

**TRANSIT COOPERATIVE RESEARCH PROGRAM**

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**TCRP Synthesis 33**

**Practices in Assuring Employee  
Availability**

**A Synthesis of Transit Practice**

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## **Practices in Assuring Employee Availability**

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## TRANSIT COOPERATIVE RESEARCH PROGRAM

The nation's growth and the need to meet mobility, environmental, and energy objectives place demands on public transit systems. Current systems, some of which are old and in need of upgrading, must expand service area, increase service frequency, and improve efficiency to serve these demands. Research is necessary to solve operating problems, to adapt appropriate new technologies from other industries, and to introduce innovations into the transit industry. The Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP) serves as one of the principal means by which the transit industry can develop innovative near-term solutions to meet demands placed on it.

The need for TCRP was originally identified in *TRB Special Report 213--Research for Public Transit: New Directions*, published in 1987 and based on a study sponsored by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). A report by the American Public Transit Association (APTA), *Transportation 2000*, also recognized the need for local, problem-solving research. TCRP, modeled after the longstanding and successful National Cooperative Highway Research Program, undertakes research and other technical activities in response to the needs of transit service providers. The scope of vice configuration, equipment, facilities, operations, human resources, maintenance, policy, and administrative practices.

TCRP was established under FTA sponsorship in July 1992. Proposed by the U.S. Department of Transportation, TCRP was authorized as part of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA). On May 13, 1992, a memorandum agreement outlining TCRP operating procedures was executed by the three cooperating organizations: FTA, the National Academy of Sciences, acting through the Transportation Research Board (TRB), and the Transit Development Corporation, Inc. (TDC), a nonprofit educational and research organization established by APTA. TDC is responsible for forming the independent governing board, designated as the TCRP Oversight and Project Selection (TOPS) Committee.

Research problem statements for TCRP are solicited periodically but may be submitted to TRB by anyone at anytime. It is the responsibility of the TOPS Committee to formulate the research program by identifying the highest priority projects. As part of the evaluation, the TOPS Committee defines funding levels and expected products.

Once selected, each project is assigned to an expert panel, appointed by the Transportation Research Board. The panels prepare project statements (requests for proposals), select contractors, and provide technical guidance and counsel throughout the life of the project. The process for developing research problem statements and selecting research agencies has been used by TRB in managing cooperative research programs since 1962. As in other TRB activities, TCRP project panels serve voluntarily without compensation.

Because research cannot have the desired impact if products fail to reach the intended audience, special emphasis is placed on disseminating TCRP results to the intended end-users of the research: transit agencies, service providers, and suppliers. TRB provides a series of research reports, syntheses of transit practice, and other supporting material developed by TCRP research. APTA will arrange for workshops, training aids, field visits, and other activities to ensure that results are implemented by urban and rural transit industry practitioners.

The TCRP provides a forum where transit agencies can cooperatively address common operational problems. TCRP results support and complement other ongoing transit research and training programs.

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## NOTICE

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The members of the technical advisory panel selected to monitor this project and to review this report were chosen for recognized scholarly competence and with due consideration for the balance of disciplines appropriate to the project. The opinions and conclusions expressed or implied are those of the research agency that performed the research, and while they have been accepted as appropriate by the technical panel, they are not necessarily those of the Transportation Research Board, the Transit Development Corporation, the National Research Council, or the Federal Transit Administration of the U.S. Department of Transportation.

Each report is reviewed and accepted for publication by the technical panel according to procedures established and monitored by the Transportation Research Board Executive Committee and the Governing Board of the National Research Council.

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## **PREFACE**

A vast storehouse of information exists on many subjects of concern to the transit industry. This information has resulted from research and from the successful application of solutions to problems by individuals or organizations. There is a continuing need to provide a systematic means for compiling this information and making it available to the entire transit community in a usable format. The Transit Cooperative Research Program includes a synthesis series designed to search for and synthesize useful knowledge from all available sources and to prepare documented reports on current practices in subject areas of concern to the transit industry.

This synthesis series reports on various practices, making specific recommendations where appropriate but without the detailed directions usually found in handbooks or design manuals. Nonetheless, these documents can serve similar purposes, for each is a compendium of the best knowledge available on those measures found to be successful in resolving specific problems. The extent to which these reports are useful will be tempered by the user's knowledge and experience in the particular problem area.

## **FOREWORD**

*By Staff  
Transportation  
Research Board*

This synthesis will be of interest to transit agency managers, operations, and human resources staffs who are responsible for attracting and retaining good employees. It will also be of interest to others who interact with transit agencies to help employees succeed. This synthesis presents state of the practice information about the various actions transit agencies (and other employers) have taken to help ensure the availability of quality employees in an increasingly competitive employment environment. It focuses on the practices and policies transit agencies have put in place to help minimize absenteeism at their agencies, from which other agencies may find useful applications.

Administrators, practitioners, and researchers are continually faced with issues or problems on which there is much information, either in the form of reports or in terms of undocumented experience and practice. Unfortunately, this information often is scattered or not readily available in the literature, and, as a consequence, in seeking solutions, full information on what has been learned about an issue or problem is not assembled. Costly research findings may go unused, valuable experience may be overlooked, and full consideration may not be given to the available methods of solving or alleviating the issue or problem. In an effort to correct this situation, the Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP) Synthesis Project, carried out by the Transportation Research Board as the research agency, has the objective of reporting on common transit issues and problems and synthesizing available information. The synthesis reports from this endeavor constitute a TCRP publication series in which various forms of relevant information are assembled into single, concise documents pertaining to a specific problem or closely related issues.

This document from the Transportation Research Board addresses three basic categories: (1) Preventive Measures, designed to stop absenteeism from occurring; (2) Management Interventions, utilized to deal with absenteeism that does occur; and (3) Other Management Strategies. In particular, it focuses concern on practices related to employee selection, internal motivation of employees, labor-management cooperation, supervisory involvement, incentive and discipline programs, and workers compensation programs.

To develop this synthesis in a comprehensive manner and to ensure inclusion of significant knowledge, available information was assembled from numerous sources, including a number of public transportation agencies. A topic panel of experts in the subject area was established to guide the researchers in organizing and evaluating the collected data, and to review the final synthesis report.

This synthesis is an immediately useful document that records practices that were acceptable within the limitations of the knowledge available at the time of its preparation. As the processes of advancement continue, new knowledge can be expected to be added to that now at hand.

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Ph.D. candidate, University of South Florida, conducted much of the literature search for this study. The Florida Department of Transportation and the Central Florida Regional Transportation Authority (LYNX) provided additional funding for portions of the research.

This study was managed by Donna L. Vlasak, Senior Program Officer, who worked with the consultant, the Topic Panel, and the J-7 project committee in the development and review of the report. Assistance in Topic Panel selection and project scope development was provided by Stephen F. Maher, Manager, Synthesis Studies. Don Tippman was responsible for editing and production. Cheryl Keith assisted in meeting logistics and distribution of the questionnaire and draft reports.

Gwen Chisholm, Senior Program Officer, assisted TCRP staff in project review.

Information on current practice was provided by many transit agencies. Their cooperation and assistance are appreciated.

## **PRACTICES IN ASSURING EMPLOYEE AVAILABILITY**

### **SUMMARY**

The National Transit Database (Federal Transit Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation) for report year 1996 indicates that labor and fringe benefits comprised 76.4 percent of operating expenses at transit agencies in the United States (*National Transit Summaries and Trends for the 1996 National Transit Database*). Given the significance of labor expenses at transit agencies, identifying and documenting actions to enhance worker performance in terms of attendance can yield significant benefits. Assuring employee availability is a challenge facing transit daily and will be a growing challenge in the future. Information is needed about current practices in controlling absenteeism and improving worker availability.

This report explores the various actions transit agencies (and other employers) have taken to help ensure the availability of quality employees in an increasingly competitive employment environment. Information in the report is based on survey results received from 36 transit agencies from throughout the United States, as well as specific information received from a half-dozen other transit agencies that were not asked to respond to the full survey. Six different focus groups were facilitated with 57 bus operators from a large transit agency to get a perspective on absenteeism from the employees' point of view. In addition, an extensive literature review was conducted to obtain information on how other public and private agencies were dealing with the subject of employee availability.

The report focuses primarily on the practices and policies transit agencies have put in place to help minimize absenteeism. These practices fall into three basic categories: (1) preventive measures that are designed to prevent absences from occurring, (2) management interventions that are used to deal with absenteeism that does occur, and (3) other management strategies.

Although many transit agencies continue to be plagued with high levels of absenteeism, a number of techniques that help improve attendance performance are being used successfully. The utilization of customized selection instruments and tests for job applicants has helped transit agencies develop better personal profiles of potential employees. Transit agencies have expressed satisfaction with the tests' predictive capabilities of new employees' attendance performance. Transit agencies have increased their chances of minimizing absenteeism by improving the health of their employees through wellness programs, health screenings, ergonomic equipment, and training programs. Employee Assistance Programs help employees cope with life's various pressures and provide much needed counseling for dealing with such stress. Day care centers located at transit facilities are believed to reduce absenteeism among parent/employees with young children, though there has been no cost-benefit analysis to determine if the subsidized cost of the day care service is offset by savings in reduced absenteeism.

Although there is considerable disagreement over the ability of financial incentives to improve attendance, there is growing evidence that larger cash rewards based on performance periods of less than a year are much more achievable, popular, and successful than

programs that require perfect attendance for a full year. Lottery programs that offer cash prizes and/or gift certificates to those with excellent attendance records have also been popular and effective.

Transit agencies are providing represented (union) employees with more flexibility in their use of time off. Many agencies allow their bus operators to swap days off with other operators who have similar work shifts, and a number of agencies allow their bus operators to take some of their annual leave in daily rather than weekly increments. These flexibility provisions help minimize absenteeism and foster better relations between represented employees and management.

Tighter controls on the use of sick leave usually result in less absenteeism. It was remarkable how many agencies admitted to not doing a good job of tracking absenteeism or enforcing attendance regulations. Those agencies that take these responsibilities seriously, and dedicate resources and time to attend to such functions, invariably enjoy better attendance. This practice alerts employees that their performance is being monitored, and also provides managers with the opportunities to identify the causes of employees' absenteeism on a regular basis. Consequently, they are in a better position to assist employees with improving their performance.

A number of transit agencies have come to realize that there is a vital connection between attendance and how well the agency establishes more personal, ongoing relationships with its employees. There may be serious "disconnects" between represented employees and management at transit agencies, where transit managers have lost touch with the pressures and unfavorable working conditions with which bus operators in particular must deal. Focus groups of bus operators held at one large transit agency consistently reported on poor equipment and facilities, unrealistic schedules, inadequate supervisory support, difficult passengers, and the absence of communication with anyone in the agency. Those operators have basically determined that the agency doesn't care about them; therefore, they are not going to be terribly concerned with taking a few days off sick when they feel the need to just get away from the pressures of driving a bus.

A number of transit agencies realize that the external environment is causing them to reconsider some of their hiring practices. A red-hot national economy has created an "employees' market" in many regions where unemployment is very low. Hiring reliable part-time employees has become a particular challenge when there are so many other job opportunities where pay is comparable and that provide better working conditions than those faced by low-seniority bus operators (who invariably are assigned the worst routes, days off, and work shifts). There is also a feeling that the new generation of workers has different attitudes toward employer loyalty and the value of leave time. In addition, there is a growing recognition that not only single parents, but households with two working parents as well, have family responsibilities that will be given priority over work responsibilities now more than in the past. Some transit managers believe that perfect attendance is no longer a reasonable expectation, and they have set their sights on reducing excessive absenteeism as a more realistic goal.

There is significant evidence that transit agencies have found ways to help achieve reasonable employee availability. Although the methods to do this require work, resources, and possibly organizational change, they are well worth implementing to ensure better service to the public, better bottom line budgets, and better ongoing relationships between employees and managers.

## CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

**THE CRITICAL NATURE OF EMPLOYEE AVAILABILITY IN THE TRANSIT INDUSTRY**

Employee availability is a key factor in public transit agencies for many reasons. Unlike most other public services, and certainly unlike typical office environments, transit agencies are obligated to provide precise service in accordance with a published schedule. Buses and trains simply must be where the schedules say they are going to be or the level of trust passengers have in the service will diminish, ridership and revenue will decrease, and the agency will fail to accomplish its primary mission of providing safe, reliable mobility to the region it serves. To ensure that this primary mission is accomplished, employees must be available when scheduled service demands their presence.

In spite of the fundamental importance of attendance to transit agencies, bus operators experience as much as three times the average rate of absenteeism as other blue-collar workers (1). Identifying and documenting actions to enhance better attendance can have significant financial benefits for labor-intensive transit agencies. For instance, the Miami--Dade Transit Agency determined that it would need 26 fewer bus operators on its "extra board" (the roster of bus operators needed to work for those operators who are absent) if the absence rate could be reduced from 20 to 18 percent (2). The Santa Clara Valley Transit Authority determined that every 1 percent increase in absenteeism among their represented (union) employees costs the agency \$1 million in overtime or added personnel to replace the absent employees and protect the service promised to the public. In 1980, estimates of the annual national cost of bus operator absence were set at \$294 million. Translated into 1995 dollars, this amounts to in excess of \$3,750 per operator per year (3).

Beyond the purely budgetary impacts, high levels of absenteeism, particularly among bus operators, can also lead to other organizational inefficiencies and problems. Jacobs and Conte have described the negative cyclical process that can be started when absenteeism becomes excessive at a transit agency (3):

Delays (in service) occur because the replacement drivers are often less familiar with routes and traffic patterns. Delays can lead to dissatisfied customers who in turn opt for alternative transportation methods. As properties experience lower levels of ridership, budget cuts and other cost reduction methods are instituted with predictable drops in driver morale and job satisfaction. This leads to added job stress and increases in employee absences.

As noted above, unscheduled absences cost transit agencies a tremendous amount of money. They also add a considerable administrative burden. One large transit agency on the West Coast reports that 70 percent of all its disciplinary actions concern employees with attendance problems. In addition, high levels of unscheduled absences can lead to lower morale within a work force. Unnecessary absences result in hardships for other employees, who may be required to work when they had otherwise expected to be off (4).

In spite of the critical importance of good attendance, this element of employee performance is a significant problem for many public transit agencies. Of the 36 transit agencies surveyed for this synthesis project, 39 percent (14) stated that absenteeism in their agency has gone up in the past 5 years, whereas only 14 percent (5) reported that absenteeism had gone down (Figure 1).

The 36 selected systems surveyed for this synthesis were asked the following question: "On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 meaning there is no problem and 10 meaning there is a serious problem, how do you rate the level of absenteeism in your agency?" The average rating for all 36 agencies was 6.97. The most frequent rating given was 8. As Figure 2 shows, one-half of all reporting agencies rated themselves 8 or higher. This strongly suggests that absenteeism and employee availability are serious problems in a high percentage of transit agencies.

The survey used for this project also asked, "What is the average number of days of unscheduled absence per year, per bargaining unit employee?" Regrettably, 14 of the 36 agencies did not know the level of absenteeism in their agency. Of the 22 agencies that did respond, the annual level of unscheduled absenteeism ranged from 3 to 52 days, with an average of 16.07. The reader should note that these numbers do not include predictable, scheduled absences such as annual leave or personal days. These numbers only address *unscheduled absence*, the bulk of which is attributable to sick leave, with workers compensation leave and Family Medical Leave having much less of an impact.

**THE COMPETITIVE MARKETPLACE FOR EMPLOYEES**

There are numerous factors that affect employee availability, many of which are within a transit agency's ability to

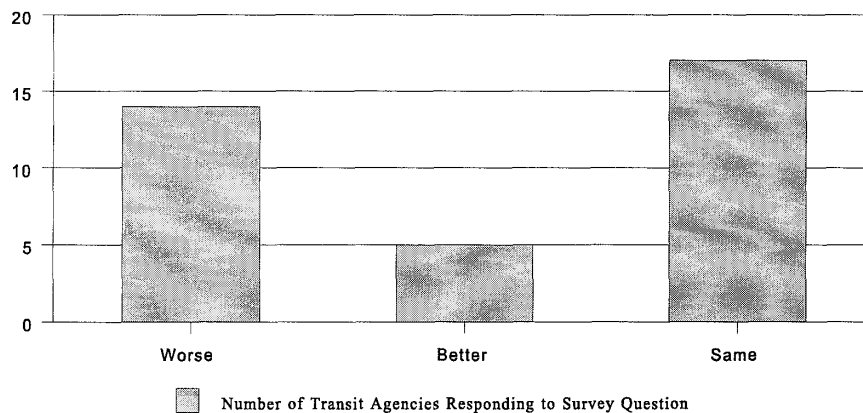


FIGURE 1 Trends in absenteeism in transit agencies over the past 5 years.

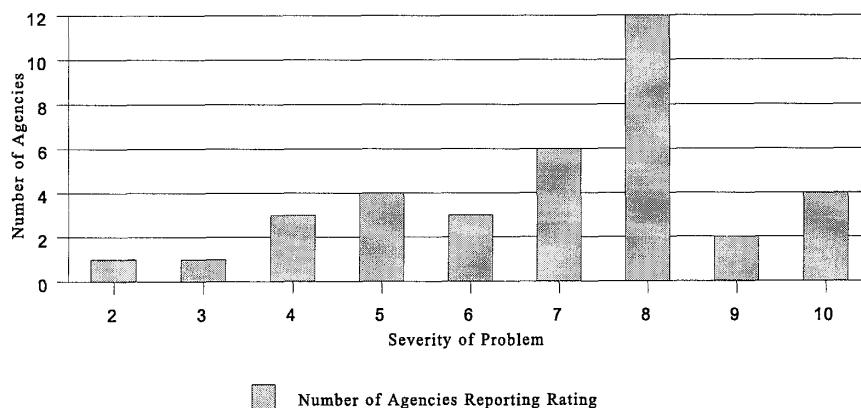


FIGURE 2 Severity of absenteeism problem (10 = most serious).

control or influence. However, there are other factors in the external environment that influence employee availability to which transit agencies can only react. Eleven of the 36 transit agencies reported that more attractive pay and benefits offered by other employers in their region contribute to attrition and employee unavailability. Most of the transit agencies reporting this as a problem are in regions with very low unemployment (3 percent or less.) In these circumstances, employers are willing to pay more competitive wages and provide better benefits to attract and keep good employees.

One of the actions that many transit managers admit contributes to absenteeism is the use of part-time bus operators. A number of transit agencies now use part-time employees, and many of those agencies require that all new bus operators be first hired as part-time employees. In many cases, the pay for part-time employees is relatively low, and benefits are reduced or not provided at all. In a full-employment economy, most agencies report that it is difficult to attract and/or retain good mechanics and bus

operators. At Seattle Metro Transit, the number of part-time bus operators in the agency has dropped from 1,000 to fewer than 800 in the past year. This rate of attrition obviously leads to problems with employee availability.

It is impossible to tell part-time bus operators exactly when they can expect to become full-time employees (although many report that it averages about 1 year.) During that time, part-time bus operators might find other full-time work with better hours and better benefits, and leave the transit agency in spite of prospects for a full-time operator's job in the not-too-distant future. One agency reported that it is not unusual for part-time operators to leave the agency after they have been trained and receive their Commercial Drivers License. They will often go to work for over-the-road truck companies, some of whom have been recruiting from Eastern European countries to fill positions.

According to Carmen W. Daecher of Safety, Claims & Litigation Services, Inc., in Camp Hill, Pennsylvania,

"There is a shortage of drivers for all commercial vehicles, and, as the economy improves, fewer remain as drivers. Someone will train a driver, then the driver will look for a better job driving elsewhere" (5).

Transit agencies that have developed two-tier wage systems, or who rely on part-time employees, have noticed dramatic attrition. Turnover among part-time bus operators was reported to be as high as 50 percent at one mid-sized transit agency in the past year (6). When an area's economy is booming, it is difficult to attract or retain employees with the offer of part-time work, low starting wages, and no benefits. One transit agency reported that they experience high failure rate on physical exams and job skill tests, whereas many others noted they are not attracting high caliber candidates to part-time positions. Employees in hot economies know there are a lot of job opportunities. According to several transit agencies in areas of low unemployment, some fast food restaurants pay their employees better wages than that of starting bus operators and offer substantial cash bonuses for employees who stay with the company for 6 months. One agency recently reported losing a part-time bus operator to a local factory that offered new employees \$500 signing bonuses.

Driving a bus simply isn't attractive work to a lot of people. Part-time bus driving is distinctly unattractive to mothers with children who might want to work part-time, but need a regular schedule. A number of transit systems are reassessing their use of part-time bus operators and just how part-timers are paid. Two agencies reported that they are moving away from the use of part-time operators. One agency in a tourist-oriented economy is hiring more full-time operators, but asking them to take their vacations in the off-tourist portions of the year. In Denver, where unemployment is 1.7%, the starting hourly rate for part-time bus operators was recently raised \$2 an hour to be more competitive in an "employees' market."

One transit manager noted that he believes part-time operators actually have *better* attendance than full-time employees because their wages are low and they can't afford to miss work. However, another agency reported that part-time employees often need another job to make ends meet. These employees sometimes get tired from working the other job and call in sick when they don't have the energy to work their transit shift.

Many agencies note that it is currently not a good market for hiring part-time employees. The use of part-time bus operators may have made good sense when unemployment was much higher. In areas where unemployment is less than 3 percent, the competition for good employees is particularly fierce.

## A NEW GENERATION'S CHANGING WORK ETHIC?

Employees who are between the ages of 24 and 35 (born between 1965 and 1976) have come to be referred to as members of "Generation X." This synthesis project certainly provides no scientific analyses of work habits of this generation. However, the survey questionnaire asked transit managers if they detected the new generation's attitude toward work and loyalty to the employer. Better than one-half (19 of 36) replied affirmatively; the most common response being that younger employees seem to lack a sense of commitment to their job. A number of agencies noted how younger employees seem to value their leisure time more ("I'll do anything you want, as long as you don't interfere with my leisure time"). A number of agencies stated that the generation of employees that has grown up in the 1990s has never been through tough economic times and doesn't understand the value of a stable job. They note that many young employees still live with their parents and simply lack a sense of responsibility that might come with paying a mortgage or serious rent.

Other agencies stated that there is a deterioration in the work ethic of younger employees who treat their jobs in a rather entrepreneurial, mercenary way. They regard themselves as "resources," no more, no less, that are there to do a job and get out. They don't think of themselves as being part of some "work family." In a good economy, they feel there are better jobs somewhere else, and they will stay only until they find something better. Some agencies noted that there is more absenteeism and turnover among younger employees. There is also recognition that the new generation has grown up seeing stories of major downsizing by employers, while hearing they should expect to change their careers on average six times in their lives.

Most of these observations by transit managers are confirmed by Bob Losyk, President and CEO of Innovative Training Solutions, Inc., of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and author of the book *Managing a Changing Workforce: Achieving Outstanding Service with Today's Employees* (7). He notes that the loyalty and commitment to the workplace that previous generations had is gone. Too often Generation Xers saw their parents' dedication to a company repaid with downsizing and layoffs. Consequently, he believes young people feel that there is no such thing as job security. They won't wait around and pay their dues when there is no long-term commitment from management. His studies lead him to conclude that Generation Xers look to jump ship when they can upgrade their situations, and often leave a job at the hint of a better position. Losyk believes that Generation X will bring many positive developments in the workplace. However, he also concurs with transit managers' observations that Generation Xers strongly believe there is life after work.

and that work is only a means to their ends: money, fun, and leisure.

## **CHALLENGES PRESENTED BY THE FAMILY MEDICAL LEAVE ACT**

The most frequently cited external factor that affects transit employee availability is the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA). The FMLA has presented challenges to many agencies, and there is no easy or quick method to resolve the problems associated with it. Although the FMLA's intent is positive for most situations, many transit managers believe it provides an opportunity for those who have a low sense of responsibility or interest toward their job with another opportunity to stay out of the workplace when they feel like it.

This federal legislation provides employees with up to 12 workweeks of unpaid, job-protected leave a year, and requires group health benefits to be maintained during the leave as if employees continued to work instead of taking leave. To be eligible for leave covered by FMLA, employees must have worked for the employer for at least 12 months, and worked at least 1,250 hours during the 12 months prior to the start of the FMLA leave. Leave may be taken for the following reasons:

- For the birth of a son or daughter, and to care for the newborn child;
- For the placement with the employee of a child through adoption or foster care, and to care for the newly placed child;
- To care for an immediate family member (spouse, child, or parent--but not a parent in-law); and
- When the employee is unable to work because of a serious health condition.

"Serious health condition" means an illness, injury, impairment, or physical or mental condition that includes, among other things:

- A period of incapacity requiring the absence of more than three calendar days from work, school, or other regular daily activities that also involves continuing treatment by (or under the supervision of) a health care provider; and
- Any period of incapacity (or treatment therefor) due to a chronic serious health condition (e.g., asthma, diabetes, epilepsy, etc.).

The FMLA permits employees to take leave on an intermittent basis or to work a reduced schedule under certain circumstances. Intermittent/reduced schedule leave may be taken when medically necessary to care for a seriously ill family member or because of the employee's serious health condition.

Twenty-six of the 36 agencies surveyed reported that this legislation has affected employee availability. At least 10 of the agencies expressed extreme concern with FMLA's effects, referring to the legislation as "a nightmare," "a disaster," or "a royal pain." Many expressed their concern over how FMLA has "bastardized" the progressive discipline process. The legislation does not allow employers to take negative action, such as demotions or disciplinary action, against employees taking FMLA leave. Some agencies report that "abusers are learning how to play the game" and "run around the system." Some agencies reported the FMLA is "killing them" because such leave is not counted against the employee in the disciplinary process. They claim unions coach their members to file under FMLA if possible when taking leave to avoid such absences being counted against their progressive discipline record.

Transit managers state that they have no problem with the act's provisions for employees to be granted leave to care for a sick family member or a newborn child, or to recover from a verifiably serious health condition or injury. The major point of contention is with the FMLA provision that permits employees to take "intermittent/reduced schedule leave" because of a "serious health condition." The frustration comes from trying to operationalize the definition of serious health condition. It is difficult to confirm or deny the effect of certain health conditions such as gout, migraines, soft-tissue injuries, depression, and even "irritable bowel syndrome." Transit managers report that cases of Hepatitis C, where infections are contracted through sexual activity, are commonly reported and cause for leave based on the definitions of FMLA. More than one agency complained that getting doctors' notes for FMLA leave is too simple and that doctors are reluctant not to approve an employee's request for FMLA leave for fear of being sued. Once an employee is certified as having a condition under FMLA, they don't need to submit updated doctors' certificates for 60 days. Agencies are restricted in their ability to discipline those who they think are abusing this provision and who, perhaps, are only working 4 days a week. At least one agency stated that they believe their employees who take FMLA leave are working other jobs.

Some agencies reported that they have offered input to professional human resource associations that have drafted proposed amendments to the FLMA legislation, but nothing has resulted from these efforts yet.

## **SYNTHESIS OBJECTIVES**

The purpose of this synthesis report is to review the state of the art in practices used by selected transit agencies in assuring employee availability. There are a variety of factors that transit agencies must be mindful of as they attempt to assure themselves that they will have the employees

necessary to provide the service promised to the public, in a manner that is fiscally responsible. As this report is being written, the nation's economy has grown and unemployment in many markets has become almost nonexistent. There is fierce competition for good job applicants in all types of employment. This competition affects how successful transit agencies will be in attracting and retaining employees now and in the foreseeable future. It will also cause them to question their own practices in areas such as the use of part-time employees, hourly wages, the provision of benefits, and selection of candidates for job openings.

At the same time, many agencies feel that new attitudes toward work and employer loyalty are evolving throughout the country. This may be attributable in part to different approaches the "20-something" generation has toward their careers and priorities in life. It may also be partly attributable to the changing nature of households, where the proportion of families with two working parents is now 64.5 percent, and 64.8 percent of mothers of children under the age of six are now at work (8). The percentage of women in the work force with children under the age of 18 increased from 30.4 percent in 1960 to 71.4 percent in 1996 (9). According to the Economic Policy Institute of Washington, D.C., families worked 247 more hours--the equivalent of six more weeks a year--in 1996 than they did in 1989 (10). Also, in 1989, they worked nine more weeks a year than in 1979. Some analysts suggest that there just aren't that many more hours families can give to work (11). According to surveys and opinion polls taken in 1995 and 1996, 42 percent of workers feel "used up" by the end of the workday. Between regular work time, overtime, commuting, chores, and attending to children, the average worker in a dual-earner household with children puts in 14.8 hours per day (9).

Transit agencies must ensure that they are aware of the stressful conditions under which bus operators in particular work. Some of the conditions that make bus driving difficult seem to have become worse in recent years. Transit managers now talk about what to do with "toxic passengers" those that cause difficulties for bus operators and passengers alike. The 1998 shooting and murder of a bus operator by a deranged passenger in Seattle, Washington, in which the bus ultimately plunged from a bridge (injuring 30 passengers and killing 1), represents the type of incident bus operators fear could happen to them at any time. In addition, congestion on our nation's highways continues to get worse. According to the Texas Transportation Institute, the amount of severe congestion in all of the 70 urban areas they review each year has more than doubled (from 16 percent to 35 percent) between 1982 and 1996 (12). These conditions often cause bus operators to have that much more difficulty with keeping on schedule and keeping passengers content. Bus operators experience increasing tension as they try to balance their desire to

provide good customer service with the unrelenting pressure to remain on schedule (1).

Transit agencies need to address these challenges in an industry in which unions and managers alike often resist changing practices that have been in place for many decades. Addressing the issues of employee availability must be done in a work environment where trust is often lacking between labor and management. Controls on the use of sick leave must be negotiated. There also appears to be a disagreement between transit management and labor on the fundamental purpose of sick leave. Managers tend to believe that sick leave is provided by the agency as insurance against occurrences of legitimate illness and injury. It is a privilege extended by the agency, not an entitlement of the employee. Labor tends to believe that sick leave is a benefit that has been negotiated, with costs of the use of such benefits figured into an agency's budget. They believe it is time to be used as needed, the use of which is not to be dictated by management.

Transit agencies must take effective actions in the midst of these challenging circumstances to ensure employee availability. These actions include practices related to employee selection, internal motivation of employees, labor-management cooperation, supervisory involvement, incentive and discipline programs, and workers compensation programs.

## SYNTHESIS METHODS AND ORGANIZATION

Four methods were employed to assemble information for this synthesis:

1. Literature and research review,
2. Survey questionnaire (including extensive telephone follow-up),
3. Field interviews and site visits, and
4. Focus group meetings with bus operators.

Members of the Project Panel for this synthesis report contributed beneficial insights and experiences, many of which are reflected in the development of the survey and the report.

An 80-item questionnaire was mailed to 50 transit agencies throughout the United States. Thirty-six responses were returned for a 72 percent response rate. Those agencies that responded to the questionnaire represent a cross section of mostly mid-sized and large transit agencies from all geographic sectors of the country. The questionnaire appears in Appendix A. Responding agencies are listed in Appendix B, and their geographic location is indicated on a map of the United States in Appendix C.

Chapter 2 reviews the causes of absenteeism from the points of view of transit managers and bus operators. The findings included in this chapter were derived from the questionnaire, as well as from focus groups that were conducted with 57 bus operators from a large transit agency concerned about its high level of absenteeism. These findings provide a powerful reminder of the need to understand the difficulties bus operators experience that can lead to unscheduled absences.

Chapter 3 reviews the strategies transit agencies currently use to maximize employee availability, including:

1. Preventive measures (ways to prevent absences from occurring):
  - Utilizing customized selection instruments to assess new applicants,
  - Enhancing employees' health through wellness programs and ergonomic equipment,
  - Assisting with off-the-job needs such as day care for children and elderly parents,
  - Providing various forms of incentives and awards to encourage excellent attendance, and
  - Providing more flexibility in the use of leave time to take care of personal needs.

2. Management controls (actions taken to control excessive absenteeism):

- Requirements to accrue a certain level of sick leave before sick leave is paid,
- Denial of pay for the first day of sick leave after a certain number of sick leave occurrences,
- Requiring documentation and auditing the authenticity of medical certificates,
- Methods for addressing pattern absences,
- Progressive discipline, and
- Managing back to work programs.

3. Management interventions:

- Group supervision programs for bus operators,
- Total quality management programs,
- Positive discipline,
- Communicating the importance of good attendance, and
- Modifying agency procedures to facilitate the attraction and hiring of new employees.

Chapter 4 provides conclusions and recommendations for further research.

## CHAPTER TWO

**ABSENTEEISM FROM THE POINTS OF VIEW OF TRANSIT MANAGEMENT AND LABOR**

The survey questionnaire for this project asked the following question: "What do you think are the primary causes of absenteeism in your agency?" Managers from 36 agencies offered 18 different causes of absenteeism as shown in Figure 3.

A more careful review of this list reveals that many of the "causes" of absenteeism cited by the transit agencies are not causes, per se. For instance, stretching weekends or abusing FMLA and workers compensation are not causes of absenteeism, they are manifestations. The question that needs to be answered is why do employees do these things? Do they lack a responsible work ethic? Do they basically dislike the responsibilities of being a bus or train operator? Are they ill-suited for their job? Do they dislike their supervisor or the agency for which they work? Are their working conditions so unfavorable that they need to take "mental health days?" Do they have other physical, mental, or emotional problems that cause them to not perform well in their jobs? These questions are particularly important to ponder because, by one estimate, nationally, only 28 percent of sick days are taken because of actual illness (9).

Good attendance is extremely important to transit agencies, yet they are plagued with substantially higher-than-average rates of absenteeism (1). When policy and

practice seem to clash, the reasons often can be understood by observing the points of their intended intersection. For that reason, an account of absenteeism from the perspectives of bus operators can add an important voice to the discussion. Recognizing the value of the operators' experience frankly discussed, one large transit agency, working together with the union, hired a professional research firm experienced in conducting focus groups with employees in both public and private agencies.

During the last week of September and the first week of October 1998, six different focus groups were conducted with bus operators at this transit agency. Three of the focus groups were "self-selected" (i.e., operators signed up to be a part of a focus group when they learned of the opportunity to participate). Three of the focus groups were recruited groups, whose members were selected at random by the research firm. All employees were paid to attend. The 57 bus operators in attendance included a representative cross section of the agency's employees in terms of age, seniority, race, and gender. The age of operators in attendance ranged from 22 to 65 and years of seniority ranged from 1 to 32, with an average of 11 years of service. Forty-two operators were male and 15 were female. Fifty operators worked full-time and seven part-time. Thirty-one operators were African-American, 24 were Hispanic, and 2 were non-Hispanic white (13).

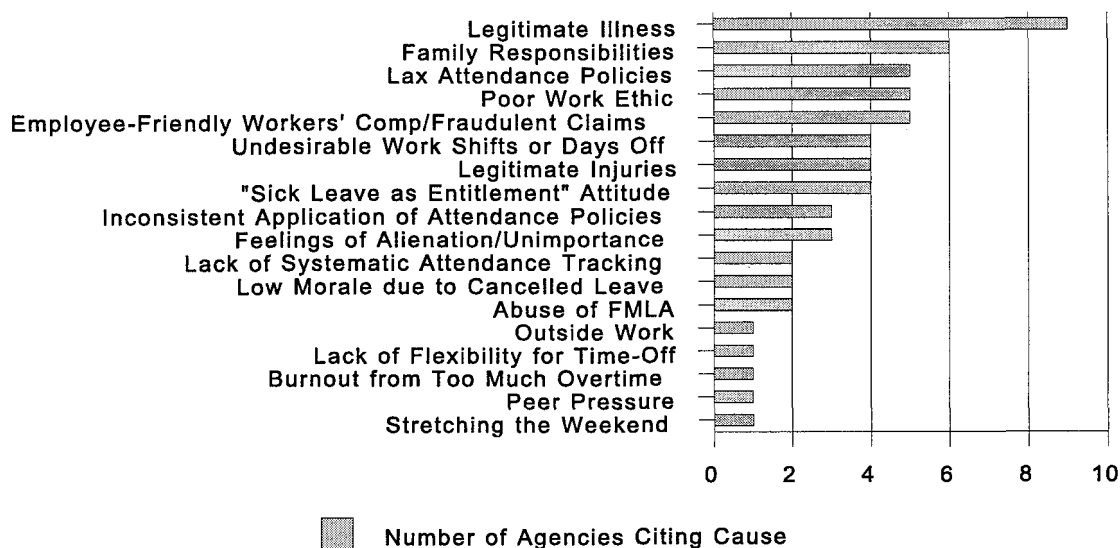


FIGURE 3 Primary causes of absenteeism as identified by transit agencies.

Each focus group lasted 2 hours, with an average of 10 bus operators per group. At each meeting, the facilitator explained that the purpose of the session was to gain their insights into the causes of absenteeism at the transit agency. One focus group knew in advance that management would observe them. The remaining five were told that no one from management would be watching or listening. The operators in attendance were also assured that, although their input would be reported, no names would be associated with any comments and no tape recordings were to be made of the proceedings. Either the principle investigator for this synthesis or a project assistant participated in all of the focus groups.

This chapter summarizes the input that bus operators provided during those sessions, which was remarkably similar across all groups, even though operators came from three different operating facilities. One session was for employees who preferred to speak in Spanish. The focus group facilitator encouraged the operators to speak to the things about their job that might cause them to use sick leave when they weren't really sick. The bus operators seemed willing to express their true feelings and opinions. The input received should prove enlightening for any transit official interested in reducing absenteeism.

## **BUS OPERATORS' BACKGROUNDS**

Each operator was asked to say how long he or she had worked at the agency and why they chose to work there. Although the operators had a variety of work experiences, the most frequently cited former occupations were school bus driving, truck driving, security services, and construction. Only 6 of the 57 participants were college graduates. When asked why they joined the transit agency, the overwhelming majority stated that they came for better pay and better benefits. Those who worked in construction noted that driving a bus offered steady work.

Fewer than 10 percent of the operators stated that they joined the agency because they expected to like being bus operators. A very few stated that they thought they would like to work with the public, and a couple of operators said they didn't want to be confined to an office. However, it was clear there was nothing intrinsic about the nature of the work a bus operator does that drew many of them to join the agency.

## **SCHEDULES**

Numerous bus operators stated that they occasionally needed to take time off due to the stress of the job. One of the most frequently cited reasons for stress was a tight bus route schedule. Operators stated that, in some cases, the

schedules were 10 years behind the times. Traffic congestion had increased tremendously, but bus route schedules had not been adjusted in accordance with these conditions. Passengers in wheelchairs take far more time to board and are using transit more, particularly since they are being encouraged to use fixed-route transit versus paratransit. A multitude of passes and fare media makes fare enforcement more time consuming, and bike racks add more pressure to completing a route on time. Some operators added that most other drivers on the road are not sympathetic to a bus when it is trying to reenter traffic from a bus pullout, and that this also contributes to buses running late.

Operators feel pressure to accomplish their primary mission of providing reliable, timely transit service; however, above all, they must provide safe service, and they find that they must drive unsafely if they are to maintain what they regard as unrealistic schedules. Even greater pressure comes from passengers who get tense over missing connections, getting to work late, etc. Passengers tend to let the drivers know their displeasure, even though the operators have done everything within their power (and may have even taken some risks) to stay on schedule. Operators know full well that speeding tickets could result in lost jobs.

Tight schedules can also consume recovery time for operators at the end of routes. They often have no time to use restrooms or take just a short breather from their work. Two operators recounted times when they had to urinate into a cup while inside the bus, because they had no time to relieve themselves at the layover point. In the opinion of one operator, "Management doesn't care about these needs. They treat us as if we aren't humans."

Other operators noted that the lack of time for breaks at layover points also contributed to poor eating habits. With only a few minutes to eat, they down conveniently available junk food rather than more nutritious meals. One operator noted she had gone from a size 6 to a size 14 during her time as a bus operator and blamed most of that on a work schedule that doesn't provide for decent breaks for reasonable food.

Tight schedules were clearly of paramount concern to the vast majority of bus operators. As one stated, "There's only one good route--the one I take to go home when I'm done."

## **EQUIPMENT AND FACILITIES**

Bus operators do not shape or control the environment in which they work. Their workplace is a rolling machine that is maintained by someone else and subject to deterioration in

any number of ways. Good driver's seats are critical to bus operator comfort, yet many operators noted that they have "rocking chair seats" that require repair or replacement. Operators were all the more frustrated having to sit in such seats even after reporting the problem many times. In some cases, radios were inoperative, giving bus operators an even greater sense of isolation as they drove their routes. Air conditioning was too often inadequate to cool the entire coach comfortably, resulting in passenger discomfort as well. As with tight schedules, bus operators take the brunt of passenger complaints about inadequate bus conditions.

Buses that break down in service cause greater inconvenience for passengers and even more headaches for bus operators. The operator of a bus following a broken down bus must take the complaints from passengers who had been waiting for the lead bus that never showed up. Buses that get repaired must often "deadhead" past waiting passengers to get back on schedule. Operators know they will be facing unhappy passengers the next day, which has caused some to call in sick the next day.

As noted earlier, bus operators cited problems with accessing restrooms. On some routes there were no restroom facilities at the layover point, whereas in other cases the restrooms were too far away for the operator to get to them and back in a reasonable time. This posed a particular problem for female bus operators. Two operators recounted times when they had to stop the bus in the middle of a route near a fast food restaurant to use the restrooms. Some passengers, concerned with making their connections with intersecting buses, took exception to the operator doing this, which resulted in extremely unpleasant remarks being made to the bus operator.

Operators also noted that a quiet room that used to be available to operators who were in between pieces of work had been converted to more office space for other agency functions. This quiet room had been an important place for those operators who preferred to be out of the general din that exists in an operator's preparation room.

## **SECURITY AND PASSENGERS**

Numerous operators reported being cursed at, threatened, and slapped. Other reported having been spit on, hit with objects such as umbrellas, and shot at with BB guns. All bus operators were aware of far more serious incidents, including a stabbing and serious beatings. More than 30 assaults on bus operators and occurred within the past year. All operators knew such things happened and that it could very well happen to them. One operator asked, "Do you know what it's like going to work everyday worried about your well-being, your safety, maybe your life?"

The clear majority of operators agreed that over the years the character of bus passengers has changed for the worse. Passengers are more likely to snap at bus operators over any disagreement or misunderstanding. Operators stated that there are more people using drugs, more homeless people, more people who used to be in institutions, and more people carrying weapons. As one operator stated, "Each time you open that door, you don't know what will come through." Some passengers feel they have leverage over a bus operator by threatening to call transit supervisors with complaints. One operator recalled an incident where a passenger, trying to board with an invalid transfer, said he would call in a complaint if the driver refused his transfer. After the operator suggested he do so, because he was enforcing the rules as part of his job, the passenger said, "You're not going to like this complaint. I'm going to say that you cursed me, threatened me, and drove recklessly."

The operators noted how difficult school students could be on certain routes. Some students hit the "Stop Requested" bar with no intent of disembarking. Others pull the emergency switch as a prank. The operators believed that routes that carry lots of students need more under-cover police.

Some routes are particularly unattractive because they serve high crime areas where assaults on bus operators are more frequent. Bus operators assigned to such a route will often call in sick. One operator related that he took 2 days sick leave after driving on a particularly dangerous route because of the stress and tension he felt. A considerable amount of sick time is used on Halloween because of incidents of abuse, such as having rocks, eggs, and even a bucket of urine thrown at operators.

## **PERSONAL NEEDS/INFLEXIBLE RULES**

The majority of the operators in these sessions admitted they booked sick when they really weren't as their only way of attending to certain personal responsibilities. Because of operator shortages, the agency offered no opportunities for drivers to swap days off, and only rarely granted the use of annual leave on a daily basis without an advance request. Operators have had to call in sick to attend teachers' conferences, the graduation of a son or daughter, the birth of a child, the funeral of a close friend, because a regular baby-sitter was not available, or because a car wouldn't start. Operators also noted how time sensitive their jobs were. If they were even a second late for report, they would lose their run and be credited with a "late report" on their attendance record. Although they understood the need for the requirement in an agency that runs on a schedule, they noted that life is not always predictable, especially for those with children. A number of operators noted how helpful a day care center at the operating facility

would be. Unexpected things can happen to the best-prepared employee. Some would call in sick rather than lose their run and be subject to a late report.

## **OTHER BUS OPERATORS**

Most operators in the focus groups acknowledged there were abusers of sick leave among their ranks, which contributed to excessive absenteeism in the agency. The attendance policies were quite lax, and a number of operators took full advantage of this laxness. The operators did not offer a definition of "sick leave abuse" nor did they have firm ideas on what should be done about people who abuse sick leave. There was general agreement that unusual levels of absenteeism occur on paydays and Mondays. Many said they knew operators who use their sick days as soon as they are accrued. They also knew of an operator who hadn't worked a Thursday in 14 months (his regular days off were Tuesday and Wednesday.) This type of attendance pattern makes it more difficult for legitimate requests for annual leave to be granted on a daily basis.

Some operators acknowledged that there were other operators who would shut down a bus to take a break when they wanted one. Although some operators said they understood that sometimes this happens because of stress, they also noted that several operators just don't have a good work ethic. An operator who puts a bus down intentionally creates stress for the bus operator behind him, who will need to pick up all the waiting passengers that are now late. Again, the bus operator doing his job properly will catch the flack of unhappy passengers who believe he is running late. Some operators acknowledged that they have called in sick when they knew they were going to be behind an operator with a reputation of putting a bus down. Operators also acknowledged that they know of fellow operators who abused their break time at certain layover points. That kind of behavior makes passengers upset at the transit system, and even drivers who do their jobs perfectly will face passengers who are upset over the actions of another driver. Operators also noted that some operators simply do not enforce agency rules dealing with fares and transfers. This makes conditions worse for operators who do try to enforce the rules, because it appears that favoritism is being extended to some passengers.

## **INSUFFICIENT COMMUNICATION/ NONSUPPORTIVE SUPERVISION**

One of the most powerful points made in every focus group was that operators felt there was a lack of support from management. For example, operators are told to enforce the fare policy and not allow anyone to board with an invalid transfer. However, field supervisors don't always

support them when a passenger complains. Operators are told to give the passenger the benefit of the doubt; however, if a spotter was riding the bus and noticed the driver allowing the passenger to board with an invalid transfer, drivers believe they would be "written up." The operators expressed the need for a consistent policy and for more supervisors who would enforce that policy.

When passengers file complaints, bus operators also believe that they are "presumed guilty until proven innocent." Although every complaint has two sides, some operators believe that transit managers already have their minds made up before they hear the operator's side of the story. Some operators stated that they feel they are "the enemy within the agency."

Many participants noted that bus operators who become supervisors let it "go to their heads" and don't communicate well with their former associates. One operator wished for a simple friendly greeting on the bus radio system, a "Good Morning" or "Thank you for being here today." Instead, the message is more likely to be an order, such as "Make your announcements of stops in accordance with the ADA." Another operator suggested building comradery by giving the operators a quick debriefing before they started their day.

The operators claimed that they rarely hear from supervisors or managers. They feel there is little or no follow-up to their suggestions. Bulletin boards are cluttered and not helpful in terms of highlighting truly important information. They believe managers have no idea what is really happening in the field. One operator told of a situation where she had been physically threatened and, although she felt traumatized, no one was sent to replace her for over an hour. Another operator could not forget an incident when a passenger spit in his face; a supervisor and a police officer witnessed the event but did not react. Such events drain morale, as evidenced in one operator's statement, "If they don't care about me, I don't care about them." This same attitude was echoed by several bus operators who had long since become fed up with buses that broke down, tight schedules, the lack of accessible restrooms, insufficient support, and little communication. As one operator advised, "If you show me you care a little about me, I'll bend over backward for you." Most operators in attendance firmly believed that transit managers were out of touch with a bus operator's needs and that they really didn't care. They felt there was a double standard for managers who had no trouble getting time off to see their child's graduation, or to attend a friend's funeral. Consequently, when the operators need time off for personal needs, they admit to calling in sick. As one operator stated, "When you get upset at the agency, you say the hell with it. I got two sick days; I'll take them. Now I'm giving you the stress."

There are many strategies transit agencies need to utilize to address the problems associated with absenteeism, particularly among bus operators. The next chapter will

highlight the strategies transit agencies are using in an attempt to minimize absenteeism and ensure employee availability.

## CHAPTER THREE

**STRATEGIES USED BY TRANSIT AGENCIES TO MAXIMIZE EMPLOYEE AVAILABILITY**

There are many factors that can contribute to transit agencies having problems with employee availability. Chapters 1 and 2 documented many of the factors: tight labor markets, legitimate illnesses or on-the-job injuries, family responsibilities, employees who either have poor work attitudes or are not well suited to a customer relations job, lax attendance policies, the lack of flexibility for taking time off, difficult/stressful working conditions, and employees' sense of alienation and unimportance. Given the variety of contributing factors, transit agencies have had to adopt a number of different strategies to enhance employee availability. This chapter places each of these strategies into one of three categories: *preventive measures* designed to prevent absence *before* it occurs, *management controls* on the use of sick leave that deal primarily with the monitoring of attendance and to applying discipline after unscheduled absences, and *other management interventions* worthy of discussion that don't fit neatly into either of the first two categories.

**PREVENTIVE MEASURES**

Transit agencies are taking a number of proactive steps to help prevent absences from occurring. Most of these steps address the primary causes of absenteeism and include the following:

- Hiring practices
- Health maintenance
- Addressing off-the-job employee needs
- Providing incentives to come to work
- Providing employees with more flexible schedules.

There are many different techniques within these categories that are being used in the industry. The extent to which they are being used is described here in more detail.

**Hiring Practices**

Although it has always been important to do as thorough a job as possible when reviewing a candidates' skills, character, and work background, there are factors prevalent today that make the employee selection process even more challenging and important. First, many agencies note that very low unemployment in their regions has resulted in "employee markets," where competition for qualified workers is intense. Many transit agencies acknowledge

that it is more difficult to attract the higher caliber candidates, especially given transit's seniority system and how it results in new employees getting the least attractive shifts and often no benefits (for part-timers or employees on probation). Second, previous employers are becoming more reluctant to provide full information on the work record of past employees for fear of being sued. Third, the majority of transit systems note that many members of the new generation of employees have a distinctly different attitude toward work and employer loyalty. Fourth, the "lack of work ethic" or "laziness" among employees was the third leading cause of absenteeism according to transit agencies surveyed for this report (see Figure 3). Bus operators who took part in the focus groups described in chapter 2 further confirmed this as a contributing factor to absenteeism.

*Employee Selection Instruments*

The four preceding factors suggest that customized selection instruments may be increasingly valuable as tools for matching applicants' aptitudes with the requirements of the job. On average, those agencies that reported using such customized selection instruments rated "absenteeism as a problem" as 6.06 on a scale of 1 to 10 (Figure 2), whereas those that did not use customized selection instruments rated "absenteeism as a problem" at 7.05.

There are many testing instruments that transit agencies can use to help develop a job candidate profile. Of the 36 agencies surveyed, 16 use customized selection instruments to help determine which candidates they will select. Six of the surveyed agencies use the Bus Operator Selection Survey (B.O.S.S.). The B.O.S.S. uses a 77-item survey, designed under a grant from the American Public Transit Association, as an initial screening tool for the selection of bus operators. This survey takes approximately 30 minutes to complete and asks questions that help a transit agency determine the applicants' attitudes toward safety, attendance, and customer service. To a lesser degree, temperament, social involvement, timeliness, and self-confidence are also assessed. The B.O.S.S. was validated on more than 800 bus operators across the country using a classic, concurrent, criterion-related study designed to determine if incumbent bus operators who scored well on the test also had good attendance records. The validity test demonstrated that incumbent bus operators who scored higher on the attendance biodata predictor

tended to be absent less for any reason, used fewer days of worker's compensation, and were late less often (3).

The test places applicants into one of five categories, with those in Category One being the most desirable to hire. Those who are predicted to have strong attendance and acceptable safety records are in Category Two. Those who are predicted to have strong safety records and acceptable attendance are in Category Three. Those who are predicted to have acceptable safety and attendance records are in Category Four, but characterized as potentially poor risks. Those in Category Five are considered to have a low probability of success and are not hired (14). Twenty-six transit agencies from across the country have tested over 15,300 candidates using the B.O.S.S. However, very few have conducted systematic analyses of the performance of bus operators hired after taking the B.O.S.S. One such agency that has performed such an analysis is New Jersey Transit. At New Jersey Transit, 73.1 percent of those bus operators who scored best on the B.O.S.S. test and were in the highest classification (Category One) had zero sick days in their first year, compared to 46.67 percent with zero sick days for those selected from Category Three. Overall, among all the bus operators selected through the B.O.S.S. instrument at New Jersey Transit, 75 percent had one or no sick days and 93 percent had fewer than five sick days in their first year (15). New York City Transit reported that the dropout rate among bus operator trainees has decreased 11 percent and that student accidents have decreased 30% since they began using the B.O.S.S. to help select their new bus operators (15). Citifare (the transit agency for the Regional Transportation Commission in Washoe County, Nevada) has also determined that employees who scored well on the B.O.S.S. test have had better attendance records than those with lower scores. Hence, there are preliminary indications that there is a correlation between high B.O.S.S. test scores and good attendance, although the remaining agencies have indicated that they have not yet done evaluations. No agency that has begun using the B.O.S.S. expressed disappointment. Even those without sufficient experience to evaluate its effectiveness have a positive feeling about it. One states that their agency is "noticing a difference," another felt "they were better off with it than without it," whereas another expressed great satisfaction with the nature of the questions on the tests.

Not all transit agencies that have considered using the B.O.S.S. program have adopted it. A transit agency in Southern California decided against purchasing the B.O.S.S. based on its belief that it wasn't well suited to their diverse pool of candidates. The agency believed that the life experiences of many Vietnamese candidates didn't correlate well with the nature of many of the questions, and the language skills of the applicants proved to be a barrier to easy completion of the test. An agency in the

state of Washington felt the cost of the B.O.S.S. testing service was too high, particularly for small and medium-sized transit agencies. This agency also expressed concern that reliance on the test to select candidates might subject them to Equal Employment Opportunity-related challenges from applicants in their community. Agencies interested in knowing more about this issue might wish to consult the *Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures* as adopted by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

Citifare stands out among transit agencies because it uses four different tests (explained later) to help select bus operator candidates: the B.O.S.S.; the Driver Risk Index Video Test; the REID Report; and Seattle Metro's "Working with the Public" Video Test. At Citifare, unscheduled absences average 10 days per year (considerably better than the average of 16.07 days of unscheduled absence of all transit agencies surveyed for this report), and attendance performance has stayed about the same over the past 5 years. Citifare believes that the use of multiple tests is beneficial, because they focus primarily on different areas. For instance, candidates might be particularly strong in safety, but they might exhibit very weak attitudes in attendance. Hence, they believe that the thorough review of candidates using different testing instruments ultimately benefits the agency by allowing them to select the very best candidates, as validated by multiple selection instruments. Each test acts as a sieve that helps the agency sort out the best candidates.

The Driver Risk Index used by Citifare is an evaluation instrument designed to measure the driver's traffic risk recognition and control skills. According to Dr. Jack Weaver of Advanced Driving Skills Institute of Clearwater, Florida, it is an instrument used by a number of public and private agencies involved in the transportation of goods or passengers (16). It takes about 45 minutes to complete and consists of 50 video vignettes showing traffic situations from the vantage point of the driver. The applicants are asked to agree or disagree with the commentator's comments about the scenario. A correct answer receives a score of one, while all other answers receive a score of zero. Citifare believes it helps to predict the ability of the applicant to drive defensively (14). The more safely an operator drives, the less likely they are to have accidents that might cause them to miss work due to injury.

The REID Report is produced by Reid Psychological Systems of Chicago, Illinois. Reid Psychological Systems has developed numerous employment testing programs to help identify critical information about job applicants that is difficult to find solely through interviews and resumes (17). The test used by Citifare consists of three parts that take approximately 1 hour to complete. The first part is an integrity attitude scale with 83 questions that test the

candidate's trustworthiness and productivity. The second part is a social behavior questionnaire with 73 questions designed to uncover an applicant's experiences at work and elsewhere. The third part has 46 questions designed to determine safety attitudes and recent drug use. Each section results in the candidate being placed in one of three categories: "Recommended," "Qualified Recommended," and "Not Recommended." Citifare's Transit Manager Michael Steele states "It is amazing how many people taking these tests will admit they've stolen something, or hang around with people who use drugs, or have had a shouting match with their supervisor." Citifare managers believe that candidates who are more honest and score well on the integrity test are less likely to call in sick when they really aren't. They also believe that drug use can lead to unnecessary absences from work. At Citifare, candidates whose scores result in a "Not Recommended" evaluation are not hired.

Another candidate screening tool is the Seattle Metro's "Working with the Public" Video Test. First developed in 1979 by the Seattle Metro transit agency, the test consists of 65 video vignettes showing typical scenarios that a coach operator faces. In each vignette, a critical incident is dramatized, with the action stopping at the point where the operator would need to make a judgment concerning the situations. Four possible choices are then presented to the candidate. The correct answer solves the problem in the most effective, courteous manner. Other answers are weighted in terms of their effectiveness in resolving the problems. The manner in which the candidate "handles" the situation demonstrates the quality of the driver's human relation skills (18).

As described by the bus operators who participated in the focus groups reported on in chapter 2, stressful incidents with passengers can have a major effect on a bus operator's attitude and ability to work. Those with a greater ability to let unimportant things go and who remain calm when provoked will have a greater tolerance for the tension that a bus operator will experience. This in turn can affect a bus operator's attendance record and availability to the transit agency.

The Seattle Metro Video Test has been used by more than 65 transit agencies in the United States. Based on surveys of 54 transit agencies in 1993, 73 percent agreed that the video test improved the quality of new hires and that the public relations skills of applicants would be difficult to know without it (18). More than 80 percent saw improvements in areas that would be expected to be directly effected by improved judgment in working with people. The impact on turnover and sick leave was not as great, but still important (40-50 percent noted improvements). One respondent to this synthesis report's survey recently abandoned the Seattle Metro Video Test claiming insufficient correlation between performance and test

results. Two other agencies use a test very similar to the Seattle test (customized a bit for their local circumstances) and are quite pleased with its predictive capabilities. Pierce Transit in Tacoma, Washington, reported that the transit agencies in the state of Washington formed a consortium to help pay for the updating of the Seattle Metro Test. ERGOMETRICS, a private firm in Seattle, is now marketing the new video tests entitled "START People Sense" and "START Driving." The updated subject matter includes customer relations, relations with supervisors and co-workers, and working with a diverse customer base including teenagers and paratransit customers (19).

#### *Conducting Thorough Reference Checks*

Virtually all employers want the work history of a potential employee. Hence, it was mildly surprising to learn that only 23 of the 36 transit agencies surveyed indicated that they conducted a thorough reference check of each applicant's record of attendance in prior positions. The most likely cause for this, which was noted by a few agencies, is that previous employers are reluctant to offer specific information on past employees, fearing potential lawsuits. (This might not prevent a transit agency from obtaining information on applicants' attendance records if their previous employers were public agencies. The California Public Records Act allows prospective employers to review all but the most sensitive work records of a public employee, such as medical or police records, which might constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy.) Information gained from references is more suspect, which results in agencies not being able to complete thorough analyses of past attendance records. In the absence of detailed attendance information, Houston Metro in Harris County, Texas, noted that it examines an applicants' entire work history to get a sense of their employment stability. If a pattern of employment stability is lacking, they do not offer the candidate the job. Most transit agencies conduct extensive screening, including criminal background and driving record checks. The Tri-County Metropolitan Transportation District of Oregon (Tri-Met) in Portland, Oregon, reports that they do not accept applications unless there are at least three references listed. They also require applicants to perform "work demonstration tests" in which candidates must perform certain movements that demonstrate their capability to perform the types of movements they will be required to do on the job (such as reaching, assisting people in wheelchairs, etc.).

#### *Requiring New Employees to Attest That They Understand Attendance Policies*

Transit agencies generally advise new employees of agency policies (including attendance policies) during

their orientation or initial training. However, only 19 of the 36 transit systems have adopted the practice of having employees formally attest, in writing, that they have read, understand, and agree to abide by the agency's attendance policies. Some agencies commented that such a technique has no impact on employee behavior, particularly with the FMLA in effect. This technique is regarded as a "reinforcer" by those who use it, one that helps highlight the significance of attendance, and is just a small part of the agencies' comprehensive approach to preventing and controlling absenteeism.

Pierce Transit attempts to minimize turnover among new employees by being candid with their job applicants about the difficult nature of the relief bus operator job. Each job applicant is given a three-page report entitled "The Life of a Relief Transit Operator at Pierce Transit" that they must read and sign prior to being interviewed (Appendix D). This report describes the relatively unattractive aspects of working for an employer whose first shift begins at 3:31 a.m. and whose last shift ends at 1:11 a.m. The report describes how relief operators have no choice as to which shift they will work or what routes they will drive. The report also describes scenarios in which work assignments might be changed with only 1 hour's notice, and applicants are advised that there is no guarantee of when they will be promoted to a full-time operator's position. In short, Pierce Transit emphasizes that during the time a new employee is a relief bus operator, it will be very difficult for them to schedule their private lives around what their employer expects of them. The agency believes that this candid, realistic report helps to minimize turnover they might otherwise experience with newly hired and trained bus operators.

## Health Maintenance

Transit agencies would be wise to provide more emphasis on helping their employees maintain good health. In his 1994 report, "Working on the Hot Seat: Urban Bus Operators" (1), Gary Evans noted that "Urban bus drivers die at a younger age from coronary heart disease, typically retire earlier with physical disabilities and are absent from work at much higher rates for gastrointestinal, musculoskeletal and nervous disorders than their contemporaries in numerous other occupational groups." In other driver-related industries, health maintenance has proven to be a primary concern for managers (20). The academic and trade literature related to truck drivers lists alcohol and drug abuse (21--23), fatigue (24--26), back pain (27,28), and "lifestyle hazards" including food, nutrition, and exercise (29) as the primary reasons for health related problems and absence. Henrickson suggests that an agency must stress that they operate in an organizational culture that does not condone drug and alcohol abuse (20,30).

Although this report concerns itself with employee availability, the issue of health care also has substantial impacts on the budgets of all employers, including transit agencies. San Diego Transit's Vice-President of Human Resources, Frank Shipman, reports that health care expenditures at his agency have increased by 10 percent or more in each of the past 2 years, following relatively low increases in the previous 5 years. Estimates of health care costs in the United States exceeded \$600 billion in 1995 (20,31). One forecast is for these costs to increase to 15 percent of the gross national product or \$15,200 per employee per year by the year 2000 (20,32). Subsequently, transit agencies and other public and private employers have taken many steps to address the causes of poor health or injury.

## Wellness Programs

The vast majority (30 of 36) of transit agencies reported that they offer various types of "Wellness Programs." The intent of such programs is to encourage employees to stay healthy and fit, for their own benefit and for the benefit of the agency. A particularly popular element of wellness programs is on-site fitness centers (one agency calls them "fitness factories") with workout rooms featuring weights and other exercise apparatus. Seven agencies reported providing such facilities. Another agency reported that they provide exercise classes after hours for all interested employees.

Many other agencies reported that a variety of health self-improvement courses are offered, either through their medical benefits program or through the agency's Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Courses are offered that address such subjects as smoking cessation, nutritional education, weight reduction, diabetes control, kidney disease prevention, allergies, heart disease, prostate cancer, and stress management.

A few agencies reported having health fairs on site, where information on available health and fitness services can be obtained. At these fairs, checks on blood pressure, heart rate, cholesterol counts, bone density, body fat, and glucose levels are performed by health maintenance organization (HMO) providers or nurses from local hospitals. Other agencies focus on a particular health concern by conducting "heart days," "cancer days," or providing flu shots. In addition, a clear majority (23) of the 36 transit agencies reported they do provide physical exams at no cost to employees. One agency reported that they pay for "nicotine patches" that help some smokers quit. Another agency reported success with a program that offered dollars for pounds lost in a weight reduction program.

At Pierce Transit, a joint labor--management "Health Express Committee" has been established to provide opportunities for employees to learn about ways in which

they can take control of their own health and well-being and to encourage them to incorporate this information **into** their daily lifestyle choices (33). This committee has engaged in virtually all of the activities noted above. It is largely self-supporting and conducts a number of fundraisers throughout the year to raise money for the purchase of exercise equipment, incentives, and snacks and supplies for promotional events. These fundraisers also promote healthy lifestyle choices by serving healthful, low fat meals. Pierce Transit supports this program by providing time for employees to serve on the committee, designating space for exercise facilities and wellness events, assisting with the cost of incentives, subsidizing flu shots, and purchasing books and newsletters for the wellness library located in the human resources department (34). The Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District has a Health and Fitness Committee that is engaged in coordinating several events such as basketball tournaments, golf outings, softball and football games, and picnics. The committee promotes a healthy, active life-style.

Some transit agencies (13 of 36) provide discounts for employees who join health clubs or programs offered at places such as the YMCA. One transit agency reported that insurance premiums are reduced for employees who join fitness programs. One agency has tried to promote discounted health club memberships, but "didn't have enough takers to put the program in place." In spite of that, the agency is still trying to establish such a benefit for its employees. There is an undeniable belief that such programs are positive and can help reduce absenteeism, and that it is a good benefit to offer people who do want to improve themselves. In addition, both Marnie Slakey, Human Resources Director for Pierce Transit, and Bill Volk, Executive Director at Champaign-Urbana, report that the work of their health committees helps to improve general morale at their agencies, which they believe helps to minimize absenteeism.

Unfortunately, no transit system surveyed for this report had quantified the benefits of their wellness programs, and there was a lack of consensus on the effects of such programs on absenteeism. Clearly these are programs of a positive nature, but comments received from transit agencies indicate that the impact of such voluntary programs on overall attendance is more indirect and difficult to judge. One agency believes such "programs are effective for those people who truly want to make a change in their lifestyle, but have minimal impact on those who really don't care." Among other comments received were that wellness programs tend to be used by highly motivated people who generally exhibit good attendance habits with or without such programs. However, there is a considerable amount of evidence that wellness programs can have significant effects on attendance and the bottom line performance of other employers.

Other industries have documented the benefits of implementing wellness programs. A 4-year study of Control Data Corporation employees gathered statistics on exercise, weight, smoking, hypertension, alcohol use, cholesterol, and seat belt use. Results indicated that people with hypertension required 25 percent more hospital days than nonhypertensive employees; overweight workers incurred 11 percent higher costs than workers of normal weight; and smokers of one or more packs a day had medical claim costs 18 percent higher (20,35). Kansas found that state employees who smoked cigarettes spent 69 percent more time in the hospital than nonsmokers (20,36). Birmingham, Alabama, established a wellness program after its medical costs increased by more than twice the national rate from 1975 to 1983. A study was established in which 1,100 employees were assigned to control and wellness groups. Both groups received thorough health screenings and a health risk appraisal. However, only the wellness group received the benefits of a health awareness meeting every 2 weeks, a fitness center, programs on smoking cessation, weight reduction, stress management, cholesterol modification, and hypertension control. The results showed fewer employees smoking, fewer workers with cholesterol levels of over 200, and fewer with high blood pressure. Overall medical costs per employee remained virtually the same from 5 years earlier. Hospital days per 1,000 employees fell from 926 in 1984 and 569 in 1985 to 260 each in 1989 and 1990 (37,38).

The Adolf Coors Brewing Company in Golden, Colorado, has built their wellness programs into the culture of the company. They estimate that they save \$1.9 million annually in terms of medical costs, reduced sick days, and increased productivity, or \$6.15 for every dollar invested (20,39,40). The company has a preventative health program that includes a comprehensive battery of screening tests, an on-site fitness center, cardiac and orthopedic rehabilitation facilities, dental and medical clinics, and mammography and cervical screening programs (41). Wellness center participants miss an average of 2.0 workdays per year because of illness or injuries; nonparticipants miss 3.1 days. The company uses a Health Hazard Appraisal, detailing personalized information on the chance of premature death or disease, to achieve employee (and spouse) awareness. Coors' experience identified elements essential for a successful wellness program, including support and direction from the chief executive officer, making it a stated priority, hiring or subcontracting with qualified specialists, and establishing a separate budget (20,39,40).

Exercise is a major component of a wellness program. Exercise is directly related to weight control and muscle and tendon strengthening. One insurance company study indicated that sick days dropped from eight to three for employees who exercised (20). In another study, women

employees who exercised twice a week incurred \$600 a year in medical costs, compared with \$1,500 by those who did not exercise. The savings for men were comparable (\$561 versus \$1,220) (20). In the Boston Police Department, a pilot program was created to determine the potential impact of a weight loss program. Seventy-eight members of the department, who were 20 percent over their ideal weight, attended a 12-week nutrition training program. Two-thirds finished the program, reporting an average weight loss of 7.5 pounds per employee. One year later, 49 percent self-reported an average weight loss of 24 pounds (20,42).

Sometimes incentives are used to get people to take part in wellness programs. In Glendale, Arizona, 98 percent of the city employees participated in wellness programs, up from 40 percent the previous year. The reason for this was the waiving of the \$150 deductible for medical insurance. Glendale estimates that it saved \$10 for every dollar spent by reducing absenteeism and on-the-job accidents and through low and infrequent health insurance rate increases (20,43).

Most studies of employers that have implemented wellness programs report a variety of positive results. Behavioral change can be encouraged by a seven-step wellness intervention that includes: (1) awareness, (2) education, (3) incentives, (4) programs, (5) self-action, (6) follow-up, and (7) support (20). Results are also likely to occur if there is one-to-one outreach by counselors.

#### *Programs That Emphasize Safety and Accident Prevention*

Thirty of 36 transit agencies reported that they do have training programs that emphasize safety and accident prevention. Virtually every transit agency emphasizes safety in the training of new bus operators. This is such a standard activity that no transit system commented on any special features. One agency reported that representatives of the state's worker's compensation programs have worked closely with the transit system to identify safer methods for accomplishing various tasks.

MUNI in San Francisco has had more than its share of assaults on bus operators in the past few years. The agency has gone to great lengths to install digital cameras on buses in high-risk areas to help discourage attacks on bus operators or passengers. They have also instituted a local program similar to "Guardian Angels." The agency has hired passengers who have previously been the cause of disturbances themselves and given them training in human interaction and dispute resolution. These employees then ride the buses and help to defuse any situations that appear to be potentially volatile. In addition, the agency

has identified several operators who have been in a number of assaults. Although no one wants to appear to blame the victim, some operators have aggressive or defensive approaches, and don't help their own cause when interacting with certain types of passengers. The agency provides special training on interpersonal skills, and tries to emphasize that the operator's attitude and behavior can affect the behavior of the other party.

#### *Ergonomic Equipment or Work Stations*

Twenty-three of 36 transit agencies reported that they have been mindful of finding ergonomic equipment for a variety of applications throughout the agency. Ergonomics represents the study of equipment design to reduce operator fatigue and discomfort (44). Examples of ergonomic solutions reported by surveyed transit agencies include specially contoured chairs for those who sit all day (such as telephone information personnel); pads, keyboards, and wristbands that help prevent or minimize carpal tunnel syndrome; adjustable Recaro air-float seats for bus operators; telescoping and tilting steering wheels in buses; portable back pillow supports; and properly sized work tables for mechanics to help avoid neck and shoulder stress.

Also, more attention is being paid to the movements employees frequently make that can result in strained muscles or other injuries. For example, one agency reported on a simple stick with an eraser on one end that allows operators to change the messages on the headsigns of buses without reaching or stretching unnecessarily. Another cited the inclusion of remote-controlled side-view mirrors on all buses, which are clearly safer and easier for drivers to adjust. Another agency noted that their risk management staff includes an ergonomic specialist who helps identify better equipment and offers training on appropriate ways to use ergonomic equipment.

Perhaps the greatest attention has been paid to the bus operator's workstation. Research has shown that 80.5 percent of bus operators have experienced some degree of back and neck pain compared with 50.7 percent of nonoperators, and the incidence of reported low back pain is 20 percent higher for operators than for nonoperators (45). Frequent awkward postures, muscular effort, vibration, and shock, as well as exposure to whole body vibration and prolonged sitting in a constrained position, contribute to overworking the lumbar spine and its supportive structures, causing low back pain (46). BC Transit of Vancouver, British Columbia, has developed standards that are applied to the workstations of all new buses it purchases. These include pneumatic ride seats instead of spring suspension seats, tilting and telescoping steering columns, power assist steering, left-side convex mirrors, and relocated fareboxes. With these modified specifications, bus

operator workstation-related injuries have been reduced by 78 percent, and there has been an 86 percent reduction in the amount of time off per injury (47,48).

The study funded through Transit Cooperative Research Program (TRCP) Report 25 was intended to further the research into improving the workstation of bus operators (47). More than 135 operators provided input on their major concerns with the workstation. The workstation that was ultimately designed was validated by using JACK (a CAD-based human simulation software package) and by having a prototype driven by 24 bus operators from different transit agencies. All 24 operators rated the prototype better than the standard bus workstation for each of the major design criteria that included:

- An 18-inch steering wheel,
- A tilt-telescoping steering wheel,
- Remotely activated mirrors,
- A farebox no taller than 36 inches,
- A pin joint suspension driver's seat,
- A seat with air-actuated lumbar and back side bolster support features,
- A turn signal platform located on the floor angled at 30 degrees,
- Instrument panels adjustable for height and divided into left, center, and right,
- An annunciator system that ideally would allow hands-free communication, and
- A keypad and small display to be the central interface with the bus electronic system.

A cost-benefit analysis of the recommended workstation was developed based on information from Connecticut Transit and BC Transit. The conclusion reached was that the additional costs associated with modifying the operator workstation could be recovered through savings in medical costs and worker's compensation costs within 3.7 to 8.1 years. This estimate was regarded as conservative and in keeping with the positive results that were observed at BC Transit and at an automobile carpet manufacturing facility that also implemented an ergonomic redesign of workstations (46).

### Addressing Off-the-Job Employee Needs

Employee attendance can be affected by factors relating to other responsibilities in their lives. The stress of dealing with family responsibilities, marital problems, financial problems, drug or alcohol abuse, and a host of other conditions can wear on the best-intentioned employee. EAPs are designed to help employees deal with personal issues in a confidential manner. (In fact, one agency reported that their local bargaining unit manages an EAP.) Although the immediate benefit is toward the well-being of

the employee, transit agencies recognize the benefits as well. They realize that EAPs can help employees with particularly difficult problems get back to work as quickly as possible. Thirty-five of 36 agencies reported that they offered EAPs. Transit agencies noted that between 10 and 15 percent of their work force use services offered through their EAPs each year. EAPs help relieve job-related stress and other problems that can negatively affect attendance, at little or no cost to the employee. There is consensus on the value of EAPs, though it is difficult to judge its impact on attendance.

One-half of all the agencies responding to the survey indicated that they did provide critical stress assistance to employees who have been through some sort of shock or trauma. Examples might include when a train operator runs over a person who has decided to commit suicide by jumping in front of the train or after a bus operator has been assaulted or threatened with a weapon. The significant factor is to have the employee see someone who is skilled in dealing with such trauma as soon as possible. These resources are usually made available through the agency's EAP.

The survey also asked if the agency provided child care or elder care. Single parent households are not uncommon, and the norm is for both parents in a two-parent household to work. Parents must occasionally respond to their children's needs during work hours. Day care might be provided by a friend or family member who might not always be able to perform such duties, causing employees to have to scramble for substitutes or miss work altogether. This is becoming an increasingly significant factor as the percentage of women within transit agency work forces increases. At Pierce Transit, women now comprise 40 percent of all bus operators. In addition, the "sandwich generation" of employees with children and aging parents might also have responsibilities of caring for elderly parents that could cause them to miss work.

VIA in San Antonio, Texas, was the only transit agency found to provide child day care at their main operating facility, where all agency personnel, including bus operators and mechanics, could avail themselves of the service. The hours of operation are 5:30 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. When the day care center was first opened in 1990, the hours were from 5:00 a.m. to 9 p.m., but over time, the agency found that those extended hours were not necessary. The center was developed after the agency sought and received input from employees on their needs. With full support from their policy board, VIA decided to manage the facility themselves to ensure the highest degree of control over the quality of child care staff, policies, and procedures. VIA pays highly competitive salaries to their professional staff at the center. The enhanced compensation scale, which includes VIA benefits and a career

ladder, has enabled the center to attract professional teachers dedicated to quality care for children and minimize the turnover rate. The center cares for children from birth until the age of seven. The tuition fees are as follows:

Full-time child/grandchild of VIA employee:	
Infants and toddlers	\$75 weekly
Preschool (2-7)	\$70 weekly
Nieces/nephews:	
Infants and toddlers	\$90 weekly
Preschool (2-7)	\$80 weekly
Drop-in:	
All ages for up to 9 hours	\$20
daily All ages hourly	\$ 4 hourly

The center currently serves 75 children, all but a few of whom are children or grandchildren of the 1,600 VIA employees that work at the transit facility. The child development center must be subsidized at a rate of approximately \$100,000 per year. No one at VIA could say if the center was cost effective in terms of saving at least \$100,000 per year through reduced absenteeism. However, the center has been in operation since 1990 and has proven to be extremely popular. Representatives of VIA believe that the day care center does help reduce absenteeism and makes the agency more attractive to job applicants. They believe it has helped the morale of the employees. Parent/employees no longer worry about their children, and those who are able visit them during breaks. There is no thought of discontinuing the service; instead, they are considering providing school age care during the holidays and summer as well as care for sick children.

Some transit agencies report that they are extremely reluctant to place a child care facility on their property because of liability concerns, such as an infant being dropped or a child falling off a swing. VIA officials were aware of the possibility of children being injured while on their property, but did not consider the issue a major obstacle. According to Human Resources Director Michael Catalani, public agencies in Texas enjoy tort liability limits of \$350,000. The agency is self-insured. After 9 years of operation, there have been incidents where children at the center have fallen, chipped their teeth, scraped their knees, or suffered other relatively minor injuries; however, VIA has never experienced a lawsuit nor have they had to settle out of court to deal with a child's injury.

The Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (LACMTA) reported providing day care services on site, but only at their administrative headquarters. These services are available to employees with children from 8 weeks of age to pre-kindergarten. According to LACMTA managers, this program improved attendance, enabling employees to return to work more quickly, and improved morale as well among administrative employees.

Those with children at the day care center could easily check on them during their breaks and in between shifts, whereas other employees simply enjoyed seeing babies and toddlers. However, LACMTA does not have plans for instituting day care centers at any of their operating facilities. That agency is currently under severe budget strains, and they don't have operating facilities as large as the 1,600-employee facility in San Antonio. They do have an agreement with a private day care provider that extends a 10 percent discount on day care services to LACMTA's employees in exchange for the agency's assistance in promoting the private company by placing brochures and posters in LACMTA facilities.

The Regional Transit District (RTD) in Denver, Colorado, had studied the possibility of providing a day care facility on site after receiving feedback from employees on the importance of this type of service. The agency subsequently decided against having a facility on site, citing concerns over liability and the potential for grievances. However, it appears they are going forward with a pilot program that will subsidize two off-site day care centers for a total of \$50,000 a year. Employees in need of this service will be able to take advantage of reduced rates at these centers, which are located near RTD's operating facilities. Initially, the union expressed concern over providing direct subsidies to the employees who use the service. This was believed to be a direct form of compensation that would need to be extended in some other equal fashion to all employees. Although this benefit is being championed by a number of board members at RTD, managers are concerned that employees' expectation levels will be raised in ways that the agency will not be able to afford in the future.

Sun Tran in Tucson, Arizona, reported that their city's new paratransit center has added a day care facility, but none of the fixed route bus operators are able to use it because their shifts begin either too early or too late for the hours the day care center is open. However, Sun Tran has budgeted grant funds to construct a day care center in their new fixed route facility.

New Jersey Transit offers optional tax sheltered spending accounts (flexible spending accounts) for dependent care expenses. A handful of other agencies noted that they provide information on the location and availability of day care centers nearest employees' homes, but they don't provide financial assistance, nor do they assume liability in providing the information.

### Providing Incentives to Come to Work

In its most generic form, the incentive payment is any compensation that has been designed to recognize some specific accomplishment on the employee's part. In general, it

TABLE 1

DETAILS AND EFFECTIVENESS OF PROGRAMS ALLOWING EMPLOYEES TO CASH IN SICK LEAVE UPON RETIREMENT

Transit Agency	Total Sick Hours That May Be Accrued	Total Sick Hours That May Be Cashed Out at Retirement	Is This Effective in Reducing Absenteeism?
Milwaukee County (Wis.)	120 days	110 days	Yes
Sun Tran (Albuquerque, N.Mex.)	1,200 hours	96 hours	Yes, for some
Roaring Fork (Aspen, Colo.)	400 hours	133 hours	Yes, for most
Sun Tran (Tucson, Ariz.)	600 hours	300 hours	No (50% is not deemed enough)
Orange County TA (Calif.)	Unlimited	160 hours	No
Spokane Transit (Wash.)	180 days	80 days after 25 years of service	Not much
Ann Arbor (Mich.)	Unlimited	3 months	Fairly effective
Broward County (Fla)	Unlimited	480 hours	No
Tri-Met (Portland, Oreg.)	1,496 hours	748 hours	Not really

Note: TA = Transportation Authority.

is hoped that the prospect of the incentive payment will inspire the desired performance (49). In the transit industry, employee attendance is easily defined and highly measurable, and consequently lends itself to incentive programs. Taxpayers, who ultimately pay for public services, often fail to support incentives if they are perceived as a bonus over and above what has to be paid if there is no improved service to show for it. However, other research indicates that public anxiety is most likely to arise when significant bonuses are paid to a handful of senior managers. The payment of modest incentives to a larger group of employees has not caused a similar reaction (49).

Do incentives help reduce absenteeism? Does the opportunity to be rewarded with money or time off help prevent absenteeism? One-third of the surveyed transit agencies said no, one-third said yes, and one-third offered no comment. A variety of incentives have been offered, with very mixed results. These methods are described here in more detail.

#### *Cashing in Sick Leave at Retirement*

A clear majority (25) of the 36 transit agencies allow their employees to cash in sick leave at retirement, although the percentage or total number of hours that can be cashed in varies considerably. Transit agencies also differ in the number of hours employees are allowed to accrue. The intent of such programs is to encourage employees not to use sick leave by paying them for some of its value upon retirement. Table 1 shows samples of the different incentives that are provided.

These samples show that the practice of paying for unused sick leave upon retirement varies considerably from agency to agency. Some agencies don't offer this incentive

at all. Some pay as much as 880 hours of sick leave upon retirement, whereas others pay as few as 96 hours. One agency requires an employee to work a minimum of 25 years to qualify for this benefit, whereas another requires only 10 years. Some transit agencies have caps on how many total sick hours or days may be accrued, whereas others allow employees to accrue an unlimited amount.

No patterns of success emerge from the responses to the survey. The specific provisions of these incentives have been the subject of negotiations between labor and management at each transit agency. No transit agency reported that they have done any true analysis of the effectiveness of this incentive. Some agencies expressed concern over allowing employees the right to accrue unlimited amounts of sick leave. They report instances of workers approaching retirement who find doctors that recommend the employee not work due to stress, soft tissue injury, or some other condition that is difficult to confirm or deny. This allows employees to be paid full time while staying away from work during a substantial portion of their final year. Other long-term employees are reported to take advantage of the time they have accumulated to have surgery on nagging conditions while they still have full insurance. They recover while getting paid full wages, and still have enough sick leave in the bank to receive lump sum payments upon retirement for the hours they did not use.

#### *Cashing in Sick Leave at the End of the Year*

Thirteen of 36 agencies provide employees with the opportunity to cash in a certain amount of sick leave at the end of each calendar year. Examples of this are provided in Table 2.

TABLE 2

DETAILS AND EFFECTIVENESS OF PROGRAMS ALLOWING EMPLOYEES TO CASH IN UNUSED SICK LEAVE AT THE END OF THE YEAR

Transit Agency	Minimum Sick Hour Balance Required After Cash Out	Sick Hours That May Be Cashed Out at the End of the Year	Is it Effective in Reducing Absenteeism?
Sun Tran (Albuquerque, N. Mex.)	1,200	96	Yes, for some
COTA (Columbus, Ohio)	120	Any amount over 120	Maintenance: Yes
OCTA (Calif.)	120	Any amount over 120	Operations: Not much
Ann Arbor TA (Mich.)	200	Any amount over 200	Not really
			Helps good and average
Houston Metro (Tex.)	64	96	Yes
Tri-Met (Portland, Oreg.)	1,400	96 at 50% of value	Not really
VOTRAN (Daytona Beach, Fla.)	288	96	Yes, approximately 35% of employees use this

Note: COTA = Central Ohio Transit Authority; TA = Transportation Authority; VOTRAN = Volusia County Transit; OCTA = Orange County Transportation Authority

Dekalb County, Georgia, adopted a sick leave incentive program that rewarded employees by means of monetary stipends. When an employee accrued a sick leave base of 30 days or more, he or she received straight pay for one-quarter of the unused sick days for the previous year. The remaining three-quarters of the sick days were added to the accumulating base. During the period from 1983 to 1987, Dekalb experienced a reduction of 5.48 days of sick leave used per employee. It was estimated that this amounted to a productivity improvement of 15.37 person years of work for the organization (50).

There appears to be more favorable opinions toward the effectiveness of this method than toward the method of paying for sick leave at retirement. The benefit is more immediate and noticeable to the employee. It is typically provided at a time of year (after the holidays) when extra cash comes in handy to pay the bills. Employees who view sick leave as a "right" (rather than insurance) usually see a direct one-for-one return on their trading of sick leave.

Transit agencies may be reluctant to provide "extra pay" to employees who don't use their sick leave, but at least they don't pay the absent employee sick leave plus time-and-a-half to a replacement. In addition, the sick leave paid for annually is paid at current pay rates, rather than the higher rates that would be in effect upon an employee's retirement.

#### *Trading Unused Sick Leave for Annual Leave*

Only 4 of the 36 transit agencies surveyed indicated that they allow employees to trade unused sick leave for annual leave. This provision would comply with a theory that time off is more important to an employee than money. Transit agencies might realize savings if there are sufficient employees to cover an employee's shift without requiring overtime.

None of the four agencies that use this incentive indicate that it is effective. Although one of the four agencies enjoys very low absenteeism, it is believed that here employees are more interested in trading unused sick leave for pay rather than more time off. Two other agencies indicated that only employees who have always exhibited good attendance use this incentive. The other agency rates itself a 10 on the "absenteeism as a problem" scale, meaning they perceive absenteeism to be a serious problem at their agency.

#### *Lottery Games or Prizes for Employees with Good Attendance*

Only 2 of 36 agencies reported the use of potential prizes as incentives for good attendance. The Milwaukee County Transit Agency provides \$35 gift certificates every four months to bus operators with perfect attendance. These certificates can be used at local restaurants or shopping malls. All operators who have missed no more than 2 days over a 4-month time frame are eligible for gift certificates. Approximately 45 such certificates are awarded on a lottery basis every 4 months. Although not everyone eligible wins a gift certificate, operators realize they will receive one if their attendance is perfect for the 4 months. It is a popular program that has been in place for many years and is supported by both management and labor. Managers at the agency cannot document the program's effects on absenteeism, but they believe it has merit. Maintenance employees at Milwaukee County Transit are eligible for similar sized rewards if they miss no time due to on-the-job injuries as part of a safety and attendance incentive program.

The Central Ohio Transit Authority (COTA) also uses a lottery for its maintenance employees, which is part of an industrial safety program. To be eligible for the lottery cash prizes, a maintenance employee must have both perfect

attendance and no industrial accidents for the quarter. Everyone who has accomplished that receives \$10. Approximately 50 of 150 maintenance employees meet these standards each quarter. Every employee who has met those standards is then also eligible for a \$40 award. Twelve such cash prizes are selected in a lottery type of drawing each quarter. One eligible employee also wins \$500 each quarter on a lottery basis. This program is extremely popular with employees. Everyone gets at least a small prize, about 25% receive a larger cash award, and one employee wins a substantial amount. The lottery is an exciting event each quarter that adds a little zest to the workplace. There are no reported bad feelings from those who don't win. The agency believes this program has a positive impact on attendance and will continue the program.

Pedalino and Gamboa reported on a unique lottery program employed at a manufacturing and distribution plant during the 1970s (51). Each day employees received a playing card upon arrival at work. At the end of the week, the player (employee) with the best poker hand received \$20. The authors reported a post-baseline absenteeism reduction of 18.3 percent. In another private sector example, the New York Life Insurance Company designed an incentive program that used positive reinforcement principles to reward employees who did not use their sick leave. Employees who did not use their sick leave had their names entered into a lottery. The reward was a savings bond with a value that ranged from \$200 to \$1,000. During

the first year of this program, absenteeism decreased by 21 percent (50).

#### *Cash Awards for Perfect Attendance*

Seventeen of the 36 transit agencies surveyed indicated that they offer cash awards for perfect attendance. The amounts of the awards vary substantially, from one day's pay to as much as \$1,000 for a year of perfect attendance. Some agencies award cash or certificates based on quarterly performance, whereas others base awards on an annual basis. A sampling of specific techniques is provided in Table 3.

It is impossible to draw firm conclusions from this limited amount of information, but there is evidence that incentives might work when provided in certain ways. Every agency that indicated that financial incentives are ineffective offer very small rewards for perfect attendance (approximately \$100 per year.) Those who believe that incentives do work generally pay more substantial amounts (up to \$1,000 per year.) Another agency that paid \$500 for perfect annual attendance, but is not listed in Table 3, also agreed that incentives were effective. That agency is not listed in the table because it had to temporarily discontinue their entire incentive program when they found that some employees were falsifying accident reports in order to win an additional \$500 for a perfect safety record.

TABLE 3  
DETAILS AND EFFECTIVENESS OF CASH AWARDS FOR PERFECT ATTENDANCE

Transit Agency	Amount of Award	Time Required for Perfect Attendance	Does It Help Reduce Absenteeism?
Milwaukee County Transit (Wis.)	\$35 gift certificate to Restaurants or shops	Four months	Yes
COTA (Ohio)	\$500	One year	Yes
WMATA (Wash., D.C.)	One day's pay	One year	No
Roaring Fork Transit (Aspen, Colo.)	\$250	Six months	Yes
Spokane Transit Authority (Wash.)	\$100	One year	No
MARTA	One day's pay	One year	No
New Jersey Transit	\$150	One year	Don't know
York County Transit (York, Pa)	Points toward items in household goods catalogue	Monthly, quarterly, yearly	Yes, employees with Perfect attendance went from 3 to 13
Denver RTD (Colo.)	One day's pay	One year	Yes, if publicized
Connecticut Transit	One-half day's pay	Six months	Don't know
Miami Valley Regional TA (Ohio)	10 cents per hour for all straight time worked that quarter	Quarterly, paid in a lump sum	No
TARC (Louisville, Ky.)	5 cents per hour pay increase, paid the next year	One year	Not very effective (20 of 550 benefited), but a Start
Bi-State (St. Louis, Mo.)	\$50	Quarterly	Don't know
Pierce County Transit (Tacoma, Wash.)	\$100	Quarterly	Yes
Santa Clara County Transportation Authority (Calif.)	\$250	Quarterly	Unscheduled absences Reduced from 12.5% to 9.8%

Note: COTA = Central Ohio Transit Authority; WMATA = Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority; MARTA = Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority; RTD = Regional Transit District; TARC = Transit Authority of River City.

As appears to be the case in virtually all incentive programs, opinions were not unanimous on the effectiveness of substantial monetary incentives. The Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority reported abandoning a program that paid up to \$500 a year for perfect attendance after evaluating their program and concluding it did not change behavior or reduce absenteeism. San Diego Transit instituted what appeared to be an attractive incentive program in 1993. Represented employees at San Diego Transit were eligible for \$250 for each calendar quarter of perfect attendance (part-time employees were eligible for \$125 per calendar quarter). According to Vice-President for Human Resources, Frank Shipman, attendance improved in the first year of the program, but the next year absenteeism began to climb until it reached its old levels by 1995. The incentive program was discontinued as a result of collective bargaining in the following contractual agreement reached in 1996.

On the other hand, the Santa Clara County Transportation Authority reported great success with their program, which offers as much as \$1,000 per year to those with perfect attendance. Awards of \$250 are earned for each quarter of perfect attendance. Santa Clara's program differs from San Diego's in one significant way: the quarters are "rolling quarters," not calendar quarters. In other words, if an employee should become sick one day, their "next quarter" to achieve perfect attendance starts the day they return to work. This provides each employee with continuous incentive for perfect attendance even though they might miss work 1 day. San Diego's Vice-President for Operations, Richard Murphy, believes that the lack of the "rolling quarter" provision probably hurt the chances for the incentive program's success at his agency. Santa Clara's program has been in place for 2 years, and unscheduled absences have been reduced from 12.5 percent to 9.8 percent. Managers credit the incentive program for this dramatic shift. Each reduction of 1 percent in absenteeism saves the agency \$1 million per year.

The Capital Area Transportation Authority (CATA) in Lansing, Michigan, also reports great satisfaction with its substantial incentive program. At CATA, all represented employees are eligible for rewards of \$125 for each calendar month of perfect attendance, and an additional \$500 for perfect attendance for a full year. Hence, represented employees can earn up to \$2,000 per year for perfect attendance. Employees are also eligible to receive \$75 for each calendar month in which they miss only 1 day and \$50 for any calendar month if they miss no more than 2 days. Part-time employees are also eligible for bonuses of a proportionally lower amount. Out of approximately 150 eligible employees, 56 had perfect attendance in 1998. It must be noted, however, that CATA provides no contractual sick leave pay as most transit agencies do. In other words, employees who miss work because they are sick do

not get paid. Dave Smith, Director of Operations for CATA, reported that the incentive program has helped reduce unscheduled absenteeism at the agency from approximately 3 percent to 1 percent. Although he would not claim the program saved the agency money on a pure dollar basis, he states that the program helps the agency achieve its overall goals of excellent attendance, positive labor/management relations, and outstanding customer service. Mr. Smith notes that in addition to offering incentives, CATA is extremely firm in administering progressive discipline for those who violate attendance policies. In spite of that firm approach, there have been no grievances submitted in the last 4 years. He believes the more positive labor/management relationship saves the agency time and expense due to minimal grievances and avoided expenses associated with arbitration and negotiations.

#### *"Team Competition" for Awards*

Only three transit agencies reported that they use a team competition for cash awards, where cash awards are based on the attendance records of preselected groups of employees. York County Transit uses incentives on both an individual performance basis and a team basis. Although they believe individual performance incentives have worked, team incentives have been less effective.

The Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) offered an incentive to their maintenance employees that was focused on productivity, but included an additional \$100 per year for every maintenance employee if the entire maintenance work force experienced less than 3 percent unscheduled absences during the year. This policy proved to be ineffective. The "peer pressure" that was expected to occur didn't happen. Senior employees in particular showed no signs of bowing to any pressure from other employees. OCTA revised their program to focus on individual incentives for the maintenance employees. Each individual that achieves 3 months of perfect attendance earns \$50. If an employee achieves perfect attendance during all four quarters, they receive an additional \$100 (for a total of \$300 for the year.) This program has proven to be popular and effective. Of the 230 maintenance employees eligible for the awards, approximately 165 have achieved perfect attendance for the entire year.

The Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority recently instituted a group incentive for all represented employees. If all bargaining unit employees as a group reach certain attendance goals, they receive percentage bonuses of approximately \$36 per quarter. Although this amount appears small in comparison to the \$250 an individual employee can earn with perfect attendance in a quarter, it represents a tangible benefit that even those who don't have perfect attendance can realize. Managers report that

the union is not particularly supportive of team-oriented awards because it tends to set one employee against another. However, it is part of the 5-year labor agreement.

#### *Other Techniques*

A variety of other techniques were identified as good attendance incentives. COTA holds an awards banquet for those with perfect attendance. Similarly, the Capital District Transit Authority (CDTA) in Albany, New York, holds an annual luncheon with the Executive Director for all employees with perfect attendance over the past year. A number of agencies offer time off rather than money for those with perfect attendance. Montgomery County Transit in Maryland provides 8 hours of annual leave for those with perfect attendance, whereas Volusia County Transit (VOTRAN) in Daytona Beach, Florida, provides an extra holiday for those with perfect attendance over 6 months. Two transit agencies mentioned that the attendance records of employees are part of the criteria for selecting employees of the month, quarter, and year. (It is likely most agencies consider attendance records when honoring their best employees.)

Citifare in Reno/Sparks, Nevada, does not require perfect attendance to receive monetary awards. Employees who have four or fewer occurrences of absence receive 1 percent of their gross wages as a bonus at the end of the year. They also allow employees to reduce their number of occurrences by one if they attend a class that emphasizes the importance of good attendance.

Sun Tran in Tucson, Arizona, allows employees to "sell back" incentive time they earn. In this system, employees are credited with a progressive number of hours for each month that they have perfect attendance. Every 6 months, employees can be paid for up to 16 hours of the "incentive time" they have earned. If they do take unscheduled absence, they can cash in their incentive hours, but they must start over again in the progressive cycle of accumulating hours. The agency believes that the program works pretty well, with a high percentage of employees realizing cash benefits from their participation and good attendance.

Sunline Transit in Thousand Palms, California, is the public transit provider in a region that has many small cities in a distant part of a large county. They have taken advantage of the vacuum in some services that can't be efficiently provided by small cities or a large geographic county. They have been very entrepreneurial in developing a "Sunline Services Division" within their agency that provides services such as street sweeping, graffiti removal, compressed natural gas fueling stations, and street light maintenance. Sunline gives their part-time bus operators first chance at working any of these jobs, in addition to

their bus operating assignments. This allows the part-time employees to supplement their income and earn benefits. It has resulted in a lower turnover rate among part-timers and, in addition to other efforts, a very positive relationship between management and labor.

Both the Metropolitan Atlanta Regional Transit Authority (MARTA) and the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) allow unused sick leave to be added to time worked for the purpose of calculating pension benefits at the time of retirement. The MTA allows every 20 days of accumulated sick leave to be converted to a month's worth of attendance for the purposes of calculating pension benefits upon retirement. Managers at MTA believe that this technique may only be a small part of the puzzle of achieving good attendance, but they believe it helps and they have no intention of discontinuing the practice. The Sacramento Regional Transit District allows unused sick leave to be "sold back" by employees and placed into their deferred compensation accounts. Employees are allowed to sell back as much as the limit of their deferred compensation plans allow (up to \$9,500 per year), but an employee must still retain at least 480 hours of sick leave in the bank. Transit managers at Sacramento regard this as more of a reward for those with good attendance than a behavior modifier for those with poor attendance. In short, they don't think this technique has helped decrease absenteeism.

#### *Summary of the Effectiveness of Incentives*

As noted earlier, there is no consensus on the subject of whether or not incentives are effective in improving attendance. Many transit managers feel very strongly that they are effective, whereas others feel equally strongly that they are not. Some transit managers feel that they might only reward people who would have good attendance records anyway. They might all be right with regards to how incentives have been implemented in their own agencies. Other local factors, such as the external environment of the transit agency, might influence attendance and the value of incentives. For instance, two different agencies reported that the high cost of living in their areas makes monetary rewards more attractive.

The questionnaire for this project included the following question: "Do you think your employees regard sick leave as a 'right' to be used whenever they want or as insurance for when it is really needed?" The vast majority (23) of the 33 agencies that responded to this question clearly believe their employees regard sick leave as a right to be used whenever needed for personal reasons. That being the case, it seems unlikely that a bus operator or mechanic would trade having 12 paid days off (worth approximately \$1,500) to gain a small bonus of approximately \$120 (one day's pay) earned by having perfect attendance.

Perhaps incentives need to be more substantive to be attractive enough to have an effect on attendance behavior. Most agencies (though not all) that offer larger cash awards report greater success with their incentive programs. A more substantial award is likely to make someone think a little harder when they are considering taking a "mental health" day off. Clearly, the experiences from the Santa Clara County Transportation Authority and the Capital Area Transportation Authority appear to support such a theory.

It might also be worthwhile to reconsider whether a year's worth of perfect attendance should be used as the standard when judging attendance performance. Perhaps it is unrealistic to expect bus operators in particular, who are often exposed to bad weather and hundreds of other people each day, to have perfect attendance over the course of an entire year. In addition, if an employee should have a legitimate illness early in the calendar year, they have no more incentive to achieve perfect attendance for the rest of the year. Most agencies that offer monetary awards for perfect attendance achieved during a month, quarter, 4 months, or half-year believe that their incentives have a positive effect on attendance. Similarly, the one agency that provides a bonus of 1 percent of gross wages to all represented employees who have four or fewer occurrences of sick leave enjoys a stable and relatively low rate of absenteeism.

Only one transit agency made reference to offering a specific class on the importance of good attendance. Such a course can help younger employees in particular to consider the value of banking sick leave. Three agencies reported that they believe more senior employees regard sick leave as insurance, whereas younger employees regard it as time that they may use as needed. Younger employees might not believe that they will work at the agency indefinitely, or they might not see themselves as being susceptible to injury or long-term illness. A class on attendance could feature employees who have suffered off-the-job injuries or sudden illnesses that incapacitated them for many weeks. They can testify how their bank of sick hours kept paychecks coming in to pay the bills.

Many transit agencies noted that incentives do not affect the behavior of employees with poor attendance nor do they change the behavior of those employees who already have excellent attendance patterns. However, the majority of employees fall somewhere in between the excellent and poor categories. Incentives can help reward and recognize the excellent employee and encourage the average employee to improve.

"Lottery Awards" for those with good attendance have worked quite well in the few places that reported using such incentives. These programs not only offer the possibility

of substantial awards to a few, but also add a little fun to the workplace. Those that offer almost everyone who qualifies at least a little something are that much more likely to be successful.

A few transit agencies that support incentives stated that they must be publicized and well known to the employees. They noted that it was also important to "make a big deal" out of the fact that employees have earned such awards by means of announcements on bulletin boards, in newsletters, at meetings, and through letters sent to the employees' homes (so the rest of the family can see that the employee has been honored.) In addition, a couple of agencies (and the literature as well) stressed that incentives work best when there is also good monitoring of unscheduled absences and progressive discipline is administered (52). This is consistent with Champaign-Urbana Executive Director Bill Volk's assessment that there is no single "silver bullet" that will reduce absenteeism at a transit agency. He believes a comprehensive approach of "carrots and sticks" and a heavy dose of respect toward employees is required to keep absenteeism in check.

One final note on the subject of incentives is how active (or inactive) transit agencies are in trying to determine their own employees' feelings about the issue. Only 25 percent of the agencies indicated that they have sought the opinions of their employees as to what incentives would be attractive to them. Although a number of the agencies responding affirmatively stated that they discussed such matters during labor/management meetings or during negotiations, only one agency indicated it used surveys to obtain their employees' attitudes toward incentives. Although methods of communication with a unionized work force might be a sensitive issue, it would seem that a better understanding of the feelings of the rank and file on this matter, gained through surveys that could be mutually developed between labor and management, would be helpful in the development of meaningful incentive programs. Goodman and Atkins suggest asking employees two questions about what can be done to motivate them to come to work. Those questions are "what privileges would people like to have that they do not have now?" and "what do you find aversive or irritating in the work setting?" (53).

### **Providing Employees with More Flexible Schedules**

In years past, represented transit employees (particularly bus operators) had little flexibility in their use of annual leave. In most cases, operators and mechanics were required to select their vacations for the coming year in weekly blocks. This made matters easier for bus operations schedulers, who have the difficult task of developing cost-efficient run assignments in accordance with a myriad of

TABLE 4

## METHODS AND EFFECTIVENESS OF GRANTING ANNUAL LEAVE IN DAILY INCREMENTS

Transit Agency	Features of Program	Effectiveness in Minimizing Absenteeism
Sun Tran (Albuquerque, N. Mex.)	No unreasonable request is refused	Somewhat helpful
Milwaukee County Transit	Can use 1 week in daily increments if the employee has 5 weeks vacation	Has been helpful as part of a broad benefits package that keeps turnover low
COTA (Columbus, Ohio)	One week in daily increments	Makes a difference (they wish they could offer time off in hourly increments)
WMATA (Washington, D.C.)	All vacation may be taken in daily increments and changed with supervisor's approval	Eliminates some degree of calling in sick for family obligations or emergencies
Citifare (Reno/Sparks, Nev.)	All vacation may be taken in daily increments	More an accommodation to employee needs than an incentive for better attendance
Sun Tran (Tucson, Ariz.)	One week in daily increments	Doesn't help that much because they grant so much time off
Tri-Met (Portland, Oreg.)	One week in daily increments	Helps attendance somewhat, also helps morale
Pierce Transit (Tacoma, Wash.)	One week in daily increments (referred to as "Wild Week")	Doesn't help a lot
Orange County Transit (Calif.)	Must bid 40 hours of vacation and the rest may be taken daily if available	Doesn't help a lot
Greater Cleveland RTA	Two weeks in daily increments	Works well in operations, but is a problem in maintenance

Note: COTA = Central Ohio Transit Agency; WMATA = Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority; RTA = Regional Transit Authority

rules contained in the collective bargaining agreement dealing with split shifts, straight runs, maximum hours of wheel time, etc.

This strict method of granting time off obviously conflicts with the unpredictable events in an individual's life. Transit employees might need a day off here and there for reasons ranging from family obligations to home repairs. However, their only way to have that day off was to call in sick, even though they were not sick. Use of sick leave in this fashion certainly contributes to a higher level of absenteeism. Transit agencies appear to now recognize the need for employees to have more flexibility in taking time off. A brief summary of the methods reported on are described here.

#### *Ability to Use Annual Leave in Daily Increments*

Twenty-nine of the 36 agencies surveyed reported that they allow employees the opportunity to use annual leave in daily increments. The most common program offered allows represented employees to take 1 week of their vacation time in daily increments; however, there are many other variations offered by different transit agencies (see Table 4).

The only negative feedback received regarding this flexibility provision was from the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority (RTA), where there have been problems in the maintenance divisions. Some mechanics

with high seniority chose to take every Friday off during the summer, making those entire weeks unavailable to mechanics with less seniority. RTA has advised the union to propose a solution, because they were the party that requested the flexibility program. Management has suggested that the program would work better if only 1 week was available in daily increments.

#### *Provision of Personal Days Off*

The vast majority (27 of 36) of transit agencies offer their employees personal days off that they may select for any reason. The number of personal days off ranged from one (Seattle) to five (Milwaukee). The benefits of the personal day off are virtually the same as those associated with granting the use of annual leave time in daily increments. Accordingly, the number of personal days offered by transit agencies may vary based on the number of annual days that an employee can take in daily increments.

#### *Ability to Swap Days Off*

A surprising number (15 of 36) of transit agencies reported that they allow employees, including bus operators, to swap days off with other employees. This program provides employees with flexibility at no cost to the employer. When employees need to take a work day off, they simply determine who works similar hours and arrange to trade places. There is no need for additional personnel to cover someone's absence and there is minimal administrative

paperwork, because both employees agree to collect the same paychecks. Operations managers want to be notified of the swap in order to keep track of their work force and make note of it on their run sheets, but the process can otherwise be quite informal. The employees do all of the work involved with the switch. Section 553.31 of the federal Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) states:

The FLSA provides that two individuals employed in any occupation by the same public agency, to substitute for one another during scheduled work hours in performance of work in the same capacity. Where one employee substitutes for another, each employee will be credited as if he or she had worked his or her normal work schedule for that shift.

Furthermore, the act states that the agency is required to be aware of the arrangement prior to the work being done, but they are not required to keep a record of the hours of the substitute work. An example of the procedures and forms used at Broward County Transit in Pompano Beach, Florida, is attached as Appendix E. Some agencies offer unlimited opportunities to swap assignments, whereas others limit such swaps to five per month. If an individual fails to report for the assignment agreed upon as part of the swap, they may lose the right to take advantage of swap opportunities for 1 year.

The Roaring Fork Transit agency reports frequent use of this provision, whereas Broward County Transit reports only occasional use. One transit agency noted that the "more responsible" employees use these swap provisions. They noted that no employee would want to swap with another employee who has an unreliable attendance record. There is, however, a general consensus that this is a tool that helps employees and the transit agency, and helps, at least a little, in minimizing absences.

#### *Other Flexibility Methods*

A few other strategies offering flexibility were reported by transit agencies. In Albuquerque, personal days, per se, are not granted, but 4 hours of vacation leave is provided for each 6-month period in which no sick leave is used. Two transit agencies noted that they believe 4-day workweeks should be regarded as a form of flexibility, whereby employees are able to accomplish personal tasks during a normal workweek without missing a day of work. Seattle Metro Transit noted that bus operators working 10/40 workweeks (10 hours a day, 4 days a week) have better attendance records than operators working 5-day weeks.

Similar benefits of the 10/40 workweek arrangement were reported by the City Street Department of Norfolk, Nebraska (54). This schedule provided employees with the flexibility to address some of their personal tasks that normally might require time off if the employee worked a

regular 5-day workweek. The program was deemed to be very beneficial because it reduced absenteeism and overtime, improved employee morale, and maximized the use of equipment.

Pierce Transit reported that they offer represented employees 80 hours of unpaid leave each year. This leave must be preapproved by a supervisor a day in advance (approval is not guaranteed), but it allows employees the opportunity to take care of personal business without taking sick or annual leave. Although this might still require paying someone overtime to cover the absent employee's shift, at least they are not also paying the absent employee sick or annual pay. The employee might hope to make up for the pay missed by working overtime during that pay period.

Perhaps the most intriguing technique reported was a "Paid Time Off" (PTO) program. In such a program there are no separate categories for sick leave, annual leave, or personal leave. These programs recognize that everyone needs time off, whether for illness, or vacation, or to take care of personal business or other obligations. Every employee is granted so many paid personal days off per year to be used for whatever purpose they choose. Although the time truly is the employee's own there are still rules that apply, and there remains the emphasis on taking time off in a planned fashion, approved by the employer. Although there are rules and consequences associated with a PTO program, there is a greater element of trust and less separate documentation of sick leave. In such systems, absence from work is regarded as a performance problem. Thus, employees with a record of excessive absenteeism can be dismissed for poor performance, rather than misuse of sick leave.

One of the objectives of a PTO program is to discourage taking "sick" time off when the employee is not really sick. Employees realize that those days used in that manner will come from their only bank of hours, which is there to cover vacation and personal business days as well. The Dallas Area Rapid Transit agency now uses this method of managing leave for their administrative employees. These employees used to be eligible for as many as 26 vacation days and 12 sick days each year, and had the right to carry over and bank all of their hours (making them eligible for huge payoffs at retirement.) PTO now consists of vacation and sick leave lumped together. New employees start at 17 total PTO days for the first 5 years, increasing by 3 days for every 5 years worked, with a cap of 29 PTO days. It is estimated that this program saves the agency \$11 million over 10 years. However, they don't expect bargaining unit employees to agree to institute such a program.

MARTA uses a system they refer to as "Personal Paid Time" (PPT). MARTA employees earn vacation time from

a separate account. Every employee accrues 1 day of PPT per month, and may accrue a maximum of 240 days of PPT. This time may be used for illness or personal business. However, there are limits to its use. The first three occurrences of using PPT in a rolling 12-month period results in no consequences. Employees receive warnings on the fourth, fifth, and sixth occurrences, and are terminated on the seventh occurrence, regardless of how many days of PPT they have in their bank.

The review of literature discovered that PTO was becoming more widespread in other kinds of organizations. In a 1994 survey of 360 organizations, 17 percent of respondents reported using PTO banks, with another 13 percent considering their implementation (41). Also, PTO programs seem to be working: 86 percent of respondents that used them indicated that they were effective, and nearly one-half had experienced a decrease in unscheduled absences (55). Memorial Hospital in Rockford, Illinois, instituted a PTO program in the late 1980s and claims to save more than \$2.5 million per year in lower overtime costs, increased productivity (because of a 36 percent decrease in unscheduled absences), and reduced costs for temporary help (41).

In many organizations, employees are allowed to bank unused annual and sick leave hours and receive cash for some portion of this time upon retirement. PTO programs discourage this "banking" technique. Employers believe that PTO not only saves the organization money, but helps reduce management's involvement in the day-to-day life of employees while giving them more flexibility in their use of time (41).

The city of Fridley, Minnesota, established a PTO program in the 1980s, with which it has been highly satisfied. Among other considerations, the city was concerned that employees who were about to leave or retire were using excessive amounts of sick leave. The city had previously provided employees with 12 days of annual leave and 12 days of sick leave. Under the PTO plan, employees now receive 18 annual leave days, which can be used for annual or sick leave. After employees have worked with the city for 7 years, the number of leave days increases to 24, and after 15 years, it goes to 26. New employees (and current employees who had accumulated fewer than 30 days leave) have a 30-day cap for accumulation at the end of any calendar year. Current employees who had accumulated more than 30 days leave were treated in the following fashion: Each day of accumulated annual leave was counted as 1 day under the new plan. For sick leave, existing employees received 1 day of the new leave time for each day of sick leave accumulated under the old plan for the first 45 days. Then, for the next 45 days of accumulated sick leave, employees received 1 day of the new sick leave for every 2 days accumulated under the old plan.

Any additional sick leave was converted at the rate of 1 day for every 3 days. The total amount (if more than 30 days) became the cap for that particular employee. After being employed by the city for three years, employees can cash in a maximum of 3 days of leave per year. After 15 years of service, employees can cash in 5 days (41).

#### *Summary of the Effectiveness of Flexibility Provisions*

In general, transit agencies have demonstrated a great willingness to accommodate the needs all employees have for occasional flexibility in their time off. Most feel that their flexibility provisions help reduce absenteeism and the inappropriate use of sick leave to at least a small degree. Some comment that their employees appreciate this benefit and try to schedule their days off as far in advance as possible. No agency regretted providing this flexibility. Even if its main affect is to improve employee morale, this in itself may help improve overall attendance, reduce turnover, and help ensure employee availability.

### **MANAGEMENT CONTROLS ON THE USE OF SICK LEAVE**

The previous section of this chapter, dealing with Preventive Measures, illustrated proactive efforts transit agencies are using to help prevent sick leave absences. Some of the strategies, such as incentives, are sometimes referred to as "carrots," which are nonpunitive techniques that encourage people to come to work. This section of the report focuses on Management Controls. These strategies assume that some employees will use sick leave excessively and illegitimately, and often involve some form of discipline. They include:

- Requirements to accrue a specified level of sick leave before sick leave is paid,
- Denial of pay for the first day of sick leave after a certain number of occurrences,
- Requiring documentation and auditing the authenticity of medical certificates,
- Methods for addressing patterns of absence,
- Progressive discipline, and
- Managing back-to-work programs.

#### **Requirements to Accrue a Specified Level of Sick Leave Before Sick Leave Is Paid**

Twelve of 36 transit agencies reported that they require a certain level of sick leave to be accrued before the first day of sick leave will be paid. Table 5 provides samples of the parameters established by some of the agencies that enforce

TABLE 5

## REQUIREMENTS TO ACCRUE A MINIMUM OF SICK LEAVE BEFORE SICK LEAVE WILL BE PAID

Transit Agency	Amount of Required Sick Leave That Must Be Accrued Before Payment	Does It Help Control Excessive Sick Leave?
Milwaukee County Transit	38 days (300 hours)	Yes
Tri-Met (Portland, Oreg.)	240 hours	With most employees
Ann Arbor Transit (Mich.)	3 days	Minimal
TARC (Louisville, Ky.)	50 days required to pay for first 3 days of sick leave	Yes, fairly effective, but is being changed as a result of collective bargaining
RTD (Denver, Colo.)	85 days required to pay for first 2 days of sick leave	No, no difference in attendance patterns between those with and without 85 days of sick leave
Sacramento RTD (Calif.)	480 hours	No, especially when operator shortage results in lots of overtime
		Opportunities

Note: TARC = Transit Authority of River City; RTD = Regional Transit District

this provision. This technique is intended to force employees to save their sick leave if they want to be reimbursed. For at least a time, it might deter employees from calling in sick to take a "personal day off" if they can expect to be paid for that time.

#### Denial of Pay for the First Day of Sick Leave After a Certain Number of Occurrences

Six of 36 agencies reported that they deny reimbursement of sick leave pay if the employee has surpassed a certain number of sick leave occurrences. The provisions of such control techniques are very similar among the agencies using them. For example, Sun Tran in Tucson, Arizona, does not pay for the first day of sick leave after the third occurrence in a rolling 12-month period, and does not pay for the first 2 days of sick leave after the fifth occurrence. Similarly, Citifare in Reno/Sparks, Nevada, does not pay for the first day of sick leave after the fourth occurrence in a 12-month rolling period, and does not pay for the first 2 days of sick leave after the seventh occurrence, unless the employee is hospitalized due to an accident or emergency.

Transit agencies are generally satisfied with the effectiveness of this control technique. Citifare claims that the penalties for incurring incidents of absenteeism are effective in reducing the total number of days, but the provision of "linking" occurrences of continuous treatment to one occurrence has been used excessively and needs to be modified.

#### Denial of Sick Leave Used Before or After Holidays

Eighteen of 36 agencies responded that they deny holiday pay if an employee does not report to work immediately

before and/or after a holiday. Most agencies commented that this is an effective strategy for ensuring that employees will not take an extra day off if they want to be paid for the holiday.

#### Requiring Documentation and Auditing the Authenticity of Medical Certificates

Thirty-one of the 36 agencies reported that they require some form of formal documentation (medical or otherwise) to support claims for paid time off. In many cases, the documentation is not required until a certain number of absences have occurred, the number of days absent exceeds a certain limit, and/or some form of patterned absence or suspicion develops about an employee's reason for missing work. For example, Broward County Transit does not pay for sick leave if an employee is in "sick leave monitoring" status and fails to produce medical documentation. The Washington Area Metropolitan Transportation Authority (WMATA) in Washington, D.C., requires employees to submit a doctors' certificate for each absence in excess of three consecutive days and for each occurrence in excess of four occurrences per year. At Seattle Metro Transit, if medical certificates are not turned in by a stipulated time and with appropriate information, sick days become unexcused absences and discipline applicable to misses applies. A few agencies noted that they reserve the right to call the employee's doctor to verify the nature of the illness or injury, and some also reserve the right to visit the employee's home when they are using sick leave.

Although most agencies reported that they require medical documentation to validate a claim for sick leave, only 13 of the 36 agencies actually check the authenticity of the medical notes. Many agencies expressed frustration with the relative ease employees have in getting HMOs to

provide doctors' certificates verifying a visit, but offering little else about the nature of the visit. Of those who claim to check the authenticity of doctor's notes, all but one indicated they did it on only a spot check basis or when there was cause for suspicion. At WMATA, the position of Absenteeism Manager has been established to deal with nothing but employees who are missing work. No other transit agency surveyed has made such a commitment. There are two Absenteeism Managers at WMATA. At WMATA, managers believe it is important to consistently communicate the organization's interest in attendance, or it won't improve.

At WMATA, if a supervisor believes a health care provider is signing certificates negligently or in bad faith, he will advise the Absenteeism Manager and the Authority's Medical Director. The Authority's Medical Director will investigate, discuss the problem with the provider, and will, if necessary, initiate action to exclude noncooperating providers from participation in Authority-funded health and welfare programs. The Absenteeism Manager, acting on the advice of the Medical Director, will periodically distribute to supervisors a list of health care providers who are believed to have provided doctors' certificates under questionable circumstances.

The Port Authority of Allegheny County (PAT) in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, was not asked to complete this survey; however, the agency did advise this report's principle investigator of the effectiveness of the auditing that they performed in 1995. PAT's hourly employees are required to furnish a certificate from an attending physician for illnesses of two or more working days in order to be compensated for absences due to illness. It was determined that the same physician was completing an inordinate number of requests. A decision was made to conduct an intensive review of all sick pay requests from the most recent 2-year period. A special audit/review was performed by in-house staff. As a result of this audit, 10 percent of all sick pay requests are now reviewed quarterly on a continuing basis. Knowing that sick leave requests are now subject to regular audit, employees' use of sick leave has decreased. PAT averaged 4,500 sick leave requests annually prior to review and is currently averaging approximately 3,600 requests post review. This effort has resulted in estimated savings of \$280,000 per year.

### **Methods for Addressing Patterns of Absence**

Similar to receiving holiday pay based on the necessity to report to work before and/or after a given holiday, this method addresses other types of patterned absence, such as the Friday/Monday absences around weekends or those before or after an employee's days off. Nineteen of the 36 agencies responded that they do have methods for dealing

with these types of absences. In most cases, the method they refer to is counseling and/or warnings, which are provided at any time an employee begins to evidence patterns of absence.

VOTRAN in Daytona Beach, Florida, reviews occurrences of absence every quarter. Employees who display pattern absences are placed on "payroll notification," meaning no sick days are paid without medical documentation. They report that in most cases employees who have already been counseled generally improve without having to be placed on payroll notification.

At WMATA, if any employee shows a pattern of absences on a specific day of the week or month, the Absenteeism Manager may determine that doctors' certificates for future absences for medical reasons must be approved by the Authority's Medical Officer.

As noted in chapter 1, a number of agencies reported that they are struggling with the provisions of the FMLA. One agency has hired an FMLA Coordinator, while another cited their efforts in establishing a Quality Improvement Team to improve the process and administration of FMLA cases. Transit agencies often require the employee, as the law allows, to obtain a second medical certification from a health care provider of the employer's choosing, at the employer's expense. If the opinions of the employee's and the employer's designated health care providers differ, the employer may require the employee to obtain certification from a third health care provider, again at the employer's expense, whose opinion shall be final and binding. The third health care provider must be approved jointly by the employer and the employee. Employees are also being required to recertify their condition every 60 days. WMATA has taken that requirement one step further, notifying their employees that they must provide medical documentation every time they are absent for the same reason, unless the doctor has already specifically noted the time off required in a previous certificate. WMATA's Absenteeism Manager, Adrienne Francis, states that "it is not reasonable to not get verification." Although she genuinely sympathizes with any individual with a legitimate illness, employees must still be held accountable for their absences. This is consistent with WMATA's "zero tolerance" for abuse of sick leave.

Six transit agencies reported that they deny pay for sick leave in manners different than those described previously. Pierce Transit will deny sick leave for employees who claim to be suffering depression due to disciplinary action that has been taken against them. The CDTA in Albany, New York, and the Bi-State Development Agency in St. Louis, Missouri, do not pay for the first 2 days of absence in any situations, and believe that this is an effective way

TABLE 6

## SCHEDULES OF SAMPLE STANDARD PROGRESSIVE DISCIPLINE PROGRAMS

Transit Agency	Allowed Absences Before Progressive Discipline Starts	Number of Steps to Termination After Progressive Discipline Is Started
Sun Tran (Albuquerque, N. Mex.)	56 hours within 12 months	7-counseling, verbal warning, two written warnings, 1-, 3-, and 10-day suspensions
CDTA (Albany, N.Y.)	12 days in 1 year	3-written warning, two suspensions
Sun Tran (Tucson, Ariz.)	6 occurrences in 9 months	3-verbal warning, suspension, Suspension
Pierce County Transit (Wash.)	5 occurrences in 6 months	Positive performance counseling
OCTA (Orange County, Calif.)	8 occurrences in 12 months	3-verbal warning, written warning, 2-Week suspension
Broward County (Fla.)	5 occurrences in 12 months	3-1-, 3-, and 5-day suspensions (unless doctors' certificates are provided)
Bi-State Development Agency (St. Louis, Mo.)	4 occurrences in 6 months	3-two written warnings, 5-day suspension
Utah Transit Authority	5 occurrences in 12 months	5-three verbal warnings, 1- and 3-day suspensions
VOTRAN (Daytona Beach, Fla.)	2 occurrences in 6 months	4-counseling, written warning, 1- and 3-day suspensions
CT Transit (Connecticut)	4 occurrences in 12 months	6-two written warnings, 3-day suspension, written warning, 5-day suspension, final written warning

Note: CDTA = Capital District Transportation Authority; OCTA = Orange County Transportation Authority; VOTRAN = Volusia County Transit

of reducing absenteeism. The Mass Transit Administration of the state of Maryland also does not pay for the first two days of an unscheduled absence unless the employee is hospitalized.

The York County Transportation Authority pays employees for the first 2 days of sick leave with no questions asked. However, after the first two occurrences, employees need to be out for 4 days before they are paid for their first day of sick leave. Employees may use their annual leave if they request pay for that time they are out. The agency reports that there is a common understanding that sick leave is intended for legitimate illness or injury.

The Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) in the Philadelphia region does not pay for the first 3 days of sick leave absence, and only pays for days beyond that if doctors' certificates are supplied. Although this sounds like a policy that would discourage the use of sick leave, SEPTA remains plagued with a 13% unscheduled absence rate. The policy does not discourage those who wish to take a day off here or there. Such employees reportedly make up for it by working overtime that week or have learned to live with less.

### Progressive Discipline

Virtually every agency (35 of 36) reported that they use progressive counseling and/or suspensions at well-understood intervals prior to possible termination for unacceptable attendance. The strictness and details of such systems

vary considerably. Table 6 provides highlights of the basic provisions of progressive discipline at agencies still using suspensions as part of the progressive discipline process.

As can be seen from the information in Table 6, the precise schedules for administering progressive discipline vary considerably among the reporting agencies. Those with the fewer number of occurrences allowed tend to report a higher level of satisfaction with their systems' effectiveness. Some agencies measure attendance events by occurrences (where each occurrence might have multiple days), whereas others measure by days or hours of absence. At least one agency does not count an absence as an occurrence if the employee presents medical documentation. Others make no distinction (an unscheduled absence is an unscheduled absence).

Some transit agencies reported that they "blend" the standard for determining when progressive discipline is started. For instance, the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transportation Authority's policy allows six absences, or three or more occurrences totaling 60 hours, in a rolling 12-month period before discipline is administered. Counseling is provided after that sixth (or third) occurrence. On the seventh absence or fourth occurrence totaling more than 60 hours within a rolling 12-month period, the employee is subject to a suspension of 3 days. On the eighth absence or fifth occurrence totaling more than 60 hours, the employee is subject to termination. Although this policy appears to be relatively strict, operations managers have the authority to "mitigate" (in essence, erase) an

absence if some evidence can be shown that the absence was unavoidable.

At WMATA, progressive discipline is initiated at the ninth occurrence or the fifteenth day of unscheduled absence in the course of 12 months. At that point, the Absenteeism Manager will review the facts relevant to each identified employee, including such concerns as the employee's overall attendance record, presence of major medical problems, prognosis for medical recovery, duration of past absences, employee's length of service, etc. The Absenteeism Manager will direct an appropriate action including anything from continued employment subject to the Medical Office's approval of doctor's certificates, to reassignment to other duties, to disqualification and discharge. The manager will review each identified employee at 3-month intervals, or more frequently, until attendance becomes satisfactory or until the employee is discharged.

Some agencies prescribe "working suspensions," where employees are issued the equivalent of a suspension for purposes of the record, but work their normal shift during the dates of the "paper" suspension. Other agencies report that the only way to send a message on the importance of attendance is to "hit the employees in the pocket book" by having them serve the suspension.

Five of the 36 agencies reported using "point systems" to track and manage employee attendance. Point systems can take into account all forms of attendance problems including sick leave and late reports. A different number of points are assessed for each occurrence, and when a certain number of points are accumulated progressive discipline measures are implemented.

An example of a point system was reported by TARC (Transit Authority in River City) in Louisville, Kentucky (see Appendix F). Points are not charged for scheduled absences, such as vacation or personal days, nor are they assessed for absence due to on-the-job injuries. However, points are charged against recurring or excessive absences such as sick leave. One point is charged for a full-day excused absence, and a half point is charged for a half-day excused absence. An "excused absence" is one that is documented with a doctor's note. Two points are charged for a full-day unexcused absence, whereas one point is charged for a half-day unexcused absence. An "unexcused absence" is defined as one in which no doctor's note is provided. Once an employee accumulates 10 points, they receive counseling. When the employee has accumulated 15 points, they are counseled and advised that they are on "probation." This alerts the employee that continued unscheduled absences could put their job in jeopardy. At 20 points, employees are discharged. Managers at TARC believe this has been somewhat effective. Bus operators average

10.2 days of unscheduled absence per year, whereas maintenance personnel average 6.6 days.

Point systems in and of themselves do not guarantee success in controlling excessive absenteeism. One large transit agency that currently uses a point system is averaging 31 days of unscheduled absences per year per employee, far more than the average of 16.07 reported by the 36 agencies surveyed for this report.

## Managing Back-to-Work Programs

### *Worker's Compensation*

As part of the survey used for this synthesis project transit agencies were asked the following question: "On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 meaning no problem and 10 meaning a serious problem, how do you rate the nature of workers compensation in your agency?" The average score provided by 33 responding agencies was 6. Perhaps this problem was rated less serious than overall absenteeism because there are more straightforward steps agencies can take to help minimize the possibilities of on-the-job injuries. However, the expert panel for TCRP SF-06 agreed that as long as there are opportunities for people to get paid 85 to 90 percent of their salaries by "working the system," there will be some people who are going to take advantage of such opportunities.

The majority of the transit agencies reporting on their methods of handling worker's compensation absences indicated that they use third party administrators (TPAs) to manage the details of getting injured transit employees to expert physicians and to stay on top of their recuperative process to ensure the fastest possible return to work. Some believe that TPAs are like any other professional service that offers experience and specialty expertise in an area in which the transit agency has no particular strength. Some believe it is important to have an outside party serve as the administrator of worker's compensation claims to avoid potential collusion between transit agency employees who might have personal friendships.

One frequently stated recommendation offered by multiple agencies was to not lose track of any employee absent due to worker's compensation. Appendix G provides the flow chart used at Pierce Transit, which illustrates how they administer all their cases of employees who have been injured on (or off) the job. Pierce Transit's Redeployment Program serves as a good illustration of how such cases *must be managed aggressively*. Contact should be made weekly with the employee. One agency noted that it reserves the right to visit the employees at their homes. A number of agencies noted that they used independent medical exams, sought second opinions when they thought

it appropriate, and cross-referenced claims with the state agency responsible for worker's compensation. A number of agencies reported that they used private investigators for surveillance of particularly suspicious cases. A few agencies reported on their use of attorneys who specialize in workers compensation litigation.

Some agencies reported that their state's worker's compensation laws were extremely liberal and that they were frustrated in their attempts to manage such cases. New Jersey Transit noted that the state of New Jersey gives medical control of workers compensation cases to the employer. Their own medical department is in a much better position to oversee cases, and they report workers compensation to be only a mild problem.

Other agencies stressed the importance of their agency's self-insured status. This puts a greater responsibility on the agency to stress safety and accident prevention. Citifare in Reno/Sparks, Nevada, related their success in getting assistance from the State Industrial Insurance System loss prevention team. That team came to their agency and reviewed everything related to driving a bus, and developed training programs and provided recommendations that have helped the agency decrease its insurance expenses by \$300,000 per year.

#### *Light Duty*

Twenty-seven of 36 agencies reported that they employ light duty (or modified duty) programs that encourage employees who have missed work due to on-the-job injuries to return to work as quickly as possible. The vast majority of transit agencies expressed satisfaction with the effectiveness of light duty programs. Agencies report that they don't want the employee to get into the habit of staying at home. Consequently, they identify work that the employee can do for the agency without risking aggravations to their injuries. Examples of such work include providing transit information as part of the telephone customer services function or providing information at transit centers. Other types of jobs include patrolling the perimeter of agency property, helping in the print shop, and doing simple clerical work. None of the work is particularly attractive and the boring nature of some of the work and being paid at less than the employee's standard wage, seems to serve as an incentive to return to work. As one agency noted, employees performing light duty feel that if they are already at work they might as well be making their full wage.

In almost all cases, light duty is only offered to employees who are missing work due to a worker's compensation claim. One agency reported that if an employee refuses to perform light duty work that they are deemed medically able to do, they lose worker's compensation benefits.

#### **Summary of Management Controls**

- It should come as no surprise that people's behavior will be strongly influenced by the boundaries that govern such behavior. The stricter rules that have been put in place by transit agencies to help control sick leave have generally been more successful than less strict rules. For instance, transit agencies that only allow a few *days* of absence before progressive discipline starts, rather than a few *occurrences* of absence, tend to show a lower rate of unscheduled absenteeism. Agencies that deny pay for the first day of sick leave after so many occurrences of sick leave in a 12-month period report that such provisions are effective. Denying sick leave pay for days before and after holidays has also been successful.
- When people are held accountable for their actions, it is likely that their actions will be more responsible. Lack of "follow-up" or lax administrative monitoring is one factor that many transit managers report as a contributing factor to absenteeism in their agencies. A few agencies made that point abundantly clear when they noted that their progressive discipline programs work well when they are being properly monitored and administered, and not very well when they are not. One manager of an agency with a much higher than average rate of unscheduled absenteeism noted, "You could have all the policies in the world to control absenteeism, but if they are not enforced and monitored, they do little good in controlling the problem."
- Inconsistent application of attendance policies has many potential causes and works against an agency's efforts to reduce absenteeism. One agency reported that attendance policies that are complex and hard to understand are difficult for some transit supervisors to administer. Another explanation offered by some agencies for inconsistent application of attendance policies is that some managers, those who come from the ranks of bus operators and mechanics, may find it uncomfortable to administer discipline to their former peers. Part of the problem might be the lack of information systems that provide frequent and regular reports on unscheduled absence that are easy to use and understand. In addition, because of tight budgets, some transit agencies might not be able to find the administrative resources to thoroughly audit sick leave use or monitor employees' overall attendance records. However, the return on such an investment could be substantial. Transit agencies that have conducted thorough audits of doctors' certificates have reported substantial reductions in requests for sick leave. The message that someone is checking the validity of doctors' notes gets around quickly and can be

effective. WMATA dedicates resources for two positions known as Absenteeism Managers, whose responsibility is to monitor attendance performance on an agency-wide and individual employee basis, and take action as soon as trends and patterns occur. This large agency averages only 9.36 days of unscheduled absence per employee per year (compared with the 16.07 average of all agencies surveyed for this project.)

- Although it was clear when transit agencies started progressive disciplinary procedures, it was not clear if agencies kept employees informed of their status at the early stages of the process. The Maryland Mass Transit Administration noted that, although their progressive discipline process doesn't start until the sixth occurrence of sick leave in a rolling 12-month period, they now verbally counsel each employee at their third, fourth, and fifth occurrences. Perhaps early notification could help keep employees from getting to the point where progressive discipline is necessary.
- Denying pay for the first day of sick leave after a certain number of sick leave occurrences in a 12-month period seems to work to the satisfaction of those agencies that use it. It is a technique not used until a pattern of absence has been demonstrated by the employee and possibly influences the decision of an employee who is not really sick (but is considering calling in sick) to come into work that day. There is less consensus on the technique of denying the payment of the first few days of sick leave until the employee has accrued a fairly substantial amount of sick leave. Some believe that it is a tough, but realistic tool to use in the transit environment that has helped them control excessive absenteeism. Others question the basic fairness of a strategy where you allow employees to earn sick leave, but not to be paid for the first few days of its legitimate use, until the employee has accrued a fairly substantial amount of sick leave time, which can only be gained over a number of years. The only transit agency that actually analyzed the technique by establishing two control groups (one with the required number of hours accrued and one without) concluded that there was no statistical difference between the attendance performance of the two groups. Another reason to question this technique is the potential chilling affect it might have on attracting good candidates for employment, particularly during times when unemployment is low and competition for good employees is fierce. This denial of sick leave pay might cause applicants to look elsewhere when making their choice of where to work.

## OTHER MANAGEMENT INTERVENTIONS

To this point, the report has reviewed the preventive measures and management controls transit agencies have used to try to assure employee availability and minimize absenteeism. There is yet another set of strategies transit agencies report using that don't neatly fit into one of these first two categories. This section describes those strategies that are generally quite progressive and that tend to stress organizational and personal development. They can be applied either before or after an absence occurs. The strategies that will be reviewed include:

- Group Supervisor programs
- Total Quality Management
- Positive discipline
- Communicating the importance of good attendance.

In addition, this section will describe some of the ways transit agencies are modifying their procedures of attracting and hiring new bus operators to be more competitive in an "employees' market."

### Group Supervisor Programs

Ten of the 36 agencies reported that they use the "group supervisor" program in their bus operations division. This program is designed to help "personalize" the work environment for a bus operator who works in the field and doesn't get many chances to interact with other representatives of the agency. In particular, in large transit agencies operations supervisors tend to police the system and respond to incidents, but do very little supervision or coaching of operators. In a group supervision program, each operations supervisor takes responsibility for knowing at least a little about 20 to 30 bus operators. They familiarize themselves with the operators' work record, including attendance, and provide advice accordingly. They also serve as a conduit between management and operators, and can be an advocate for bus operators, when appropriate. This type of program is not focused solely on attendance. However, it helps build better spirit among workers and puts a more human face on what can be a very cold employment environment. The relationship that can be developed between supervisors and operators can help attendance performance. The British Institute of Management found that low absence rates have been noted as one of the effects of the higher morale often found in small working groups. They also found that opening the lines of communication between employees and higher levels of management helped to reduce absenteeism by reducing stress (56).

The presence of a group supervisor program is usually indicative of the agency's recognition of the importance of

employees as the most valuable resource in a service agency. Hence, it is not surprising that the average score for transit agencies utilizing group supervision programs was 6.1 on the "attendance as a problem" scale, compared with 7.1 for those agencies that do not use such programs. Agencies that use this strategy averaged 10 days of unscheduled absence per year, whereas agencies that do not averaged 17.06 days of unscheduled absence.

A number of agencies have considered establishing such a program, but find that the logistics of dealing with the far-flung, field-oriented bus operator work force are difficult to overcome. San Diego Transit has found that mobile data terminals in supervisors' cars help to overcome some of the logistical difficulties. These terminals allow supervisors in the field to track and record bus operator performance. While in their cars, supervisors can enter information on their mobile data terminals that is then placed in the employee's records. Supervisors can meet with bus operators while they are in the field and be knowledgeable of the operator's performance based on a review of their records by means of the mobile data terminals. San Diego currently has computerized day-to-day tracking of each employee in every area, including miss outs, attendance, personal development planning, special requests, and drug testing.

San Diego Transit (the first transit agency in the nation to institute the Group Supervisor program in 1980) believes the most important benefit of the program is to give a line employee a real connection with a management employee. Every month each supervisor makes at least two personal contacts with each member of his group. Over the years the groups have competed with each other in areas of attendance. This personal contact usually results in fewer grievances because a line employee has a bond with a supervisor. That supervisor gets involved with any action that affects that operator. Frank Shipman, San Diego Transit's Vice-President for Human Resources, believes the program offers a great way to open lines of communication throughout the organization. He notes that drivers now have a choice of seeking counsel from their union or their group supervisor. The agency is starting the process of preparing "Personal Development Plans" for each operator.

Chapter 2 described many of the potentially unattractive features of being a bus operator. Pierce Transit also describes some of the difficulties new bus operators will face in "The Life of a Relief Operator at Pierce Transit" (Appendix D). Consequently, it should come as no surprise that many transit agencies around the country reported that their highest turnover was among new bus operators, many of whom are relatively young. Young employees in particular might need more coaching and counseling on the basics of job preparedness. Agencies

might need to put special effort into communicating with young employees to teach them about job responsibilities and to make them feel they are part of an agency that is interested in their well being. In speaking about Generation X, Losyk recommends that employers develop mentoring programs to increase their loyalty and keep employees on board longer (8). LYNX, in central Florida, has recently started a Mentoring Training Program in which experienced operators guide, tutor, and advise new operators during the first weeks of their careers to help make their adjustment to the "LYNX-like" way of doing things as natural as possible.

A mentor can offer encouragement, answer questions, and lend an empathetic ear to drivers before they hit the road on their own. A mentor lends support and provides advice on the everyday challenges of being a bus operator that may not necessarily be covered in the initial training. Each mentoring experience lasts between 60 and 120 days, depending on the need of the new operator. LYNX Director of Operations Bill Schneeman states that "Adjustments to any new job can be overwhelming, but those a bus driver experiences are even more demanding, not only for the employee, but also for his or her family" (57). Mentors perform their roles on a purely voluntary basis, although the agency recognizes them with certificates, awards, and constant praise and recognition. Ongoing recognition increases employee involvement and helps employees feel a commitment to their work environment. Recognition also reinforces desired behaviors, builds self-esteem, nurtures trust and respect, says "thank you," renews enthusiasm, affirms self-worth, and celebrates success (58). The success of the program has been astonishing. Turnover among part-time bus operators was reduced from 50 percent to 8 percent in 1998 (6).

### **Total Quality Management**

Total Quality Management (TQM) is a management philosophy concerned with people and work processes that focuses on customer satisfaction and improving organizational performance. TQM requires an enterprise to systematically energize, manage, coordinate, and improve all business activities in the interest of its customers (59). It is a comprehensive philosophy that focuses organizational resources on the improvement of work processes by empowering well-trained employees to meet or exceed customer expectations (58). TQM is highly process-oriented and requires clear and accurate measurement of agency progress toward established goals.

Given the industry's renewed focus on the importance of the customer, and given the ability of transit agencies to quantify much of what they do, it would seem that TQM might be commonly applied at transit agencies. However,

implementers of TQM in the public sector face challenges not found in the private sector, including a lack of market incentives, a short-term perspective caused by frequent political changeovers, a highly centralized and layered structure, a separation of powers that requires negotiation and consensus building, conflicting needs between various customer groups, and an emphasis on due process over efficiency (59). Recent research has found that most of the foundations for TQM are not yet in place in the transit industry (58). Most transit governing boards and unions are not actively involved in issues of quality. Policy statements have not been formed, transit employees have not been trained in the process, and the measurement of results is not very rigorous. However, at least one agency has put considerable effort into the TQM program.

By 1990, the Southwest Ohio Regional Transit Authority (Metro) in Cincinnati, Ohio, had recognized that their agency had become a classic bureaucracy, with a top-down command and control system in place. Labor relations were poor, and the performance of the agency in terms of complaints, accidents, road calls, and attendance was not satisfactory (60). In 1990, this agency undertook a 5-year transformation to become a more empowering, flexible organization. To implement this transformation, Metro developed a new vision for the organization. More than 900 employees participated in intensive 1-day sessions designed to review current practices at Metro and then to envision what a "perfect" Metro could be. Cross-organizational teams of employees from every level of the organization drafted the following vision statement:

1. We make Cincinnati a great place to live,
2. Customers are why we're here,
3. Outstanding service is our commitment, and
4. Employees are Metro; we are a team.

Union leaders were involved in the process from the start. Once the process of reengineering the agency and the development of dozens of cross-functional teams were established to address a myriad of issues, the pressure was on both management and the union to change their relationship. Confrontation was replaced with cooperation, joint problem solving, and employee involvement at all levels of the organization. As a result, every major area of service quality has improved, including preventable accidents, miles between road calls, and passenger complaints. Overall absenteeism (including unscheduled) steadily decreased from 10.5 percent in 1994 to 8.9 percent in 1997 (61). The agency can provide no other reason for the improvement in attendance.

TQM is an arduous undertaking, and many organizations that start such a process do not succeed (59). However, the development of cross-functional teams has often been recommended as a way of increasing morale and

productivity. Participating in cross-functional teams can improve job satisfaction, teamwork, and productivity (62). Goodman and Atkins (53) report that job satisfaction is an important quality to have among employees. It reduces stress and helps to provide employees with a sense of a particular identity and a sense of fitting in. Some methods necessary to create this sense of belonging, which increases the likelihood that an employee will not take unexcused absences, are an ability to participate in important decisions about group objectives, to contribute to the performance of the group in a significant way, and to share in the rewards of the group accomplishments.

Many transit agencies have established cross-functional committees, some of which can have direct and indirect impacts on attendance. For instance, 23 of 36 agencies surveyed for this report acknowledged that unattractive work schedules with split shifts, nonconsecutive days off, or graveyard shifts probably contribute to absenteeism. A number of agencies have established "Route Review Committees" to help solve problems with routes that are difficult to operate. Improvements in these working conditions can affect employee morale and attendance.

TQM starts and ends with training (58). Pierce Transit recognizes the need for all of its personnel to grow and develop and has instituted a seminar entitled "Increasing Human Effectiveness: Managing the Rapids of Change." The 2-day seminar is based on the premise that the way people feel about themselves affects their performance in all areas of life (including work). The concepts that are covered are designed to help employees

1. Develop a positive self-image,
2. Increase self-confidence,
3. Develop self-esteem,
4. Overcome fear of failure,
5. Overcome self-imposed limitations,
6. Set positive goals,
7. Handle stress and change, and
8. Develop a winning attitude.

Pierce Transit managers believe the investment in the program will result in employees who are flexible, positive, poised, enthusiastic and effective human beings. According to Marnie Slakey, the agency wants to help its employees be successful in coping with on-the-job stress. They also want each employee to be trained to take responsibility for their actions, to be in control of their fate. Improving each employee's effectiveness is also intended to help reduce absenteeism. Pierce Transit averages 11 days of unscheduled absence per represented employee per year, far better than the 16.07 average reported by the 36 agencies surveyed for this project. Ms. Slakey notes that training has not been used as effectively as it could be in the transit industry. Members of this synthesis' review

panel agree that training has often been characterized as being part of the disciplinary process. Transit agencies should realize that training could be a more proactive part of each employee's development process.

### Positive Discipline

A small number of the agencies reported that they now use the concept of "positive discipline." These agencies do not use a punitive method of dealing with poor attendance (e.g., suspending people from work without pay). The transit agency still sets the standards for what is regarded as acceptable attendance. If an employee does not comply with these standards, the agency requires the employee to take a day off, with pay, to reconsider their commitment to the organization. This day is sometimes referred to as "decision making leave." Before returning, the employee prepares an action plan (sometimes referred to as a "behavioral contract") for which they will be held accountable. Attendance requirements for the next 6 to 12 months are usually quite strict. Agencies report that the attendance of most employees in these circumstances improves. Positive discipline requires that the employee accept responsibility for achieving good attendance. The action plan drafted by the employee is negotiated with management, and the agreement of the employee to the provisions of the plan places the onus on them to improve their attendance.

COTA uses a system with elements of positive discipline. At COTA, absences of only 1 day or several consecutive days are considered "Attendance Events." No action is taken during the first eight attendance events in a rolling 12-month period. A verbal warning is issued at the ninth event, a written warning at the tenth, and on the eleventh event the employee must visit the Human Resources Department for counseling. On the twelfth event there is final counseling and a warning that the thirteenth attendance event will result in discharge. COTA managers report that discharge based on attendance performance is extremely rare and that the policy is too liberal to adequately control absenteeism. However, their level of unscheduled absence (11.5 days per year) is less than the average for all agencies surveyed (16.07 days per year).

Progressive discipline processes are designed to ultimately reduce poor attendance, but suspensions that are part of the process contribute, at least temporarily, to absences. A positive discipline program addresses the inconsistency between suspending employees from work due to attendance infractions after emphasizing the importance of good attendance. It saves the agency the costs of covering the shift of someone serving a suspension. It also respects the employees' need for income and therefore reduces the animosity that might be felt by an employee toward their

employer as a result of a suspension. As one manager noted, if you really are trying to develop trust and teamwork between labor and management, suspensions probably aren't going to help. Goodman and Atkins concur that severe discipline may be more counterproductive than helpful, especially when dealing with employees who have problems related to alcoholism or drugs (53). A number of agencies reported that they require employees at certain stages of progressive discipline to use the services of counseling made available through their EAP program. Availing themselves of this resource might result in identifying confidential matters that affect the employee and lead them to resources that can improve their attendance.

### Communicating the Importance of Good Attendance

If good attendance is a high priority for transit agencies, that message should probably be communicated in a variety of ways. It is difficult to motivate if one doesn't communicate. One example from the private sector helps illustrate this. Lewis (63) describes the efforts of a Canadian shipbuilding company that emphasized communicating the importance of good attendance by means of manuals, training, interface with the union, and person-to-person communications. At this company, the morale of workers improved and they became generally more productive because the company communicated the value of their attendance at work.

Only 14 of 36 agencies reported that they practice this technique in a concerted fashion. At one agency, the director of transportation puts out memos on bulletin boards, has parties to celebrate good attendance performance, and highlights good performers through award programs that take attendance into account. This same agency also has huge posters that show the agency's overall attendance performance. Another agency produces a bi-weekly newsletter with stories that feature employees with exemplary attendance.

AT&T took a little different approach to informing employees of their attendance performance. The company had tried many different approaches to reducing absenteeism, but what worked best was the creation of a bulletin board with everyone's name on it. Each name was in letters large enough for all to see. A gold star was placed in designated spaces each day the employee came to work. AT&T found that this reduced absenteeism drastically because employees knew that someone was monitoring their absences and all people in the agency were able to tell who consistently missed work (53).

It can be argued that attendance behavior might be improved if each employee knew just where they stood at all times within attendance policies. Perhaps they would take the steps necessary to avoid falling into progressive discipline

if they knew they were approaching such status. Some managers noted, however, that employees with the worst attendance records know their status in the attendance policies all too well, and could teach classes on how to "beat the system." Ten agencies noted that they made information on employees' status within attendance policies easily available. In most cases, this meant that employees could obtain a copy of their record from their supervisor. However, one agency noted that all employees could access their standing in the attendance policies via computers in the drivers' lounge by entering their employee identification number.

### **Receiving Employee Input on the Causes of Absenteeism**

Communication is a two-way street. It is important for transit agencies to take proactive steps to inform their employees of the importance of good attendance, but it is equally important for employees to have the opportunity to advise the agency on what they believe might be causing absenteeism. Only 14 of 36 agencies reported that they discuss the causes of absenteeism with their employees. Virtually every agency that did explained that communications occurred on a one-to-one basis with employees when they have reached the progressive discipline stage and counseling is required. Agencies frequently try to find out what is causing the excessive absenteeism of that particular employee to determine if there is anything that the agency can do to help the employee improve their attendance. This might include recommending a visit to the EAP, or changing the work shift of the individual (with union consent.) One of the essential elements for success in managing absenteeism is the employer's genuine, consistent effort to help employees overcome their absenteeism problems. Employees often have nonattendance related problems that frequently result in absenteeism. Absenteeism may be a symptom, not the cause of the problem (6.3).

The project investigators were hoping to determine if any agency had taken steps to learn the causes of absenteeism by going to the source (employees) through some form of accepted research. Only one agency reported that they hired a consultant who conducted focus groups with bus operators to help identify the reasons for absenteeism from the employees' point of view. Insights gained from these sessions are summarized in chapter 2 and should prove to be extremely helpful to any transit agency that wishes to appropriately address excess absenteeism.

### **Modifying Agency Procedures to Attract and Hire New Bus Operators**

It might not be difficult to find and/or attract candidates for bus operator positions when unemployment is relatively

high and the economy is weak; however, at this time, these conditions don't exist in many areas in the United States. As noted in chapter 1, transit agencies find themselves in a very competitive marketplace for employees. Millions of jobs are being created nationwide. Eric Witcher, Manager of Human Resources of Community Transit in Lynnwood, Washington, has found that unemployed people in the Pacific Northwest are only out of work an average of 30 days or less. He believes that transit agencies must increase the frequency and diversity of recruiting efforts to help ensure employee availability. In a marketplace that is moving as fast as the American economy, transit agencies must try to keep up with the market or be left behind in the search for human resources.

At the American Public Transit Association Bus Conference, held in Cleveland, Ohio, in May 1999, a session on "How to Attract Employees to Transit" was moderated by Marnie Slakey of Pierce Transit. After excellent presentations by panelists from Houston Metro, Community Transit, and Tri-Met (Portland, Oregon), the floor was opened for comments and questions from the dozens of transit agency representatives hoping to learn some new techniques to improve their recruiting efforts. A number of techniques being used by different transit agencies are described here:

- Recruiting is being done on a far more frequent basis. Where agencies once recruited for new bus operators only two to three times a year, some agencies are recruiting every 2 months, or even on a continuing basis. This is necessary because of the multiple job opportunities that exist for candidates. Candidates cannot be expected to wait for a "new class" to be hired when they are likely to find other opportunities in the interim. This requires transit agencies to reduce their class size and possibly modify the way they instruct new classes.
- One transit agency has increased the speed of the hiring process by foregoing job interviews and relying on employee selection instruments to determine whom they will hire. They have faith in the predictive ability of the selection instruments (such as those described in the beginning of chapter 3), and they note that it saves the valuable time it takes to arrange their own staff and the candidates for interviews.
- Another way to reduce the time it takes to hire new employees is to conduct a "marathon day" at job fairs, where candidates take written tests, have physicals, and are interviewed all in 1 day. Assuming the candidates pass these tests, a conditional offer of employment is made that same day. Screening of references, driving records, and criminal background checks are completed as quickly as possible.

- Transit agencies are currently reviewing their competitiveness with respect to the pay and benefits of other employers in their area. Some transit agencies are modifying their pay and benefits to be more competitive. Those agencies that find that they are indeed competitive are being more assertive in promoting their relatively good pay, benefits, and stability. Other agencies reported that they are asking their bus operators what they like about the job to ensure that they emphasize such factors when trying to attract candidates. Tri-Met will be conducting focus groups to try to determine why employees leave.
- Transit agencies are using their unique resources to their best advantage when recruiting employees. Some are using the interior and exterior of their buses (including the electronic headsign at the front of the bus) to advertise the fact they are hiring. In a similar fashion, some agencies are hanging huge banners from their facilities, which are visible from adjacent roads. Others noted that they have placed balloons around signs at the front of their properties that announce that they are hiring. One agency reported using some of their best bus operators at job fairs or malls to help promote the agency and the job. They find that the agency's credibility is increased if someone who is actually performing the job speaks to employee candidates. Whenever possible, minority bus operators are used to represent the agency when they recruit in minority communities.
- Transit agencies can be more effective in their search for new employees by advertising in media that serves the most likely source of candidates. In some areas this results in concentrated advertising in newspapers read primarily by minorities or immigrants. In other areas it has resulted in working with human service agencies that are helping people increase their employment skills. Houston Metro offers a general education degree (GED) program for those without a high school diploma. Houston Metro will hire a candidate, help the employee prepare for their test, and give them 1 year to secure their GED.

### Summary of Management Interventions

The management interventions cited in this section tend to emphasize the human side of the transit agency enterprise. Many of the strategies are geared toward recognizing employees as people with needs for interaction, involvement, and the ability to have some control over their work environment. These strategies are clearly consistent with the findings of Coffman and Buckingham, who spent 5 years reviewing surveys conducted by the Gallup Organization. Using a massive amount of data--surveys of 1 million employees and 85,000 managers over 25 years--they found that there is a direct link between the most productive workers and

greater company profits, more satisfied and loyal customers and lower employee turnover (64). The surveys asked employees 150 questions about 18 aspects of their work, their attitudes toward it, and their workplace conditions (65). They found that the key to employee satisfaction is that employee's relationship with his/her immediate supervisor. The research shows that the best employees or business units tend to share the following perceptions (64):

- I know what is expected of me at work.
- I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right.
- At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.
- In the last 7 days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work.
- My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person.
- There is someone at work who encourages my development.
- At work, my opinions seem to count.
- The mission/purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important.
- My associates (fellow employees) are committed to doing good work.
- I have a best friend at work.
- In the last 6 months, someone has talked to me about my progress.
- This last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow.

Worth noting was that pay and perks were not as important to employees. They matter to every employee, but are not the factors that give employers the edge with good employees (65). Daecher also stresses the significance of these factors when he encourages employers of vehicle operators to "Make sure policies and procedures are in place, and give drivers RESPECT. When the organization encourages them to give input, you will have better, happier drivers" (5).

One strategy used to reduce absenteeism at a nonprofit residential program for children with autism helps demonstrate the importance of personalizing the workplace. Twenty-one staff members participated in the study, which was evaluated through the use of a multiple baseline across three individual group homes. During baseline conditions, employees reported their unscheduled absences to an individual whose only responsibility to the organization, aside from some part-time clerical work, was to arrange substitute coverage for staff who were absent. Under treatment conditions, the additional requirement of having employees notify an immediate supervisor in the event of

an unscheduled absence was imposed. The procedure reduced the use of unscheduled leave by 56 percent, 66 percent, and 35 percent in homes one, two, and three, respectively (66).

As one of the bus operators in the focus groups stated, "If you show me you care a little about me, I'll bend over backward for you." One mid-sized agency's executive director noted that he visits any employee who has been hospitalized as a result of an on-the-job injury or other

traumatic event, to assure the employee that the agency will do everything possible to assist the employee during that difficult time. This greater effort toward personalizing work relationships appears to be quite effective--director's agency enjoys an extremely low rate of absenteeism. In simple terms, there is a realization that a quid-pro-quo is always in effect, whereby the more managers show they care for their employees, the more likely the employees will provide the maximum effort for their employer.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CONCLUSIONS

Employee availability is an issue with which many transit agencies struggle. The causes of employee shortages and absenteeism are varied. Some causes can be controlled by a transit agency; some are generated by the external environment that is beyond a transit agency's ability to control, but not beyond their ability to adapt to; some causes need to be bargained over with organized labor, whereas other causes are generated by fundamental aspects of human behavior that might or might not be successfully addressed by transit agencies. Based on this synthesis review of the state of the art, there appears to be a number of actions a transit agency can take to help ensure employee availability and avoid excessive absenteeism.

The use of customized surveys and tests that enable transit agencies to develop profiles of bus operator candidates makes good sense and has shown positive results in the few agencies where analysis has been performed. Transit agencies should strongly consider investing in such selection instruments to increase their chances of getting the best candidates possible because the basic work ethic and character of an employee appears to affect absenteeism. The value of these instruments increases as competition for good employees becomes more intense in a current "employees' market," and as previous employers become more reluctant to share information about applicants' previous work records. Agencies that utilize such instruments indicate that they are more satisfied with their level of absenteeism than those agencies that do not.

Transit agencies can increase their chances of improving the health of their employees by means of wellness programs, health screenings, ergonomic equipment, and training programs that emphasize safety and accident prevention. Although the benefits of these programs are difficult to measure, they are clearly positive, assist those who wish to stay as healthy as possible, and provide an opportunity to emphasize the agency's goals for attendance.

EAPs help employees cope with a multitude of problems and can help them better balance their job responsibilities and their personal problems. The one transit agency that reported providing a day care center at its operating facility could not quantify its cost/benefit in terms of absenteeism. However, they believe it has helped reduce absenteeism, increased employee morale, and improved employee availability because it makes the agency a more attractive place of employment.

Although opinions vary greatly on the effectiveness of financial incentives for better attendance, there appear to be encouraging trends that help to identify when incentives work best.

- Agencies that offer larger cash awards report greater success with their incentive programs. Larger awards would logically seem to have more impact on behavior.
- Perhaps just as importantly, agencies that are offering their awards based on quarterly performance are having greater success. This time frame is much more achievable for employees and gives them goals more easily reached. One agency still uses a year as their measure for performance, but allows employees to have as many as four occurrences of absence and still qualify for a substantial good attendance bonus.
- Transit agencies that use lotteries for cash prizes or certificates have found them to be popular and successful in reducing absenteeism.
- There is more support for paying employees for unused sick leave at the end of the year than for paying out sick leave upon retirement.

Most transit agencies provide their employees with a considerable amount of flexibility in the use of annual leave. Many transit agencies allow their operators and mechanics to select some portion of their annual vacations in daily increments, and work with them whenever possible to grant use of annual leave on a daily basis with at least some minimal amount of notice. Almost one-half of all agencies surveyed allow employees to swap days off with another employee with similar work hours. Virtually every agency agreed that these provisions help minimize absenteeism to a small degree and help foster better rapport between managers and rank and file employees.

Transit agencies usually must bargain with their unions on how absenteeism is controlled. Not surprisingly, tighter controls tend to discourage excessive absenteeism. If transit agencies want to implement stricter controls over the use of sick leave, they will most likely have to pay for this right through the bargaining process.

There is disagreement over whether requiring employees to accrue substantial amounts of sick leave before getting

consensus on the fairness and effectiveness of denying the first day of sick leave time after an employee has been absent a certain number of times during the past 12 months.

Active monitoring of absence, combined with consistent application of progressive discipline, is regarded as the single most effective way to minimize excess absenteeism. It is surprising how often agencies admit they do not do a good job in this area. Agencies that dedicate personnel to doing nothing but this function, and live by a "no tolerance" policy toward excessive absenteeism, have enjoyed good results. Consistent auditing of the authenticity of doctors' certificates has also paid big dividends to transit agencies in reducing absenteeism.

Positive discipline programs are being used in more workplaces in an attempt to treat employees as responsible adults, avoid bitter feelings, and minimize absenteeism caused by employees serving suspensions.

Transit managers are not only attempting to use "carrot and stick" approaches (incentives and penalties), some are also realizing that transit employees need to feel more involved in their agency. Agencies that use Group Supervision programs have a noticeably lower rate of absenteeism than those that don't. The single agency that engaged in substantial organizational culture change, where a new vision statement was developed and implemented with the full participation of employees from every level of the organization, realized a decrease in absenteeism of more than 10 percent. Transit agencies that make the extra effort to personalize their relationships with employees and respond assertively to their needs have found that "what goes around, comes around." Employees in such agencies are more likely to be willing to give the essential effort all agencies need to succeed.

The competition for employees in many regions of the country that are experiencing nearly full employment is affecting transit agencies' ability to attract and retain good employees. Many agencies are questioning the efficiency of using part-time bus operators as the number and quality of applicants for such jobs decrease. Others are increasing the wages and benefits they offer to new part-time employees as they experience turnover rates as high as 50 percent. One entrepreneurial transit agency has managed to establish itself as a provider of other public services (street sweeping, street light maintenance, graffiti removal, etc.) and provides their part-time bus operators with the first opportunities to earn extra income and benefits by working at these services.

Transit agencies also have to deal with what many regard as a new attitude toward work and loyalty to employers. Many transit managers detect a new generation of employees that don't regard transit as a long-term career because they have been accustomed to seeing massive layoffs and hearing that they will change careers up to six times in their lives. The younger generation seems to have a greater need to balance their lives between work and leisure time than the previous generation. In addition to this, more households are now characterized by two working parents or an unmarried single working parent with young children. Family responsibilities were rated as the second most significant reason for absence from work. One agency states that all transit systems have to reassess what they regard as a reasonable attendance standard given these new realities. They suggest that minimizing excessive absenteeism is a more realistic goal than expecting perfect attendance.

The following items could be the subject of future study:

- A number of transit agencies are actively considering instituting day care services at their facilities. This report found only one agency currently providing such services (VIA in San Antonio, Texas). That agency subsidizes the cost of the child care center at a level of approximately \$100,000 per year. Future study should determine if that cost is recaptured through reduced absenteeism.
- Establishing an effective communication program is one of the biggest challenges to transit agencies that typically operate 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, from multiple facilities, with a large work force that operates in the field and rarely sees their fellow workers. If establishing a more personal relationship with all employees were vital to reducing absenteeism, then the transit industry would be well served by identifying best practices in organizational communications.
- Detailed case studies of public and private transit agencies with low absenteeism might be conducted to determine what strategies and/or conditions they have in place that might be duplicated by other agencies. Surveys of employees might be undertaken to determine the correlation between job satisfaction and absenteeism at these agencies.
- More analysis on the long-term impact of customized employee selection instruments needs to be conducted to determine the cost-benefit of these tools.

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## APPENDIX A

### Survey Questionnaire

<b>Questionnaire</b>  <b>PRACTICES IN ASSURING EMPLOYEE AVAILABILITY</b>  <b>TCRP Synthesis Topic SF-06</b>
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Your Name and Title \_\_\_\_\_  
 Organization \_\_\_\_\_  
 Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_

Your participation in this survey will help transit agencies throughout the nation do a better job of preventing, controlling, and minimizing absenteeism. When answering the following questions, please make a special effort to explain why you believe a certain technique is working or not working. If you need more space to complete your response, please attach additional pages with your comments. Your confidential results will be synthesized into a report to be available from the Transportation Research Board in 1999. In the interim, if you choose to participate, we will mail you our preliminary findings in the next 120 days. Thank you for your contribution to the public transit industry.

#### **I. Preventive Measures**

Sections A through E describe examples of ways transit agencies try to prevent employee absences *before they occur*. Please check the boxes of the measures you use.

##### **A. Practices Used When Hiring New Employees**

Administering customized surveys or selection tests/devices that help determine applicants' attitudes toward the importance of attendance.. (If you use a specific selection system or test, please identify it.)

Conducting a thorough reference check of each applicant's record of attendance in prior positions

Requiring new employees to attest (on a written form) that they have read, understand, and agree to abide by your agency's attendance policies

Other methods (please describe below)

Please tell us if any of these measures are effective or ineffective, and why. If you purposely don't use these methods, please explain why.

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**B. Health Maintenance**

Wellness Programs (e.g., smoking cessation, nutritional education, weight reduction, etc.)

Training programs that emphasize safety and accident prevention

Readily available physical examinations paid for by the agency

Ergonomic equipment or work stations

Discounts on health club membership for employees

Other methods (please describe below)

Please tell us if any of these measures are effective or ineffective, and why.

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**C. Off-the-Job Employee Needs**

Child care services or information

Information and/or assistance with elder care

Employee Assistance Program

Other methods (please describe below)

Please tell us if any of these methods are effective or ineffective, and why.

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**D. Incentives**

Allowing employees to cash in Sick Leave at retirement

Allowing employees to cash in Sick Leave at the end of the year

Allowing employees to trade unused Sick Leave for Annual Leave

Offering "Attendance Poker" or other "lottery games" resulting in prizes for those with good attendance

Cash awards for perfect attendance (please note if they are based on quarterly or annual intervals)

"Team Competition" for awards based on attendance records of groups of employees

Other methods: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Please concisely describe the features of your incentive program. Please advise us if you think they are effective.

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Do you believe incentives work? Do they change behavior in both the short and long term? Do only the "already good employees" receive the benefits?

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Do you ask your employees what incentives would be attractive to them? What have they said?

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#### **E. Flexibility Provisions**

Paid time off (a lump sum of days for sick, annual, and personal use are provided, with no questions asked of how they are used)

Ability to use annual leave in daily increments

Ability for employees to swap days off

Provision of personal days

Co-worker leave donation programs

Allowance of a specific number of leave-without-pay days

Other flexibility measure

Please provide the specifics of your flexibility provisions, and advise if you believe they are effective.

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## **II. Management Interventions**

Even with the best preventive measures, a certain amount of absence will occur. Sections A through C describe ways transit agencies attempt to control or reduce the use of sick leave. Please check the boxes of the measures you use.

### **A. Controls on the use of Leave**

Requirement to accrue a specified amount of sick leave before sick leave is paid

Denial of pay for the first day of sick leave after a certain number of occurrences

Some form of peer review or pressure to improve an employee's attendance

Required documentation (e.g., medical certificate)

Auditing of authenticity of medical certificates

Denial of pay for sick leave used before or after holidays

Methods for addressing "pattern absences" (e.g., consistently sick the days before or after days off)

Other control techniques (please describe below)

Please concisely describe the features of your control program. Please advise us if you think they are effective.

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### **B. Progressive Discipline**

Progressive counseling and suspension at well understood intervals prior to termination

"Point systems" where employees start each year with a certain number of points and earn or lose points based on attendance

"Positive Discipline" programs where warnings and counseling are issued, but no suspensions are served

Mandatory referral to EAP at certain benchmarks

Other progressive discipline techniques (please describe below)

Please concisely describe the features of your discipline program. Please advise us if you think they are effective.

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### C. Other Management Strategies

"Group Supervision" programs where operations supervisors establish an ongoing relationship with as many as 25 operators and monitor their attendance

Making information on employees' status within attendance policies easily available (e.g., through a computer in the operators' room)

Consistent communication of the importance of good attendance

"Light-duty" or "modified-duty" work assignments

Redeployment program for long term on-the-job injuries or absences

Discussions with employees on causes of absenteeism

Thorough attendance monitoring and analysis

Providing "critical stress assistance" to help those who have gone through trauma return to work

"Positive" displays of employee attendance (e.g., showing the employees with the best attendance on bulletin boards)

Overtime based on 40 hours a week, with sick leave not counting as time worked

Other management strategies (please describe below)

Please concisely describe the features of your management strategies: Please advise us if you think they are effective.

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### III. Transit Agency Decisions That Might Contribute to Absenteeism

Certain management rules or agency decisions designed to reduce costs might have negative consequences on employee attendance. Please check the boxes of the provisions noted below that you use that you think might have resulted in reduced employee availability.

The use of part-time employees (e.g., is there evidence that part-time operators promoted to full-time positions have less commitment toward good attendance?)

Competitive tendering of services (e.g., has competitive bidding for services lowered bus operators' wage levels to the point where other employment opportunities are more attractive to them, resulting in high employee turnover?)

Inflexible policies on the use of leave

Unattractive work schedules (e.g., split shifts, graveyard shifts)

Medical certification requirements that might result in lengthened absence

Please offer your thoughts below on these, or any other, agency policies that contribute to employee unavailability.

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#### **IV. External Factors Affecting Employee Availability**

A number of factors that are beyond the control of transit agencies might be impacting employee availability. Please check the boxes of the factors that you believe are affecting your agency.

Family Medical Leave Act

Americans With Disabilities Act

More attractive pay and benefits offered by other employers that contributes to attrition

Do you detect a new generation's attitude toward work and loyalty to employers?

Please provide your thoughts on how severe the impact of these, or other external factors, are and what your agency is doing to deal with them.

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#### **V. Statistical Questions**

Please answer the following questions based on your agency's experience. If you don't know the answer, please indicate that and move to the next question.

1. What is the average number of days of unscheduled absence per year, per bargaining unit employee? \_\_\_\_\_
2. How many days of sick leave may employees earn per year? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Have you noticed any discernible patterns of absence based on age, seniority, gender, parental status, shift worked, etc.? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Do you think absenteeism has gone up, down, or stayed about the same over the past five years?  
Up \_\_\_\_\_ Down \_\_\_\_\_ Stayed the same \_\_\_\_\_
5. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 meaning there is no problem and 10 meaning there is a serious problem, how do you rate the level of absenteeism in your agency?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

6. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 meaning no problem and 10 meaning a serious problem, how do you rate the nature of workers compensation in your agency?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

7. What have you done to help reduce the amount of time lost to workers compensation claims such as using third party administrators to manage cases, or employing private investigators for surveillance of suspected abusers, etc. ? Has it worked?

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## VI. Final Questions

1. Do you have a way of measuring the impact of absenteeism? If so, please explain below.

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2. What do you think are the primary causes of absenteeism in your agency?

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3. What do you believe are the most effective ways to assure employee availability?

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4. Do you think your employees regard sick leave as a "right" to be used whenever they want, or as insurance for when it is really needed? Please explain.

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Please return this survey, and all attached documents, by April 10, 1998 to:

Joel Volinski, Deputy Director  
Center for Urban Transportation Research  
University of South Florida - CUT 100  
4202 East Fowler Avenue  
Tampa, FL 33620-5375

**Thank you for your help**

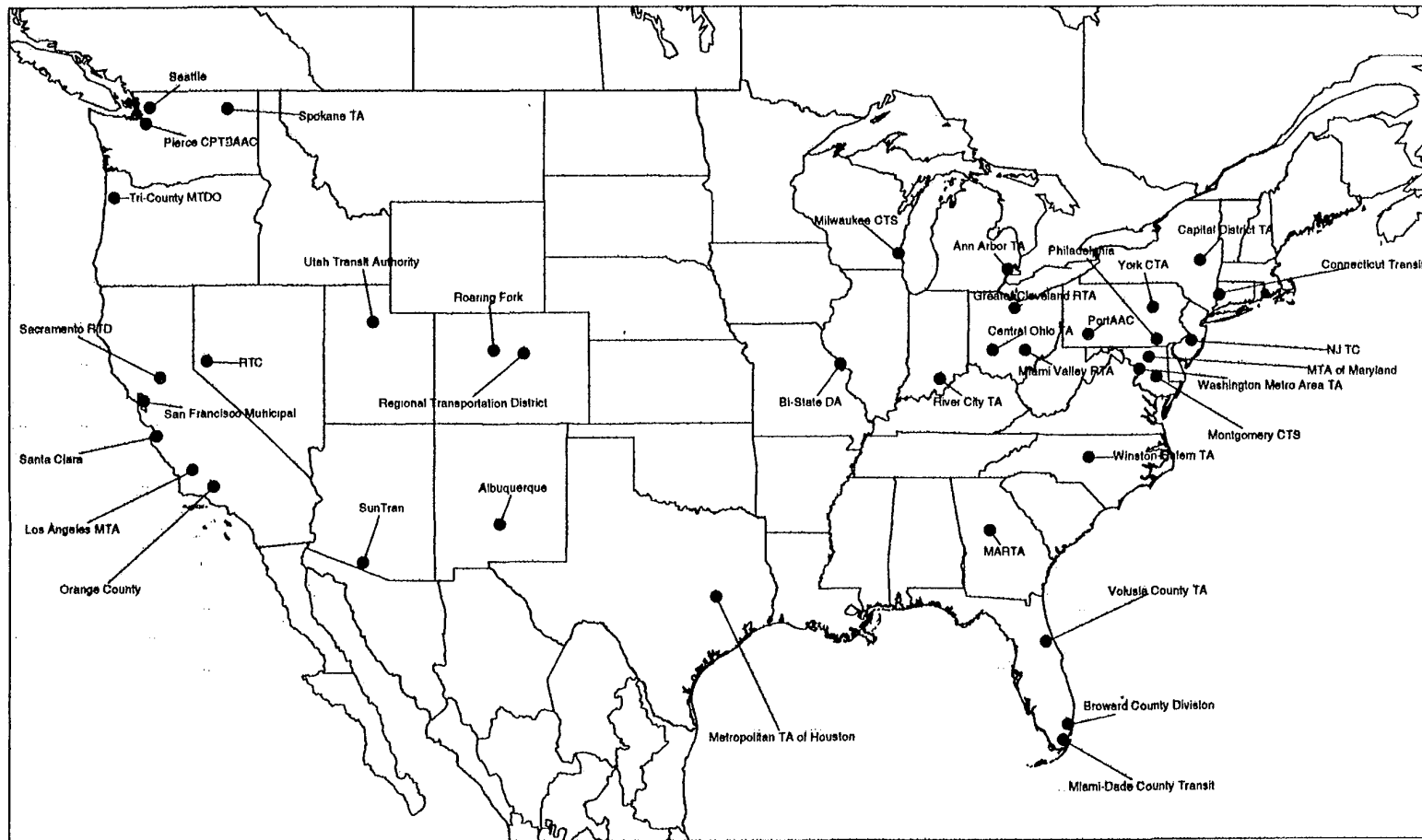
## APPENDIX B

### Survey Respondents

Ann Arbor Transportation Authority, Michigan	New Jersey Transit Corporation, New Jersey
Bi-State Development Agency, Missouri	Orange County Transportation Authority, California
Broward County Division of Mass Transit, Florida	Pierce County Transportation Benefit Area Authority Corporation, Washington
Capital District Transportation Authority, New York	Regional Transportation Commission (RTC), Nevada
Central Ohio Transit Authority, Ohio	Regional Transportation District, Colorado
City of Albuquerque Transit and Parking Department, New Mexico	Roaring Fork Transit Agency, Colorado
City of Tucson Mass Transit System (Sun Tran), Arizona	Sacramento Regional Transit District, California
Connecticut Transit (CT Transit), Connecticut	San Francisco Municipal Rail (MUNI), California
Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority, Ohio	Santa Clara Valley Transit Authority, California
King County Department of Transportation, Washington	Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority, Pennsylvania
Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, California	Spokane Transit Authority, Washington

## APPENDIX C

### Map of Surveyed Respondents



## APPENDIX D

### The Life of a Relief Transit Operator at Pierce Transit

Pierce Transit has a commitment to the public. We print schedules that tell our customers where and when they can catch their bus. We are committed to have a particular bus on a particular route at a particular time to get them to their destination. What Pierce Transit never wants to tell a customer is the reason that bus did not show up is that we had no operator to put in the seat. That's where relief operators come in.

Relief Operators at Pierce Transit cover vacancies created by full time operators, because the full time operator is on vacation, sick, in training or off for whatever reason. Sometimes we get advance notice that a full time operator will be off, which makes it easy for the dispatcher to fill the work.. Other times we get only an hour's notice or in the worse case scenario, no notice at all.

Relief Operators never know until 3:00 p.m. of any given day - what their schedule will be for the following day. This makes scheduling your personal life difficult. It is important that you have flexible daycare arrangements and your family is aware of the demands of this job.

Our first run signs up at 3:31 a.m. and our last run gets in at 1:11 a.m. So, there are only a couple of hours a day that Pierce Transit does not have buses on the road. As a relief operator, you may be the one to start at 3:31 a.m. or the one to get off at 1:11 a.m. Relief operators do not have a choice as to which shift they will work, or what routes they will drive. Assignments vary greatly, including straight 8 hour shifts, split shifts and shifts less than 8 hours. Traditionally during a split shift you would work two to four hours in the morning, then are off for a few hours and work the remainder of your shift in the afternoon. We also have what we call "trippers." These are two to four hour pieces of work. You could be assigned two or three "trippers" in any given day.

Let's pretend now that you are a relief operator and it is now after 3:00 p.m. You check with the dispatcher to find out what your assignment is for tomorrow. The dispatcher informs you that all you have for tomorrow is a 3 hour piece of work. You are told to report at 6:00 am and that you will be finished at 9:00 am. You are happy about the assignment because you have been putting in quite a few hours lately and feel like you need a break. The weather tomorrow is supposed to be nice and sunny and you decide to call a few friends and plan to meet them at the beach at 9:30 am. You go to bed that night and set your alarm to give you plenty of time to arrive before 6:00 am. At about 3:00 am your phone rings. It is the dispatcher. A lot has happened since you called in yesterday to get your assignment. Several operators have gone sick and now the dispatcher is busy juggling work. You are informed that your shift is being changed and instead of coming in at 6:00 am, you are needed at 5:14 a.m. Also, instead of only working three hours, you will now be working eight. There go all your plans! Another way this could play out is that you do not get the call at 3:00 am and come to work for your three hour shift as originally assigned. You get back to the garage at 9:00 am and are in high spirits. You turn in your work assignment at the dispatch window and the dispatcher says to you, "Bus 215 is out in the lot, running and ready. I need you to get in it and drive for another five hours. The bus should have left the lot 10 minutes ago." As a relief operator, you are expected to work this additional time. The bottom line is, it is very difficult to schedule your private life around what is expected of you at Pierce Transit.

In addition to being trained on our regular "fixed route" buses, you will also be trained in our Specialized Transportation SHUTTLE buses. Our SHUTTLE service is a door to door van service for the disabled community. Many of our SHUTTLE customers use mobility devices such as canes, walkers or wheelchairs. Some customers have difficulty communicating because of their disability. In SHUTTLE, an operator often has direct contact with the customer, assisting in their boarding or deboarding and walking them to and from the door. Unlike fixed route service, where an operator follows a specific route, SHUTTLE operators are given a name and address and it is up to the operator to find it. (Map reading is part of your training.) It takes a special person to work in SHUTTLE because of the individual needs of our disabled customers.

Relief operators are guaranteed twenty hours of work each week. This is not to say that you won't work 50 or so hours in a given week. It all depends on the workload, or the amount of vacancies created by the full time operators. There is no guarantee as to when you will move to a full time operator. Movement to full time is based on how many people retire, quit, are terminated, or get promoted. It also depends on the addition of service. Movement to full time is done according to seniority.

We expect our relief operators to be available for work. That doesn't mean that you have to sit by your phone 24 hours a day waiting for the dispatcher to call you. However, in the past, we had relief operators that were using their answering machines as screening devices. The dispatcher would call, leave a message and the operator would not call back. This was happening whether or not they were home. It became difficult to fill work. Remember the commitment we have to the public? Pierce Transit instituted a call-in policy. Today, relief operators on two of their weekends per month, are assigned a call-in time. If the dispatcher has work at that time, the relief operator is expected to come to work. If the dispatcher does not have work, the relief operator is then free to do whatever they want for the remainder of the day.

Relief operator hours are equalized. That means the relief operator with the highest seniority and the one with the lowest seniority are going to get about the same number of hours per payperiod. That's not to say that if we need an operator now the dispatcher won't take whoever is available rather than call the person with the least hours.

After hearing our expectations of relief operators, is this something you would like to do?

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Signature

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Date

**APPENDIX E**

**Broward County Transit: Operations Rules and Regulations and Operator's Manual**

# **BROWARD COUNTY TRANSIT**



## **OPERATIONS RULES AND REGULATIONS AND OPERATOR'S MANUAL**

*Revised March 1997*

## **10. Operator Shift Swaps**

Occasionally it becomes necessary for Operators to be absent from work due to court appearances, family matters, or other personal reasons. Swapping of shifts with another Bus Operator would enable an Operator to switch shifts with another Operator at the same facility and therefore not lose pay for the necessary absence.

- a. Members of the bargaining unit, except probationary employees in training, shall have the right to request a run/shift exchange by means of a form provided by the County, which both parties to the exchange must complete and sign. The completed form must be presented to the Superintendent or designee for approval.

Requests for exchanges must be made a minimum of seventy-two (72) hours in advance. In case of a documentable emergency, approval may be granted with less than seventy-two (72) hours at the discretion of the Superintendent.

- b. The maximum numbers of exchanges allowable for any bargaining unit member shall not exceed five (5) exchanges per calendar year for an Operator initiating the request. All run/shift exchange for "picking purposes" (other than partial runs) will need to be documented and will be deducted from the maximum number of five (5) swaps. The run/shift exchange cannot be used in conjunction with a scheduled vacation.
- c. Any employee on duty by virtue of a run/shift exchange shall be entitled to the same benefits, privileges, and protections and shall assume the same responsibilities as any on-duty personnel. Repayment of a run/shift exchange is the responsibility of the employee.
- d. A replacement who leaves work early because of illness shall have the sick leave deducted from his./her bank and not from the bank accrued by the employee originally assigned to the run/shift, otherwise, payroll computations will not be affected by run/shift exchanges.
- e. A run/shift exchange constitutes an even exchange and neither party becomes eligible for overtime pay because of the exchange. Each employee will be credited as if they had worked their normal schedule.
- f. An employee who abuses this procedure shall be subject to the loss of the right to run/shift exchange for the period of one (1) year. Any member of the bargaining unit who agrees to run/shift exchange, but reports sick for the agreed exchange, must provide doctor's lines to verify the illness. All sick reporting, or booking off a run must be done in accordance with existing policies. An employee who fails to provide doctor's lines or otherwise fails to report to work the agreed run/shift shall be subject to disciplinary action. Members of the bargaining unit are encouraged to police the practice themselves with the operational needs of the County, as well as the practical needs of their bargaining unit members in mind.

- g. Both affected Operators must submit paper work (as shown in Section VI,O) to the Superintendent for approval at least seventy-two (72) hours in advance of the run/shift exchange.
- h. Both Operators involved will be responsible for operating their new temporary assignment. Either employee involved in the run/shift exchange will be subject to all regular rules and regulations that govern normal operations.
- i. Both run exchanges must occur within a sixty (60) day period and must happen within the same calendar year.

**APPLICANT:** \_\_\_\_\_

BROWARD COUNTY MASS TRANSIT DIVISION

RUN EXCHANGE REQUEST/AUTHORIZATION

YEAR \_\_\_\_\_

EXCHANGE # \_\_\_\_\_

MAXIMUM OF 5

*\*NOTE: BOTH run exchanges must occur within a sixty (60) day period.*

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**REPLACEMENT**

I am eligible and hereby obligate myself to perform all run assignment duties of applicant for the specific period noted below in applicant section:

PRINT NAME OF REPLACEMENT \_\_\_\_\_

DAY: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

RUN: \_\_\_\_\_ REPORT TIME: \_\_\_\_\_ REPORT LOCATION: \_\_\_\_\_

I understand that I am not eligible for RDO work on exchange date.

---

**APPLICANT**

I am eligible and hereby obligate myself to perform all run assignment duties of replacement for the specific period noted above in replacement section:

PRINT NAME OF APPLICANT: \_\_\_\_\_

DAY: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

RUN # \_\_\_\_\_ REPORT TIME: \_\_\_\_\_ REPORT LOCATION: \_\_\_\_\_

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Signature of Applicant: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Replacement: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

RECOMMEND APPROVAL: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Superintendent Signature

c: Applicant  
Replacement  
Payroll  
File

## APPENDIX F

### TARC Attendance Policy

#### TARC ATTENDANCE POLICY

Rev 1.0

##### A. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

Regular attendance is essential to the effective operation of TARC, and to our commitment to provide high quality, dependable service to our customers. It is the expectation of TARC that each member of our team will be available for scheduled work on a consistent basis.

From time to time, an employee may have an illness, disability, or other valid reason that prevents attendance at work. The TARC Attendance Policy allows for these infrequent occurrences. As an incentive to exceed the standards of this policy, the labor agreement provides a financial reward for those who achieve perfect attendance.

The TARC Attendance Policy is intended to support the objective of regular attendance. It includes a series of disciplinary steps that bring to the employee's attention the fact that he/she is exceeding acceptable absence levels, provides counseling regarding steps that can be taken for improvement, and describes the consequences of failure to improve attendance.

##### B. DEFINITIONS

Excused Absence: Absence from scheduled work supported by adequate explanation, documentation, or a physician's statement delivered to the employee's immediate supervisor upon return to work. Whenever an employee has been absent for more than three (3) consecutive workdays, a physician's statement is required in order for the absences to be considered excused. At TARC's discretion, a physician's statement may be required for absences on a scheduled workday immediately before or after a holiday or vacation, in order for such absences to be considered excused.

Unexcused Absence: Absence from scheduled work that is either; (1) not supported by adequate explanation, documentation, or a physician's statement, (2) not supported in a timely manner as described above, (3) inadequately supported, or, (4) for any other reason not considered excused in Exhibit "A."

Verified Disability/Long-Term Illness or Injury: A continuous period of absence for a disabling medical reason of more than ten (10) working days, or, a continuous period of absence of any length requiring hospitalization, or, a continuous absence of any length for outpatient surgery, that is documented by a properly completed physician's statement delivered to the Human Resources Department at any time during the period of absence or upon return to work.

Verified Worker's Compensation: A period of absence attributable to a work injury supported by a physician's statement from a designated treating physician, a physician seen on referral from a designated treating physician, or a physician designated by TARC.

Rolling Year: A fifty-two (52) week period of active employment, ending with the Saturday of the week in which the most recent period of absence occurred. A rolling year is fifty-two (52) consecutive weeks unless interrupted by an approved leave or worker's compensation absence of ten (10) or more working days.

Physician's Statement: A statement from a licensed physician, osteopath, dentist, or chiropractor that includes the employee's name, diagnosis, dates of disability, and signature of physician or dentist. A rubber-stamp signature is acceptable. However, TARC may verify the authenticity of any statement as it deems necessary. In situations where confidentiality of diagnosis is necessary, the statement should indicate to whom Human Resources staff may direct inquiries to confirm the necessity for the absence.

### **C. CATEGORIES OF ABSENCE**

TARC recognizes three major categories of absence. These are:

#### **Category A: Scheduled or Contractual Absence**

1. Vacations
2. Paid Holidays
3. Jury Duty
4. Approved Leave, e.g., Funeral, Military, Maternity, FMLA, Union, etc.
5. Suspensions
6. Union Business

#### **Category B: Long-Term or Non-Recurring Absence**

1. Verified Disability/Long-Term Illness or Injury
2. Verified Worker's Compensation

#### **Category C: Recurring or Excessive Absence**

1. Excused Absence
2. Unexcused Absence
3. Loseouts/Tardiness/Late to Report
4. Personal Reasons
5. Any Other Absence Not Qualifying as Category A or B

## D. POINT SYSTEM

### (1) Treatment of Absence Categories

A point system will provide a progressive program for handling absences and loseouts/tardies/late to report. Absences are treated as follows:

- a. Category A absences will not count toward points that result in disciplinary steps.
- b. Category B absences will not count toward points that result in disciplinary steps.
- c. Category C absences will count toward points that result in disciplinary steps.

### (2) Accumulation of Points

Points are accumulated during a "rolling year".

### (3) Point Values of Absences/Credits

#### Excused absences

Each full workday .....	1 point
Each partial workday .....	½ point

#### Unexcused absences

Each full workday .....	2 points
Each partial workday .....	1 point
Loseout/Tardy/Late to report (work run or other assignment) .....	½ point
Loseout/Tardy/Late to report (did not work run or other assignment) .....	1 point

Credit for month of perfect attendance .....1 point

## E. PROGRESSIVE DISCIPLINARY STEPS

The three step procedure outlined below will apply to the accumulation of points during a "rolling year."

### Step 1: Counseling

After accumulating ten (10) points, an employee will be notified, in writing, of the number of points accumulated and counseled as to subsequent disciplinary steps that will result from continued absences.

### Step 2: Probation

After accumulating fifteen (15) points, an employee will be notified, in writing, of the number of points accumulated, counseled, and placed on probation. He/she will be advised that discharge may result from continued absences.

### Step 3: Discharge

After accumulating twenty (20) points, an employee will be subject to termination based on a complete review of the individual's employment record, including but not limited to the employee's attendance record for the two (2) years prior to the start date of the rolling year.

## F. GENERAL

1. Credits for Perfect Attendance: A "credit" of one point will be granted for perfect attendance in any one calendar month within the rolling year. Perfect attendance shall mean that the employee is not absent or tardy during the month, that the employee actually performed a work assignment, and missed no scheduled work due to discipline. Absences for union business or contractual paid absences for vacations, holidays, jury duty, or funerals will not negate the credit for that month.

2. Absences Involving "Ask Off's" in Transportation Department: From time to time, there is an excess of operators to perform the required work. Operators who "ask off" and are granted permission or are offered the opportunity to be off under these circumstances will not be assessed Category C absence or points under this policy.

3. Discipline Code: There are several areas of the Discipline Code where disciplinary actions are stipulated for absence or tardiness (e.g. AWOL, loseouts, etc.). This policy has been developed with no suspension steps so that the employee would not be subject to a double penalty for the same absence. However, each employee is subject to the penalties outlined in the Discipline Code should those specific rules be violated.

4. Attendance Record: Upon request, an employee may review or obtain a copy of his/her attendance record.

5. Effective Date: This policy is effective January 5, 1997, and subsequently revised on July 12, 1998. It is subject to change upon written notice to employees. Contemplated changes first will be discussed with the proper union representatives.

CLASSIFICATION OF CATEGORY C ABSENCE

## I EXCUSED

1. S - Sick

- A. Physical, mental and/or emotional incapacity (statement, if required)
- B. Accident or injury that would incapacitate individual in performing regular work function (statement, if required)
- C. Ill and going to Doctor (statement, if required)
- D. Using prescribed medication which would incapacitate individual (statement required)
- E. Dental problems, such as oral surgery or extraction (statement required)

2. O - Other

- A. Emergency leave - short term (documented if required)
  - 1. Natural disaster - tornado, flood, fire, injury of immediate family\*
  - 2. Life or death situation within immediate family\*
  - 3. Major crisis within immediate family\* - i.e., disappearance of member, domestic situation of critical nature
- B. Doctor or Dental appointment of child or spouse (statement required)
- C. Illness of child or spouse (documentation required)
- D. Appointment - notification to Dispatcher or Supervisor no later than required reporting time
  - 1. Medical doctor (statement required)
  - 2. Dentist/Orthodontist (statement required)
  - 3. Psychologist/Counselor (statement required)
  - 4. Chiropractor (statement required)
  - 5. Acupuncture (statement required)
  - 6. Court appearance (documentation required)
  - 7. House closing/moving (documentation required)
  - 8. Attorney (documentation required)
- E. Childbirth by spouse or child (documentation required)
- F. Medical or dental surgery of immediate family member (documentation required)
- G. Funeral for other than immediate family\* (documentation required)

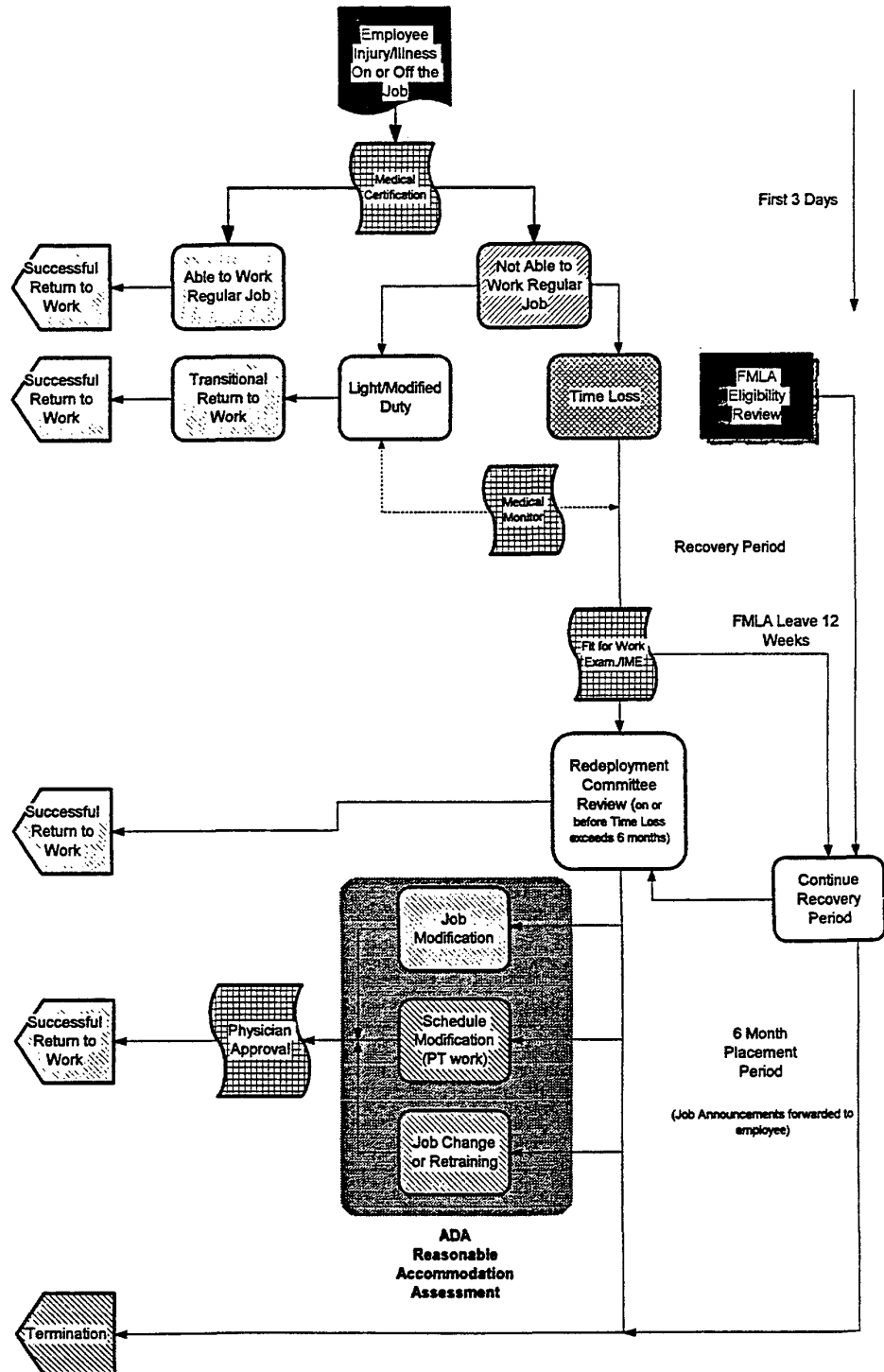
II. UNEXCUSED - NX

- A. Car trouble
- B. Inability to get to work based on lack of transportation
- C. Absent without leave
- D. Any absence not documented as required or requested
- E. Refusal to state reason for absence when requested

\* Immediate family is defined as father, mother, brother, sister, father-in-law, mother-in-law, spouse, children, grandchildren, grandparent of employee, step-children by current marriage

## APPENDIX G

### Pierce Transit Redeployment Program



**THE TRANSPORTATION RESEARCH BOARD** is a unit of the National Research Council, which serves the National Academy of Sciences and the National Academy of Engineering. It evolved in 1974 from the Highway Research Board, which was established in 1920. The TRB incorporates all former HRB activities and also performs additional functions under a broader scope involving all modes of transportation and the interactions of transportation with society. The Board's purpose is to stimulate research concerning the nature and performance of transportation systems, to disseminate information that the research produces, and to encourage the application of appropriate research findings. The Board's program is carried out by more than 270 committees, task forces, and panels composed of more than 3,300 administrators, engineers, social scientists, attorneys, educators, and others concerned with transportation; they serve without compensation. The program is supported by state transportation and highway departments, the modal administrations of the U.S. Department of Transportation, the Association of American Railroads, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, and other organizations and individuals interested in the development of transportation.

The National Academy of Sciences is a private, nonprofit, self-perpetuating society of distinguished scholars engaged in scientific and engineering research, dedicated to the furtherance of science and technology and to their use for the general welfare. Upon the authority of the charter granted to it by the Congress in 1863, the Academy has a mandate that requires it to advise the federal government on scientific and technical matters. Dr. Bruce Alberts is president of the National Academy of Sciences.

The National Academy of Engineering was established in 1964, under the charter of the National Academy of Sciences, as a parallel organization of outstanding engineers. It is autonomous in its administration and in the selection of its members, sharing with the National Academy of Sciences the responsibility for advising the federal government. The National Academy of Engineering also sponsors engineering programs aimed at meeting national needs, encourages education and research, and recognizes the superior achievements of engineers. Dr. Robert M. White is president of the National Academy of Engineering.

The Institute of Medicine was established in 1970 by the National Academy of Sciences to secure the services of eminent members of appropriate professions in the examination of policy matters pertaining to the health of the public. The Institute acts under the responsibility given to the National Academy of Sciences by its congressional charter to be an adviser to the federal government and, upon its own initiative, to identify issues of medical care, research, and education. Dr. Kenneth I. Shine is president of the Institute of Medicine.

The National Research Council was organized by the National Academy of Sciences in 1916 to associate the broad community of science and technology with the Academy's purposes of furthering knowledge and advising the federal government. Functioning in accordance with general policies determined by the Academy, the Council has become the principal operating agency of both the National Academy of Sciences and the National Academy of Engineering in providing services to the government, the public, and the scientific and engineering communities. The Council is administered jointly by both Academies and the Institute of Medicine. Dr. Bruce Alberts and Dr. Robert M. White are chairman and vice chairman, respectively, of the National Research Council.