

APPRENTICESHIP

Transit Authority Finds the Key to Worker Retention in Mentors

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The Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) and Amalgamated Transit Union Local 265 (ATU) have been tackling the problem of recruiting and retaining highly qualified transit workers with their Joint Workforce Investment (JWI) apprenticeship program.

This program has helped fill a workforce shortage felt across the country within the transit industry. Each apprentice in the 18-month program completes 2,000 hours of classroom and on-the-job training. Apprentices are also paired with mentors who help guide them through what can be a challenging career path. Maintaining contact with a more experienced mentor provides a valuable resource and works to retain new workers long term. In addition to higher employment retention rates, the metrics of success also show a reduction in absenteeism.

VTA and ATU Local 265 started the program in 2016 by creating apprenticeships for bus operators. Since then, the program has grown to include mechanics, overhead line workers, track workers and in the near future, light rail operators. It was the first transit agency in the nation to offer certified apprenticeships for coach operators and mechanics. After seeing VTA's success, 8 transit agencies are now working to emulate this apprenticeship program, including Cleveland, Baltimore and Minneapolis.

Government certified apprenticeships have traditionally only been available to the construction trades, such as electricians and carpenters. But, VTA's success in gaining certification from the U.S. Department of Labor and the California Division of Apprenticeship Standards has attracted funding that enables this kind of specialized training, while providing workers new to the transportation industry with experienced veterans who are able to provide valuable insight, advice and encouragement.



Mechanic apprentices train on a simulated equipment. (Photo courtesy of VTA)