

**Hiring and Retention Comparison with Peer Agencies
and Surrounding Jurisdictions**

(2022 JCR, p.77)

A Report to the Maryland General Assembly

Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

and

House Appropriations Committee

November 2022

Maryland Department of Transportation
Maryland Transit Administration

Introduction

The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) prepared this report in response to language contained in the 2022 Joint Chairmen’s Report (JCR). The language states:

Further provided that \$100,000 of this appropriation made for the purpose of agency administration may not be expended until the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) submits a report to the budget committees comparing itself with peer agencies and surrounding jurisdictions with respect to wage and salary levels, hiring and retention bonuses, and any other relevant metrics related to attracting and retaining employees for job classifications for which MTA is currently experiencing high vacancy rates. The report shall be submitted by October 1, 2022, and the budget committees shall have 45 days from the date of the receipt of the report to review and comment. Funds restricted pending the receipt of a report may not be transferred by budget amendment or otherwise to any other purpose and shall be canceled if the report is not submitted to the budget committees.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact public transit agency workforces across the nation, creating staffing shortages and hiring and retention issues in many positions. While some of these workforce challenges existed prior to the pandemic, these trends were exacerbated by the pandemic. As stated in a July 2022 report from Transit Center, “An increased rate of retirement coupled with struggles to recruit and retain new operators have played a key role in creating operator shortfalls. Even in the absence of a pandemic, transit agencies would be challenged by a lack of workers.”¹

Due to rapidly increasing opportunities and wages with private sector employers, transit agencies have been facing a disruption in the traditional pipeline of talent under an increasingly competitive labor market.² An October 2022 report by the American Public Transportation Association (APTA)³ summarized the results of a survey of transit agencies regarding workforce shortages. The survey found that 96 percent of responding transit agencies reported experiencing a workforce shortage and 84 percent of those agencies said the shortage is affecting their ability to provide service. MDOT MTA’s service has also been impacted by operator shortages.

While transit agencies responding to APTA’s survey identified transit operators and maintenance positions as the two most challenging positions to fill, supervisory staff and management staff were the third most difficult positions in the ranking. Delivering reliable, high-quality transit service depends on more individuals than transit vehicle operators and mechanics alone. Ensuring that these frontline staff are adequately supported by management personnel, as well as investing in the various departments and roles essential to planning, designing, building, managing, and maintaining a complex transit network, is critical to sustaining a robust transit system for today and the future.

¹ https://transitcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Bus-Operators-in-Crisis_RGB_Interactive-1.pdf

² <https://www.apta.com/wp-content/uploads/APTA-On-The-Horizon-Nov2021.pdf>

³ <https://www.apta.com/wp-content/uploads/APTA-Transit-Workforce-Shortage-Report.pdf>

The MDOT MTA undertook this study using a combination of quantitative and qualitative analyses to develop a comprehensive understanding of the existing conditions at the MDOT MTA and its peer agencies regarding staffing structure, hiring, compensation, and retention. Qualitative data of peer agencies’ staffing levels, vacancy rates, and compensation is based on data from the National Transit Database, APTA’s 2021 and 2022 Management Compensation Survey Reports, and interviews with peer agency personnel. Much of the information gathered regarding peer agencies is not publicly available; therefore, the data is averaged and/or summarized as a collective for the purposes of this report.

The MDOT MTA identified seven peer agencies based on a combination of agency characteristics, such as size, modal diversity, network served, and geographic diversity. While some analysis includes the broader transit industry, this report’s peer agency analysis primarily concerns the following peer agencies:

- Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority (GCRTA) *
- Metro Transit – Minneapolis) *
- Pittsburgh Regional Transit (PRT) *
- Regional Transportation District (RTD - Denver) *
- Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA)
- Virginia Railway Express (VRE)
- Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) *

* Also used as a peer agency in the 2020 Central Maryland Regional Transit Plan

Vacancies

The MDOT MTA is authorized for 3,365.5 positions and 3,059.0 of these positions are filled as of October 1, 2022, for a vacancy rate of 9.1 percent. Vacancy rates use a percentage of the number of positions vacant divided by the total positions authorized to help make comparisons across entities of different sizes. Exhibit 1 provides vacancy rates for MDOT MTA and several peers.

Exhibit 1. Vacancy Rates

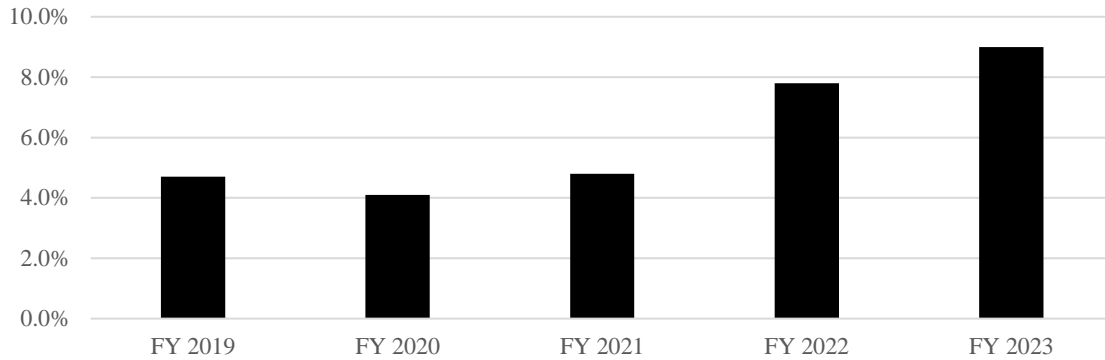
	MDOT MTA	MDOT	MD Executive Branch Agencies	MDOT MTA’s Peer Transit Agencies
Vacancy Rate	9.1% ¹	10.6% ¹	12.6% ²	13.0%

¹ As of October 1, 2022.

² As of January 1, 2022. Source: Department of Legislative Services, 2022 Fiscal Briefing

Comparatively, MDOT MTA has a lower vacancy rate than these other entities, but its vacancy rate is approximately double from its historical vacancy rates. Exhibit 2 provides MDOT MTA’s vacancy rate for the agency over the last five years.

Exhibit 2. MDOT MTA Vacancy Rates
As of July 1



Frontline Vacancies

Vacancies by job type can vary significantly. Vacancy data in key frontline positions is summarized below in Exhibit 3.

Exhibit 3. Frontline Vacancies at MDOT MTA

Frontline Positions	MDOT MTA			50 Largest Transit Agencies ⁴
	Vacancies (#)	Total Positions (#)	Vacancy Rate (%)	Vacancy Rate (%)
Operators	84	1,466	5.7	
Bus	68*	1,337	5.1	18.0
Metro	7*	54	13.0	10.0
Light Rail	9*	75	12.0	10.0
Maintenance Personnel	62	490	12.7	
Bus	26	263	9.9	13.0
Metro	24	155	15.5	10.0
Light Rail	12	72	16.7	10.0
Cleaning & Janitorial	8	66	12.1	
Police Officers	25	233	10.7	

**The number of vacancies defined includes positions that have been filled but may not yet be available to provide revenue service due to extensive training requirements.*

⁴ <https://www.apta.com/wp-content/uploads/APTA-Transit-Workforce-Shortage-Report.pdf>

While there are vacancies agency wide, this is particularly true for maintenance workers, as these roles must staff facilities 24 hours a day to assure vehicle availability does not impact service. Further, many of these positions are highly skilled and depend on specific training and career experience working with transit vehicles.

It is possible to shift transit operators to a different route or division to address staffing concerns; however, the specific skills held by maintenance workers and mechanics are inherently less flexible. Consequently, ensuring the MDOT MTA can staff a robust and consistent pipeline of talent will mitigate the impacts of staff departures or retirements. Additionally, absenteeism is consistently cited as an overlying and exacerbating challenge to frontline vacancies.

It is important to note that with an influx in zero-emission vehicles over the next decade, bus mechanics and maintenance workers will require an expanded set of skills. This transition will require individuals with a broader array of experience and training as the MDOT MTA and its peers navigate the substantive challenges of a major shift in transit vehicle fleet and facility needs. The MDOT MTA's Zero-Emission Bus Transition Plan is under development and will be informed by pilot projects and industry research to address workforce and training needs. The MDOT MTA will also be implementing an apprenticeship program to further formalize and enhance frontline worker training credentials, including the quickly growing Zero-Emission Bus field, as required by Chapter 463 of 2022.

A vacancy rate is only a snapshot in time. Complementing this statistic is the turnover rate; even if a vacant position is quickly filled, it still leads to disruption and instability as new employees must be trained and relationships rebuilt. New operators must undergo a lengthy training period, which further delays the filling of positions. The initial training is twelve weeks for bus operators and eight weeks for light rail and metro operators. Turnover rates vary widely across job types. Across all operator positions, Metro operators have the highest turnover rate at 21 percent; however, this is due in part to the eligibility requirements in place during the reporting period. Specifically, Metro Operator candidates must be existing MDOT MTA employees, permitted to apply on the basis of years of service. Consequently, these more senior employees are more likely to retire at a higher rate, leading to higher turnover.

As seen in industry-wide surveys and reporting, frontline vacancies are identified as an issue across all interviewed peers. Six out of seven agencies (86 percent) have reported difficulty recruiting and retaining operators, maintenance personnel, and cleaning and janitorial personnel. Six out of six agencies (100 percent) reported vacancies with transit police officers as an issue.

Management Vacancies

In addition to ensuring that the MDOT MTA has adequate numbers of operators and maintenance staff available to deliver transit service, it is imperative that the agency also have adequate staff to manage and support transit delivery. For example, MDOT MTA bus operators and maintenance staff report to one of four bus divisions (Bush, Eastern, Kirk, and Northwest), each of which has management staff to ensure frontline workers have the appropriate supervision and oversight. Superintendents and Assistant Superintendents are responsible for the day-to-day operations at their respective division, addressing issues that arise from absenteeism, bus

availability, discipline, mentorship, reporting requirements, and other personnel oversight requirements and responsibilities.

Once operators leave their division in a revenue vehicle, they depend on modal Field Supervision and their modal Operations Control Center to assist with any issues that may arise. This may include necessary route changes, schedule adjustments, detours, or assistance in the event of an incident or emergency. Operators’ ability to receive the instructions or assistance they need easily and efficiently is central to the ability to deliver safe and reliable service to customers, and provide operators with the management, oversight, and support necessary in the field. A suboptimal supervisory ratio can lead to increased turnover as employees leave their jobs to find more supportive environments. It can also undermine the ability of supervisors to proactively address challenges such as higher absenteeism – an ongoing challenge at MDOT MTA and transit agencies across the country.

Exhibit 4 presents the current staff for these critical support functions by mode, including the number of positions authorized and vacant, vacancy rate, and the number of operators managed. Exhibit 5 provides the average of management to staff ratios across peer agencies compared to MDOT MTA.

Exhibit 4. Management Functions Supporting Operations at MDOT MTA

	Positions (#)	Vacancies (#)	Vacancy Rate (%)	Operators Managed (#)
Bus Operations				
Division Management	15	1	6.7	1,337
Field Supervision	30	4	13.3	1,337
Operations Control Center	26	6	23.1	1,337
Light Rail Operations				
Division Management	3	1	33.3	74
Field Supervision	7	2	28.6	74
Operations Control Center	18	3	16.7	74
Metro Rail Operations				
Division Management	4	2	50.0	54
Field Supervision	5	0	0.0	54
Operations Control Center	19	5	26.3	54

Exhibit 5. Management Support Ratios

	MDOT MTA	Peer Average
Bus Operations		
Division Management	1:89	1:52
Field Supervision	1:45	1:29
Operations Control Center	1:51	1:44
Bus Maintenance	1:8	1:8
Rail Operations		
Division Management	1:20	1:22
Field Supervision	1:11	1:8
Operations Control Center	1:4	1:4
Rail Maintenance	1:6	1:8

Note that MDOT MTA numbers are an average of Light Rail and Metro Rail.

Non-Operations Vacancies

MDOT MTA had vacancy rates of over 10 percent in several support departments including Accounting, Human Resources, Engineering, Information Technology, Procurement, and Training. This aligns with interviews from peer agencies that reported challenges filling similar positions, particularly in engineering and accounting.

Additionally, a high-level analysis looking at the ratios of agency staff to revenue vehicles as a proxy for the degree to which agencies are staffed relative to their service level offers a snap-shot comparison of MDOT MTA against its peers, as shown in Exhibit 6 below.

Exhibit 6. Ratio of Employees to Revenue Vehicles

Agency	Agency Employee to Revenue Vehicle Ratio
MDOT MTA	1.6: 1
Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority (GCRTA)	3.4: 1
Metro Transit (Minneapolis)	3.7: 1
Pittsburgh Regional Transit (PRT)	2.3: 1
Regional Transportation District (RTD - Denver)	1.5: 1
Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA)	3.4: 1
Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA)	2.9: 1
Peer Average	2.9: 1

MDOT MTA operates as a lean organization, with a lower employee to revenue vehicle ratio than its peers. MDOT MTA uses consultant staff to support many roles throughout the agency, serving in embedded positions to augment the number of state staff. This allows MDOT MTA

additional flexibility to staff up or down depending on the volume of projects and specific skillset needed. However, this increases the administrative duties for state employees, limiting their time available to provide and develop subject matter expertise, and creates challenges with succession planning. Exhibit 7 includes the vacancy rate for non-operations departments for both state employees and consultant positions.

Exhibit 7. Non-Operations Staffing

	State Employee	Consultant	Total	Vacancy Rate
Planning and Programming	14	31	45	9%
Engineering	26	81	107	11%
Commuter Bus	8	7	15	13%
Information Technology	41	33	74	12%
MARC	19	17	36	8%
Safety	31	41	72	11%
Service Development	19	10	29	24%
Track and Structures	5	9	14	7%

Recruitment and Retention Efforts

A nationwide survey of transit agencies⁵ found that compensation and schedule are leading reasons why workers quit, followed by concerns over contracting COVID-19, harassment and assault, and other factors. For over one-half of respondents, the significance of compensation and work schedule has increased since the pandemic.

The survey also found that regulations and labor agreement provisions can impede efforts to improve the recruitment and retention of transit workers. Specific examples of regulatory challenges include drug and alcohol testing policies and commercial driver’s license (CDL) testing and requirements. Current requirements for MDOT MTA bus operators require candidates to be at least 21 years old, pass a background check and a medical examination that includes the federally mandated U.S. Department of Transportation physical, and possess or obtain a CDL with Passenger Bus and Air Brakes endorsements. MDOT MTA is taking a comprehensive look at all requirements to identify options to reduce barriers to employment.

Employee Safety

The safety of MDOT MTA’s employees and riders is MDOT MTA’s highest priority. Like any employee in any industry, transit workers need assurance of their personal safety while doing their job. Unfortunately, transit workers have seen a greater risk to their personal well-being over the last several years due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the increase in assaults on transit operators.

⁵ <https://www.apta.com/wp-content/uploads/APTA-Transit-Workforce-Shortage-Report.pdf>

The dedicated MDOT MTA staff continued to work throughout the COVID-19 pandemic to provide critical transportation services to Marylanders and enable other essential workers to get to their jobs. MDOT MTA responded quickly to the COVID-19 pandemic by instituting rear-door only bus boardings in an effort to protect operators and encourage social distancing, increasing the frequency and thoroughness of cleaning and sanitizing of transit vehicles, providing personal protective equipment for operators, and holding vaccination clinics to ensure that MDOT MTA employees had prioritized access to COVID-19 vaccines at a time when vaccination availability remained limited for most Marylanders.

Over the last several years, assaults on transit operators in Maryland have increased. Between 2014 and 2021, an average of 51 assaults were committed against MDOT MTA operators each year. This is consistent with what other transit properties across the country have experienced. When a transit operator is assaulted, it jeopardizes the health and safety not only of that individual, but also transit riders and the public at large. Assaults can range from spitting on operators, striking operators with closed fists or objects, assaults or threats of assaults with deadly weapons, and inappropriate physical contact. This is in addition to the verbal abuse and other nonphysical encounters directed at operators that occur far too frequently and can take a psychological impact on operators.

Over the last several years, MDOT MTA has championed passage of a bill that would add transit operators to the list of frontline workers protected in law from assaults by increased penalties. Senate Bill 208 of 2022, as well as prior introductions of the bill, would have expanded the crime of felony second-degree assault to include the intentional causing of physical injury by a person who knows or has reason to know that the victim is a bus, train, or light rail operator or station attendant engaged in performing public transit services. Despite widespread support for the bill from MDOT MTA, WMATA, several labor unions, the Maryland Association of Counties, the Central Maryland Transportation Alliance, and the Transportation Association of Maryland, the bill has failed to make it out of committee each year. MDOT MTA believes that any assault committed against a transit operator is reprehensible and should be subject to the same penalties that exist for other frontline workers. Any effort to improve recruitment and retention of transit workers must start with protecting them from on-the-job violence from the public that they are dedicated to serving.

In September 2022, MDOT MTA launched a public service campaign to reduce the incidence of sexual harassment on transit. The campaign is focused on educating the public on what constitutes sexual harassment and how it can be stopped to improve the transit experience for all – not just the traveling public but for operators as well. The campaign represents a step forward in the safety and security commitments made by MDOT MTA in its Rebuilding Better strategic plan released in 2021⁶.

⁶ <https://s3.amazonaws.com/mta-website-staging/mta-website-staging/files/Strategic%20Plan/StrategicPlan-2021-lo.pdf>

Compensation Levels

Compensation is an important factor in the recruitment and retention of transit workers; however, compensation is not just about salary. The MDOT MTA offers a comprehensive compensation and benefits package to all employees that includes:

- More than 40 days of paid leave and holidays in the first year;
- Health insurance including medical, dental, prescription drug, and vision coverage;
- Membership in a defined-benefit pension plan and eligibility to participate in two supplemental retirement plans;
- Tax-deferred savings plan;
- Life insurance;
- Behavioral health support;
- Continuous training and development;
- Tuition reimbursement and student loan forgiveness; and
- Transportation benefits on local bus, Light Rail, Metro Subway, MARC Train, and Commuter Bus.

An individual employee's compensation level varies by job classification and number of years on the job. Across job classifications, salaries vary based on whether the classification is covered by a collective bargaining agreement. The majority of MDOT MTA's frontline employees are represented by one of three unions: 1) the Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1300, representing approximately 2,317 operators and maintenance employees; 2) the Office and Professional Employees International Union Local 2, representing approximately 167 schedule makers, clerks, and accountants; and 3) the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Local 1859, representing approximately 175 sworn police officers, security guards, and fare inspectors. Generally, employees at MDOT MTA who are not covered by one of these three unions receive the same salary increases that all other State employees receive.

Comparing compensation packages across different job categories within MDOT MTA can be difficult, as the different collective bargaining agreements result in a patchwork of salary levels, annual salary increases, pension plans, and employee benefits.

In addition to the benefits listed above, certain union members also benefit from one-time negotiated salary bonuses, perfect attendance bonuses, bonuses for reductions in absenteeism, tool allowances, additional paid time off, and shift differentials. Moreover, some positions are salaried positions, while other positions have paid overtime opportunities, allowing employees to significantly increase their annual income. Additionally, as noted in a 2017 report by the Department of Legislative Services⁷, the pension plan for MDOT MTA's union employees generally have better benefits and lower employee costs than the State employees' pension plan.

MDOT MTA recognizes the importance of salary to compete against other potential employers. MDOT MTA's primary competitors for employees comes from WMATA, locally operated

⁷ <http://dls.maryland.gov/pubs/prod/TaxFiscalPlan/Review-of-Pensions-Administered-by-the-Maryland-Transit-Administration.pdf>

transit systems, and private employers. As a State agency, MDOT MTA operates within the general constraints of pay equity across all State employees. Significant variations in pay and benefits, including the amounts and timing of salary actions, amongst union and non-union employees, or employees of one union versus another, can create significant morale issues.

The most recent salary action granted to all State employees, and extended to MDOT MTA union employees, was a 4.5 percent salary increase effective November 1, 2022. This action is in addition to previous salary increases. In the five-year period from fiscal year 2018 to 2022, State employees received salary increases totaling 9.5 percent and one-time bonuses totaling \$3,000 and most MDOT MTA unions received salary increases totaling 15.0 percent. Comparatively, WMATA and SEPTA employees received salary increases totaling 15.7 and 13.0 percent, respectively. MDOT MTA just recently reached agreement with OPEIU Local 2 on a four-year agreement that provides salary increases totaling 20 percent (including the 4.5 percent November 1, 2022, increase) plus a one-time bonus in November 2022 of \$2,750. For an employee making \$60,000 per year, the agreement reached with Local 2 provides over \$35,000 in additional pay over the four-year period.

Exhibits 5 and 6 provide salary levels for certain positions at MDOT MTA and the average salary for these positions across MDOT MTA’s peer agencies. Salary levels for MDOT MTA positions include the 4.5 percent salary increase effective November 1. Note that the selected peer agencies are from across the country, with differing costs of living and other characteristics. Further, not all agencies provided data for all position types. Finally, roles are not consistently identified with the same name and the organizational structure is not necessarily one in which a direct one-to-one comparison can always be made.

Exhibit 8. Salary Comparisons

Position	MDOT MTA Salary	Average Peer Salary
Administrator/CEO	\$247,064	\$251,119
Chief Administrative Officer	\$146,045	\$199,382
Chief Financial Officer	\$144,871	\$179,935
Chief Technology Officer	\$121,971	\$186,246
Director of Human Resources	\$119,106	\$193,429
General Counsel	\$147,769	\$239,176
Procurement Director	\$119,670	\$163,598
Police Chief	\$185,533	\$167,764
Public/Gov. Affairs Administrator	\$103,948	\$149,084
Chief Engineer	\$139,428	\$185,955
Engineering Area Manager	\$105,104	\$109,971
Planning Director	\$131,651	\$154,277
Project Development Manager	\$101,518	\$149,550
Capital Program Manager	\$91,671	\$129,328
Chief Operating Officer	\$196,460	\$201,050
Operations Director	\$109,164	\$115,458

Chief Safety Officer	\$131,651	\$165,607
Modal Safety Officer	\$84,924	\$92,597
Modal Director	\$97,833	\$149,164
Service Development Director	\$111,464	\$136,876
Modal Manager	\$90,656	\$103,229
Modal Maintenance Director	\$88,824	\$113,702
Modal Maintenance Div. Superintendent	\$88,296	\$108,376
Modal Maintenance Manager	\$89,589	\$91,219
Transit Operator (Starting Hourly Wage)	\$20.23	\$22.27
Transit Operator (Top Hourly Wage)	\$34.37	\$31.99
Mechanic (Average Hourly Wage)	\$35.53	\$34.89
Transit Police Officer (Starting Hourly Wage)	\$25.62	\$24.56

Recruitment Strategies

The workforce shortages that MDOT MTA is facing are the result of many factors and will take a multi-pronged effort to address. In addition to considerations related to employee safety, salaries, and scheduling noted above, MDOT MTA is focused on developing a pipeline of future employees and enhancing recruitment efforts to ensure that the benefits of employment with MDOT MTA are widely known.

In September 2022, MDOT Secretary Jim Ports hosted an event with representatives of community colleges, trade schools, and high school vocational programs to share ideas about partnering together to match the skillsets needed for hundreds of MDOT's skilled worker positions, including MDOT MTA mechanics and maintenance positions, with the training and job discovery happening at these learning centers.

On November 5, 2022, the MDOT Motor Vehicle Administration, in partnership with MDOT MTA, the MDOT State Highway Administration, the Maryland Transportation Authority, the Maryland Motor Truck Association, and Anne Arundel County Public Schools held the second CDL Information and Career Day to educate the public and potential CDL applicants about what is required to become a CDL holder in Maryland.

In addition, the MDOT MTA is enhancing its recruitment approach to help with recruitment efforts, including:

- Reviewing hiring requirements to remove barriers to employment, consistent with Federal and State regulations;
- Updating the employment page on the MDOT MTA website to provide more information to job seekers about positions and benefits and to increase visual appeal;
- Attending job fairs and hosting virtual information sessions for prospective employees;

- Social media posts highlighting existing employees and benefits of working for MDOT MTA;
- Partnering with the Baltimore City Mayor’s Office of Employment and Development on virtual information events and social media promotion;
- Collaborating with community partners and CDL schools;
- Placing hiring advertisements on buses and railcars to act as moving billboards;
- Utilizing open and continuous recruitments for certain hard-to-fill and high-turnover positions;
- Hiring an executive-level equity position to oversee all aspects of internal and external equity;
- Continuing efforts to deliver on commitments made by MDOT MTA to its riders, employees, and stakeholders in its Rebuilding Better strategic plan⁸ for centering equity, addressing safety and security, providing reliable and efficient transit services, communicating with stakeholders, and planning for a sustainable future;
- Strengthening relationships between MDOT MTA’s Office of Human Resources and hiring managers so that all parties have clear expectations on their roles and responsibilities; and
- Exploring opportunities for open testing, working with USJobLink.com to recruit external candidates, and offering referral and sign-on bonuses for certain key positions.

Conclusion

While the MDOT MTA is not unique in its workforce challenges in the current labor market, the MDOT MTA recognizes that recruiting and retaining a quality workforce is critical to meeting its mission to provide safe, efficient and reliable transit across Maryland with world-class customer service. To achieve that, MDOT MTA will continue to identify and address impediments to the recruitment and retention of MDOT MTA employees.

⁸ <https://s3.amazonaws.com/mta-website-staging/mta-website-staging/files/Strategic%20Plan/StrategicPlan-2021-lo.pdf>