

## Core Bus Service Success

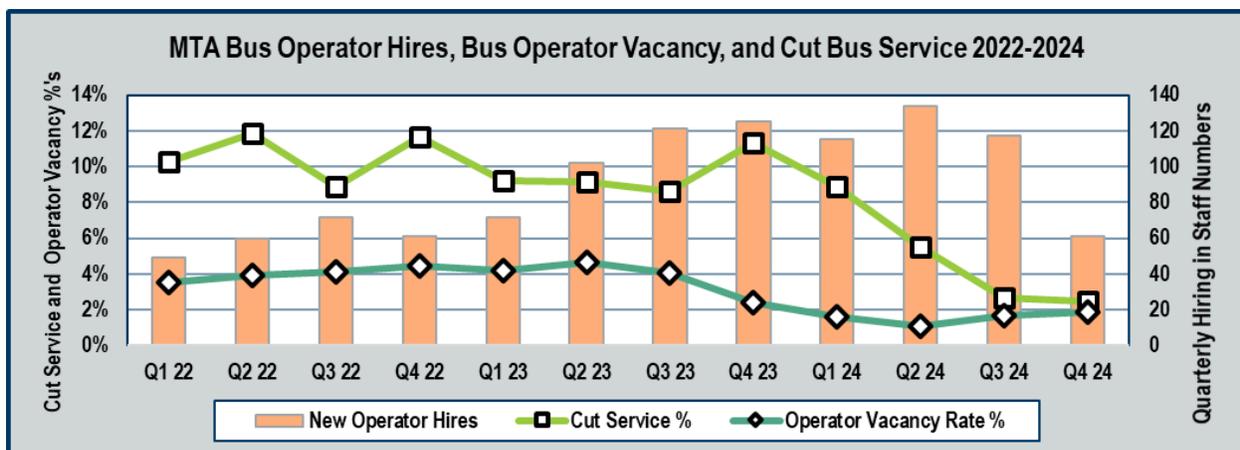
Ensuring a fully staffed bus operator workforce is critical to service reliability and customer satisfaction. By systematically analyzing staffing levels alongside service performance, MTA can demonstrate how targeted recruitment efforts directly translate into tangible improvements on the street. This section examines the relationship between bus operator staffing and service outcomes, reviewing quarterly trends from Q1 2022 to Q4 2024 to highlight how these gains have unlocked both near-term reliability benefits and service expansions.

### Definition of metrics

- ▶ **New Operator Hires:** The number of new bus operators brought into the workforce each quarter. Higher hiring rates indicate efforts to fill vacancies and expand service capacity.
- ▶ **Operator Vacancy Rate (%):** The percentage of unfilled bus operator positions. A high vacancy rate suggests workforce shortages that may impact service reliability.
- ▶ **Cut Service (%):** The percentage of scheduled bus service not delivered due to operator shortages or other operational constraints. A lower cut service percent indicates more reliable service for riders.

Table 9 and Chart 6: Cut Service and Core Bus Staffing

	Cut Service %	Operator Vacancy Rate %	New Operator Hires
Q1 22	10.3%	3.5%	49
Q2 22	11.8%	4.0%	60
Q3 22	8.9%	4.2%	72
Q4 22	11.6%	4.4%	61
Q1 23	9.2%	4.2%	72
Q2 23	9.1%	4.6%	102
Q3 23	8.6%	4.1%	121
Q4 23	11.3%	2.4%	125
Q1 24	8.9%	1.6%	115
Q2 24	5.5%	1.1%	134
Q3 24	2.7%	1.7%	117
Q4 24	2.5%	1.9%	61



Source: MTA internal data

## Analysis and Results

As seen in Table 9 and Chart 6 above, from Q1 2022 through Q4 2024, the interplay between hiring, vacancies, and cut service paints a clear picture: when MTA commits to aggressive recruitment, vacancy rates fall, and after a brief lag, service reliability improves markedly. Bus operators constitute the largest category of MTA staff—over 1,300 positions within a total workforce of roughly 3,300—so stabilizing this group was essential to reversing chronic service cuts.

In 2022 and early 2023, quarterly hires were modest (49–72 operators), and vacancy rates hovered between 3.5% and 4.6%. In Q2 2023, MTA escalated its hiring campaign, peaking at 134 new hires in Q2 2024. As a result, the operator vacancy rate plunged from 4.6% to just 1.07% over twelve months. Hiring then eased slightly in Q3 and Q4 2024, with vacancy rates settling between 1.6 and 1.9%.

Despite this hiring surge, cut service did not immediately decline. High rates of unserved bus service persisted through much of 2023, reaching 11.3% in Q4, due to the time required for training, onboarding, and route integration. By Q3 2024, however, cut service had fallen sharply to 2.67%. It stabilized at 2.5% in Q4, confirming workforce stabilization's lagged but profound impact on the reliability of services.

MTA's ability to sustain aggressive hiring from mid-2023 through mid-2024 was pivotal in driving down vacancy rates and anchoring service reliability. This experience underscores the necessity of proactive workforce planning: recruiting must outpace anticipated demand to avoid service disruptions. While late 2024 vacancy stabilization validated these efforts, ongoing recruitment and retention strategies will be critical to address turnover, retirements, and future ridership growth.

## Enabling Future Service Enhancement

With vacancy rates at multi-year lows and a fully staffed operator pool, MTA plans to implement significant proposed service improvements in Fall 2025 that previous staffing shortages made infeasible. Recognizing the importance of maintaining this momentum, MTA has also authorized the addition of 70 new operator PINs for fiscal year 2026, further strengthening capacity and ensuring the resilience of the bus network.

## Conclusion

The correlation between robust hiring, low vacancy rates, and improved service reliability is unmistakable. By reducing operator vacancies from over 4.5% to below 2%, MTA cut unserved bus service by more than 8% within a year. These staffing gains underpin current reliability achievements and enable the Fall 2025 service enhancements and the 70 additional operator PINs planned for FY 2026. To sustain and build upon these successes, MTA must continue proactive recruitment, invest in comprehensive training, and reinforce retention, securing the transit workforce that riders depend on today and in the years ahead.