



# **TWC Case Studies - Linking Workforce Initiatives to Job Quality, Psychological Safety, and Mental Health**

TRB Annual Meeting 2025

Truck and Bus Operator Health and Wellness Subcommittee

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# Transit Workforce Center – Mission

Operated by the **ITLC**, the **Transit Workforce Center (TWC)** is **FTA**'s first ever national technical assistance center for transit workforce development.



## mission

The **TRANSIT WORKFORCE CENTER** is the Federal Transit Administration's first ever national technical assistance center for transit workforce development. Its mission is to help urban, suburban, tribal, and rural public transportation entities throughout the U.S. recruit, hire, train, and retain a diverse workforce for now and into the future.



# Safety, health and wellness, and transit workforce outcomes

- 66% of agencies struggling to retain employees, 92% having difficulty with hiring, and 71% reducing service due to workforce shortages (APTA, 2022)
- Recruitment barriers include “physical and verbal abuse from passengers” and “safety and security issues” (APTA, 2022)
- Bus operators impacted by high rates of chronic health conditions (Bushnell et al., 2011); 10 years older on average than typical American worker (BLS, 2023)
- Current and former workers' survey responses reflect "a perceived lack of responsiveness from agencies" (APTA, 2022)



# Transit Worker and Rider Safety research

*Researchers met with frontline workers to discuss experiences with assaults and incident follow-up*

## Physical Safety → Mental Health

- Symptoms of PTSD
- Dreading coming into work
- Switching roles to avoid assaults/incidents
- Enjoyment of work decreasing/disappearing
- Therapy

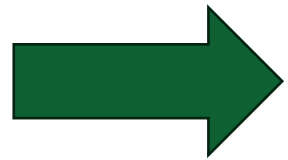
## Work Culture → Mental Health

- Under reporting of incidents
  - Perception that nothing will be done
  - Fear of repercussions
- No outlet for feelings of being unsafe
- Choosing between pay and mental health
- Going back to work too soon

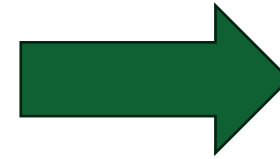


# Pathways to worker well-being and psychological safety

**Supportive  
services and  
programs**



**Job quality**



**Mental health,  
Psychological  
safety**



# Employee engagement in the transit industry

*TCRP Report 174: Improving Safety Culture in Public Transportation (2015)* - “key components of safety culture” include an emphasis on safety from leadership, “employee/union shared ownership and participation,” and organizational trust

*TCRP Report 245: Mental Health, Wellness, and Resilience for Transit System Workers (2024)* - “[although] an organization’s safety culture primarily involves its health and safety programs, organizations with good safety culture also demonstrate mutual trust and a shared perception of safety among all employees.”



# Additional evidence on development of job quality

- Mental health can be bolstered by access to:
  - Fitness programs
  - Mindfulness programs
  - Health education programs
- Psychological safety requires spaces open for honest dialogue
  - Mentorship relationships
  - Affinity groups
- Job quality measures consider job tasks, schedules, safe working environments, autonomy, career progression, and other factors



# Mentoring: A big boost for retention

- Structured mentoring: provides a source of guidance, and an outlet for processing challenges
- Consistent evidence showing increase in retention after implementation
- If you think you DON'T have a mentoring program...





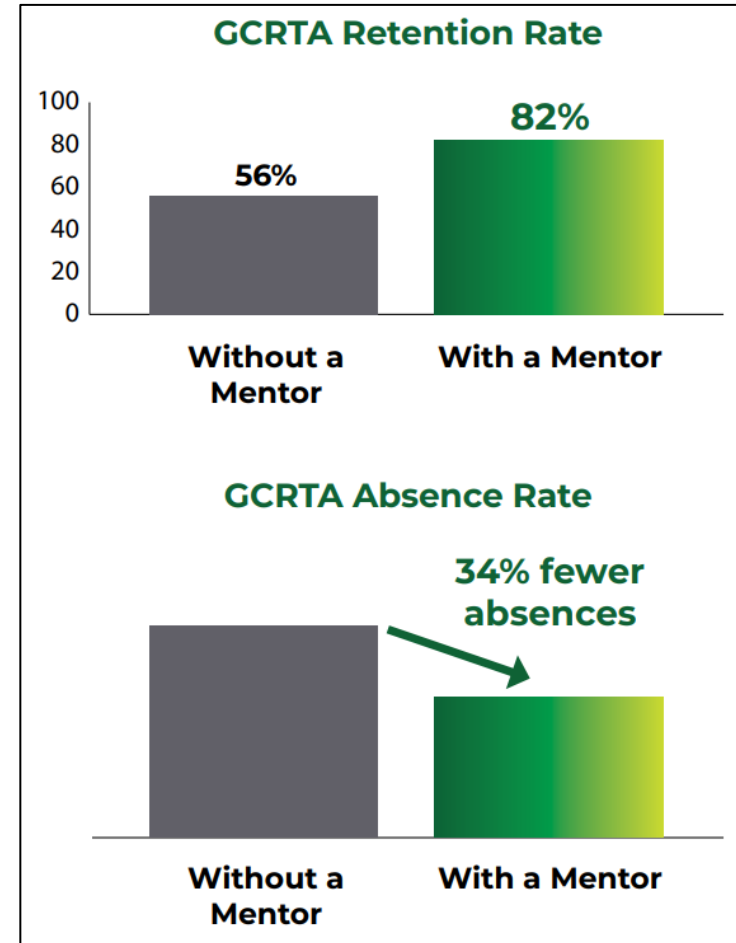
# Mentorship at GCRTA

"It changes lives because it prepares you for other things....having someone to just be able to talk to....It's helped so many people and it's life-changing around here."

DeAndre Parker, Mentor

"I feel like I accomplished a lot. I feel like I can grow within [GCRTA]."

Diamond Mock, Mentee



Source: TWC (2023). ["Transit Mentorship Metrics: Positive Signs for Retention, Attendance, and Additional Outcomes."](#)



# Mentorship at GGT - the WIN Partnership

- Labor-management partnership model, jointly sponsored by Golden Gate Transit and ATU Local 1575
- Mentorship program created foundation for registered apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs

Mentors assist mentees with developing soft skills and building confidence as drivers.

Mentors hold confidential, monthly meetings to check in with each other.

“...we’re bringing a diverse group of staff to get [mentees] exposed [to career possibilities]. What we’re finding is that the more diverse the group is, the better. As students, they may connect with a certain mentor, or someone from operations, or a supervisor. What we want to see is our students finding their personality as someone in transit.”

**Rich Diaz, Bus Operator Apprenticeship Coordinator**



# Community engagement and outreach



Case example:

**Operators Engaging and Connecting Communities (OECC) Program**

Metro Transit (Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN)





# Accessible learning environments

## Central Ohio Transit Authority (COTA)

- Columbus, OH
- COTA realized some participants had different ways of learning, had likely had Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) in high school
- Now accommodates young people with potential learning disabilities in technician pre-apprenticeship program
- COTA worked to determine what barriers to success might exist, exploring varied ways to train and establish competency to fit the individual's learning styles

“COTA gets another good employee who, with some special attention, now has the confidence to succeed. This approach provides us with a well-rounded and diverse workforce and helps us live up to our motto, Moving Every Life Forward.”

**COTA's Workforce Development  
Senior Program Manager**



# Housing support and wrap-around services

Case example: DRIVE - Developing Responsible Individuals through Valuable Education

## About DRIVE

- Began in 2020
- Partnership between the MS Home Corporation and MSDOT, as well as local agencies and non-profit organizations
- Uses Emergency Solutions Grants through CARES
- Places unhoused individuals in job training and jobs while providing transportation and housing assistance

## Mental Health and Safety

- Community partners offer supportive services such as mental health services, budgeting classes, free drug testing, etc.





# Childcare support

## **Prairie Hills Transit, Spearfish, SD**

- Made creative use of federal grant funding to establish its own childcare center, which now sustains itself financially
- Open to community, but PHT employees get 30% discount

## **Transport Workers Union (TWU) Local 100 – New York City Transit Childcare Fund**

- Since 2002, collective bargaining agreement has made available a childcare stipend for union members to be used at provider of their choosing (including family)
- The program reportedly has improved attendance



Source: Prairie Hills Transit



# Thank you! Any questions?

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