

Full Recommendations and Implementation

The BRTC has undertaken analyses to address workforce challenges that hinder the delivery of reliable, safe, and efficient transit services. Our findings have culminated in strategic recommendations to bolster workforce capacity, enhance recruitment and retention, and align staffing strategies with MTA's long-term operational and policy goals.

However, MTA faces a complex mix of funding and decision-making constraints. As a state agency operating under MDOT, multiple regulatory bodies and oversight agencies control MTA's budget and hiring decisions.

Funding Constraints

- ▶ MTA's financial resources come from state appropriations and federal grants. MTA derives its financial resources from state appropriations and federal grants administered primarily by the FTA. This funding is tied to the state's budget cycle and specific federal conditions, limiting flexibility.
- ▶ The agency operates within a fixed framework of permanent positions—known as Personal Identification Numbers (PINs). With the Administrator's approval, MTA's human resources department can reallocate existing PINs to fill permanent roles. However, departments must justify and submit any requests for additional PINs beyond the current allocation to the Transportation Secretary's Office (TSO). If TSO lacks available PINs, it must request additional funding from the Maryland Department of Budget and Management (DBM), with any impact on positions covered by collective bargaining agreements (CBAs) requiring union discussions.

Decision-Making Constraints

- ▶ Statewide pay equity laws, CBAs, and the State of Maryland salary scale heavily influence staffing decisions. However, the peer compensation analysis shows these standards do not align with industry norms. For example, with the Administrator's approval, MTA HR submits proposals to TSO for compensation adjustments. Adjustments beyond step 21 require explicit TSO approval, and any changes affecting employees in the EPP salary plan require further approval from the Governor/DBM. Similarly, salaries for employees covered by CBAs must be negotiated with the union, limiting flexibility in addressing competitive pay gaps.
- ▶ Although MTA has the autonomy to create programs within its budget, any salary impact must undergo the same approval process, limiting the agency's ability to adapt staffing and compensation strategies quickly.

These multi-layered constraints mean that this report outlines many recommendations and implementation paths that require external support and collaboration with federal and state partners. Despite these limitations, MTA has made noteworthy progress, notably reducing overall vacancy rates from 7.5% to 5.2% amid rising post-pandemic ridership. However, the challenges persist, particularly in filling roles that require specialized skills, such as rail maintenance and transit police.

We developed our implementation strategies with these constraints in mind. We have identified key partners and barriers that MTA must work with—from TSO and DBM to union representatives—to secure the flexibility needed to grow the workforce. Addressing these systemic limitations is essential to ensure that MTA meets its current operational needs and is well-positioned for continued improvements in service delivery, with the possibility of expansion with rising ridership and the State of Maryland's policy goals.

General Workforce Recommendations

The 2024 APTA salary survey shows that MTA compensation for department heads, managers, and professional staff significantly trails peer agencies. Department heads earn an average of \$53,000 less than their counterparts nationally and nearly \$93,000 less than those at SEPTA. Similar gaps exist across other roles. MTA salaries range from 11 to 24% below peer averages and up to 52% below the highest-paying agencies. These disparities undermine MTA's ability to retain and attract specialized talent, particularly as better-paying opportunities exist at other agencies and in the private sector.

Despite these compensation challenges, MTA ranks high in efficiency among the peer transit systems analyzed. It places near the top in key metrics such as passenger miles, revenue hours, and capital spending per employee, which is more than double the peer average. While these figures reflect a productive and committed workforce, they also suggest potential risks of overwork and burnout if staffing and compensation levels are not addressed.

MTA's increasing dependence on contractors for core functions further complicates workforce stability. In some areas, like engineering, consultants outnumber state staff by more than 3 to 1. Contractor firms often offer higher pay and greater flexibility, making it harder for MTA to compete for talent under state salary constraints. The report recommends a phased plan to shift key roles back to permanent positions, helping retain institutional knowledge and improve workforce cohesion.

The analysis also reviewed hiring trends, highlighting mixed results. A 2023 recruitment campaign saw notable success in bus operator hiring. Still, vacancies remain high in light rail maintenance and transit police, reflecting broader national challenges. These findings suggest a comprehensive workforce strategy centered on competitive compensation, professional development, and modern HR tools to support long-term service reliability.

Enhance Compensation

- ▶ Conduct a comprehensive salary review to align pay rates across all employee categories with peer transit systems (Transit Cooperative Research Program, 2023) (Transit Center, 2023).
- ▶ Adjust compensation packages to reflect competitive benchmarks, addressing disparities contributing to staff attrition. (Transit Cooperative Research Program, 2023) (Transit Center, 2023)
- ▶ Secure necessary budget approvals and implement transparent communication strategies to inform current and prospective employees of salary improvements (American Public Transit Association, 2023) (Transit Center, 2023).

Build Workforce Capacity

- ▶ Reduce reliance on contractors by transitioning indispensable roles to permanent staff positions with competitive salaries (Maryland Transit Administration, 2022).
- ▶ Identify pivotal roles where contractors fulfill essential functions, such as engineering or project management, and prioritize these for conversion to permanent roles (American Public Transportation Association, 2023).
- ▶ Develop a phased plan to systematically increase directly employed professional permanent positions (PINs), ensuring operational stability and reducing long-term costs associated with contractor dependency (Maryland Transit Administration, 2022).

Strengthen Recruitment and Retention

- ▶ Develop a comprehensive strategy that combines competitive compensation with robust training programs tailored to different job categories (American Public Transportation Association, 2023) (American Public Transit Association, 2022).

- ▶ Expand career development opportunities, such as mentorship programs and leadership pathways, to retain talented employees and reduce turnover rates (Mineta Transportation Institute, 2024) (American Public Transit Association, 2021).
- ▶ Continuously monitor and assess workforce needs through data-driven tools to identify emerging challenges and refine recruitment strategies accordingly (Mineta Transportation Institute, 2024) (Transit Cooperative Research Program, 2024).

Targeted Recommendations

Addressing specific workforce segments requires tailored strategies grounded in each group's operational context. For maintenance workers, the report emphasizes that aging infrastructure and deferred repairs increase the urgency of building a robust, skilled workforce. A streamlined hiring process expanded training capacity, and stronger pipelines through partnerships with technical schools are essential to sustaining long-term maintenance capability, which will continue the positive trajectory staffing those positions.

In the capital staffing area, the analysis underscores MTA's need to rebuild its in-house engineering and project management workforce. Although engineering vacancies dropped from 11% in 2022 to 1% in 2024, this shift was mainly due to short-term consultant use—a practice that risks higher costs and weaker institutional continuity. The current workload is challenging, with capital spending per employee more than double the peer average. Long-term staffing stability will require a strategic hiring plan and competitive compensation to reduce contractor reliance and support successful project delivery.

Transit police staffing faces different but equally pressing challenges. The unit's 12% vacancy rate in 2024 reflects national trends. Still, the analysis identifies promising models from peer systems that integrated unarmed safety personnel to improve recruitment, public engagement, and officer workload. Implementation of these approaches, alongside better wellness support and streamlined hiring, will depend on leadership from the Transit Police itself rather than MTA human resources.

Maintenance Workers

Fill Maintenance Gaps

- ▶ Implement targeted recruitment campaigns to attract metro and light rail (LRT) maintenance staff, leveraging incentives such as sign-on bonuses and clear pathways for skill progression (American Public Transportation Association, 2023) (Mineta Transportation Institute, 2024) (Transit Cooperative Research Program, 2024).
- ▶ Simplify the hiring process to reduce time-to-hire and establish cross-training programs to increase staff flexibility and capability (American Public Transit Association, 2021) (American Public Transportation Association, 2023).

Expand Training

- ▶ Increase the number of maintenance trainer positions to ensure a steady pipeline of skilled workers (Transit Center, 2024).
- ▶ Expand and refine partnerships with technical schools and community colleges to create specialized training programs, fostering long-term workforce development (American Public Transportation Association, 2023) (Mineta Transportation Institute, 2024).

Capital Staff

Restore Skilled Capital Staff Internal Workforce

- ▶ Increase MTA's capital staff to manage major projects like the Purple and Red Lines, ensuring effective oversight, timely completion, and successful integration into the transit network.

- ▶ Add permanent engineering and construction management positions to support the growing capital program while reducing MTA's frequent reliance on external contractors (Maryland Transit Administration, 2022) (Office of the Comptroller of Maryland, 2025).

Transit Police

Boost Recruitment

Increase starting salaries and introduce retention bonuses for specialized transit police roles. (American Public Transportation Association, 2023) (Mineta Transportation Institute, 2024) (Hutton, 2024)

- ▶ Streamline hiring processes and implement wellness programs to support officer mental health and job satisfaction (American Public Transportation Association, 2023) (Transit Cooperative Research Program, 2024).

Diversify Public Safety

- ▶ Implement community-based safety initiatives alongside traditional policing, integrating social workers and public educators to address the root causes of crime (Mitman, 2023) (Police Executive Research Forum, 2022).
- ▶ Develop partnerships with local organizations to provide unarmed safety personnel for non-emergency situations, fostering a collaborative approach to transit security (Hernández, 2024) (Pan, 2022).

Implementation Strategies

The overarching insights gained through these analyses informed the implementation strategies. Recommendations such as benchmarking salaries, leveraging advanced analytics, expanding training programs, and integrating community engagement reflect the interconnected nature of workforce challenges. By addressing systemic and targeted issues, MTA aims to create a resilient and adaptable workforce capable of supporting Maryland's broader climate, equity, and mobility objectives.

Competitive Compensation and Benefits

- ▶ Regularly benchmark salaries against peer agencies and enhance benefits packages, including tuition assistance, childcare support, wellness programs, and student loan forgiveness.

Workforce Planning and Analytics

- ▶ Leverage advanced data analytics to forecast staffing needs and refine hiring strategies based on real-time workforce trends.
- ▶ Develop and refine methods and tools to continuously assess the effectiveness of recruitment and retention initiatives.

Training and Career Development

- ▶ Expand training programs tailored to specific workforce areas, such as maintenance, operations, and capital project management.
- ▶ Create apprenticeship and mentorship programs to build career pipelines and foster professional growth.

Leveraging Technology

- ▶ Invest in modern workforce planning tools and automation technologies to improve recruitment efficiency and operational scheduling.
- ▶ Utilize predictive analytics to anticipate workforce gaps and optimize resource allocation.

Public Safety and Community Engagement

- ▶ Partner with community organizations to integrate unarmed safety personnel into transit systems.
- ▶ Educate the public on collaborative safety measures, such as reporting tools and intervention strategies, to strengthen community trust.

Implementing these recommendations will enable MTA to overcome its workforce challenges, ensuring reliable transit services while advancing Maryland's broader climate, equity, and mobility objectives. Strengthening recruitment, retention, and training efforts will build a resilient workforce supporting the Baltimore region's growing transit needs.