



Transit Operator Mentoring Fact Sheet: Early Success Stories

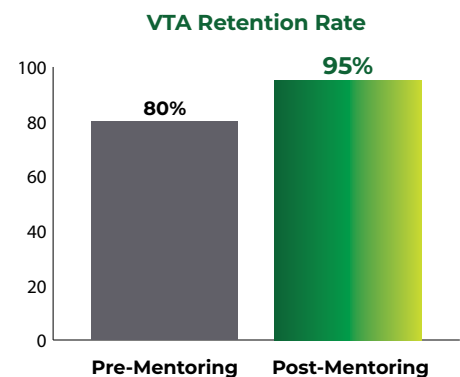
Peer mentoring is an excellent way to improve morale, skills, and retention among the transit bus operator workforce. Operator mentorship programs pair seasoned bus operators with new ones for technical skill instruction and/or individualized coaching and support to help mentees be successful in their new positions. They leverage institutional knowledge and incumbent workers' expertise to improve training and support for new workers. Successful mentee-mentor pairs often include a mentor with significant experience in the role, shared job functions, and some overlap in demographic characteristics, so that the pair can draw upon shared experiences.

Though transit agencies and unions have benefited from mentoring for many years, in both formal and informal structures, the practice of tracking mentoring outcomes and return on investment for mentoring programs is relatively new. Agencies starting new mentoring programs can generate valuable insights and show leadership in the industry by tracking and sharing outcomes from the very beginning.

This fact sheet provides overviews of four of the country's most robust bus operator mentoring programs and preliminary data on the success of these programs (as of Spring 2023). Three of the four mentorship programs are tied to Registered Apprenticeship programs. Although mentorship programs can be implemented outside of the Registered Apprenticeship framework, the additional distinction has significant benefits. (Learn more about apprenticeship [here](#)).

Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) (California)

- The mentoring program was launched in 2008 as part of a labor-management partnership called the Joint Workforce Investment (JWI).
- VTA had an 80% retention rate prior to JWI. **The retention rate increased to ~95%** with JWI; peer mentoring was cited as the biggest reason for the increase.
- The program **improved metrics on attendance, accidents, grievances, and customer service complaints**, per VTA staff.
- For an in-depth look at the structure of peer-to-peer mentoring at VTA, please see the report titled "[Equity from the Frontline: Workers' Insight and Leadership Supports a Network of Apprenticeships in Transit.](#)"



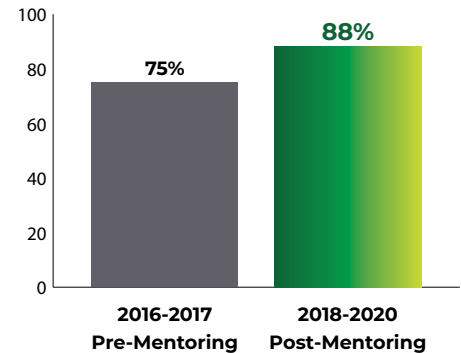
Metro Transit (Minneapolis, MN)

- Program launched in 2018
- Total mentees to date: 531
- Total mentors to date: 108
- In the words of one mentor, "I was really hoping for something like this when I was a young driver — to have somebody to talk to, somebody to look to for guidance, to point me in the right direction. I'm glad this program is here and that I'm a part of it."
- Participants in the mentoring program (mentees) had a **lower rate of unexcused absences** than non-participants (41% in 2018 and 44% in 2019, as opposed to 51% in 2018 and 2019 among non-participants).
- Participants had **lower rates of recorded violations** per hire than non-participants—0.08 versus 0.09 in 2018, and 0.03 versus 0.05 in 2019.
- **No verified complaints** were filed by passengers against participants, compared with 0.1 verified complaints per hire among non-participants in 2019.

AC Transit (Oakland, CA)

- Program launched in 2018
- Total mentees to date: 241
- Total mentors to date: 27
- All new operators at AC Transit have participated in mentoring since 2018.
- In the two-year period before the mentoring program started (2016-2017), AC Transit realized a 75% retention rate of 118 certified new hires. During the mentoring program's initial launch (2018-2020), AC Transit realized an **88% retention rate** of 208 operators initially hired and trained.
- Since 2020, the retention rate has steadily increased and continues to reach 89-93% of new hires retained. In their most recent complete year of data (2021), AC Transit had an operator **retention rate of 93% at 6-months post-certification, and 89% after one year.**
- The Mentor Coordinator reflected that “this mentorship program has had a positive impact with regard to the success of developing professional operators. The mentees are extremely grateful and appreciative for the program.”

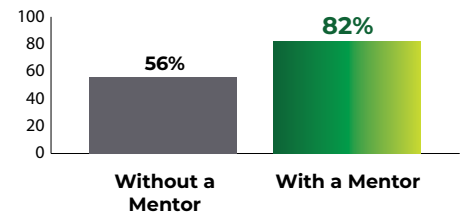
AC Transit Retention Rate



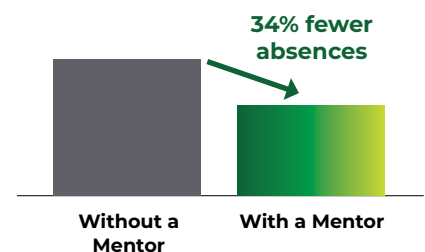
Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority (GCRTA) (Ohio)

- Program launched formally in August 2022
- Total mentors to date: 65
- Total mentees to date: 81
- Retention before the program launch was about 50% at one year post training certification.
- Retention since the program began has been about 56% among those without a mentor and **82% among those with a mentor.**
- Absenteeism has also improved dramatically; new operators who have been paired with a mentor have had **34% fewer absences and 47% fewer misses** than their peers who have not been paired with a mentor.
- The agency's District Director explained that “the data reflects the positive energy going into this program that is yielding tremendous results for our agency.”
- A recent [TRB webinar](#) discusses GCRTA's mentoring program.

GCRTA Retention Rate



GCRTA Absence Rate



Other Helpful Resources:

- [TCRP F-28, Bus Operator Workforce Management: Practitioner's Guide](#) includes case studies on both VTA and GCRTA, as well as extensive information on mentorship throughout.
- The Aspen Institute developed a [Cost of Turnover Tool](#) to help employers estimate the cost of replacing staff. Though not specific to transit, this tool can be used to measure the costs of *not* having programs in place that improve retention. Learn more about the tool and its application to transit [here](#).
- The [Transit Workforce Center Resource Center](#) contains many resources pertaining to transit workforce development, including research, webinars, and training materials. Resources on transit mentorship can be viewed [here](#).