

# Meeting Summary

## Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization Transit Working Group

### August 23, 2022, Meeting

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

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=baT\\_K2jg0QI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=baT_K2jg0QI)

Meeting materials posted at: <https://www.bostonmpo.org/calendar/day/20220823>

## Meeting Agenda

### 1. Welcome and Meeting Guidelines—*Sandy Johnston, MPO Staff*

Sandy Johnston welcomed attendees to the Transit Working Group (TWG) Coffee Chat, and he invited attendees to introduce themselves in the chat. S. Johnston introduced himself as a Senior Transportation Planner on the Boston Region MPO's staff and manager of the TWG. S. Johnston explained that this meeting's topic of focus is a report on Bus Operators in Crisis, and the meeting will be co-facilitated by Chris Van Eyken of TransitCenter.

### 2. Bus Operators in Crisis Report—*Chris Van Eyken, TransitCenter*

C. Van Eyken began his presentation with an overview of the Bus Operators in Crisis report published by TransitCenter, of which he was the lead author. This research was spurred by pandemic-related labor shortages and questions about how this phenomenon affects agencies' ability to deliver services. The report derived its findings from interviews with agency staff, union representatives, and former transit operators, as well as from desk research on past studies and economic development data in an effort to identify larger trends outside of the transit industry.

The researchers found that the difficulty of finding and retaining skilled transit operators affects agencies of all sizes across the country, resulting in agencies needing to cut or delay services. One of the key reasons behind this crisis is that a large percentage of transit workers are baby boomers, but as they come of retirement age agencies are struggling to recruit enough employees to replace retirees. Additionally, a decline in job quality makes operator positions less attractive and pay raises have not kept up with cost of living, especially in big cities. Overall, this is a crisis that has been a long time coming and COVID simply exacerbated pre-existing shortages.

Some of the recommendations presented in the report include making the jobs more attractive to potential hires and investing in benefits to retain workers, such as

competitive compensation, improved employee facilities, signing bonuses, and assistance with obtaining a commercial driver's license (CDL), among others. Additionally, agencies must emphasize mental health, as operators can face verbal and physical assault during their routes which can significantly impact retention. Overall, agencies must prioritize operators' health and safety and actualize operator feedback on a regular basis to ensure the longevity of their employees' tenure.

States can assist agencies in their efforts to hire and retain operators by increasing and maintaining funding for transit operations, as well as expediting the processing of CDLs, and reducing the barriers of entering the workforce for formerly incarcerated peoples. The federal government can help by raising the profile of issues such as driver safety and drug testing guidelines, as well as issuing comprehensive guidance and policy for agencies to aid in developing recruitment policy.

Robert Guptill (Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority) asked whether the issue of bus route length in relation to operator health and safety came up in C. Van Eyken's research. C. Van Eyken said that route length was not specifically raised, but other issues were identified as having an impact on timing, such as offboard fare collection and dedicated bus lanes. R. Guptill raised the additional issue of split shifts as placing a heavy strain on operators who are not able to fully rest between shifts. Split shifts can cause difficulties for those with childcare responsibilities also.

Karen Dumaine (TransAction Associates/CrossTown Connect/Neponset Valley TMA) expressed agreement about the need to expedite the CDL process and shared some successful changes the TMA has implemented to boost driver hiring and retention, such as wage increases, gas cards, and improved amenities.

Jeff Bennett (128 Business Council) shared that since the pandemic shifted transit operator schedules as well as safety needs, his agency has implemented more break and relief time between routes.

Kristine Gorman (Jacobs Infrastructure Consultant) expressed that she would like to see the positions of bus operator promoted more as a career path with growth. C. Van Eyken responded that in recent years, many scheduling and transit planning jobs have been taken over by candidates with planning degrees, where in the past operators had the opportunity to move into those roles. Gildardo Alzate stated that while operators may not be able to move into planning positions, there are still plenty of roles where operator experience is key.

S. Johnston raised the question of developing a transit operator workforce and asked how municipalities can support such an endeavor. C. Van Eyken responded that a good first step may be for municipalities to connect transit agencies with community colleges and high schools to prepare students for operator careers while also providing the first steps in obtaining a CDL or other licensures.

K. Dumaine raised the concern of promoting operators to office jobs and then being unable to fill those operator roles. C. Van Eyken responded that that scenario has been an issue for some agencies.

S. Johnston raised the related issue of a lack of cross-agency collaboration in the event of operator or resource shortages. C. Van Eyken responded with an example of childcare as a resource shortage, which places an additional strain on operators who must deal with rising costs of childcare as well as a job which is physically and mentally demanding.

### **3. Closing and Next Steps**

S. Johnston reminded attendees that the slides and contact information would be sent to attendees via email after the meeting. S. Johnston also invited participants to attend the quarterly Transit Working Group meeting to be held on September 20, 2022. He again thanked presenters and attendees, and he shared his contact information in the chat.

## Attendance

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### Members

### Representatives and Alternates

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Karen Dumaine	TransAction Associates, CrossTown Connect, Neponset Valley Transportation Management Association
Tyler Terrasi	MetroWest Regional Transportation Authority (MWRTA)
Emily VanDewoestine	MWRTA
Shona Norman	Cape Ann Transportation Authority
Chris Van Eyken	Transit Center
Heather Hoffman	
Jack Narron	Massachusetts Department of Transportation
Robert Guptill	Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA)
John Strauss	Town of Burlington
Gilardo Alzate	
Lisa Weber	Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Jeff Bennet	128 Business Council
Lauren O'Connell	ITDP
Kristine Gorman	Jacobs
Linda Sacchetti	Brockton Area Transit Authority
Laura Gilmore	MBTA

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### MPO Staff/Central Transportation Planning Staff

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Sandy Johnston, Senior Transportation Planner  
Logan Casey, Administrative Coordinator

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**Title VI Specialist**

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Boston, MA 02116  
[civilrights@ctps.org](mailto:civilrights@ctps.org)

**By Telephone:**

857.702.3700 (voice)

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- **Relay Using TTY or Hearing Carry-over:** 800.439.2370
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