



TransitCenter

TransitTools no.10

WHO RULES TRANSIT?

In addition to being service providers, transit agencies are major employers. But the demographics of transit agency employees don't necessarily match those of their riders. Census numbers reveal that the majority of transit riders are women, people of color, and people with low incomes. Most agencies don't report demographic data, but TransitCenter research points to a gender imbalance throughout transit agency ranks and a lack of people of color at leadership levels.

Women comprise 39% of the transit agency workforce, and only 3 transit agency CEOs are women. Women are under-represented on the boards of MBTA in Boston and MARTA in Atlanta. Transit agency boards are predominantly white, and just one CEO among the 15 largest US agencies is a person of color.

What policies might change if more diverse voices were contributing to transit? We might see more service added in off-peak hours to accommodate errands and domestic work. We might see the elimination of transfer fees, enabling essential multi-leg trips to work, school, and errands. We might have a more comprehensive conversation about policing on transit, and what "safety" means in practice. And we might hear stronger challenges to expensive new rail projects to wealthier, whiter communities that divert transit resources away from where riders actually live.

There are any institutional hurdles to increasing the diversity of the transit workforce. Fortunately several agencies are putting money and staff time towards addressing the problem. By removing barriers to employment and creating inclusive, equal opportunity workplaces, transit agencies can plan and run transit that works better for more people.

Does the workforce at your transit agency reflect its riders?



1. Create a more inclusive hiring process

Agencies should begin by tracking data about their workforce and use that information to inform hiring decisions. Agencies should also reassess recruitment techniques and job requirements.

- **Track and report data.** It's critical to know how an agency's workforce compares to the people it's serving. In response to data indicating its mechanics division lacked diversity, Metro Transit in Minneapolis launched a targeted apprenticeship program.
- **Reach new audiences by partnering with outside organizations.** Agencies should hold career-fair style events where potential applicants can learn about job openings, ask questions, and meet people from the agency. And they should work with trade schools and training programs in the region to publicize positions.
- **Remove discriminatory requirements from job descriptions.** Two-thirds of US transit agencies require driver's licenses for jobs that do not require driving, despite the fact that the percentage of people with a driver's license has been dropping for decades.

2. Break down gender barriers

Creating a work environment where women feel confident expressing new ideas is critical, as well as creating ample opportunities for advancement.

- **Allocate staff time and resources to assessing institutional barriers.** LA Metro established a Women and Girls Governing Council, which is a women-run organization made up of Metro staff that makes recommendations to better recruit and retain women.
- **Men should seize opportunities to promote women.** When Andy Byford took over as President of New York City Transit in 2018, he gave a speech about bringing more women into the transit agency's ranks, and quickly followed up by appointing two women to senior level positions.
- **Establish mentorship programs: No transit agencies have mentorship programs specifically geared towards women.** Establishing such initiatives would provide women with a welcoming space for sharing strategies and learning the ropes from more senior-level staff.

3. Leadership reform

Boards and CEOs play an essential role in guiding decisions at transit agencies. But leadership at the highest level of transit agencies is overwhelmingly pale, male, and non- transit riding. Historically, transit advocates haven't focused their efforts on agency leadership, but that's starting to change.

- **Advocates should suggest candidates for board member appointments.** At the urging of OPAL, an advocacy group in Portland, Oregon's governor nominated three people of color to TriMet's board in 2018.
- **Introduce legislation that makes transit agency boards more reflective of riders.** Thanks to advocacy from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, NJ Governor Phil Murphy signed legislation in 2018 mandating that the NJ Transit Board contain at least one transit rider.
- **Rethink the process for hiring a CEO.** In 2018, advocacy group Clevelanders for Public Transit presented a vision of qualities it would like to see in Greater Cleveland RTA's future CEO, as well as a request that final candidates participate in a public forum and Q&A session.