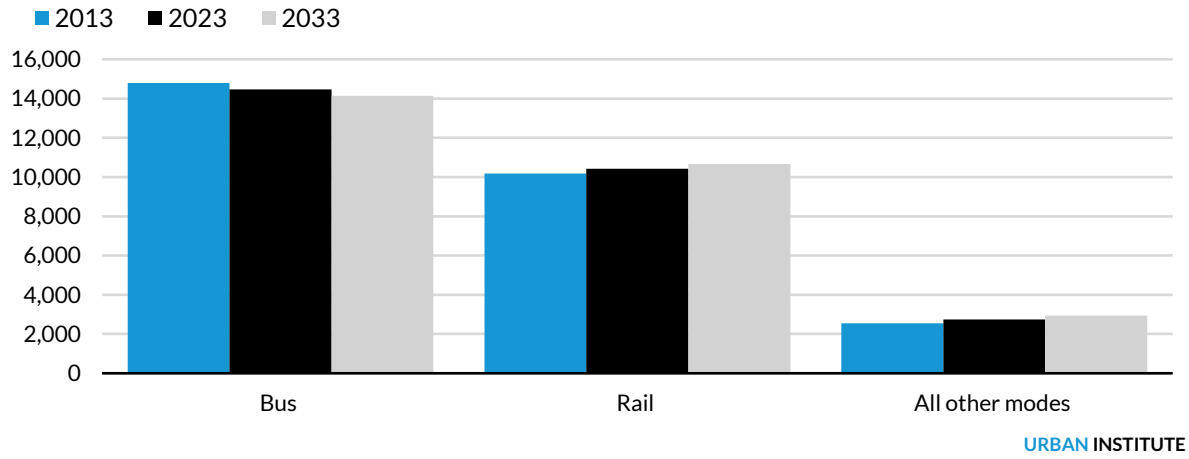
Source: The authors, based on data from the National Transit Database.
Note: Other includes purchased transportation services and insurance.

These trends are likely to be associated with a continued decline in bus vehicle revenue miles and a slight increase in rail and other types of transit service (figure 19). Our baseline assumption is that nationwide transit service would increase less than half a percentage point, a far lower rate of increase than expected national population growth.

FIGURE 19

Baseline Scenario for Service Levels

Annual vehicle revenue miles (in 100,000s)



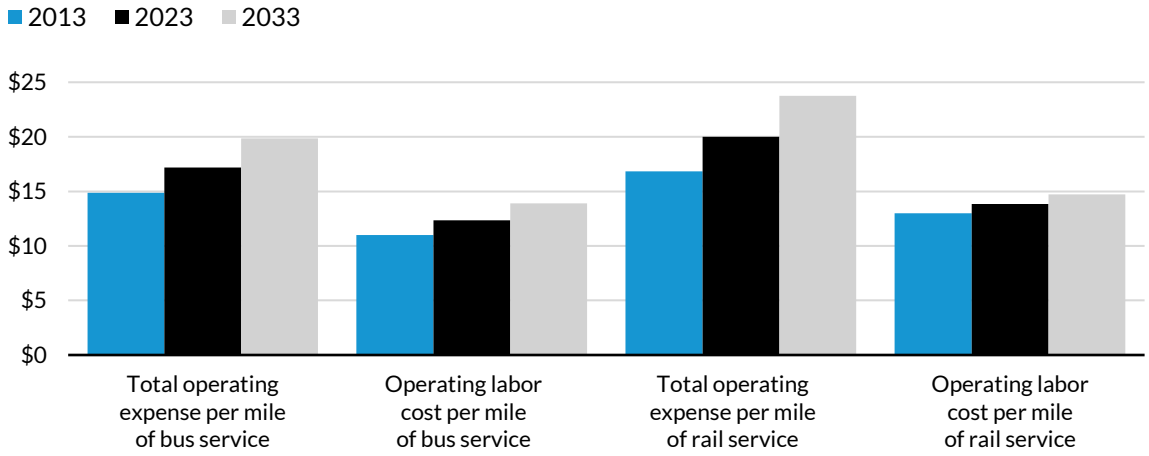
Source: The authors, based on data from the National Transit Database.

The consequence of these opposing trends—substantial increases in operating expenses combined with little increase in transit service—could reduce operational efficiency. Adjusted for inflation, we expect total operating expenses for both rail and bus service to increase substantially between 2023 and 2033 (figure 20). We estimate that this increase would be largely concentrated in nonlabor cost increases.

FIGURE 20

Baseline Scenario for Efficiency

Cost per mile of service in 2023 dollars



URBAN INSTITUTE

Source: The authors, based on data from the National Transit Database.

Major-Cuts Scenario

We next estimate the potential impact of major cuts to transit funding. One source of reduced support could be through fewer federal financial contributions, though that reduction would be indirect in terms of its impacts on operations in large metropolitan areas. Some recent policy proposals have included the recommendation to eliminate federal funding for transit, suggesting that this concept could be implemented given a willing White House and Congress (Dans and Grove 2024).[52]

Federal transit funding is used for both operations and capital expenditures, but the funding's use varies depending on the specific federal source and the size of the recipient transit agency. Since the 1990s, large transit agencies have been restricted to using federal transit support for capital needs, not operations, though smaller agencies could use the funding for operations. As such, federal support has come to play an increasingly important role in covering operational costs for those agencies. Emergency

federal support provided during the pandemic—which represented a large increase over the previous years' federal transit funding—was associated with a change in rules. These funds could be used by agencies of any size for operations. These realities make it difficult to estimate how much cuts in federal funding could affect workforce outcomes.

Nevertheless, we attempt to do so in this section. For each urban area, we identify the following:

- **The share of transit operating revenues derived from federal sources in 2019**: We assume this share can be multiplied by the baseline transit operations expenditures for 2033. The federal share of transit operations expenses—exempting pandemic assistance—increased from 8 to 11 percent between 2013 and 2019. We thus estimate that the federal share of transit funding would increase to about $7.4 billion annually by 2033.
- **The share of overall transit capital revenues, unrelated to new lines, derived from federal sources in 2019**: We assume this share can be multiplied by the baseline transit capital expenditures for 2033.

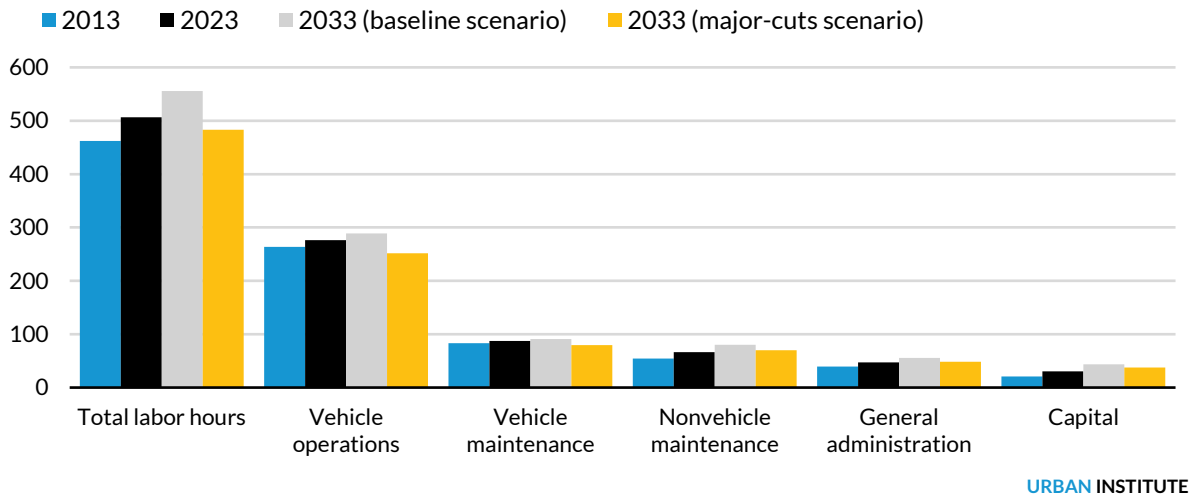
We estimate the transit workforce in the context of an elimination of federal subsidies (we assume state and local governments would *not* make up the gap and instead would leave transit agencies little choice but to cut service). These estimates do not account for potential employment losses in manufacturing for buses and trains purchased with federal funds. That said, we do estimate the potential benefits to employment in those industries if investments were *expanded*.

Absent federal cuts, we expect an increase in total labor hours. With federal cuts, however, we estimate a 13 percent reduction by 2033. This would reduce labor hours to below 2023 levels overall and to below 2013 levels for vehicle operations, posing a major threat to transit agencies' ability to provide adequate service (figure 21). In sum, we estimate that eliminating federal funding would require transit agencies to cut roughly 35,000 jobs compared with our baseline estimate.

FIGURE 21

Major-Cuts Scenario for Labor Hours

Annual labor hours, in millions



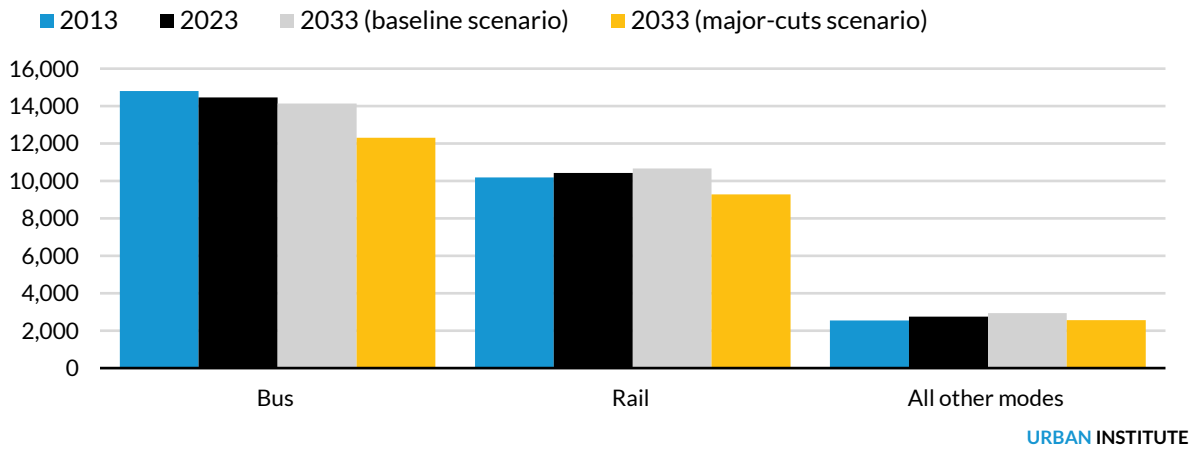
Source: The authors, based on data from the National Transit Database.

The elimination of federal support would force a major cut in service levels compared with baseline (figure 22). We expect this would mean 17 percent fewer bus vehicle revenue miles and 9 percent fewer rail vehicle revenue miles compared with 2013 levels, undermining transit agencies' ability to provide service that is useful for riders in urban areas nationwide.

FIGURE 22

Major-Cuts Scenario for Service Levels

Annual vehicle revenue miles (in 100,000s)



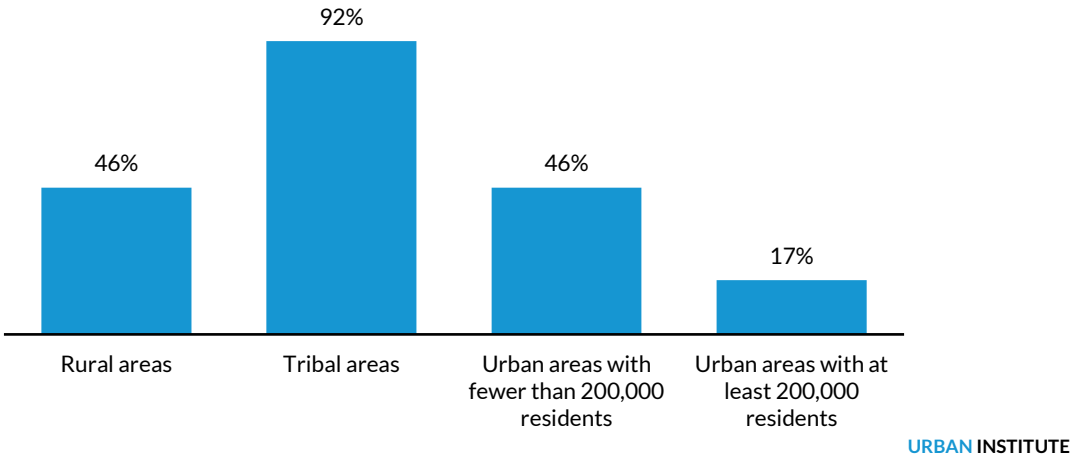
Source: The authors, based on data from the National Transit Database.
Notes: VRM = vehicle revenue miles. Assumes total operating expenses of $19.84 per bus VRM and $23.75 per rail VRM for 2033.

Given the distribution of federal funding, we expect these cuts would be concentrated in rural areas and small metropolitan areas, where the typical agency might have to cut up to half of its transit service and cut half its jobs if federal operations funding ceased.[53] The median transit agency in a rural area or in an urban area with fewer than 200,000 residents received 46 percent of its operating funds from the federal government in 2024, and tribal transit providers received an even higher share (figure 23). Transit agencies in larger urban areas, on the other hand, are much less reliant on the federal government, meaning cuts would, on a relative basis, affect them much less.

FIGURE 23

Share of Operating Costs Funded by the Federal Government, 2024

The federal government is key to funding transit operations in rural areas



Source: The authors, based on data from the National Transit Database.
Note: Classification of transit agency by geography is based on database reporting module.

Ambitious-Service Scenario

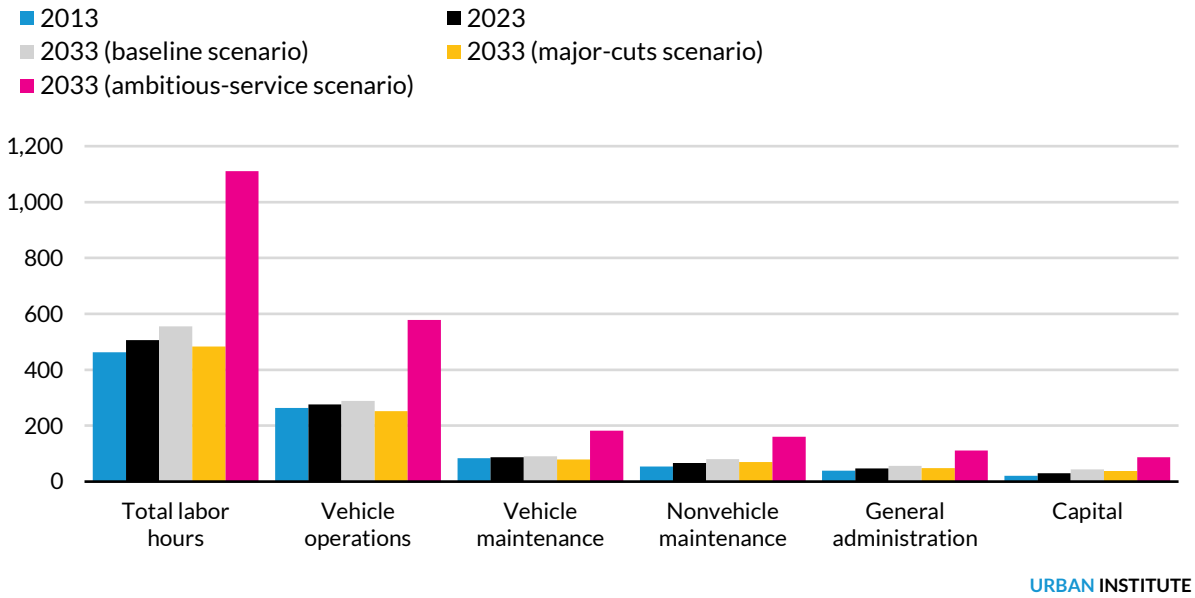
Finally, we estimate the potential for an ambitious *increase* in transit service. Such an increase could make it possible to dramatically improve peoples' accessibility to jobs while reducing reliance on driving for millions of Americans. We assume each urban area doubles the transit vehicle revenue miles it operates compared with the 2033 estimate. We then estimate the workforce needed to fulfill that service need, given our estimates of vehicle miles operated per operations employee. Because our data are at the urban area level, the effect of doubling transit service is not equivalent in terms of labor hours by urban area, depending on local productivity. We assume that most workforce needs would be for bus and train operators.

This alternative scenario would mean a dramatic work increase in the industry. Assuming no increases in labor efficiencies—which could be feasible in the context of larger transit service providers—we estimate that doubling service would require an additional 267,000 employees nationwide by 2033 (figure 24).

FIGURE 24

Ambitious Service Scenario for Labor

Annual labor hours (in millions)



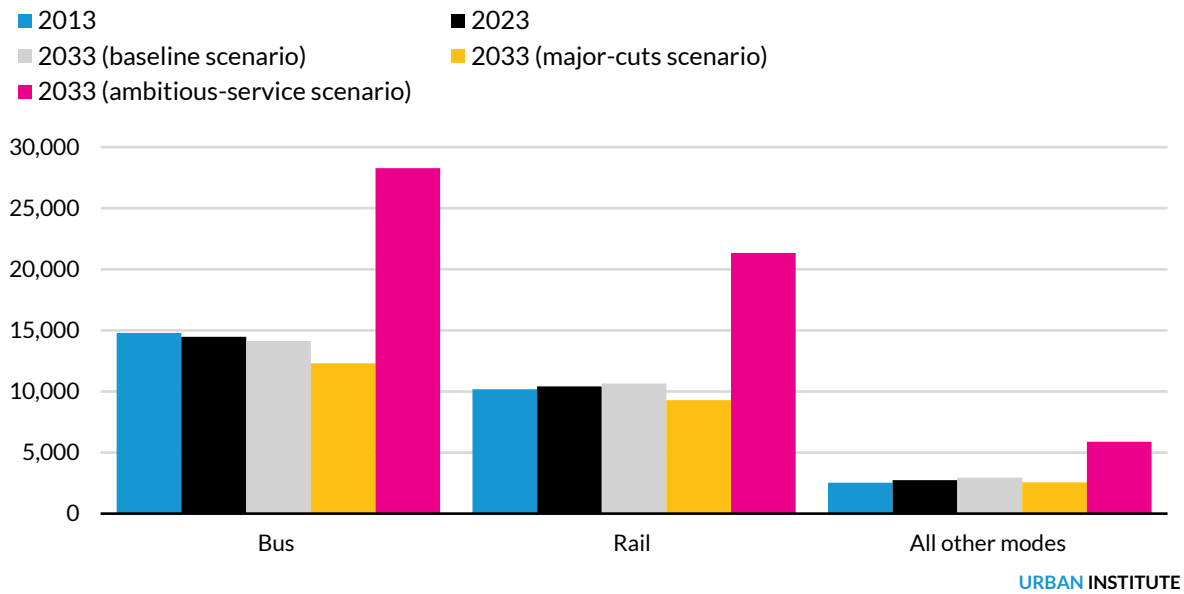
Source: The authors, based on data from the National Transit Database.

Additional service could have dramatic effects on people's ability to get around their communities by transit (figure 25). A doubling of service miles could mean, for example, having the Utah Transit Authority, in Salt Lake City and its suburbs, providing as much service in 2033 as the much larger Boston-region Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority did in 2023. This would be a vast improvement, giving the typical resident much better access to bus or rail service than previously.

FIGURE 25

Ambitious-Service Scenario for Service Levels

Annual vehicle revenue miles (in 100,000s)



Source: The authors, based on data from the National Transit Database.
Notes: VRM = vehicle revenue miles.

4. Hiring Barriers

To add nuance to the field's understanding of what might be contributing to prolonged position vacancies, high turnover, and workforce shortages plaguing many transit agencies, we built upon research from APTA (2023). That work surveyed 1,300 current and former workers at 190 transit agencies, including the 50 largest agencies by ridership volume. This survey effort featured two parts. The first gathered information on how agency leadership perceives their workforce issues and how they planned to improve conditions, and the second focused on current and former transit workers to identify the forces driving them to leave their agency roles. To provide additional insight, we review salaries and benefits for jobs that compare with jobs transit workers hold in several metropolitan areas and identify potential explanations for why transit agencies may be uncompetitive in attracting workers.

Key Findings from Previous Research

According to APTA's research, compensation, including wages and benefits, was the most frequently cited reason employees left their jobs. Beyond pay and benefits, employees left because of scheduling challenges, negative interactions with passengers, disapproval of management conduct, hiring and training challenges, health-related issues, and feelings of being overworked or burned out.

Among former transit agency workers, taking a job outside the transportation industry was the most common next step (28 percent), followed by choosing other nontransit jobs in transportation or logistics (22 percent). Seventeen percent retired. Many current workers noted that former colleagues commonly sought positions in government agencies, and many operators sought jobs involving driving. This suggests that workers who departed transit operations roles might have been willing to stay but for administrative or compensation-related issues.

These explanations have implications for agencies' ability to hire. When asked which factors might discourage potential workers from applying for transit jobs, several themes emerged:

- About half of respondents noted reasons related to pay and benefits.
- Nearly a fifth mentioned hesitation regarding their role engaging with transit riders, such as fear of physical and verbal abuse from passengers.

- Many pointed to required drug and alcohol testing (47 percent), the need to have or acquire a CDL (33 percent), mandatory background checks (16 percent), and requirements to meet certain driving record standards (4 percent).

Method for Comparing Transit Jobs Across Sectors

We sought to understand how transit job postings compare with similar roles in other sectors based on the factors APTA's research identified as most important: compensation, benefits, and qualifications. We examined what information is available to potential applicants when deciding whether to apply for transit positions versus comparable jobs in the nontransit public and private sectors.

We explored available jobs in the Boston, Houston, Minneapolis–St. Paul (the Twin Cities), San Francisco–San Jose (the Bay Area), and Washington, DC, metropolitan areas. Within each, we analyzed open positions advertised during March, April, and May 2025. We selected roles that transit agencies are struggling most to fill, as well as at least one job type from each of the four major job classifications the NTD uses: vehicle operations, maintenance, general administration, and capital.[54]

We reviewed five types of roles: bus, train, or shuttle operator; vehicle mechanic; police officer (most transit agencies have their own police forces to maintain safety); administrative assistant; and project manager. For each role, we examined one posting from a transit agency, one from another type of public agency, and one from a private company in each metropolitan area (we could not identify a transit police position in the Boston metropolitan area). Ultimately, we reviewed 74 job postings.

To ensure reasonable comparability for job types across sectors, we selected roles that were listed as requiring the same number of years of experience. In rare cases where an exact match was unavailable, we selected roles as closely matched in years of experience as possible. Additionally, whenever possible, we prioritized roles with the lowest barriers to entry (e.g., entry-level positions, as opposed to midcareer positions), as transit agencies struggling to fill vacancies in operations roles have made targeted efforts at the entry level to reduce barriers to applicants (Puentes et al. 2023).

Our review consisted of examining a 20-point checklist of elements that fit into three categories: minimum required qualifications, compensation and scheduling, and nonwage benefits. For each of these 20 elements, a job posting could receive one of three marks: (1) "yes," this element is explicitly listed within the job posting; (2) "no," this element is explicitly not required or featured as a part of this role; or (3) "not listed," meaning that the checklist element was not explicitly referred to within the listing, giving the potential applicant no information on the topic. As a final step, we identified the

minimum starting salary or wages associated with each role. We present detailed comparisons between job postings in Appendix A.

Readers should not interpret our findings as necessarily representative of all transit agencies or all employers in these sectors, let alone comparable sectors. We use these job postings to identify potential areas where transit agencies might improve their competitiveness and illustrate the types of information available (or missing) from job postings across sectors.

Findings from Comparing Transit Jobs Across Sectors

Based on our analysis, we identified several patterns in how transit agencies position themselves relative to competitors in the nontransit public and private sectors. Below, we explore these themes through illustrative examples from our sample.

Compensation Varies by Role Type

Transit agencies' compensation competitiveness varies by role. Agencies were most competitive for vehicle operator positions, moderately competitive for mechanic and police officer positions, and least competitive for administrative and capital positions. This is broadly consistent with the wage patterns across sectors reported above. It suggests that in the postpandemic period, as agencies have struggled to keep operations going, the general environment for vehicle operator positions across the sector has been difficult, not just among transit agencies. We compare examples from Greater Houston and the Bay Area in box 1.

BOX 1

Transit Agency Compensation Compared with Pay in Other Sectors

Vehicle Operators in Greater Houston

Houston's transit agency, METRO, offered a minimum starting salary for vehicle operators that was 17 percent higher than the comparable local public-sector posting and 14 percent higher than the comparable private-sector posting. METRO also offered a $2,000 sign-on bonus plus an additional $2,000 bonus after 1.5 years on the job. Additionally, METRO explicitly stated it would pay for applicants to acquire a CDL within their first year—a significant cost savings for potential employees. The nontransit public-sector and private-sector postings we examined offered similar base pay, but the private-sector role featured a guaranteed minimum of 35 hours per week, which none of the postings from the other sectors mentioned. This schedule certainty could be attractive to workers seeking income stability.

Project Managers in the Bay Area

This pattern reversed for roles working on capital investment. In our Bay Area sample, the nontransit public-sector project manager posting for the City of San Francisco offered a minimum starting salary 14 percent higher than that of the transit agency (BART) and 2 percent higher than in the private sector. The city government role also mentioned step-based guaranteed annual salary increases and the availability of overtime—features not mentioned in the transit agency posting. Additionally, although BART offered transportation subsidies to workers, neither the city nor private-sector postings mentioned tuition reimbursement. The private-sector posting also noted hybrid and remote work options, which the transit agency did not.

Source: The authors, based on a review of job postings.

These observations suggest transit agencies may be allocating compensation resources strategically toward operational roles, where they face the most acute shortages, while administrative and capital positions may be less competitive. This situation could make it challenging to attract talented workers who do not directly operate services but are nonetheless essential to agency functioning. But validation across a larger sample would be needed to confirm that this pattern holds broadly.

Qualification Requirements Are Often Higher at Transit Agencies

Across the postings we examined, transit agencies frequently listed more stringent qualification requirements than did organizations offering comparable roles in other sectors, particularly requirements regarding drug and alcohol testing, background checks, and education minimums. In some

cases, these higher barriers were offset by higher compensation. In other cases, however, transit agencies imposed more requirements while offering lower or comparable pay, a combination likely to deter applicants. In box 2, we provide examples of qualification requirements in Greater Boston and the Twin Cities.

BOX 2

Qualification Requirements for Transit Agency Jobs Compared with Other Positions

Vehicle Operators in Greater Boston

Among the job postings we reviewed in the Greater Boston area, all three sectors required a valid driver's license, but the qualification requirements diverged significantly from there:

- **Transit agency (MBTA)**: Required a high school diploma or GED, a CDL, drug and alcohol testing, and a physical exam.
- **Nontransit public sector (Boston Public Schools)**: Required only a basic driver's license.
- **Private sector (Paul Revere Transportation)**: Required a physical exam and drug and alcohol testing but did not explicitly require a CDL or a high school diploma or GED.

The MBTA posting thus presented the highest number of explicit barriers to entry. But the MBTA also offered the highest starting salary (8 percent higher than the public-sector postings and 25 percent higher than the private-sector postings) and the most comprehensive benefits package, including tuition reimbursement, child care support, and transportation subsidies. This represents a potentially defensible trade-off: higher barriers justified by better compensation.

Mechanics in the Twin Cities

In the Twin Cities, the private-sector mechanic posting (Buerkle Acura) listed no minimum requirements related to drug testing, background checks, driver's licenses, or education attainment—only a knowledge-based exam. Meanwhile, both the transit agency (Metro Transit) and the state government postings required drug testing, a high school diploma or GED, a valid driver's license, and a CDL. The transit agency, in addition, required a clean driving record and a physical examination. Despite these higher barriers to the transit agency mechanics role, the private sector offered the highest pay (57 percent higher than the state government and 34 percent higher than the transit agency) and mentioned a guaranteed minimum of 35 hours per week, paid training, and up to $10,000 in hiring and retention bonuses.

Source: The authors, based on a review of job postings.

Several factors likely contribute to these patterns. Transit agencies receiving federal funding must comply with Federal Transit Administration drug and alcohol testing regulations that private-sector employers might not face. Transit agencies also operate under intense public scrutiny where safety incidents generate significant media attention, creating institutional pressure for extensive screening. Additionally, budgetary constraints may prevent transit agencies from raising wages even as they recognize recruitment challenges, while legacy policies or union contract provisions may maintain qualification requirements that bear reconsideration in light of current labor market realities.

The implications of these comparisons are significant. Even if a transit agency's total compensation package, including benefits, is competitive long term, the combination of more screening requirements and lower starting pay could deter potential applicants. Job seekers may choose not to apply or may accept competing offers before completing transit's lengthy screening process. This suggests that transit agencies might need to reduce barriers, increase compensation, or both. Questions worth examining include whether all requirements are truly necessary or federally mandated, whether some requirements could be reframed as preferred rather than mandatory, and whether some screenings could happen after hiring rather than as application barriers.

Transit Agencies Offer Enhanced Benefits but Fail to Highlight Them Consistently

Across all geographies and role types in our sample, transit agencies consistently offered transportation subsidies—a benefit rarely mentioned in other sectors' postings. But the level of detail provided about benefits packages varied considerably across postings. Some offered comprehensive descriptions of tuition reimbursement, child care support, and family coverage, while others provided minimal information beyond standard insurance offerings. Meanwhile, transit agencies notably did not offer workplace flexibility options such as remote or hybrid work, even for roles where such arrangements might be feasible. This reaffirmed our findings from the national analysis (figure 15). In box 3, we compare example job postings in the Boston and Washington, DC, regions.

BOX 3

Benefits Listed in Postings for Transit Agency Jobs and Private- and Public-Sector Jobs

Mechanics in Greater Boston

In the Greater Boston area, the three mechanic postings we examined illustrated stark differences in how different sectors communicate benefits:

- **Transit agency (MBTA):** Listed transportation subsidies, tuition reimbursement, child care support, and standard insurance benefits.
- **Nontransit public sector (City of Cambridge):** Listed only standard insurance benefits.
- **Private sector:** Listed only standard insurance benefits.

The MBTA posting provided substantially more detail about its benefits package, potentially making it more attractive to applicants who value comprehensive benefits. The explicit mention of child care support and tuition reimbursement could be particularly compelling for working parents or those seeking to advance their education. Furthermore, neither the city nor the private-sector postings mentioned transportation benefits, suggesting this is a genuinely unique advantage for transit agencies.

Administrative Assistants in Washington, DC

The pattern was less favorable for the transit agency offering administrative roles in Washington, DC:

- **Transit agency (WMATA)**: Listed transportation subsidies and standard insurance.
- **Nontransit public sector (local government)**: Listed transportation subsidies, tuition reimbursement, family benefit extension, and standard insurance.
- **Private sector (Transdev)**: Listed only standard insurance.

Here, the nontransit public-sector postings offered the most comprehensive benefits package, including tuition reimbursement and family coverage extension—neither of which the transit agency mentioned. This suggests that the transit agency may not be competitive in terms of benefits for nonoperational roles or may not be effectively communicating the benefits it does offer.

Source: The authors, based on a review of job postings.

Transportation subsidies represent a genuine competitive advantage that other sectors cannot easily replicate. Free or discounted transit access has tangible monetary value, particularly in metropolitan areas where commuting costs can be substantial. Yet the inconsistent mention of other valuable benefits across transit agency postings suggests either that benefit packages vary significantly

between agencies or that agencies offer competitive benefits but fail to communicate them effectively in their recruitment materials.

Child care support is particularly worth noting. Across our sample of job postings, explicitly noted child care support was rare across all sectors and geographies. When it did appear, it was most commonly in transit agency postings. Given rising child care costs nationwide and the challenges working parents face—particularly for operational roles with nontraditional schedules where finding early-morning or late-evening child care can be difficult and expensive—this benefit could serve as a significant differentiator for transit agencies. Yet even among transit agencies, child care support was inconsistently mentioned, suggesting either genuine variation in what agencies offer or inconsistent communication of available benefits.

The implications for transit agencies are straightforward. At a minimum, agencies should ensure their job postings comprehensively describe all available benefits, particularly those that differentiate them from competitors. This is a zero-cost intervention that could immediately improve their competitive positioning. Beyond that, agencies should consider whether their benefits packages genuinely meet the needs of today's workforce, particularly related to family support, professional development, and work-life balance.

The Remote Work Gap for Administrative and Capital Roles

Transit agencies in our sample rarely offered remote or hybrid work options, even for administrative and capital roles where such arrangements are increasingly common in other sectors. This gap was particularly notable for project manager positions, where the private sector consistently mentioned workplace flexibility while transit agencies did not. Box 4 provides an example from the Twin Cities.

BOX 4

Job Postings Mentioning Workplace Flexibility

Administrative Assistants in the Twin Cities

Metro Transit was the only transit agency administrative posting in our sample to mention remote work eligibility. This suggests that although some transit agencies may be offering workplace flexibility for administrative roles, it remains the exception rather than the rule. Notably, the Metro Transit posting also had the lowest educational barrier (a high school diploma versus a college degree for other sectors) but offered fewer explicitly listed benefits than the other public-sector postings.

Source: The authors, based on a review of job postings.

The lack of remote or hybrid work options in transit agency postings, even for roles that could feasibly be performed remotely, may put transit agencies at a disadvantage when recruiting for administrative and capital positions. Workplace flexibility has become increasingly important to job seekers, particularly since the pandemic fundamentally shifted expectations about where and how knowledge work can be performed. When private-sector competitors explicitly offer hybrid or remote options and transit agencies do not mention any flexibility, transit agencies signal a more rigid work environment that may deter candidates who have come to expect or require flexibility.

The Twin Cities example demonstrates that offering remote work for administrative roles is possible within transit agencies, yet its rarity across our sample suggests this remains an organizational challenge. Transit agencies may face legitimate operational constraints, as transit work often requires significant in-person coordination, and organizational culture may emphasize on-site presence. But for roles such as project managers, administrative assistants, and other positions that primarily involve computer-based work, the lack of flexibility represents a missed opportunity to compete more effectively for talent.

Sign-On and Retention Bonuses Are More Common Outside Transit Agencies

Although transit agencies in our sample occasionally offered hiring bonuses, the bonuses appeared less frequently and were generally smaller than those that nontransit public-sector and private-sector employers offered, particularly for police officer roles. In box 5, we provide comparable examples related to sign-on and retention bonuses for police officers and mechanics.

BOX 5

Bonuses for Transit Positions and for Public- and Private-Sector Positions

Police Officers in Washington, DC

Bonus structures varied significantly across the three Washington, DC, police officer postings:

- **Transit agency (WMATA):** Up to a $20,000 sign-on bonus.
- **Nontransit public sector (City of Washington, DC):** Up to $25,000 in hiring and retention bonuses spread over multiple years, plus $6,000 in rental assistance.
- **Private sector (Allied Universal):** No bonus mentioned.

The City of Washington, DC's combined bonus and rental assistance package totaled $31,000, significantly more than WMATA's offering. Additionally, the city mentioned overtime and annual step-based pay increases, creating a clear picture of long-term earning potential. Despite the city's more generous bonus structure, WMATA still offered higher base pay (7 percent higher than the city and 45 percent higher than the private sector). WMATA also offered a unique retirement benefit: Officers can retire after 25 years of service with no age minimum, at 64 percent of salary.

Mechanics in the Twin Cities

The private sector appeared most competitive on bonuses for Twin Cities mechanics positions:

- **Transit agency (Metro Transit):** Hiring bonus and retention bonus mentioned (amounts not specified) along with guaranteed annual step-based pay increases.
- **Nontransit public sector (Minnesota DOT):** No bonuses mentioned.
- **Private sector (Buerkle Acura):** Up to $10,000 in hiring and retention bonuses split over two years, a guaranteed 35-hour work week, and paid training.

The private sector also offered the highest base pay (57 percent higher than the state government and 34 percent higher than transit), creating a significantly more lucrative total compensation package.

Source: The authors, based on a review of job postings.

Bonuses attract applicants, incentivize staying through difficult initial training periods, and reward tenure. Our observations suggest that transit agencies may be losing ground to competitors that offer more substantial or more clearly articulated bonus structures. This is particularly notable given that APTA's research identified compensation as the primary reason workers leave transit jobs. Although base pay is important, a substantial signing bonus may be compelling to job seekers facing financial

pressures, particularly for entry-level positions for which applicants may need to cover relocation costs, purchase uniforms or equipment, or bridge income gaps during training periods.

Commercial Driver's License Requirements Are Often Offset by Paid Training

APTA's research identified the need to acquire a CDL as a barrier to hiring among transit agencies, but the postings we examined suggest agencies are often willing to pay for CDL training, an advantage other sectors do not uniformly offer. Box 6 provides examples in the Houston and Bay Area regions.

BOX 6

Commercial Driver's License Requirements in Job Postings

Vehicle Operators in Greater Houston

CDL requirements and support varied across the three Greater Houston vehicle operator postings:

- **Transit agency (METRO):** Did not require a CDL at time of application and explicitly stated the agency would pay for applicants to acquire a CDL within their first year on the job.
- **Nontransit public sector**: Did not specify whether a CDL was required.
- **Private sector**: Explicitly required a CDL.

This represents a competitive advantage for METRO. A CDL can cost $3,000 to $5,000 to obtain when factoring in training, testing, and time off work. By removing this barrier and offering paid training, METRO effectively increased the value of its compensation package by that amount while expanding its pool of eligible applicants.

Vehicle Operators in the Bay Area

In the Bay Area, all three vehicle operator postings required a CDL, though the transit agency (BART) posting was for train operators rather than bus operators:

- **Transit agency (BART):** Required a CDL (for train operators, not bus operators).
- **Nontransit public sector (University of California, San Francisco):** Required a CDL.
- **Private sector (Zum Inc.):** Required a CDL but offered paid training to acquire it.

Here, the private-sector employer offered the same advantage as Houston's METRO (i.e., paid CDL training), suggesting this practice is not unique to transit agencies. Zum offered a $5,000 sign-on bonus on top of the paid training, making the position competitive despite offering lower base pay than BART.

Source: The authors, based on a review of job postings.

The CDL requirement appears to be less of a barrier when employers offer to pay for training. Transit agencies that already provide paid CDL training should advertise it prominently in postings, as this represents both a significant cost savings for applicants and a genuine competitive advantage. Transit agencies should consider whether the requirement is truly necessary at the time of application or whether a probationary period with paid training might expand the applicant pool without compromising safety or service quality.

When private-sector employers combine paid training with additional incentives, such as large sign-on bonuses, they may present a more attractive total package to potential applicants despite lower base wages. This suggests transit agencies cannot rely solely on paid CDL training as a differentiator. They must ensure their overall compensation and benefits package remains competitive even after accounting for this training support.

5. Implications for Transit Agencies

Our research provides new evidence about the transit workforce. The transit workforce is growing and likely will continue to grow unless federal cutbacks force a massive employee reduction. But these trends vary by region, with some metropolitan areas posting workforce declines over the past two decades. Our data also indicate that transit workers in general make somewhat more money, on average, than workers in similar roles in other sectors, but this is not true for transit workers in management and administrative occupations, who make less. In addition, transit workers access several nonwage benefits compared with other similar jobs.

Nevertheless, transit agencies face a competitive landscape in attracting workers compared with nontransit public-sector and private-sector employers. Based on our analysis of a sample of job postings, we find that transit agencies' competitive positioning varies significantly by role. For vehicle operator positions, transit agencies offered higher pay than other sectors in four of five metropolitan areas and frequently provided paid CDL training, creating a competitive advantage. For police officers, transit agency pay was higher than in other sectors more often than not, though other sectors sometimes offered larger bonuses. Transit agencies typically offered competitive pay for administrative roles (usually ranking first or second among sectors), though the lack of remote work options may offset this advantage.

The weakest competitive positioning is in project manager roles, where transit agencies consistently offered lower pay than agencies in other sectors and lacked both workplace flexibility options and comprehensive benefits communication. For mechanic roles, transit agencies never offered the lowest pay among the three sectors but, in some markets, imposed significantly higher qualification barriers without corresponding compensation advantages.

How Our Findings Compare with Previous Research

Our analysis adds important data to APTA's findings about barriers to hiring. On compensation, APTA's research indicated noncompetitive pay as a primary concern, but our analysis of postings suggests this varies dramatically by role. Transit agencies appear to pay competitively or better for vehicle operators and police officers, while lagging for administrative and capital roles. Competitive wages for frontline workers in public transit are likely attributable in part to higher unionization rates among public-sector workers and are consistent with a large body of research finding that union jobs command a wage

premium (Blanchflower and Bryson 2024).[55] Competitive wages also likely reflect, in part, the urban nature of much transit work, and the higher wages workers tend to earn in cities (e.g., Glaeser and Gottlieb 2009). The picture is further complicated by bonuses, which other sectors offered more frequently or in larger amounts, sometimes offsetting transit's base pay advantages.

On benefits, transit agencies offered unique mobility subsidies and sometimes comprehensive packages, including child care support and tuition reimbursement, but communication about these benefits was inconsistent across postings. Transit agencies fell notably short on workplace flexibility, with remote or hybrid work options almost entirely absent even for administrative and capital roles, where such arrangements are increasingly standard elsewhere. This is potentially important for understanding transit agency recruitment and retention in light of recent research showing that workers find workplace flexibility (e.g., flexible work schedules, or the possibility of remote or hybrid work) to be a valuable workplace amenity (e.g., Barrero, Bloom, and Davis 2021; Mas and Pallais 2017).

Our findings align with APTA's research on drug and alcohol testing and background check requirements. Transit agencies listed these requirements more frequently than agencies in other sectors across our postings, potentially deterring applicants. Such effects would be broadly consistent with the research literature on the labor market effects of occupational licensing, which generally creates barriers to entry and can depress labor supply (Kleiner and Wang 2025), though the presence of such restrictions also tends to be associated with higher wages. To help with CDL requirements, however, many transit agencies offered to pay for training, though this advantage was not uniformly advertised, and some private-sector employers have adopted similar practices.

Strategic Implications for Transit Agencies

Immediate, Low-Cost Actions

Transit agencies can take immediate steps to improve their competitive positioning without budget increases. First, job postings should comprehensively describe all benefits, particularly mobility subsidies, paid CDL training, family coverage, and child care or tuition support. Many transit postings in our sample provided minimal details, potentially causing agencies to lose applicants. Second, agencies offering paid CDL training should feature this prominently in job titles and descriptions rather than burying it in requirements sections. Third, agencies should review whether all listed qualification requirements are necessary or whether some could be reframed as "preferred" or offered as pathways during employment rather than application barriers.

Medium-Term Competitive Adjustments

Transit agencies should consider enhanced bonuses where budgets allow, particularly for hard-to-fill roles. These bonuses may be more compelling to job seekers than equivalent amounts distributed across future paychecks, especially for entry-level positions where applicants face up-front costs. Agencies should also evaluate workplace flexibility for administrative and capital roles, as the absence of remote or hybrid options increasingly disadvantages transit positions when competing for applicants. Even partial flexibility could meaningfully improve competitiveness for roles where transit currently lags on compensation.

Child care support is a significant opportunity for differentiation. Across our entire sample, explicitly noted child care support was rare in all sectors. When it did appear, it was most commonly in transit agency postings. Given rising child care costs nationwide[56] and the particular challenges of finding care during the early-morning and late-evening hours common to transit operational schedules, expanding and prominently advertising child care benefits could be a powerful recruiting tool. This is especially relevant for attracting working parents to vehicle operator and mechanic positions where nontraditional schedules create child care challenges.

Long-Term Strategic Considerations

Transit agencies may need to reconsider compensation strategies, given high qualification barriers and lower pay than competitors in some markets. Moreover, to the extent transit-sector employment challenges arise in part from an aging workforce, agencies could consider tailoring compensation strategies and approaches to job design to target early-career workers (Briggs and Sirois 2025). Where federal regulations mandate certain requirements, agencies should communicate this clearly to applicants and ensure compensation adequately reflects the additional screening burden. Where requirements are discretionary, agencies should evaluate whether the benefits of extensive screening justify potentially deterring applicants.

Finally, agencies should strengthen messaging around job security, public service mission, and long-term career development opportunities to differentiate themselves from private-sector employers. The intrinsic value of transit work—contributing to community mobility and environmental sustainability—could be far more prominent in recruitment materials and job postings themselves, potentially appealing to candidates who value mission-driven work even when pure compensation lags behind alternatives (Cassar and Meier 2018). With respect to job security, one factor for consideration is to both advertise and structure work recognizing the relative exposure of transit-sector work to labor market disruptions attributable to the adoption of artificial intelligence, which, to date, has not been

largely adopted in transportation occupations (Handa et al. 2025). At the same time, agencies could carefully leverage the benefits artificial intelligence offers to reduce workloads (e.g., paperwork).

Future Areas of Research

Future research on the following topics should be a priority to support transit agencies in their efforts to stabilize their labor force and provide the highest-quality service possible:

- **Expanding the body of evidence on intervention effectiveness:** The literature reveals limited evidence of successful interventions or measurable improvements in transit workforce conditions since the pandemic. This gap may reflect both the recent implementation of interventions and the lack of systematic evaluation of workforce strategies.
- **Quality-of-life impact assessments:** Questions remain about what the long-term economic, environmental, public health, and social costs of service reductions might be for communities and regions. Research of this nature could help ensure transit's future fiscal health and service quality, given interest from policymakers. But there is a dearth of work connecting metrics in these categories to changes, both realized and anticipated, to the transit labor force. Future work should strive to remedy this.
- **Sentiment analysis:** Our work shows that although transit agencies are adjusting the nature of some roles, labor force shortages sometimes prove persistent. More concrete understanding of why this might be the case is needed. Analysis of public sentiment held toward transit agencies and the jobs they offer—not just perspectives from current and former employees—would contribute to such an understanding. A social stigmatization toward these roles may have formed that has kept applicants away even though, on paper, transit jobs are stable and often competitive. If indeed transit has an image problem, knowing the specifics would set agencies on the best path toward correcting that problem.
- **Gaining insights from a greater diversity of sources and a larger range of methods:** There is a gap in peer-reviewed academic research focused on transit workforce solutions. Most available evidence comes from industry surveys and interviews with employees across agencies selected as case studies. Quantitative analysis is scant, as are findings from academic studies.

Appendix

TABLE A.1

Comparisons of Vehicle Operator Positions

	DC Metro Area			Greater Boston Metro Area			Houston Metro Area			Bay Area			Twin Cities		
	Transit	NT pub.	Priv.	Transit	NT pub.	Priv.	Transit	NT pub.	Priv.	Transit	NT pub.	Priv.	Transit	NT pub.	Priv.
Qualifications															
Subject to periodic D/A testing	NL	NL	NL	Yes	NL	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	NL	Yes	NL	Yes	Yes	Yes
Subject to background check	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	NL	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Requires high school diploma or GED	No	NL	NL	Yes	NL	NL	Yes	NL	NL	Yes	NL	Yes	No	No	NL
Requires college degree	No	NL	NL	No	NL	NL	No	NL	NL	No	NL	No	No	No	NL
Physical exam requirements	No	Yes	NL	Yes	NL	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	NL	NL	Yes	Yes
Knowledge-based exam/certification	Yes	Yes	NL	Yes	NL	NL	Yes	Yes	NL	No	NL	NL	NL	Yes	NL
Valid driver's license required	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Driving record of fewer than 2 moving violations required	Yes	Yes	Yes	NL	NL	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Commercial driver's license required	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	NL	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Compensation															
Starting salary minimum (000s)[a]	$50	$67	$70	$65	$60	$52	$23.40/hr.[c]	$20.00/hr.	$20.50/hr.	$81	$54	$64	$60	$58	$54
35-hour-a-week minimum schedule	NL	Yes	NL	Yes	No	Yes	NL	No	Yes	NL	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Overtime available	Yes	NL	NL	Yes	Yes	Yes	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	Yes	NL	Yes
Paid training period	Yes	NL	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	NL	NL	Yes	NL	NL	Yes	Yes	NL	NL
Hiring bonus	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	Yes[b]	Yes	Yes	NL	NL	NL	Yes[d]	Yes	NL	NL
Retention bonus	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	Yes	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	Yes	NL	NL
Guaranteed annual (step) pay increases	NL	NL	NL	Yes	Yes	NL	NL	Yes	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL
Benefits															
Transportation benefits for employee	Yes	NL	Yes	Yes	NL	NL	Yes	NL	NL	Yes	NL	NL	Yes	NL	NL
Medical, dental, vision, and life insurance	Yes	NL	Yes	Yes	Yes	NL	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes[e]	Yes	Yes
Benefits explicitly extend to family?	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	Yes	NL	NL	Yes	Yes	NL	NL	NL	NL
Tuition reimbursement	NL	NL	NL	Yes	Yes	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	Yes	NL	NL	NL	NL
Child care support	NL	NL	NL	Yes	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	Yes	NL	NL	NL	NL

Source: Author's review of job listings for transit jobs and comparable jobs.

Notes: D/A = drug and alcohol; NL = not listed in job listing; NT pub. = nontransit public sector; Priv. = private sector.

[a] Unless otherwise noted, the salaries are annual and rounded to the nearest thousand. [b] Includes a $1,000 sign-on bonus and a $500 referral bonus. [c] Bilingual pay incentive available. [d] $5,000 sign-on bonus. [e] Access to health and wellness classes and facilities.

TABLE A.2

Comparisons of Vehicle Mechanic Positions

	DC Metro Area			Greater Boston Metro Area			Houston Metro Area			Bay Area			Twin Cities		
	Transit	NT pub.	Priv.	Transit	NT pub.	Priv.	Transit	NT pub.	Priv.	Transit	NT pub.	Priv.	Transit	NT pub.	Priv.
Qualifications															
Subject to periodic D/A testing	NL	NL	Yes	Yes	NL	Yes	Yes	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	Yes	Yes	NL
Subject to background check	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	Yes	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	Yes	NL
Requires high school diploma or GED	Yes	Yes	NL	Yes	Yes	NL	Yes	Yes	NL	Yes	Yes	NL	Yes	Yes	No
Requires college degree	No	No	NL	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	NL	No	No	No
Physical exam requirements	NL	NL	Yes	NL	NL	Yes	NL	NL	Yes	Yes	Yes	NL	Yes	NL	NL
Knowledge-based exam/certification	Yes	Yes	NL	NL	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	NL	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Valid driver's license required	NL	Yes	NL	Yes	Yes	Yes	NL	Yes	Yes	NL	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	NL
Driving record of fewer than 2 moving violations required	NL	Yes	NL	NL	NL	Yes	NL	Yes	Yes	NL	NL	NL	Yes	NL	NL
Commercial driver's license required	NL	Yes	NL	NL	NL	No	NL	Yes	Yes	NL	NL	NL	Yes	yes	NL
Compensation															
Starting salary minimum (000s)[a]	$70	$52	$52	$141	$56	$46	$31.89/hr.	$19.43/hr.	$34.00/hr.	$85	$116	$62	$82	$69	$110
35-hour-a-week minimum schedule	Yes	NL	NL[b]	Yes	NL	Yes	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	yes
Overtime available	Yes	Yes	NL	NL	NL	Yes	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL
Paid training period	Yes	NL	Yes	NL	NL	Yes	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	Yes	NL	NL	yes
Hiring bonus	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	Yes	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	Yes[c]	Yes	NL	yes[e]
Retention bonus	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	Yes	NL	yes
Guaranteed annual (step) pay increases	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	Yes	NL	NL
Benefits															
Transportation benefits for employee	Yes	NL	NL	Yes	NL	NL	Yes	NL	NL	Yes	NL	NL	Yes	NL	NL
Medical, dental, vision, and life insurance	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	NL	NL	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes[d]	Yes	Yes
Benefits explicitly extend to family?	NL	Yes	NL	NL	NL	NL	Yes	Yes	NL	Yes	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL
Tuition reimbursement	NL	Yes	NL	Yes	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	Yes	Yes
Child care support	NL	NL	NL	Yes	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	Yes	NL

Source: Author's review of job listings for transit jobs and comparable jobs.

Notes: D/A = drug and alcohol; NL = not listed in job listing; NT pub. = nontransit public sector; Priv. = private sector. [a] Unless otherwise noted, the salaries are annual and rounded to the nearest thousand. [b] Includes minimum two-week vacation, five sick days, and life insurance. [c] $1,500 sign-on bonus [d] Access to health and wellness classes and facilities. [e] Up to $10,000 sign-on bonus.

TABLE A.3

Comparisons of Police Officer Positions

	DC Metro Area			Greater Boston Metro Area			Houston Metro Area			Bay Area			Twin Cities		
	Transit	NT pub.	Priv.	Transit	NT pub.	Priv.	Transit	NT pub.	Priv.	Transit	NT pub.	Priv.	Transit	NT pub.	Priv.
Qualifications															
Subject to periodic D/A testing	NL	NL	Yes	No pos. open	Yes	NL	Yes	Yes	Yes	NL	Yes	NL	Yes	Yes	Yes
Subject to background check	Yes	NL	Yes		Yes	NL	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	NL	Yes	Yes	Yes
Requires high school diploma or GED	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	NL	NL	Yes	Yes	Yes	NL	Yes
Requires college degree	No	No	No		No	No	No	No	NL	NL	NL	No	Yes	NL	Yes
Physical exam requirements	Yes	Yes	NL		Yes	NL	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	NL	Yes	Yes	Yes
Knowledge-based exam/certification	Yes [a]	Yes	NL		Yes	NL	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Valid driver's license required	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Driving record of fewer than 2 moving violations required	NL	NL	Yes		Yes	NL	NL	NL	NL	Yes	NL	NL	Yes	NL	Yes
Commercial driver's license required	NL	NL	NL		NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL
Compensation															
Starting salary minimum (000s)	$71	$66	$49		$68	$51	$60	$78 [d]	$67	$123	$108	$67	$82	$60	$76
35-hour-a-week minimum schedule	NL [b]	NL	NL		Yes	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	Yes	NL	NL	NL
Overtime available	NL	Yes	Yes		yes	Yes	NL	Yes	NL	Yes	Yes	Yes	NL	NL	NL
Paid training period	NL	NL	NL		NL	Yes	NL	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	NL	NL	NL	NL
Hiring bonus	Yes	Yes [c]	NL		NL	NL	NL	Yes	NL	Yes	Yes [f]	NL	Yes [g]	NL	Yes [h]
Retention bonus	NL	Yes	NL		NL	NL	NL	Yes	Yes	NL	Yes	NL	Yes	NL	Yes
Guaranteed annual (step) pay increases	NL	Yes	NL		Yes	NL	NL	Yes	Yes	NL	Yes	NL	Yes	NL	Yes
Benefits															
Transportation benefits for employee	Yes	NL	NL		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	NL	NL	Yes	Yes	NL
Medical, dental, vision, and life insurance	Yes	Yes	NL		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes [e]	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Benefits explicitly extend to family?	NL	Yes	NL		Yes	NL	Yes s	Yes	NL	Yes	Yes	NL	NL	Yes	Yes
Tuition reimbursement	Yes	Yes	NL		Yes	NL	NL	Yes	Yes	NL	Yes	NL	Yes	Yes	Yes
Child care support	NL	NL	NL		Yes	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	Yes	NL	NL	NL	NL

Source: Author's review of job listings for transit jobs and comparable jobs.

Notes: D/A = drug and alcohol; NL = not listed in job listing; No pos. open = No positions currently open and/or no hiring page available to review; NT pub. = nontransit public sector; Priv. = private sector. [a] Written exam waived for lateral police officers, military veterans, and anyone with a four-year college degree. [b] Retirement after 25 years of service (no minimum age) at age 64. [c] $25,000 hiring bonus and $6,000 rental assistance. [d] Many incentive payment steps based on education and time on the force. [e] Lifetime medical benefits, including spouse. [f] $12,000 signing bonus. [g] $4,000 signing bonus. [h] $5,000 signing bonus.

TABLE A.4

Comparisons of Administrative Officer Positions

	DC Metro Area			Greater Boston Metro Area			Houston Metro Area			Bay Area			Twin Cities		
	Transit	NT pub.	Priv.	Transit	NT pub.	Priv.	Transit	NT pub.	Priv.	Transit	NT pub.	Priv.	Transit	NT pub.	Priv.
Qualifications															
Subject to periodic D/A testing	NL	Yes	Yes	Yes	NL	NL	Yes	NL	NL	NL	NL	Yes	NL	NL	NL
Subject to background check	NL	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	NL	NL	Yes	NL	Yes	NL
Requires high school diploma or GED	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Requires college degree	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Physical exam requirements	No	No	No	yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	NL	No
Knowledge-based exam/certification	No	No	No	NL	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	NL	No	NL	No
Valid driver's license required	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Driving record of fewer than 2 moving violations required	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Commercial driver's license required	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Compensation															
Starting salary minimum (000s)	$62	$56	$57	$78	$71	$72	$61	$57	$58	$121	$127	$95	$63	$68	$60
35-hour-a-week minimum schedule	NL	NL	NL	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL
Overtime available	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	Yes	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL
Paid training period	NL	NL	NL	Yes	NL	Yes	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL
Hiring bonus	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL
Retention bonus	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL
Guaranteed annual (step) pay increases	NL	Yes	NL	NL	NL	Yes	NL	NL	NL	Yes	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL
Benefits															
Transportation benefits for employee	Yes	Yes	NL	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	NL	yes	NL	NL	Yes [a]	Yes	Yes
Medical, dental, vision, and life insurance	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes [b]	Yes	Yes
Benefits explicitly extend to family?	NL	Yes	NL	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	NL	NL	Yes	Yes
Tuition reimbursement	NL	Yes	NL	Yes	Yes	Yes	NL	NL	Yes	NL	NL	NL	NL	Yes	Yes
Child care support	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	Yes	NL	NL	Yes	NL	NL	NL	NL

Source: Author's review of job listings for transit jobs and comparable jobs.

Notes: D/A = drug and alcohol; NL = not listed in job listing; NT pub. = nontransit public sector; Priv. = private sector. [a] This position is eligible for a hybrid (both remote and onsite) telework arrangement. [b] Access to health and wellness classes and facilities.

TABLE A.5

Comparisons of Project Manager (Capital) Positions

	DC Metro Area			Greater Boston Metro Area			Houston Metro Area			Bay Area			Twin Cities		
	Transit	NT pub.	Priv.	Transit	NT pub.	Priv.	Transit	NT pub.	Priv.	Transit	NT pub.	Priv.	Transit	NT pub.	Priv.
Qualifications															
Subject to periodic D/A testing	NL	Yes	NL	NL	NL	NL	Yes	Yes	NL	NL	Yes	NL	Yes	NL	NL
Subject to background check	NL	Yes	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	Yes	NL	NL	Yes	NL	NL	Yes	NL
Requires high school diploma or GED	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Requires college degree	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Physical exam requirements	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Knowledge-based exam/certification	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Valid driver's license required	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
Driving record of fewer than 2 moving violations required	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
Commercial driver's license required	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Compensation															
Starting salary minimum (000s)	$97	$88	$92	$130	$92	$138	$76	$90	$78	$162	$184	$180	$80	$94	$84
35-hour-a-week minimum schedule	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL
Overtime available	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	yes	NL	NL	NL	NL
Paid training period	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL
Hiring bonus	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL
Retention bonus	NL	NL	yes	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	Yes
Guaranteed annual (step) pay increases	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	Yes	NL	NL	NL	NL
Benefits															
Transportation benefits for employee	Yes	NL	NL[a]	Yes	Yes	NL	Yes	Yes	NL	Yes	NL	NL	Yes	Yes	NL
Medical, dental, vision, and life insurance	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes[b]	Yes	Yes
Benefits explicitly extend to family?	NL	Yes	Yes	NL	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	NL	Yes	Yes
Tuition reimbursement	NL	NL	Yes	Yes	NL	NL	NL	Yes	NL	NL	Yes	Yes	NL	Yes	Yes
Child care support	NL	NL	NL	Yes	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL

Source: Author's review of job listings for transit jobs and comparable jobs.

Notes: D/A = drug and alcohol; NL = not listed in job listing; NT pub. = nontransit public sector; Priv. = private sector. [a] During the first six months, a minimum of three days a week in the office is required to learn firm culture and develop relationships. After that, flexible hybrid/remote work is allowed. [b] Access to health and wellness classes and facilities.

Notes

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[2] Sandy Brennan, "Best Practices: How to Better Support Frontline Transit Workers, Prioritize Their Mental Health and Build for a Better Future," Mass Transit, June 3, 2025, https://www.masstransitmag.com/safety-security/article/55288809/best-practices-how-to-better-support-frontline-transit-workers-prioritize-their-mental-health-and-build-for-a-better-future.

[3] Jared Brey, "Transit Agencies Must Replace Thousands of Maintenance Workers," *Governing*, May 23, 2024, https://www.governing.com/workforce/transit-agencies-must-replace-most-maintenance-workers-this-decade.

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