

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-19-290](#), a report to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

FTA provides more than \$12 billion annually to support and expand transit services. The operation of transit systems depends on a skilled, qualified workforce, but impending transit worker retirements and advances in transit technology may create challenges for the transit workforce such as finding eligible applicants for transit jobs and obtaining the technology expertise needed.

GAO was asked to review various issues related to the sufficiency of the transit workforce. This report discusses the extent to which: (1) information exists about future transit workforce needs and (2) FTA assists with addressing current and future transit workforce needs, among other things. GAO reviewed DOT and FTA documents, including strategic and performance plans, and interviewed DOT and FTA officials and other transit stakeholders, including representatives of transit agencies, research organizations, and unions. Stakeholders were selected based on recommendations from other transit stakeholders and for geographic diversity, among other factors.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making three recommendations to FTA: (1) in collaboration with stakeholders, determine whether additional transit workforce data are needed; (2) develop a comprehensive transit workforce strategy; and (3) develop performance goals and measures for FTA's transit workforce development efforts. DOT concurred with our recommendations.

View [GAO-19-290](#). For more information, contact Mark Goldstein, at (202) 512-2834 or goldsteinm@gao.gov.

March 2019

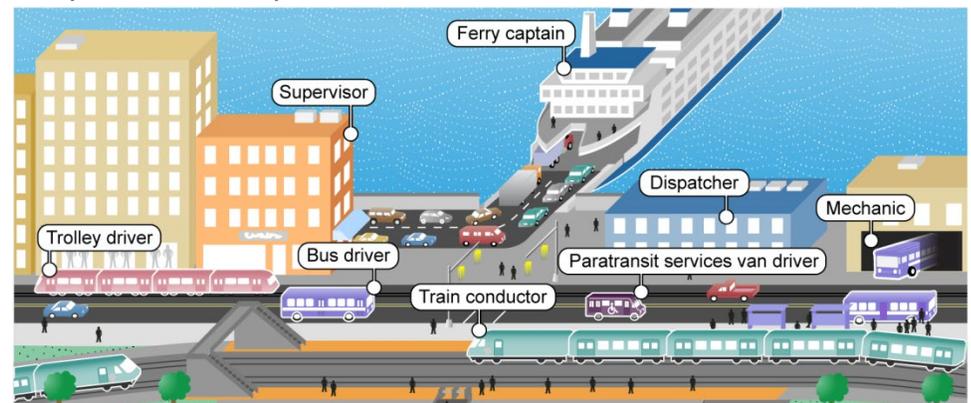
TRANSIT WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Improved Strategic Planning Practices Could Enhance FTA Efforts

What GAO Found

The nation's transit infrastructure requires a trained workforce, consisting of a variety of occupations (see figure), to operate, maintain, and oversee it.

Examples of Transit Occupations



Source: GAO analysis of Federal Transit Administration (FTA) information. | GAO-19-290

Information on future transit workforce needs is limited in part by the absence of transit-specific workforce projections. According to Federal Transit Administration (FTA) officials, the best information available is an August 2015 report developed by the Department of Transportation (DOT) and other federal stakeholders to produce transportation job projections. However, the report's transit data are combined with ground passenger transportation data (e.g., school buses, taxis), and many of these services are specifically excluded from the statutory definition of transit. Transit-specific data were not available and would be costly to obtain, according to the researchers who wrote the report. Thus, the report does not exclusively reflect the transit workforce. The views of stakeholders GAO interviewed varied regarding whether additional workforce data were needed. Working with stakeholders to understand what, if any, additional information is needed could enable FTA to weigh the complete costs and benefits of developing future transit workforce data. This approach could also enable FTA to make informed decisions on allocating the appropriate resources toward transit workforce efforts.

While FTA assists transit stakeholders with addressing workforce needs—for example, providing about \$29 million in workforce development assistance in fiscal year 2017—it lacks key strategic planning practices that could ensure its efforts are effective. FTA first reported to Congress in 2016 that it planned to develop a transit workforce strategic plan; however, no clear action has been taken to develop one so far. Further, FTA does not have clearly defined performance goals and measures—as outlined in the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (GPRA) and the GPRA Modernization Act of 2010—for FTA's transit workforce development efforts. Without these key strategic planning practices, FTA is limited in its ability to make informed decisions about effectively leveraging its resources to address future transit workforce needs and in measuring the effectiveness of its efforts.