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# CAREERS IN PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION



A GUIDE FOR JOB SEEKERS FUNDED BY  
THE FEDERAL TRANSIT ADMINISTRATION

A product of the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce  
Development at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey



# Introduction

Whatever your interests, you can find a meaningful career in Public Transportation. Working in a public transit agency or with one of the many contractors of Public Transportation services, you can help keep your community on the move! You may think first about bus or rail operators, but workers also repair vehicles, count fares, purchase equipment, address marketing and sales, and perform other duties. More jobs are “going green” as the industry transitions to fuel efficient technologies and sustainable practices, from Vehicle Mechanics who work on engines that use biofuel to Chief Sustainability Officers who strategically plan green projects and purchases.

Career paths in Public Transportation are flexible – you can choose to work your way up in a particular job group, or you can explore jobs in several different areas! Entry-level jobs often have few formal educational requirements, but long hours and weekend schedules are common for frontline vehicle operations and repair jobs. Over time, seniority is rewarded with better pay and schedules and workers gain satisfaction from making an impact in their communities. Advanced training and/or a college degree is often needed to move to higher-level positions. Luckily, many employers provide educational opportunities for their workers, as well as other benefits. In fact, a large number of jobs in the industry are unionized, especially those in public transit agencies.

## How to Use this Guide

Job seekers, students, and others can use this guide to build a basic understanding of Public Transportation careers and to create a platform for further research.

The guide identifies:

- **4 Functional Areas of Public Transportation**
- **20 Job Groups and Key Skills**
- **A sampling of common occupations, including:**
  - o **Short description**
  - o **Educational requirements**
  - o **Broad salary range**  
*(varies by region, union affiliation, size of employer)*

Based on a review of available jobs data and interviews with experts, this guide provides an overview of the types of work that may be found at a typical large, metropolitan public transit agency, or across a mixture of smaller public agencies and contractors in a region. Public transit agencies typically have a unionized frontline workforce, but they vary greatly in size, types of transportation offered, services performed in-house versus by contractors, area and customer base served, and other factors. Large metropolitan agencies, for example, may plan, design, finance, build, operate, and maintain transit and multimodal transportation. At a small agency, by contrast, fewer services may be available and job functions may be combined. In some areas, contractors perform some or all of the functions that public agencies perform elsewhere. The most commonly contracted areas of work involve management, facilities maintenance, demand response transportation, capital planning, and other administrative functions. The rate of unionization among contractors varies.

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## Sources & Additional Resources

The information in this guide was gathered from a number of public sources, as well as through interviews with Public Transportation experts. Sources, which also provide additional resources for job seekers, include:

- Wages by Area and Occupation, Bureau of Labor Statistics  
<http://www.bls.gov/bls/blswage.htm>
- Occupational Outlook Handbook (OOH), 2010–11 Edition, Bureau of Labor Statistics  
<http://www.bls.gov/oco/>
- O\*NET Online  
<http://online.onetcenter.org/>
- 2008 National Transit Database Report, Table 18: Employee Work Hours and Employee Counts  
<http://www.ntdprogram.gov/ntdprogram/data.htm>
- American Public Transportation Association  
<http://www.publictransportation.org>
- Fast Lane Hires  
<http://www.fastlanehires.com/>

# Functional Areas, Job Groups, & Skills



## VEHICLE OPERATIONS (6 OUT OF 10 JOBS)

Over half of all jobs in the nation's large urban public transit agencies (over 150,000 jobs!) are in Vehicle Operations (National Transit Database, 2008). Many more of these jobs can be found at smaller agencies and contractors. A diverse group of workers ensures that everything—from buses and trains to ferries and other vehicles—run safely and on time. Some common unions in the operations area include the Amalgamated Transit Union; the United Transportation Union; the Transport Workers Union; the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees; the Marine Employees' Commission; the Service Employees International Union; Seafarers International Union of North America; and the Inlandboatmen's Union of the Pacific.

## VEHICLE MAINTENANCE (2 OUT OF 10 JOBS)

About 20% of those at large urban transit agencies, or nearly 50,000 people, work in Vehicle Maintenance (National Transit Database, 2008). These workers, who can also be found at smaller agencies and contractors, are responsible for keeping buses, commuter trains, subway cars, and other vehicles moving. Workers in these jobs repair, inspect, clean, and otherwise maintain Public Transportation vehicles as well as oversee the inventory of parts and tools needed to keep vehicles operational. Examples of unions active in the Vehicle Maintenance area, especially in transit agencies, include the Amalgamated Transit Union, the Service Employees International Union, the Brotherhood of Railroad Signalmen, and the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees.

## FACILITIES, TRACK, & ROAD MAINTENANCE (1 OUT OF 10 JOBS)

Non-Vehicle Maintenance positions make up about 11% of jobs in urban transit agencies, or over 28,000 jobs, according to the National Transit Database (2008). Also found at other types of Public Transportation employers, these individuals maintain the facilities and other equipment Public Transportation employers are responsible for—from buildings, to

signs and signals, to railroad tracks. This area includes building technicians and other skilled workers who maintain Public Transportation-related equipment. Key unions active in the Facilities, Track, & Road Maintenance area include the Amalgamated Transit Union, the Service Employees International Union, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, and the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees.

## CENTRAL SERVICES AND ADMINISTRATION (1 OUT OF 10 JOBS)

Central Services and Administration has the fewest number of jobs in the Public Transportation industry, but is one of the most diverse areas with regard to the types of jobs available and skills required. According to the National Transit Database (2008), this area accounts for just 10% of all jobs at urban transit agencies. Rural agencies differ greatly from their larger, urban and suburban counterparts in terms of the number and structure of Central Services and Administration jobs. At smaller agencies and contractors, workers often perform several roles at once, while jobs are more specialized and diverse at large, multimodal agencies. Entry-level workers may belong to the Office and Professional Employees International Union or other labor unions, but many workers in this area are managers and professionals who are not eligible for union membership. Further, several functions in this area may be contracted services.

## KEY SKILLS FOR PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION JOB GROUPS

The following table demonstrates key skills that are needed for many, if not all, occupations in the 20 Job Groups found across 4 Functional Areas in Public Transportation.

## FUNDAMENTAL SKILLS FOR PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION JOBS

Key skills that nearly all workers in all levels of jobs in the industry require include:

**Basic Academic and Work Readiness Skills (Including Punctuality):** High school level reading and math, basic communication and interpersonal skills, and other basic skills are important. Punctuality is especially important in Public Transportation, particularly in vehicle operations.

**Understanding Public Transportation Regulations, Agency Policies, and Other Legal Requirements:** Workers must be knowledgeable about traffic, vehicle operation, and other regulations that apply to their jobs, as well as be aware of agency policies and procedures and other applicable laws. Many workers, especially vehicle operators, must pass background checks and drug tests as well.

**Lifelong Learning:** Public Transportation trade unions and professional development staff offer training to Public Transportation workers at all levels. Workers are expected to continually improve their skills and knowledge both to advance and to stay current with changing regulations, rules, and technology.

**Computer Skills:** Workers at all levels need at least basic computer literacy skills to operate on-board vehicle computers, digital diagnostic equipment, and other types of computer technologies.

**Decision-Making and Problem-Solving Skills:** Public Transportation is a fast-moving industry that requires nearly all workers to solve problems in their field. Workers must take initiative and contact supervisors when necessary, but may need to solve problems ranging from mechanical failures to passenger disruptions quickly and independently.

**Safety and Health Skills:** In Public Transportation, workers are entrusted with moving members of the public safely to their destinations. All workers must be keenly aware of health and safety precautions to protect themselves, their co-workers, and the public.

**Leadership and Supervisory Skills:** While not required for many entry-level jobs, the ability to develop strong supervisory and leadership skills is key to getting promoted and advancing to higher levels of compensation in Public Transportation. At some point, nearly all workers will need these skills.

# Functional Areas, Job Groups, & Skills



	Mechanical & Repair Skills	Advanced Problem-Solving Skills	Customer Service Skills	Advanced Communication Skills	Maritime Skills & Knowledge	Investigation Skills	Planning/Strategy Skills	Mechanical & Repair Skills
<b>VEHICLE OPERATIONS</b>								
Bus Operations		X	X					
Rail Operations		X	X					
Demand Response Paratransit Operations		X	X					
Ferry Operations		X	X		X			
Other Vehicle Operations		X	X					
Security & Police			X	X		X		
Technical Operations Training		X	X	X				
<b>VEHICLE MAINTENANCE</b>								
Vehicle Cleaning and Servicing	X							
Vehicle Maintenance and Repair	X							
Vehicle Inspection		X				X		
Inventory Control		X				X	X	
Systems Engineering	X	X					X	
Technical Operations Training	X	X		X				
<b>FACILITIES, TRACK, &amp; ROAD MAINTENANCE</b>								
Building Facilities Maintenance and Repair	X							
Track/Signal/Road System Inspection and Maintenance	X							
Technical Operations Training	X			X				
<b>CENTRAL SERVICES &amp; ADMINISTRATION</b>								
Public Transportation Management		X		X			X	X
Route Planning and Scheduling							X	
Public Transportation Capital Project Development and Planning							X	
Public Transportation Business Occupations		X				X	X	