

# WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT GAPS FOR IN-DEMAND/HARD-TO-FILL OCCUPATIONS IN THE TRANSIT INDUSTRY: LOS ANGELES COUNTY

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Key workforce development gaps identified through research on ten, in-demand/hard-to-fill occupations in the transit industry in Los Angeles County, California.



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<http://doingwhatmatters.cccco.edu/StrongWorkforce.aspx>

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**Transportation Workforce Institute (TWI).** TWI ensures a well-trained and diverse transportation workforce by collaborating with industry, education, and workforce development partners to create competency- and standards-based curriculum, programs, and services that meet immediate- and long-term employer needs while connecting diverse communities and citizens through transportation projects and workforce development efforts.

## Transportation and Warehousing Report Series

This is one of several reports prepared by TWI examining industries and occupations in the transportation industry nationally and in Los Angeles and Orange Counties, California. All reports are available on TWI’s website at: <http://twi.lattc.edu/reports-publications/>.

## Introduction

During research conducted and the preparation of a culminating report, "[\*Building Career Pathways in the Transit Industry: Workforce Initiative Now-Los Angeles\*](#)", several findings suggest workforce development gaps needing further examination and/or action. The research focused on ten, in-demand/hard-to-fill occupations in the transit industry in Los Angeles County, California. The order gaps are listed in do not reflect any priority or importance. Some gaps may be more problematic and/or have higher priority for employers and/or postsecondary educators than others. The gaps, and recommendations to begin to address them, are provided in the remainder of this report.

## Workforce Development Gaps

- *Hard-to-Fill Occupations for Transit Only.* Most of the positions in the report appear not to be as hard-to-fill by other industries/companies than they are for transit.

Recommendation: Further examination of this finding is recommended. Is this truly the case? Several anecdotal stories suggest this may be so. If it is the case, what are contributing factors such as hiring practices/duration of selection process, additional position requirements transit employers may have that other industries/companies do not, etc.? Is it how position requirements are specified (e.g., in some cases it is unclear if some are required prior to employment or could be obtained during employment)? Is it a lack of awareness these occupations exist in the transit industry? Or is it because for some occupations there's an initial, entry-level position and then other occupations are obtained from promotional opportunities? If promotional, are there behavioral economic implications such as individuals may opt for a position at another employer that pays more initially or is at a higher position level? Are there other factors?

- *Position Titles and Occupation SOC/CIP Codes.* Transit position titles are not directly aligned with education program SOC/CIP Codes. In addition, there hasn't been consistency in how community colleges select SOC/CIP codes for their programs. As a result, when a specific program discipline is specified by a transit employer (e.g. a two-year degree in Electronics) postsecondary programs classified within this discipline may not be aligned with the position description or competencies. (Note: many community colleges are re-examining their program classifications for better industry alignment.)

Recommendation(s): Transit employers confer with postsecondary education providers when selecting discipline requirements for positions. An independent review of postsecondary programs be periodically conducted to establish a list of programs that are aligned with position requirements.

- *Education/Training Duration.* Requirement of transit employers do not always match postsecondary program length. Employers establish education/training requirements using months or year(s). Whereas education program lengths are categorized by units (for credit programs) or hours (for noncredit and continuing education programs and employer-sponsored training). Also, employers may use a total number of units to specify an education/training duration (such as 30 credit units as the equivalent of one-year, full-time education and training) whereas colleges may use a different total such as 24 units as the equivalent of one-year, full-time education and training. In addition, the unit equivalents specified may be assumed to be semester or quarter units, but often times is not specified. Lastly, frequently it isn't clear if any units completed will be accepted by employers or if the

units must be obtained within a specific postsecondary program or discipline. For example, will a business course an automotive student completed by accepted/counted in the total training duration for a mechanic?

Possible Solution(s): A joint employer-educator workgroup develop standards for education/training durations and unit/course specifications.

- *Position Requirements Not Taught/Covered in Postsecondary Education/Training Programs.* Several occupations have requirements that are not typically or directly taught or covered in postsecondary programs such as Class C driver's license, physical requirements, customer service skills, etc. (refer to Appendix E in report).

Recommendation(s): Employers specify which requirements are necessary upon entry...are used to screen potential applicants. Postsecondary providers determine how to address the "necessary" requirements.

- *Lack of Alignment and/or Great Variation in College Program Length, Requirements.* Community College programs can vary greatly both in the competencies they train for and program length. This is most prevalent with certificate programs.

Recommendation(s): Develop competency models for occupations where variation is most prevalent. Community colleges work collaboratively to adopt competency models and establish/implement joint standards for program(s) including program length.

- *Postsecondary Program Types and Completions Mis-Match.* For most occupations, the percentage/distribution of program types does not match the percentage/distribution of program completions. For example, refer to the Electrical- and Facilities-Related programs (see Figure 17 and 18). 36.4% of the programs in these disciplines are two-year degree programs, however only 16.8% of the completions are from two-year degree programs. Moreover, this position typically requires at least a two-year degree. Most completions are from less than two-year programs.

Recommendation: A work-group of community colleges and transit employers should be established to examine this finding and make any necessary programmatic changes or establish/implement alignment strategies. One example of a strategy could be to establish "bridge"/apprenticeship levels as entry points into hard-to-fill occupations. It is further recommended this work-group be facilitated by an independent party with workforce development experience.

- *Insufficient Number of Program Completers.* For nearly all occupations, there are insufficient numbers of program completers to fill occupations for all industries/employers in LA County. However, for most occupations there is insufficient information on how many positions exist/are filled each year in the transit industry. This gap is also only problematic, for purposes of the WIN-LA, if these are entry-level positions.

Recommendation(s): First, establish a way for transit employers to supply postsecondary providers with information in employment demand for positions. Also, career pathways should be illustrated. A diagram for of each pathway showing how individuals enter and progress through the pathway should be provided. If the initial WIN-LA occupations are entry positions, new programs may need to be developed (e.g., such as Custodial programs) or existing ones should be expanded, in other cases colleges need to increase the number of completers of existing programs (e.g., electrical where more degree completers are

necessary). If these are promotional positions, then pre-employment training may need to be developed/expanded to supply enough individuals to meet entry requirements.

- *Insufficient Information on Noncredit, Adult Education, and Employer-Sponsored Training Programs.* The only source for locating information on most of these programs is on the individual institutions' website. If programs are posted and kept up-to-date (many are not), information on total hours of the program is frequently not provided.

Recommendation: Recruit an organization(s) to be a centralized repository for collecting this information on routine schedule (e.g. yearly). Provide standard forms to collect "like" data from programs.