



Board Report

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Agenda Number: 22.

**OPERATIONS, SAFETY, AND CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE COMMITTEE  
MAY 19, 2022**

**SUBJECT: 2022 BUS OPERATOR SURVEY UPDATE**

**ACTION: RECEIVE AND FILE**

**RECOMMENDATION**

RECEIVE AND FILE report on 2022 Bus Operator Survey preliminary data analysis.

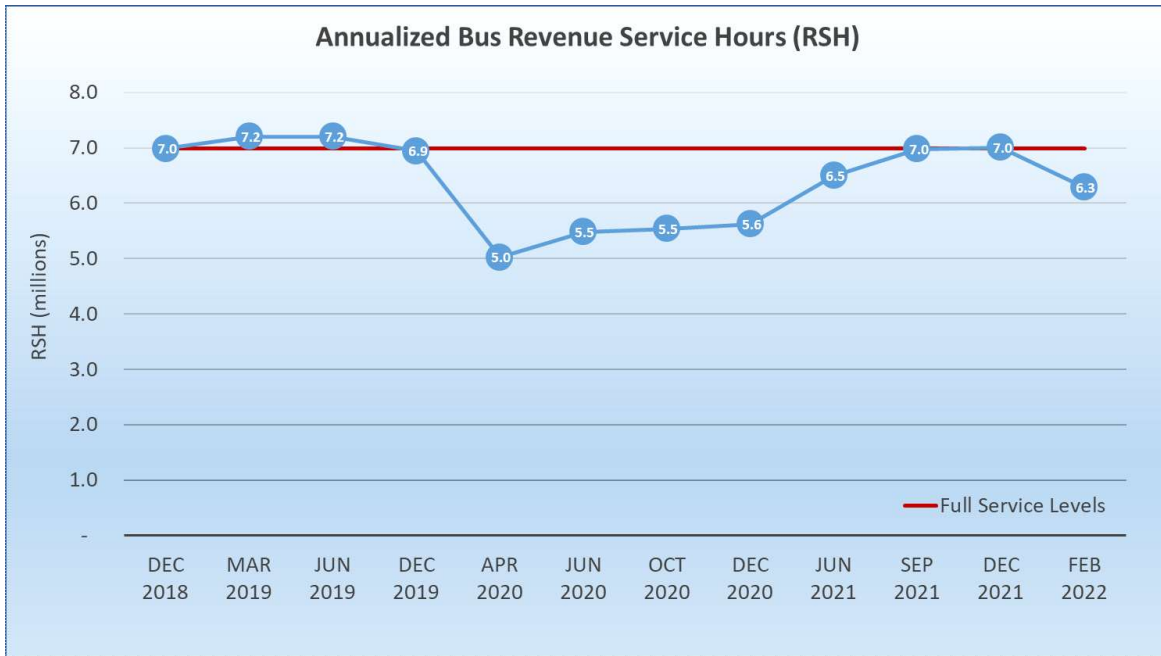
**ISSUE**

At the January 27, 2022, regular board meeting, Directors Mitchell, Solis, Bonin and Garcetti introduced Motion 43 entitled Operations Transparency and Safeguarding (Attachment A). One of the critical components of this motion was for Metro to research and report back on areas to improve operator retention and Division shortages. Since then, Metro has created a bus operator hiring and retention task force to review, create and accelerate opportunities to improve operator hiring and retention, and to better understand the challenges our operators experience when performing their work duties. A bus operator survey was initiated to garner direct feedback on areas of job satisfaction, concerns and pain points, workplace culture and environment. This report summarizes the results and findings from the 2022 bus operator survey.

**BACKGROUND**

Through the COVID-19 pandemic, the bus network has had to adjust to changes in ridership, revenues and operator availability. Figure 1 shows how service levels have changed between 2020 and 2022.

Figure 1: Metro Bus Service Levels (Dec 2018 - Feb 2022)



Despite the 30% reduction in bus service at the beginning of the pandemic in April 2020, all staff were retained. Since more operators were available compared to the amount of service provided, operator hiring was temporarily halted. However, regular attrition rates, coupled with increased short term leaves due to COVID, resulted in a decreasing number of operators as Metro was increasing service levels between June 2020 and 2021. While operator recruitment resumed in March 2021, the number of new operators hired was being outpaced by the number of operators separating from the agency. Therefore, by August 2021, the operator staffing level dropped below the number required to provide service. At the same time, service levels were scheduled to increase to pre-pandemic levels.

Despite increased efforts to attract and recruit more operators, Metro was faced with the “perfect storm” of a national labor shortage since the pandemic, including increased attrition outpacing hiring, and COVID surge impacts to operator availability. Given the significant shortage of operators, service cancellations increased to 18% and ordered operator callbacks to cover assignments increased three to four times compared to pre-COVID levels. Not only was service unreliable for our customers, ordered call backs (OCBs) were causing fatigue among operators resulting in low morale and burn out which ultimately impacts retention. As a result, bus service was temporarily reduced on February 20, 2022 in response to the operator shortage.

Metro currently employs about 3,300 active bus operators across ten directly operated bus divisions throughout Los Angeles County. An additional 600 operators are needed to fully restore service to pre-COVID levels.

**DISCUSSION**

### Operator Survey Approach

The operator survey was conducted between February 22, 2022 and March 21, 2022 to better understand the issues impacting operator recruitment and retention, including job satisfaction, concerns and pain points, workplace culture and environment. A total of 588 bus operator responses were received, representing 18% of operators. Each bus division was visited by Metro staff at least twice with the majority visited three times at different times and days of the week to ensure equal representation across all bus divisions. The survey was also accessible through a QR code that was posted throughout the divisions.

Survey staff were available at each bus division to communicate survey goals, demonstrate how to take the survey and provide assistance where needed. The survey consisted of 19 questions in a multiple-choice format with an option to provide additional feedback, which took most employees eight (8) to ten (10) minutes to complete. In addition, to avoid biased questions, staff ensured the questions were open ended and neutral in tone. A copy of the survey is included in Attachment B.

The survey results were analyzed by:

- Systemwide
- Division
- Operator tenure or seniority
- Part time/full time status
- Operators considering leaving Metro

### **Operator Survey Tenure**

- 17%: 2 years or less of service
- 25%: 3-5 years of service
- 27%: 6-10 years of service
- 31%: 10+ years of service
  - Of those with 10+ years of service with Metro, about 15% said they had over 20 years of service with Metro

Survey respondent targets were set in accordance with statistically accepted valid sample sizes and unbiased data collection. Responses were weighted to ensure that all bus divisions were proportionally represented.

### Survey Findings

Questions were designed to gain insight into three (3) main areas: Job Satisfaction, Concerns/Pain Points, and Workplace Culture/Environment.

#### **Job Satisfaction**

Operators were asked about their opinions on the following statements related to Job Satisfaction (Attachment C):

- I enjoy being an operator

- I see myself working as an Operator for another five years
- I would recommend being a Metro Operator to my family and friends
- What do you like most about being an Operator (open ended)

Sixty percent of respondents enjoy being an Operator, with a greater percentage among part time Operators. However, enjoyment trends downward over time.

Despite the majority of Operators enjoying their job, only about 40% see themselves working as an operator for another five years and again, longevity trends downward over time. In addition, only about a third of operators would recommend the job to family and friends, and part-time employees are more likely to recommend the job than full-time employees.

### **Concerns and Pain Points**

Operators were also asked about specific pain points about their job and how those influence their thoughts about leaving Metro (Attachment D). Specific questions include:

- My biggest concern with being an Operator is...
- I think about leaving Metro often
- If I were to leave Metro it would be due to...
- I'm very concerned about COVID-19

A total of 98% of respondents noted that they have concerns with being an operator. Those concerns are mainly around the following areas:

- 23%: low pay
- 22%: safety from passengers
- 21%: high stress
- 14%: fatigue
- 7%: safe operation of bus while driving
- 6%: other concerns
- 3%: unfair treatment by direct supervisor/manager
- 2%: childcare concerns
- 2%: commute times

Overall, low pay is the greatest concern of Operators, followed closely by safety from passenger confrontation, high stress, and fatigue. Concerns about low pay are highest among Operators who are part time and those with two or fewer years of service, and the concern declines steadily as tenure increases (Figures 2 and 3).

Figure 2: Operator Concerns by Full or Part Time

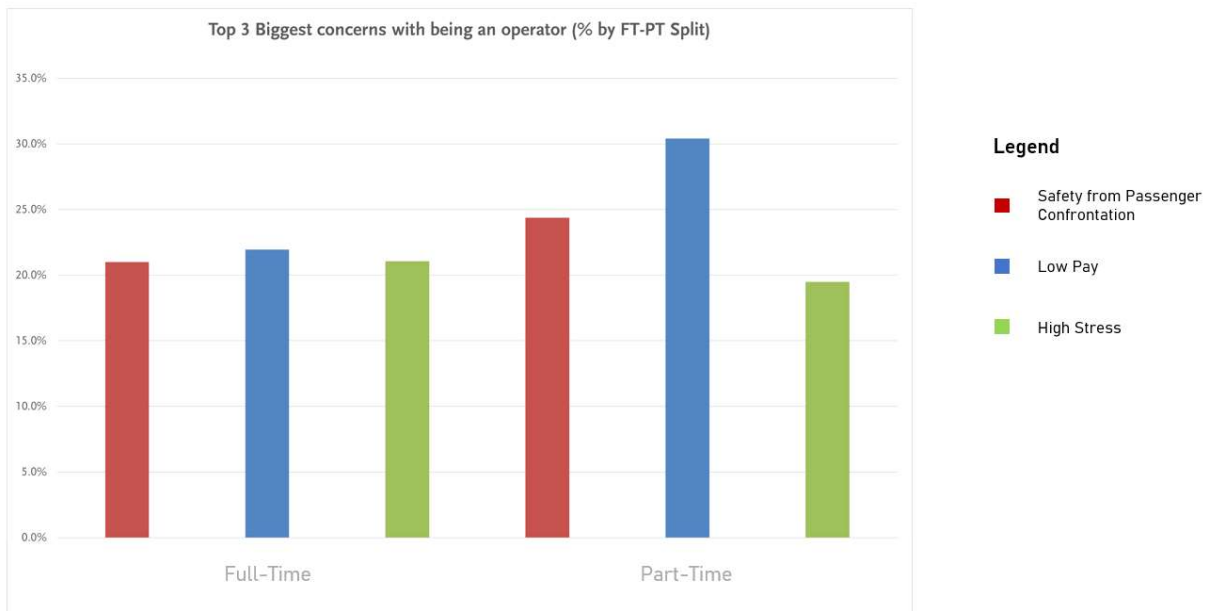
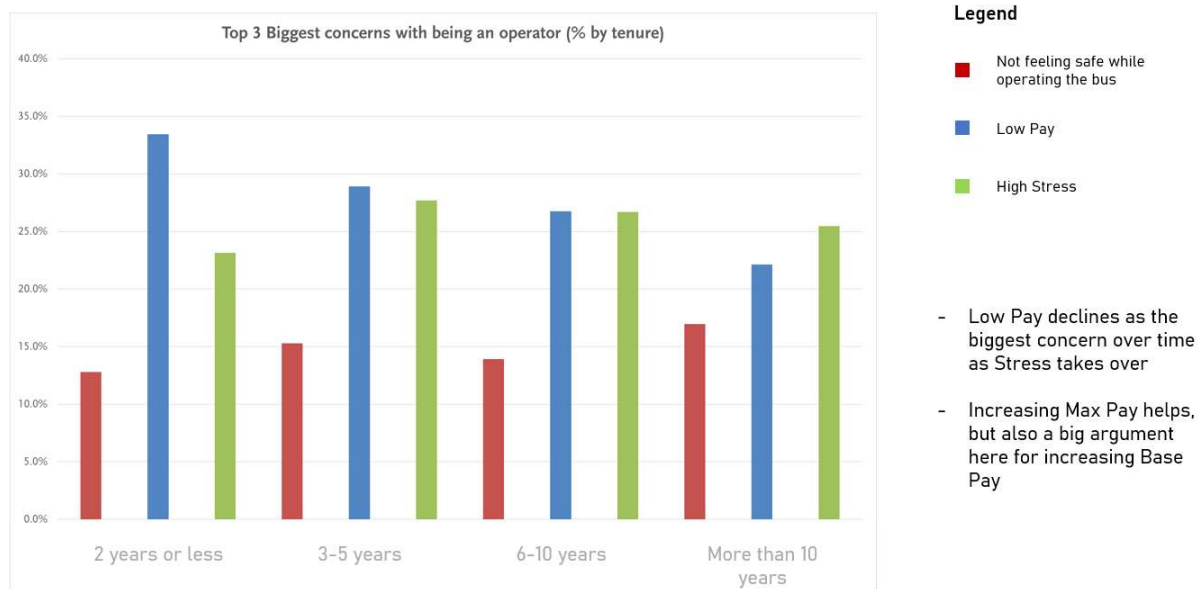


Figure 3: Operator Concerns by Tenure

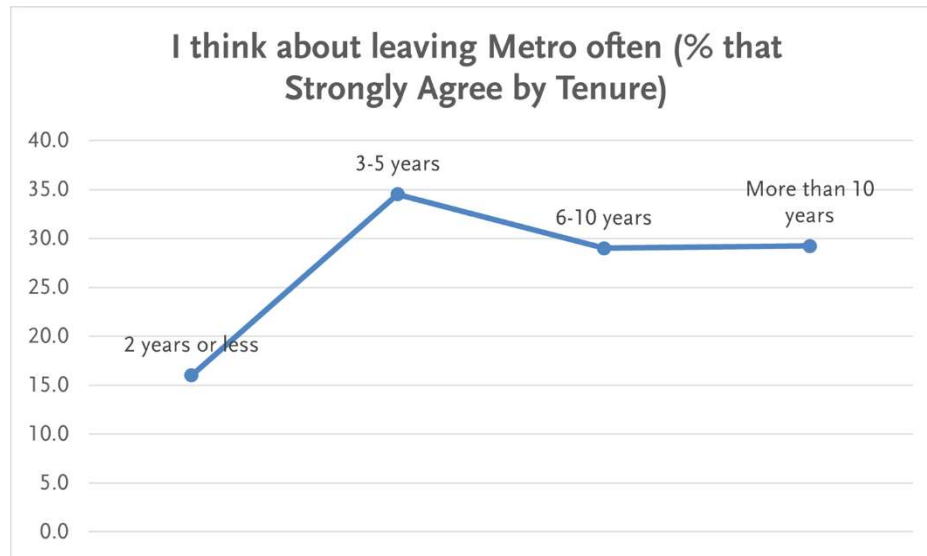


- Low Pay declines as the biggest concern over time as Stress takes over
- Increasing Max Pay helps, but also a big argument here for increasing Base Pay

Fifty-four percent of Operators are inclined to leave Metro, with the highest percentage being Operators with three to five years of tenure and the lowest being new Operators with 2 or less years of service. Again, low pay and high stress are the most cited reasons for wanting to leave Metro. However, safety and security concerns do not appear to be as critical of a driver for leaving Metro despite Operators feeling it is a significant pain point. The desire to leave Metro declines slightly after

Operators have worked five years or more (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Considering Leaving Metro by Tenure



About 65% of Operators are concerned about COVID-19 with the percentage increasing as Operators increase in tenure and those who are considering leaving Metro.

### **Workplace Culture and Environment**

Finally, Operators were asked for their thoughts on the culture and working environment at Metro (Attachment E). Specific questions include:

- Having a good relationship with my coworkers is important to me
- Having a good relationship with my direct manager is important to me
- I am satisfied with the benefits Metro offers me
- Being recognized for good work is important to me
- The culture at Metro needs to improve

Overall, about 80% of Operators surveyed value a good relationship with their direct manager and coworker and recognition. Most operators feel the culture at Metro needs to change with communication, safety, employee empowerment, and trust in leadership being the top four areas needing improvement. Finally, about half of the Operators surveyed feel satisfied with Metro's benefits.

### **Operator Suggestions for Improvement**

Operators were given the opportunity to offer suggestions on how to improve the work environment and strategies to attract new operators. Responses were word clouded and coded to identify the

most mentioned suggestions, including: humanize the position, improve communication and recognition, improve morale, enforce safety protocols, reduce or eliminate the use of ordered callbacks, and improve layover time and scheduling. Many of the responses also related to pay and feeling valued.

### Key Takeaways

The main takeaways from the 2022 Bus Operator survey are that the majority of Bus Operators generally enjoy the job and about half appreciate the benefits (e.g. insurance, tuition reimbursement and pension) offered by Metro. However, only about a third would recommend the job to their friends and family. As mentioned previously, Operators surveyed expressed dissatisfaction with pay, safety from customers, stress, and fatigue, but low pay and stress appear to be the primary reasons causing Operators to want to leave Metro. In addition, Operator retention would improve by nurturing a culture that values employees through improved communications, safety, recognition of operator efforts, and empowering them as frontline experts in their field.

### Operator Survey - Bus Operator Qualitative Feedback

Over 1400 comments were received from this survey. Many of the responses received are directly tied to the themes observed, including pay, safety, fatigue/stress and management/supervisory support/relationships. Also important to operators is more layover time, better schedules, more respect, less ordered call backs, and more respect and recognition. Examples of comments include:

#### **Pay & Stress**

- *“Competitive pay. Other jobs offer less stress more pay.” -3/7/22*
- *“Higher starting pay per hour and shorter time to reach top pay.” - 3/12/22*
- *“Raise the pay. You have minimum wage jobs reaching us, with less stress.” -3/24/22*

#### **Safety**

- *“Make sure of bus Operators: SAFETY.” -2/22/22*
- *“Better pay, better safety barriers full protection. Do something about the people that ride the bus and sleep there or stink.” -2/25/22*
- *“The main issue for every operator is uncontrollable safety from our passengers. Daily we are faced with immense danger from passengers who simply would just like to cause harm, along with passengers who are very intoxicated. These passengers threaten us and physically attack us and there’s nothing we can do. They make the ride uncomfortable for all passengers and scare customers away from taking our system.” -3/9/22*

#### **Management Relationships and Support**

- *“Better relationship with supervisors and management.” 3/3/22*
- *“Supervisor and management communication needs to improve in a positive way.”- 3/8/22*
- *“More encouragement, and for supervisors not to be so uptight, relax you still show professionalism without the hard face.” 3/9/22*

### **Recommendations Received to Improve Work Environment**

- *“Allow more time for breaks. Salary increment.”- 3/10/22*
- *“Provide more running time during rush hours. More layover time. Have better restrooms facilities at layovers.” -3/10/22*
- *“Pay the new hires more! Get them to top pay within 5 years! Understand operators have a life outside of Metro.” - 3/7/22*
- *Reduce OCB to allow for proper rest, recovery, and stress reduction.” -3/11/22*

## **EQUITY PLATFORM**

To preserve anonymity, the survey did not capture demographic information, but staff will work with the Office of Equity and Race to identify demographic analysis methods that prioritize operator trust in future surveys. In addition, the bus operator survey will assist Metro in understanding areas of improvement and opportunities for bus operator retention, hiring and how Metro can better meet their needs. This survey is an initial step to better identify and prioritize the needs of our bus operators and ensure equitable treatment of all Metro employees, specifically those that conduct the essential work that provides mobility options for thousands of people in Los Angeles daily.

## **IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS**

This recommendation supports Metro’s Strategic Plan Goal 3) Enhance communities and lives through mobility and access to opportunity and Goal 4) Transform LA County through collaboration and leadership. Metro will continue work toward retaining and attracting bus operators as valuing our people is a critical goal for all staff. Metro will continue to prioritize innovative ways to attract, train, develop, and engage our internal talent to improve employee satisfaction and increase retention of our most valuable assets.

## **NEXT STEPS**

This survey has provided important information to Metro that will be utilized in directing immediate next steps relative to where efforts are spent both for immediate and long-term recruitment and retention activities.

The results of the survey have been shared with stakeholder departments, including System Security & Law Enforcement, the Chief People Office, the Customer Experience Department, as well as with bus division management staff. In addition, division outreach and engagement sessions with Operators have been conducted at existing RAP sessions across all Bus Divisions to share the survey results, report on efforts underway to address key pain points, and to better understand the root cause of key issues such as safety concerns, stress, and fatigue. Based on the information collected, strategies will be developed to address concerns, meet the needs, and improve upon valuing our employees and increasing Bus Operator retention.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment A - Motion 43

Attachment B - Operator Survey Questions

Attachment C - Job Satisfaction Survey Results



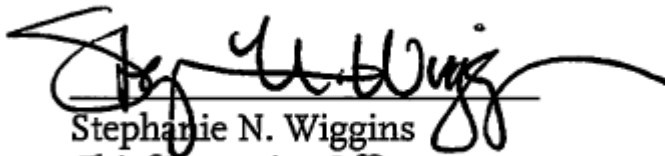
Attachment D - Concerns and Pain Points Survey Results

Attachment E - Workplace Culture and Environment Survey Results

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