

Understanding Workforce Diversity in the Transit Industry: Establishing a Baseline of Diversity Demographics

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Public transit agencies function best when the diversity of their workforce represents the communities that they serve, yet previous research finds an underrepresentation of women and minorities in senior and managerial roles, along with an overconcentration of men and workers of color—particularly Black workers—in operational roles (e.g., drivers, janitors).

This study provides updated statistics on the status of the racial/ethnic and gender diversity of the transit agency workforce in the U.S. from 2018 – 2022. In addition, we identified potential barriers and promising practices for diversifying the workforce.

Study Methods

The study updates those earlier studies with newer data drawn from five discrete research tasks: 1) review of the scholarly and professional literature; 2) review of the websites of the 50 largest transit operators; 3) analysis of employee demographic data that transit operators submitted to the Federal Transit Administration as part of Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) program plans; 4) analysis of responses to an original survey sent to the human resources personnel of transit agencies (92 responses from staff at 68 agencies), and 5) interviews with 12 professionals selected for their expertise in transportation workforce diversity monitoring, management, and/or advocacy.

This brief highlights key findings from our analysis of public transit agency workforce diversity. We received 218 EEO Program Plans that had useable workforce diversity data from 152 transit agencies for the years 2018, 2020, or 2022.

Key Findings on Transit Workforce Diversity

Our analysis of the demographic data that 152 transit agencies submitted in EEO Program Plans

reveals that the transit workforce is not particularly representative of the US labor force in terms of either sex or race/ethnicity. In addition, there is considerable room for improvement in how the data are reported.

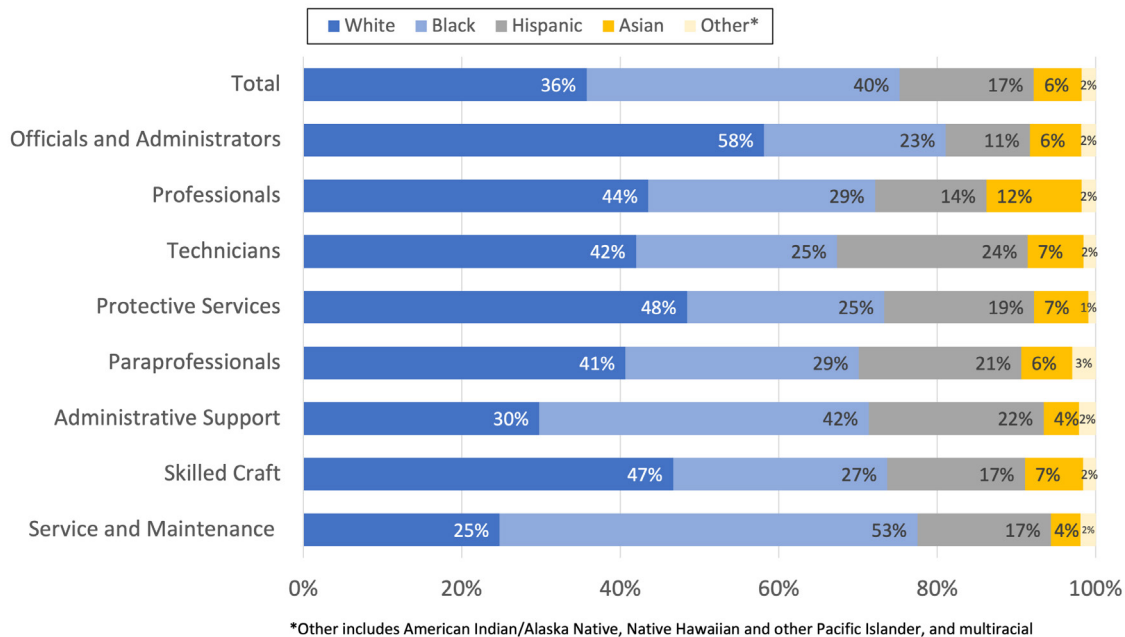
Sex: The majority of the transit workforce is male (71%). Female workers are overrepresented only in administrative-support occupations, making up 66% of the labor force. By contrast, they are 20% of officials and administrators, 24% of technical, and 5% of skilled craft workers.

Race and Ethnicity: Almost two-thirds (64%) of the workers in our data are non-White. Black workers comprise the largest group of workers (40%), even though they are only 12% of the US labor force. In contrast, Hispanic workers are underrepresented relative to their percentage in both the U.S. labor force and relative to their transit use. Finally, while the percentage of Asian transit workers reflects their percentage in the U.S. labor force, it is lower relative to their transit use.

Black transit workers are highly concentrated in lower-paying service and maintenance jobs: 52% of service and maintenance workers and 42% of administrative support positions, but 23% of officials and administrators and 29% of professionals. In contrast, White employees are overrepresented in leadership positions, and both White and Asian employees are overrepresented in the more-highly paid professional and skill-craft occupations.

Data Quality: The triennial EEO Program Plan process offers an excellent opportunity to collect the needed data, but implementation has been uneven, with the result that the data is somewhat unreliable at the industry level and also for many individual transit agencies. Problems identified in numerous Program Plans include missing data for

Race/Ethnicity of the Transit Workforce, by Job Classification (2018 – 2020 data)



certain demographic groups or job categories and data provided in a format that prevents researchers from aggregating data across agencies (i.e., data provided as percentages instead of raw numbers or data tables submitted in pdf format).

Recommendations

The following recommendations to improve workforce diversity came out of the literature review, survey of transit operators, and expert interviews:

- Improving the quality of employee diversity data available. This could in part be accomplished through more careful auditing. However, it would be valuable for FTA, APTA, or other industry partners to provide technical support and/or funding to help transit operators develop more effective processes for long-term demographic data collection and monitoring.
- Providing more institutional support for DEI work, including through strong executive and board leadership, evaluation of past DEI efforts to better understand the most effective approaches, and enhanced staffing/funding for these programs.
- Building DEI goals into hiring strategies and work practices. Options include partnering on recruitment with educational institutions and community organizations that serve non-White populations, revising position descriptions

to be more inclusive, supporting employee advancement within the organization, instituting family-friendly work schedules for operations staff, and building an inclusive workforce culture.

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To Learn More

For more details about the study, download the full report at transweb.sjsu.edu/research/2213



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