



**EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT AND AUDIT COMMITTEE
OPERATIONS COMMITTEE
AUGUST 17, 2006**

SUBJECT: BUS OPERATOR VACANCIES

ACTION: RECEIVE AND FILE

RECOMMENDATION

Receive and file report on measures taken to eliminate Bus Operator position vacancies.

ISSUE

At the June 2006 Board meeting, the Board approved a motion directing the Chief Executive Officer to report back to the Board with a plan to eliminate the Bus Operator shortage.

DISCUSSION

The need to use United Transportation Union (UTU) overtime has steadily grown as the number of Bus Operator vacancies has increased. Operations estimates that approximately \$4 million to \$5 million in UTU overtime was needed to meet service demands in FY06.

The number of Bus Operator vacancies grew as a result of increased service, a relatively low unemployment rate, and constraints in the collective bargaining unit agreement. As Consent Decree service was added, and despite increased participation in job fairs and other events, Bus Operator vacancies rose to approximately 300 positions by March 2006. To address this problem, the Chief Executive Officer and Deputy Chief Executive Officer directed staff to establish a task force that would develop and implement initiatives to reduce the number of vacant Bus Operator positions. The team included representatives from Operations, Human Resources, Administration, Community Relations and Organizational Development and Training.

The first initiative implemented, which was the result of a joint effort by the Metro and UTU negotiating teams, was to temporarily suspend restrictions on the number of hours that Part-time Operators could work. This has provided temporary relief to Operators who had worked many hours of overtime. Longer term solutions implemented by Transit Operations include the wage increase provided in the new UTU contract, temporarily suspending the use of the Business Development Operating Facility classification after completion of training and promoting successful trainees to Part-time Operator classification instead. Staff believes that these changes will make the position more appealing to potential applicants and will reduce vacancies.

The Bus Operator Vacancy Task Force continued its work to compliment the measures that Transit Operations had taken. The team reviewed current recruitment efforts and identified additional steps that would be effective in filling vacancies. A program with three major components was developed. It includes: 1) Marketing Campaign, 2) Community Outreach and 3) Educational Assistance for potential applicants. Each component is discussed below.

Marketing Campaign

The marketing campaign involves promoting the position of Bus Operator as a career instead of a job. A new brochure entitled, "America's best offers you the best," was developed. The brochure highlights the benefits of being a Bus Operator, including a rewarding career that offers excellent benefits and advancement opportunities. Brochures are being distributed at job fairs, community events and other public gatherings where potential applicants might be found. In addition, the Marketing Department has developed a "tail ad" for rear bus panels that will state, "A rewarding career is just a phone call away. Call 213.922DRIVE." These ads will run on 100 buses beginning in August and continuing for four months. The last element of the marketing campaign is the strategic placement of new ads in select print media outlets promoting Metro Bus Operator career opportunities.

Community Outreach

Community Relations personnel attend many community events that attract potential Bus Operator candidates and staff has incorporated promotion of Bus Operator careers at these events. Since April 1, 2006, Community Relations staff has participated in 16 neighborhood events attended by 300 to 5,000 participants in which brochures and job applications to are passed out to interested parties. This has increased outreach at the local level. Staff is also working with Operations General Managers to identify locations within each sector where Metro job fairs can be held. These job fairs will begin in August.

Human Resources has also conducted numerous job fairs and has increased its participation in job fairs and other community gatherings. Between June 2005 and July 2006, Human Resources participated in 68 job fairs. Human Resources and Community Relations staff work closely to coordinate their outreach efforts to ensure that Metro is represented at events that potential applicants might attend.

Staff in the Transit Operations and Organizational Development and Training units are collaborating to develop an event targeting persons or organizations representing adult high school educational programs, community colleges, WorkSource and community-based programs to promote Bus Operator career opportunities. This effort will culminate in an event to be held at the Metro Headquarters Building in September.

Staff believes that some potential applicants will find the workday of a Metro Bus Operator to be an appealing career option that involves much more than simply driving a bus. To show the potential applicants what being a Bus Operator entails, Operations and Marketing are developing a short DVD entitled "A Day in the Life of a Metro Bus Operator." The DVD will be distributed to agencies that assist individuals in finding jobs and Metro staff will use it at job fairs and other events.

Bridge Program

An innovative new pilot program has been developed collaboratively with Metro, the Los Angeles Valley College, the Wilshire Metro WorkSource Center, and the Literacy Network of Greater Los Angeles. This program will provide “bridge” training to address qualification gaps of potential Bus Operators who need help to succeed in the Metro Bus Operator Training Program. The bridge program, which will be launched on August 14, 2006, includes instruction in English, basic math, critical thinking, time management and study skills, and customer service. Staff believes that the bridge program will give individuals who are unemployed or underemployed the opportunity to start a career as a Bus Operator, and to pursue a career path in Transit Operations if they choose to take advantage of tuition assistance to qualify for future promotional opportunities.

The duration of the pilot “bridge” program is five weeks. It will be closely monitored for its efficacy. Continuation of the program will depend on program results and funding availability.

Other Options

The team identified several additional methods of recruiting more Operators. Employee incentive programs have been used elsewhere and the team considered establishing such a program at Metro. Employees who identify applicants who clear the screening process, succeed in training and pass probation would be given a monetary reward for bringing the new Bus Operator to Metro. Due to an inability to identify a funding source, this program has not been implemented.

The use of a professional recruiter was also considered. The cost is approximately \$3,000 per candidate delivered to Metro. However, no refunds and no replacement candidates would be provided if the individuals that the recruiter finds do not succeed in training or pass probation. The team also reviewed the recruiter’s plan and noted that many of the tasks the recruiter would employ are already being undertaken by the team. After consideration of this option, staff determined that it would not be pursued at this time.

In addition to posting career opportunities on Metro’s website, metro.net along with other websites, Human Resources has also posted Metro Bus Operator career opportunities on a site that specializes in jobs for military personnel returning to civilian life. To date, there has been no response from this site.

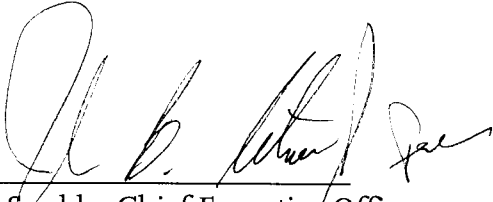
Next Steps

The team will closely monitor results of the recruitment program it has developed, will make changes as necessary, and will continue to look for new initiatives to eliminate Bus Operator vacancies. Staff will report back to the Board in three months on the program’s status and effectiveness.

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