



White Paper

Driver Hiring and Training Standards

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PURPOSE AND APPROACH

Shared use of professional vehicle drivers is a common transit coordination opportunity throughout the state. Variations in times of travel demand make it economically attractive for one agency to use drivers from another agency during idle times. For example, school bus drivers who are off during the middle of the day may be available to drive seniors to nutrition centers.

While sharing drivers may be an attractive option, there are potential barriers and constraints related to different hiring and training standards. The purpose of this white paper is to identify those barriers and constraints and recommend strategies for overcoming them.

This white paper examines:

- Current driver hiring and training standards from among a diverse sample of service providers,
- Legislative, regulatory or administrative sources of specific standards,
- Models from other states dealing with hiring and training standards,
- Challenges associated with driver hiring and training standards and potential solutions.

CURRENT DRIVER HIRING AND TRAINING STANDARDS

TTI contacted 14 agencies to document their hiring standards and new driver training programs. The agencies are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Surveyed Agencies

<i>Agency</i>	<i>Type of Provider</i>
Capital Area Rural Transportation System (CARTS)	Rural transit
El Paso County (LULAC)	Rural transit
RIO Metro (Lower Rio Grande Valley)	Rural transit
EZ Rider (Midland-Odessa)	Urban transit
Waco Transit	Urban transit
Tyler Transit	Urban transit
METRO (Houston)	Metropolitan transit
VIA (San Antonio)	Metropolitan transit
Lamar Consolidated Independent School District	School bus service
Yellow Cab Austin	Taxicab service
Sexton Transportation (Lubbock)	Taxicab service
Coach USA (Houston)	Private bus service
Gulf Coast Center (Texas City)	Health/human services
Hill County MHMR	Health/human services

The sample was comprised of eight transit systems, including three rural systems, three urban systems, and two metropolitan transit authorities. The remaining agencies included one suburban school bus operator, two private taxicab companies, one private bus company, and two health/human service (HHS) agencies that provide transportation services.

Agencies were asked to provide the minimum qualification standards they have established for drivers, including age, driving history, and criminal background standards. Agencies also provided information related to training new drivers, including the duration of classroom and field training; defensive driving program; passenger sensitivity/customer relations skills training; drug and alcohol testing; CPR/first aid training; and any other specialized training. Full results are arrayed in the appendix.

Hiring Standards

The minimum age for a driver varied from 18 to 25 years. Taxi companies reported at the higher end of the age range. One respondent used the 25 year minimum age based upon high insurance costs associated with drivers under 25. Transit agencies typically used 21 years as their minimum age standard, while the health and human service agencies both reported 18 years as their standard. A few agencies also required minimum past driving time.

Only one transit agency did not require high school diploma or GED when applying, but did require drivers to obtain a GED within two years of hire. Taxi companies and the private bus company have no education requirement at all.

There is great diversity in the evaluation of applicants' past driving records. Private companies have standards based upon regulators' requirements as well as standards based upon their insurers' requirements. Transit agencies tend to establish their own standards, while health and human service agencies meet insurers' standards. Standards based upon insurers' requirements are typically tougher than those established by transit agencies. An example of variation in standards is in the treatment of an applicant with a past DUI/DWI conviction. Some agencies will never hire an applicant with a conviction, some consider a time period only (for example, 7 years), and some are flexible in considering the driving record.

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There is similar diversity in criminal background check standards. Again, the type of conviction and time period for consideration of the record vary. Differences in driving and criminal history standards will result in applicants who are acceptable for consideration by some providers and unacceptable to others.

Two legislative/regulatory programs have significant impact on driver transferability. The first is the Commercial Driver License (CDL) requirement and the second program is the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) drug and alcohol policy.

Effective April 1, 1992, drivers of commercial vehicles were required to possess a CDL. This requirement was engendered to establish a minimum national standard for commercial vehicle drivers. Prior to the implementation of the CDL, some states allowed persons with standard driver licenses to operate any vehicle.

Commercial Driver Licenses are issued in three classes. The Type A CDL does not typically apply to transit operators. The Type B CDL applies to operators of any single vehicle with gross vehicle weight ratings of 26,001 pounds or more; or any vehicle designed to transport 24 or more people including the driver. The Type C CDL applies to operators of vehicles designed to carry 16 to 23 persons including the driver. There are also additional certification and restrictions that may be applied to a CDL. The passenger “P” endorsement is required for transit drivers who operate commercial vehicles.

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FTA drug and alcohol program requirements are established in 49 CFR Part 655. Agencies that receive funding from FTA are required to implement a drug and alcohol program. FTA prescribes drug and alcohol testing requirements under the following circumstances:

- Pre-employment,
- Post-accident,
- Random,
- Reasonable cause,
- Return-to-duty,
- Follow-up.

State regulations primarily echo the federal requirements. However, there are program-specific state requirements. For example, Texas Transportation Code Section 521.022 establishes the requirement that school bus drivers’ records be evaluated annually according to a prescribed points-based system. If a driver accumulates an excessive number of points associated with driving violations (including violations incurred operating a personal vehicle), the driver cannot operate a school bus. The Texas Department of Aging and Disability Service (DADS) maintains a list of former employees whose past conduct makes them ineligible for DADS employment in any respect, including driving.

The private-for-hire industry, including taxicab and limousine companies, are heavily regulated. These regulations are typically at the local government level and may include both minimum driver qualification standards as well as disqualification rules.

Training Standards

Training programs for new drivers are similar in content, but have varying durations. The majority of transportation programs include classroom and field training. Defensive driving, disability awareness, and customer service training are nearly universal. Further, there are several available “off the shelf” training programs in each of these subject areas. First aid/CPR and diversity sensitivity training programs are less common across providers.

Total duration of training ranges from three days for taxi drivers to 60 days for fixed-route bus operators in San Antonio. Training duration is typically longer for fixed route bus operating agencies and duration varies somewhat by size of the fleet – the larger and more complex the service area and fleet, the longer the duration of training. However, variability still remains. For example, Houston METRO required eight total weeks of training while VIA in San Antonio

required 12 weeks. (Houston METRO recently reduced their new operator training duration to four weeks.)

With respect to federal regulation, agencies whose drivers must have CDLs usually require trainees to obtain their permit and then provide training to assist them in completing the final testing. Agencies that fall under the FTA drug and alcohol policy requirement must provide employee training on the policy to new drivers.

School bus drivers must follow a state-specified training program. The curriculum is established under Administrative Code. This is the only program that has rigorously prescribed training standards prescribed in Texas Administrative Code Title 37, Part1, Chapter 14, Subchapter C.

Models From Other States

Three state DOTs model a continuum of driver eligibility specification and training support for public transit agencies receiving state funding. These examples therefore do not apply to school bus drivers or private-for-hire drivers, but can provide a framework for dealing with increasing the commonality among various agencies' drivers.

New York

New York State does not impose specific training requirements on their transit operators. However, the state does recognize that there are common training needs; and that smaller operators may not have the resources to provide some specialized training. The state has developed a set of five regional training centers that offer the following training programs:

- Defensive Driving (National Safety Council),
- Pre- and Post-Trip Inspection,
- Emergency Procedures,
- Drug and Alcohol Compliance,
- ADA Compliance,
- Blood Borne Pathogens,
- Passenger Relations (PASS).

The regional training centers are located at five locations. Each location is the facility of a host transit property, and the training staff is comprised of members of transit agency organizations as well. The staff trainers' time is "donated" to the program; expenses are limited to training materials, equipment and train-the-trainer sessions. Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) funds cover these costs and may also be available for trainee travel expenses as well. The state also provides a listing of instructors throughout the state who are qualified to teach one or more of the standard classes. Information on the development of the NYDOT driver training program is contained at <http://dot.state.ny.us/pubtrans/drtrng.html>.

Ohio

The Ohio Department of Transportation is recognized as a national leader in service coordination. Among their achievements was enabling school buses and school bus drivers to be used to carry workforce clients to jobs. The United States Department of

The Ohio Department of Transportation focuses standards and training on rural providers.

Transportation awarded Ohio DOT with a United We Rider Leadership Award in 2004.

focuses standards and training on rural providers. Because the state recognizes the rural transportation is demand response with a significant senior and disabled market, Ohio DOT mandates rural drivers complete two state-offered courses related to passenger assistance. The first is the Passenger Service and Safety (PASS) program, a training program developed by the Community Transportation Association of America that is widely used for training drivers in passenger assistance techniques for people with disabilities. The second is a program called DRIVE: Transporting Older and Disabled Passengers. DRIVE was developed by the Ohio Department of Aging, the Central Ohio Area Agency on Aging, and the Ohio Department of Transportation. Ohio DOT encourages coordination by having provided a common scheduling package to rural providers (including support and training), preventive maintenance guidelines, and a discretionary funding program for projects supporting coordinated service delivery in unserved areas.

Massachusetts

Like Ohio, Massachusetts focuses establishing driver standards and providing training support on the rural providers. The state requires drivers for rural providers to annually complete defensive driving, wheelchair lift operation, and wheelchair securement trainings. Every three years, drivers must be certified in First Aid/CPR and passenger sensitivity training. The state provides free training in these topic areas except for First Aid/CPR, which is instructed through American Red Cross. Additional option classes that are provided by the state include emergency/accident procedures, coaching the driver (developed by the National Safety Council), and safely transporting under ADA, an additional passenger sensitivity class.

Massachusetts created a Human Services Transportation Office and an Executive Transportation Office to develop coordinated human services transportation systems in concert with regional transit authorities (RTAs). The RTAs often broker all transportation services within their region, including Medicaid trips through application of scheduling technology to maximize utilization of their region's transportation resources. Common driver standards and training support these efforts.

Observations on Hiring and Training Standards and Transit Coordination

The general lack of specific standards for hiring and training drivers provides both opportunities and challenges. There are overlaps in many hiring and training standards among various agencies. Two agencies wishing to share drivers can negotiate differences in their standards and develop either a joint standard or a roster of drivers meeting both program requirements. For

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example, Yellow Cab in Houston participates in the area's ADA paratransit program, METROLift. Houston METRO requires specific driver standards and training; not all Yellow Cab drivers elect to join the program. Yellow Cab maintains records of METROLift-certified drivers and dispatches METROLift trips only to qualified drivers. This negotiated process lies in the hands of the coordinating agencies.

These arrangements are likely to be specific to the agencies coordinating drivers. Jointly using drivers when both agencies require CDLs or have FTA drug and alcohol policies can be straightforward. Some agencies already require CDLs of their drivers against the eventuality that they may have to drive a commercial vehicle. These requirements are not negotiable. The Community Council of Southwest Texas successfully applies this principle to drivers among their general public transportation, nutrition center and Head Start programs, making it possible to use any driver in any program. Further, they have recruited school bus drivers as part-time staff to meet their peak travel time demand during the 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. period.

Common training elements (for example, defensive driving) may be offered by one agency to multiple peer agencies. If drivers all received disability sensitivity training from a single known source with a recognized syllabus, agencies can feel more comfortable knowing that their customers are being served properly.

On a more inclusive scale, the New York model of establishing regional training centers that offer a group of standard courses appears particularly applicable in Texas. Such a system makes use of the existing resources of providers, including training staff. The state would limit expenses to training materials and administrative support.

Summary

Shared use of professional vehicle drivers would provide an improved coordination throughout the state. The standards described here provide a background to advance statewide coordination of transit driver hiring and training standards. To accomplish this, standards must be recognized by the array of transportation providers, including both transit agencies, human service agencies, and other relevant human transportation providers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations appear in Table 2 on the following page. The recommendations focus on systematically developing guidelines for driver hiring, training, and continuing education. An interagency task force appointed by TxDOT could develop overall guidance standards and recommendations to TxDOT and participating Workforce and HHS agencies for common adoption. Implementation would be through PTN in cooperation with existing training resources located at transit systems and administered through a curriculum coordinator. Establishment of a virtual Transit Training University would provide adult education and curriculum support and coordination of traveling trainers.

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Transit Training University would then be an education, training, and information clearinghouse for improving passenger mobility and coordination among public transportation and human service providers.

In order to develop a program, TxDOT should appoint a Transit Driver Curriculum Task Force. Task force members should include current transit training specialists, Workforce Development and Health and Human Services representatives, and adult education/curriculum specialists. The task force should:

1. Prepare recommended statewide guidance on hiring standards for public transportation drivers.
2. Prepare recommended statewide guidance on training and competency for various levels of transit services and vehicles.
3. Prepare interagency training and education agreements with existing training centers (use existing transit systems as centers). Use pooled resources and/or tuition to develop training centers.

Transit Training University would then be an education, training, and information clearinghouse for improving passenger mobility and coordination among public transportation and human service providers. While the initial planning would focus on transit drivers, the university could grow to incorporate travel training and mobility management training. The physical extent of Texas suggests that there should be a major web-based component including on-line curriculum. There would also be established physical training centers and a corps of traveling instructors.

Table 2. Recommendations

Issues/Constraint Category	Issue/Barrier/Constraint/ Specifics	Recommendation	Type of Action(s)
Interagency Coordination	Varying driver standards among agencies prevent shared use of drivers	TxDOT to appoint a Transit Driver Curriculum Task Force. Task force composition would include: current transit training specialists; Workforce Development/Health and Human Service Agency specialists; adult education / curriculum specialists; and facilitator.	Coordination Project Policy Development
Interagency Coordination		Prepare recommended statewide guidance on hiring standards for transit drivers.	Policy Action
Interagency Coordination		Prepare recommended statewide guidance on training and competency for various levels of transit services and vehicles.	Policy Action
Interagency Coordination		<u>Transit Training University</u> Prepare interagency training and education agreements with existing training centers (use existing metro transit systems as centers). Staff could be provided by multiple agencies.	Statewide Coordination Project

APPENDIX

Table 3. Hiring Practices

	CARTS	El Paso County	RIO (LRGV)	Midland-Odessa	Waco	Tyler	Houston	San Antonio	Lamar CISD	Yellow Cab Austin	Sexton (Lubbock Cab)	Coach USA	Gulf Coast Center	Hill Country MHMR
MINIMUM AGE	21	25+ (target)	21	21	25	21	21	21	21	25	25	23	18	18
MINIMUM EDUCATION	HS/GED	HS/GED	HS/GED	HS/GED	HS/GED	HS/GED	GED w/in 2 years	HS/GED	HS/GED	none	none	none	HS/GED	HS/GED
MINIMUM PRIOR DRIVING TIME	3 yr	none	none	none	5	0	3	none	none	City: 3 yr; Co.: 5 yr w/3 yr in major city	2 yr in US (City)	none	none	none
CDL? WHEN?	when applying	prefer; must get in 90 days	when applying	w/in 3 weeks	w/in 30 days	when applying	obtain in training	obtain in training	obtain in training	not required	not required	obtain in training	obtain in training	not required
PASSENGER ENDORSEMENT?	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	n/a	n/a	yes	yes	NA
PRE-HIRE DRIVING RECORD ELIGIBILITY STANDARD	common sense standard	no more than 1 moving violation in 2 years (MTP requirement)	developing now	no more than 2 violations in 5 years		no more than 3 violations in 5 years	no more than 2 violations in 3 years	flexible - look for pattern and seriousness	10 points maximum over 3 years; no DWI in 7 years	City: no more than 1 moving violations in 3 years & DDC before driving; County: no more than 2 violations in 3 years	City: no more than 2 moving violations in 1 year; Insurance: maximum 7 points in 36 month	no more than 2 moving violations in 3 years; never DWI	Use insurance company point system; maximum 4 points in 3 years	Use point system; no DUI in 7 years
POST-HIRE DRIVING RECORD STANDARD	annual check	same standard	developing now	no more than 2 violations in 1 year; annual check		same standard; annual check	no specific standard; quarterly check	none	same	City: same standard with check every 2 years; County: annual check	standard; annual	same standard; 6 month updates	same standard; annual check	same standard; annual check
DISQUALIFYING FACTORS	Generally look 7 years back using common sense; violent crimes always disqualify	Common sense: violent crime, felony, DUI (7 - 10 years back maximum)	no formal standard	no DWI over 5 years; no license restriction or CDL disqualification in 3 years; no felony ever	no DWI, felony, violent crime ever	no DWI over 7 years; no felony, harm to child ever	no DWI, felony, assault, drug possession	no DWI over 10 years; otherwise, evaluate type of offense and when it occurred	No felony ever	no felony, moral turpitude, DUI over 5 years	no misdemeanor over 5 years; no felony over 20 years	no felony over 10 years; never DWI or drug conviction	use TAC standards; specific lifetime and 5-yr preclusions	Use common sense; moral turpitude standard
CRIMINAL CHECK UPDATE?	No, however, because of Medicaid contract, are	quarterly	no	no	annually	no	quarterly	no	no	Per City requirement (every 2 years)	annually	annually	annually	no- employees expected to notify management of arrests/
DRUG & ALCOHOL TEST?: ABOVE DOT REQUIREMENTS?	DOT only	DOT - exceed training and 50% sample slightly	DOT only	DOT only	DOT - also test non-safety sensitive	DOT - also do pre-employment alcohol test	DOT only	DOT - also test non-safety sensitive	DOT only	none now; D & A coming due to Cap METRO contract	starting DOT due to MTP requirement	DOT - draw high sample than DOT requires	DOT only	DOT only

Table 4. Training Practices

	CARTS	El Paso County	RIO (LRGV)	Midland-Odessa	Waco	Tyler	Houston	San Antonio	Lamar CISD	Yellow Cab Austin	Sexton (Lubbock Cab)	Coach USA	Gulf Coast Center
TRAINING DURATION	3 days classroom; 5 - 10 days field	2 weeks; 30 - 40 hours driving; 14 hours class; 10 hours testing	3 weeks	4 weeks	6 weeks	3 wk peer training	8 weeks	Fixrt: 60 days (FT); 43 days (PT); DR 28 days	State cert: 20 hr.class; LCISD 20 hr. field	2 - 3 days	2 - 3 day plus 1 day with a driver	1 week class; 4 weeks field (min. 40 hours behind the wheel)	
DEFENSIVE DRIVING	use National Safety Council program	outsource	use Police Academy course	use TSI course	use National Safety Council program	no - looking at Smith system	use National Safety Council program	trainers National Safety Council certified; do in-house program	In-house; part of state certification	outsourced to 360 Solutions	none	combo of National Safety Council, Smith System	use National Safety Council program
PASSENGER ASSISTANCE	yes -- use CTAA course	in-house	yes - offer to others also	no - supervisors have it	yes	no - supervisors have it	yes	yes - use Project Action/CTAA blend	hire into regular service; provide for special needs drivers	minimal	yes - using Project Action "taxi pocket guide"	yes - use Project Easter Seals videos	yes- in-house: focus on loading and unloading; tie downs
DIVERSITY SENSITIVITY	no, but include recognition of differences in customer service training	none	yes	yes	not specifically	no	yes	EEO on sexual/ethnic harrassment	none	minimal	none	no (may be small part of customer service)	no (may be small part of customer service)
CUSTOMER SERVICE	yes	not especially	yes	yes - TSI	yes - NTI Academy	yes	yes	yes - in conflict avoidance	part of state cert.; "student management"	minimal	pep talk at hire	yes	yes - in-house
CPR/ FIRST AID	yes - used contractor, but trainers are now getting certified.	yes - outsource to American Red Cross	no - will use Police academy course	no	yes - TSI course	no	no	no	a rotating State requirement - every 3 yr. rotation changes	no	no	no	yes - standard Red Cross
OTHER	varied by what kind of service the driver will do	road rage awareness	local practices	local practices	local practices	local practices	local practices	local practices	Radio Assitance Team thru sheriff: security awareness	local practices; annual in-service review	review City Code regarding taxi passenger rights	have 7 computer modules for annual refresher and remedial (pre trip, ped	