



Along with fixed-route and commuter bus routes, Richmond, Va.-based GRTC Transit System operates paratransit service and promotes ridesharing and other alternative modes of transportation through its RideFinders division.

# 10

On the job with Riverside Transit Agency Mechanic Jaime Aviles. Employees are encouraged to assume more responsibilities over time and are empowered to make key decisions.

# GREAT Transit Systems to Work For



Local employees of the Access Center for Independent Living in Dayton try out the wheelchair ramp on the Greater Dayton Regional Transit Authority's newly designed bus prototype unveiled August 8, 2008 featuring the system's rebranding and new logo "It's Time to Ride".



Illinois-based Champaign-Urbana MTD's ridership is nearly 10 million per year. High per capita ridership and exceptional customer satisfaction (95 percent satisfied or very satisfied in a 2008 phone survey) are due in no small part to its outstanding employees.



# 10 GREAT Systems to

**Open-door policies, a family atmosphere and opportunities for growth and advancement help to keep transit employees happy. But each of the 10**

**transit systems profiled in this article has its own special way of making sure that employee satisfaction is part of its mission.**

>BY STEVE HIRANO

# W

WHAT MAKES A PUBLIC TRANSIT SYSTEM A GREAT place to work? The answer is complicated, depending on the needs, desires and expectations of each employee, and the unique situation of the transit system. Certainly, competitive salaries and benefits are a good starting point, but most employers need to offer much more than money and perks to maintain a fully engaged workforce. Being a great employer is as much art as it is science.

That said, *Metro* launched an effort this summer to identify 10 of the top transit agency employers in the U.S. and Canada. A scoring system was created that weighs a 750-word statement prepared by the transit agency and the results of a confidential employee survey (see Methodology sidebar). Thirty-seven transit agencies participated in the project.

The effort was not fully comprehensive, in that we did not attempt to contact every transit system in North America. Unfortunately, that undertaking would be prohibitively time-consuming and beyond the scope of any one organization. Now that we have published this report, however, perhaps a sequel can include all transit systems within range of this magazine, its Website and e-mail newsletters.

## DIVERSE SIZE AND GEOGRAPHY

The 10 transit systems profiled in this report range in size from nine to 1,999 employees. All of them are U.S. properties, although one Canadian transit system did make it to the final twenty. Three of them are in California, two in Virginia and one each in six other states — Connecticut, Illinois, Michigan, Nevada, Ohio and Virginia.

Here is the full list of Great Transit Systems to Work For (in alphabetical order):

- Alexandria Transit Company (DASH)** - Alexandria, Va.
- Capital Area Transit Authority** - Lansing, Mich.
- Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District** - Urbana, Ill.
- Greater Dayton Regional Transit Authority** - Dayton, Ohio
- Greater Hartford Transit District** - Hartford, Conn.
- GRTC Transit System** - Richmond, Va.
- Orange County Transportation Authority** - Orange, Calif.
- Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada** - Las Vegas, Nev.
- Riverside Transit Agency** - Riverside, Calif.
- SunLine Transit Agency** - Thousand Palms, Calif.



# Transit Work For

## SHARED ATTRIBUTES OF THE TOP 10

As you might expect, the top 10 employers shared many common attributes. For example, each of them possessed some or all of the following characteristics, based on open-ended survey responses from employees:

- ▶ An open-door policy among managers;
- ▶ Relaxed, family atmosphere;
- ▶ Work-schedule flexibility;
- ▶ Strong employee recognition practices;
- ▶ Approachable senior executives;
- ▶ Strong sense of community service;
- ▶ Opportunities for advancement;
- ▶ Lack of micro-management;
- ▶ Encouraging, supportive environment.

In almost all cases, a large majority of employees at the 10 transit systems said they would be “likely” or “very likely” to recommend their place of employment to their friends. This is a significant finding and a key differentiator. At one agency that did not make the final 10, only 63 percent of the employees who responded to the confidential survey said they would be likely or very likely to refer a friend, while the top 10 agencies averaged more than 92 percent, a difference of nearly 30 percent.

## MAKING THE FUTURE EVEN BRIGHTER

The ability of transit systems to attract, hire and retain top candidates to their organization hinges on their willingness and desire to become employers of choice in their communities. The transit agencies profiled in this report already have much to offer job seekers, but, even in their own estimation, still have areas where they can improve. Says **Jacob Snow**, general manager of the **Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada** in Las Vegas: “When we stop trying to improve, we’ll inevitably fail. There are several areas that we’re currently emphasizing, including succession planning, project management and in-house training. By improving in these areas, we’ll be in an even better position as an agency.”

## Methodology

An invitation to participate in the project was e-mailed to the general managers, CEOs and executive directors of more than 200 small, medium and large transit systems in the U.S. and Canada. Thirty-seven systems agreed to participate and prepared a 750-word statement describing how they create a great workplace environment and culture for all employees. As a guideline, the participants were told they might want to consider the following subject areas in their statement:

- ▶ Innovative practices in maintaining high employee morale
- ▶ Employee development, education and training programs
- ▶ Employee recognition programs
- ▶ Empowerment of employees to make key decisions
- ▶ Recruiting and retention practices
- ▶ Reductions in turnover rate
- ▶ Encouragement of employee work-life balance
- ▶ Leadership provided by general manager/CEO/president/executive director
- ▶ If applicable, relationship with organized labor
- ▶ Traditional and untraditional employee benefits
- ▶ Working relationship between board and staff
- ▶ Using HR metrics to reduce costs
- ▶ Stability of funding source as it applies to job security and wage increases
- ▶ Employee participation in corporate charity and fundraising activities

Each statement was judged by **Steve Hirano**, president of **TransitTalent.com**. He assigned a score of 1 to 100 to each statement based on its effectiveness in describing a workplace where employees could thrive both professionally and personally based on many of the factors mentioned above. The top 20 finishers were selected as finalists.

These 20 transit systems then took part in a confidential employee survey. The 22-question survey was designed to gauge employee satisfaction in a variety of areas, such as salary, benefits, workload, training, employee recognition programs, agency leadership and overall morale. Key questions included “How satisfied are you with your job?” and “How likely would you be to refer a friend to your agency as a place to work?”

The 20 finalists were pared down to 10 using the results of the survey (50 percent) and the original statement (50 percent).

Congratulations to all of the participants, many of whom found it to be a useful exercise to put together the statement.

# 10 GREAT Transit Systems to Work For

ALEXANDRIA, VA.



DASH prides itself on providing the highest level of customer service to its riders and employees. Twenty-year veterans from the agency's 20th anniversary in 2004 (above).

## Alexandria Transit Company (DASH)

Alexandria Transit Company (DASH) prides itself on providing the highest level of customer service possible to its riders and its employees. "Our management philosophy is that if we treat our employees like kings and queens, with respect and appreciation, then they are more likely to treat our external customers with that same respect and appreciation," says General Manager **Sandy Modell**. "This philosophy has worked and is the basis of the great work environment and culture that exists at all levels."

DASH started in 1984, with 17 buses and 35 employees. Today, DASH has 62 buses and 138 employees. Annual ridership has grown from 923,000 to four million riders today. Modell says the success of the DASH system is due to its employees, whose dedication, hard work and high morale has helped to attract and retain new customers. DASH has built its reputation on strong customer and community service. "We get many recognition letters from customers, community members and city officials about our wonderful, professional, safe and courteous employees," she says.

Employee recognition plays a key role in highlighting outstanding performance, focusing on reinforcing and recognizing excellent performance. DASH posts a monthly honor roll of operators who had outstanding performance in safety, attendance and customer relations. It also has an annual, well-attended employee awards banquet at a hotel, complete with dinner and dancing. The ceremony recognizes outstanding employees and recognizes all levels of transportation, maintenance and administration employees, including the coveted "DASH Difference" Award.

Throughout the year, the organization provides many opportunities to bring employees together in social settings. These activities include holiday and special event luncheons, monthly birthdays, company picnics, fish fries and cook-outs. Quarterly, DASH hosts pool tournaments, ice cream socials and a "Breakfast

Bowl" at the bowling alley with awards for the highest scores. Each Christmas employees receive a holiday turkey or grocery gift card.

Three years ago, DASH created operator work assignments that include two-week schedules to provide operators every other weekend off. The result was a 25 percent drop in call-offs on weekends. Also, operators are eligible to select these assignments within their first six months of employment, which helps with employee retention.

DASH has an excellent employee benefit package that includes a number of wellness programs along with the traditional package. Even with the rising cost of health insurance, employees are still provided with 100 percent company-paid single-coverage health insurance. In addition, employees are given a free YMCA membership and DASH recently began a Weight Watchers At-Work Program. In the first session, DASH employees lost a collective 85 pounds.

Although serious work is always at the core of DASH, it supports family and encourages fun. "As the general manager for 18 years, it has been my goal and pleasure to provide a workplace where people want to come to work," Modell says. "We have done extensive supervisory training to provide the right mindset on how to communicate and treat employees. Our board of directors has been extremely supportive and our chairman of 22 years, **Bill Hurd**, who retired at 90, was a great mentor."

A stable funding source has helped to create a secure environment for DASH employees. "In fact, just last month we held a groundbreaking ceremony for our new DASH facility, which will allow us to double the size of our fleet and our company in the near future," Modell says.

For more information about DASH, visit [www.dashbus.com](http://www.dashbus.com).

### Key Employment Data

Total number of employees:	138
▶ Female employees:	32
▶ Male employees:	106
Turnover rate for 2007:	1.4%

### EMPLOYEE Perspective

"We're a family really. We work together and we enjoy personal time together as well. The team is a diverse group with people from different ethnic backgrounds, skill sets, ages, etc. There aren't many places to work where folks still care about quality of work and life of employees."

# Capital Area Transportation Authority (CATA)

LANSING, MICH.

**W**hen new employees join the Capital Area Transportation Authority (CATA), they are greeted by three things — a banner reading “Voted #1 in America,” a new high-tech facility and a big hug from the executive director.

CATA combines an award-winning, professional and challenging work atmosphere with the supportive and caring nature of family and friends. Executive Director **Sandy Draggoo** says she has made it a cornerstone of her 24 years in the position that she and her original core group of employees cultivate this culture of excellence. This feeling pervades the entire transit property, and is evident in both the high caliber of employees and the results of their hard work.

When asked why CATA is such a great place to work, Draggoo responds: “It is a combination of employees who love their work, a board that loves us and believes in our/their mission, and a com-

munity that appreciates both groups and has throughout the many years we have been an authority.”

To foster this warm, caring environment, CATA holds several events throughout the year that preserve the family culture: holiday celebrations, ice cream socials, employee appreciation day and popcorn days. It also sponsors several employee recognition programs. Employees with perfect attendance are taken to lunch by Draggoo; operators receive recognition for having safe driving years; and all employees are eligible for community service awards.

Cultivating a personal, one-on-one relationship with each employee, and between employees, is the essential groundwork on which CATA is built. Draggoo believes that her mission is not only to lead, but to support the entire operation of the property and stay connected with each process. To that end, the executive director meets with new employees to build an initial working and personal relationship, holds monthly administration meetings as an open

*continued on page 42*

### EMPLOYEE Perspective

“CATA acknowledges your contributions. As an employee you feel valued and appreciated. In no way have I ever felt like a ‘number’ here.”

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forum for discussion, holds special meetings on key issues and decisions, and spends time "on the floor" doing whatever is necessary to inform and include CATA's employees.

Recently, when a significant financial hurdle became apparent, Draggoo met with every employee in small groups to ensure that all were fully apprised of the situation and had a chance to provide input and solutions.

Maintaining high levels of morale, efficiency and innovation requires a strong recruiting effort, and CATA uses several methods of finding top prospects. It collaborates with "Michigan Works!" and other employment agencies, sends staff members to **Michigan State University** to guest lecture about transit, forwards job postings to university listservs and uses its internship program to find home-grown talent.

CATA's relationship with its labor union has been solid, based on a long history of trust and cooperation. "Disagreement is inevitable, but the most important aspect of this partnership is that the other party is just down the hall," Draggoo says. Working respectfully with the union has allowed CATA to provide award-winning bus service.

Funding stability is another factor in CATA's ability to be a great employer. The authority has had only one millage proposal fail in its 36-year history. Looking ahead, CATA will continue to embrace fiscal responsibility to weather Michigan's economic down-



In 2007, CATA was named the #1 transit system in its size category by the American Public Transportation Association.

turn and funding stagnation. Draggoo says CATA is always planning five years ahead, allowing for flexibility when needed.

Finally, CATA employees are provided with a wide range of benefits, including comprehensive medical, dental and vision insurance (with minimal contributions required from employees); pension plans, life insurance, short- and long-term disability, deferred compensation plans; free bus passes for employees and dependents; on-site fitness facility; and health club reimbursement program.

For more information about CATA, visit [www.cata.org](http://www.cata.org).

### Key Employment Data

Total number of employees: 293

▶ Female employees: 120

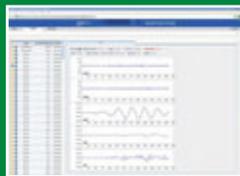
▶ Male employees: 173

Turnover rate for 2007: 9.5%

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# 10

## GREAT Transit Systems to Work For

# Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District

URBANA, ILL.

The Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District (MTD) operates in east central Illinois, and provides bus service to the communities of Champaign and Urbana, portions of Savoy and the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. The combined population of the areas served during the school year is 150,000; the MTD's ridership is nearly 10 million per year. High per-capita ridership and exceptional customer satisfaction (95 percent satisfied or very satisfied in a 2008 random phone survey) are due in no small part to MTD's outstanding employees.

Directors are very accessible to employees. In addition to being readily available when concerns arise, every three months Managing Director **Bill Volk** holds a day-long "Meet, Eat & Greet." At these informal get-togethers, employees at all levels of the company are encouraged to visit, have a snack and chat with their managing director.

MTD employees know they can rely upon their leaders to keep their workplace financially healthy, safe and secure, and well respected in the community. The MTD's Core Values of committing to "yes;" providing outstanding customer and public service; developing long-term, positive relationships; and embracing opportunity and innovation, are acknowledged and valued. "These core values are known at all levels, and our employees understand the importance of living these values," Volk says.

Critically important components of managerial/employee relationships are the eight committees structured for guidance and input on key policy, communication and social activities. The committees' responsibilities span various organizational components. Each is chaired by an administrative staff member and staffed by operational and maintenance personnel. Committee members review policies and procedures, coordinate on activities and communications, and develop and lead social activities.

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### EMPLOYEE Perspective

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Committees have significant input on the direction in which the MTD is headed, and ensure that employee attitudes and opinions are known and respected.

The MTD has a long history of promoting from within. Many members of the administrative staff began their employment with the MTD as young bus operators who grew into their positions. The possibility for advancement is very real for those employees who personify and exemplify the values of the MTD. Perhaps the best indicator that the MTD is a terrific place to work is that many employees recommend to their relatives that they seek employment at the MTD. It is quite common for fathers to recommend sons and daughters. These individuals want their loved ones to have the same high-caliber work experience they do.

The MTD offers its employees generous benefits. They include health, dental, and life insurance; employee assistance program; flexible medical spending account; dependent health care availability; individual and family access to free or reduced bus service; retirement health savings account; and a retirement plan in coordination with the Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund. To encourage exercise and promote healthy lifestyles, the MTD has an on-site fitness center, offers fitness incentive programs and provides access to a personal trainer. Everyone has ready access to the modern center with state-of-the-art exercise equipment.



The MTD has a long history of promoting from within. Many members of the administrative staff began their employment with the agency as young bus operators who grew into their positions.

While the work the MTD does is everyone's primary focus, it is acknowledged that it is also important to have fun and revel in successes. One of the company's eight committees is the Social Committee, whose members regularly plan and coordinate shared outings and activities at which employees and their families have fun together. Seasonal shopping trips to Chicago, excursions to baseball parks, annual holiday parties and chili cook-offs are among the activities the committee organizes.

For more information about MTD, visit [www.cumtd.com](http://www.cumtd.com).

### Key Employment Data

Total number of employees:	299
▶ Female employees:	78
▶ Male employees:	221
Turnover rate for 2007:	10.4%



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# 10

## GREAT Transit Systems to Work For

# Greater Dayton Regional Transit Authority

DAYTON, OHIO

In a "General Motors town" where traffic rarely stalls, parking is plentiful and residents love their cars, the Greater Dayton Regional Transit Authority (RTA) has struggled in recent years to maintain service at expected levels, fighting budget constraints and widespread economic decline. Major manufacturers have gone under or left town, and Dayton works hard to keep its downtown businesses from fleeing to the suburbs or out of Ohio entirely.

But the RTA has not let its external struggles impact its internal capabilities and accomplishments. Executive Director Mark Donaghy credits the system's 621 employees with maintaining their sense of mission and professionalism. "They care about our customers and each other and are driven to be the best transit system in North America by 2011," he says. "Daytonians, by nature, value innovative spirit, creativity and a desire to help others, and the people I work with exemplify all those great qualities."

In the past few years, the RTA has embarked on a major reinvention of itself, including innovative rebranding accomplished on a shoestring budget. Meanwhile, Donaghy has implemented or enhanced numerous employee-friendly practices.

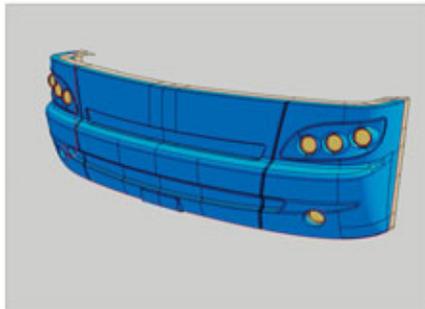
For example, Donaghy holds regular state-of-the-RTA employee meetings and practices a hands-on, employee-focused management style. He will show up in a department, often unannounced, on various shifts and spent numerous days in the maintenance department learning about the technical operations of electric trolleys, from propulsion systems to the catenary infrastructure.

RTA emphasizes solid communication throughout its structure. Employee focus groups help to establish jumping-off points toward developing solutions to agency problems. These have resulted in streamlining of routes and other important service modifications. Another communication tool is RTA's twice-monthly internal executive director newsletter.

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### EMPLOYEE Perspective

"I am allowed to set my own goals and objectives and to be myself. I am allowed to run my job the best that I can without interruptions from my supervisor."



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Empowerment of employees is accomplished both through managerial encouragement and formalized process, such as the "Operator Involvement Group," in which drivers meet with managers every month to express concerns and suggestions. A similar group proposed a new route that rolled out in 2007 and now serves an area heavily laced with restaurants, hotels, and other major employers and points of customer interest.

The agency strongly supports its Employee Benefits Fund committee in morale-boosting activities throughout the year. Activities include health fairs, lunches and cookouts, summer picnics, reduced ticket prices to recreational attractions and ballgames, holiday dinners and yearly recognition banquets.

Senior staff members, including directors and managers, receive ongoing leadership training. Donaghy makes himself available to meet and discuss matters of concern with both employees and customers on a daily basis. Other directors make it a daily practice to greet and engage riders and other customers.

Every operator must participate in training conducted by Dayton's Access Center for Independent Living. Participants learn first-hand how it feels to live with mobility and other impairments, including speech and cognitive learning problems. The training has bridged a gap between drivers and customers. The agency also employs persons with disabilities who train customers how to ride, whether they



The agency strongly supports its Employee Benefits Fund committee in morale-boosting activities throughout the year. Activities include health fairs, lunches and cookouts (pictured) and summer picnics.

are mobility impaired or just need help orienting to transit use.

The agency supports yearly programs encouraging employees to donate to the local **United Way**

and Dayton's **Culture Works**, a combined arts organization fund. In addition, the agency provides regular support of nonprofit organizations with in-kind services, token donations and event donations.

Despite its achievements, the RTA is focused on further improvements. "We must identify new methods to maintain effective two-way communication with our employees to insure that they have constant access to information and are confident that we are listening and acting on their ideas and concerns," Donaghy says.

For more information about Greater Dayton RTA, visit [www.greaterdaytonrta.org](http://www.greaterdaytonrta.org).

### Key Employment Data

Total number of employees: 621

▶ Female employees: 199

▶ Male employees: 422

Turnover rate for 2007: 13.0%

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# 10 GREAT Transit Systems to Work For

## GRTC Transit System

RICHMOND, VA.

Located in the heart of Virginia, GRTC Transit System is the primary mass transportation carrier for the Greater Richmond region. GRTC operates numerous services focused on providing clean, safe and reliable transportation to improve mobility and access throughout Central Virginia. Along with fixed and commuter bus routes, GRTC operates paratransit service through its CARE division, welfare-to-work transportation through its C-VAN division and promotes ridesharing and other alternative modes of transportation through its RideFinders division.

The heart and soul of GRTC Transit System is its employees. From mechanics to operators to corporate staff, GRTC operates not only as a business, but as a family. "The company is extremely proud of the longevity of its employees," says CEO John Lewis. "Nearly 35 percent of GRTC employees have been with the company for more than 10 years, and a growing number of operators

have been employed for 20 years or more." GRTC appreciates the commitment its employees show and consistently recognizes them through both milestone anniversary dates and regular appreciation events hosted throughout the year. GRTC employees are also regularly highlighted in GRTC television commercials, print advertisements and other forms of communication pieces.

Workplace diversity is an essential component to the success of GRTC. Through the years, the company has strived to create a work environment that promotes the varied backgrounds and cultures of its employees. For example, GRTC has strived to advance the employment of women in the workplace and, as a result, its female bus operator population increased from 30 percent in 2003 to 40 percent in 2007. "By creating a team of individuals — each bringing with them their own unique backgrounds and experiences — to accomplish the same goal, GRTC has consistently been able to grow and evolve as a company to meet the needs of both

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### EMPLOYEE Perspective

"GRTC has been like family to me and the things I've been able to learn have been extremely valuable. I have been exposed to many things that have made me a better employee and given me great versatility."

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its employees and the diverse region that it serves," Lewis says.

Throughout the years, GRTC has not only become a place to come to work, but also a place where one can continue to grow both professionally and personally. As part of succession planning initiatives, GRTC offers employees educational assistance for graduate and undergraduate courses to develop employees for career growth. In addition, employees have the opportunity to attend professional development conferences and workshops throughout the year, allowing them to continue to grow in their respective fields.

Using the role of a GRTC mechanic, for example, to maintain the knowledge and technical expertise required to troubleshoot and repair the new electronically controlled buses, GRTC partnered with a local community college to supply additional training to GRTC technicians outside of the training supplied by the bus manufacturers.

Outside of work responsibilities, GRTC also strives to promote healthy behaviors and lifestyles for its employees. Quarterly Health & Wellness Fairs are sponsored by GRTC, during which medical staff are available to check blood glucose and cholesterol levels and evaluate blood pressure. These fairs often focus on specific health educational topics, such as breast cancer awareness, healthy weight and smoking cessation. As an incentive prize for those employees who participate in these events, local health club memberships are awarded.



GRTC recognizes maintenance staff for achievements in attendance, safety and workmanship. Diesel Mechanics David Goins, Sr. (left) and Tony Byrd (right).

GRTC makes it a priority to recognize and reward employees who go above and beyond the call of duty to contribute. Employees are recognized for accomplishing excellence

in performance, attitude, customer service and attendance, and receive honors such as certificates, letters of commendation, cash awards, earned days off and participation in special honorary events. The results of these incentives speak for themselves: In 2007, GRTC's Maintenance Department recognized nearly 55 percent of its staff for achieving excellence in attendance, safety and workmanship.

For more information about GRTC, visit [www.ridegrtc.com](http://www.ridegrtc.com).

### Key Employment Data

Total number of employees:	506
▶ Female employees:	202
▶ Male employees:	304
Turnover rate for 2007:	18.2%

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# 10 GREAT Transit Systems to Work For Greater Hartford Transit District

The Greater Hartford Transit District (GHTD) is a quasi-municipal corporation that serves 16 member towns. It provides ADA complementary paratransit service to the elderly and disabled in the Greater Hartford region with approximately 100 vehicles.

The district leases paratransit buses to 29 towns and social service agencies for their respective dial-a-ride programs, in addition to 33 commuter coaches leased to private operators that provide supplemental commuter service during peak periods. Additionally, the district has been providing transportation to people entering the work force as part of the Job Access and Reverse Commute Program.

GHTD has a staff of only nine people, but the organization plays a key role in the region, serving the diverse needs of the transportation industry and its member towns. It has broad powers to acquire, operate, finance, plan, develop, maintain and otherwise provide all

forms of transportation and related services, including the development or renewal of transportation centers and parking facilities.

And the district's benefits and positive workplace environment make it a strong rival to transit properties with vastly larger numbers of employees.

Staff members are empowered to make important decisions pertaining to their job responsibilities and they are highly encouraged to offer ideas they believe will streamline and/or improve operations, decrease costs and allow the organization to play a key role in transportation in the region. "The allowance of employees to work independently and make decisions promotes confidence in the individual and helps to expand his or her creativity," says GHTD Executive Director **Vicki Shotland**.

Regular recognition and praise is noted and communicated to the employees. The senior management staff creates an environ-

## EMPLOYEE Perspective

"Our employer permits flexible working hours and encourages and finances participation in national conferences, seminars and continuing education classes. I also value the ability to work independently and to be creative within my position."

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## HARTFORD, CONN.



GHTD employees are encouraged to make suggestions and share ideas. Driver Nelly Acosta (right) is pictured with Catherine Wade.

ment of cohesiveness by stressing that employees form a single unit and that the successes of the organization should be shared by all. Employees are provided with opportunities to do more than what is specified on their position job descriptions. They are encouraged to make suggestions and communicate new ideas for consideration and implementation.

To promote camaraderie and open communication, employees are given opportunities to mingle with each other in a relaxed atmosphere. "These might include sharing cultural experiences through food, burying a time capsule, creating a mini golf course in the office, going to the local museum or just having dress-down Fridays," Shottland says. "These shared experiences take very little time, but have been a nice way to build morale and maintain a sense of unity."

Due to the size of this organization, the district does not have a dedicated human resources department, but senior managers meet to discuss some HR strategies, employee attitudes, key performance indicators, retention and recruitment of staff, employee skill level, and training programs and their effectiveness.

Company benefits are generous and include an employer-funded health savings account, dental and life insurance, and a Simplified

Employee Pension program. Management stresses the balance between work and home life and offers flexible work schedules to help employees maintain that balance.

Professional development and continuing education opportunities are also offered. Formal training and education that will directly benefit the employee's performance on the job are encouraged. This allows staff the opportunity to broaden their knowledge base and network with other transit professionals.

This entire agency is proud of what it accomplishes, the programs it oversees and the organization's philosophy that places a strong emphasis on respect for one another.

For more information about the GHTD, visit [www.hartfordtransit.org](http://www.hartfordtransit.org).

### Key Employment Data

Total number of employees:	9
▶ Female employees:	7
▶ Male employees:	2
Turnover rate for 2007:	0%

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# 10 GREAT Transit Systems to Work For Regional Transportation Commis

The Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada (RTC) serves as the transit agency, the Metropolitan Planning Organization and the traffic management agency for Southern Nevada, and it accomplishes these varied duties with a workforce of 285 employees. These employees manage major transit contracts, provide vision and direction for the mobility of the region's residents and visitors, and ensures that the agency works towards its main goal — enhancing mobility.

In return for their expertise and enthusiasm, RTC employees are rewarded with a stable work environment, channels of open communication and empowerment to make impactful decisions. They also enjoy health and dental benefits for themselves and their families at minimal expense, a monthly life insurance premium paid for by the agency and vacation leave that accrues at a rate of 3.08 hours per pay period.

And more benefits are being implemented. "With the support of our agency's leadership and our employees' collective bargaining union, we are implementing a number of unique initiatives within our organization," says RTC General Manager **Jacob Snow**. These initiatives include job sharing and telecommuting, and they achieve a dual purpose. They provide RTC employees with improved work-life balance and help to reduce congestion on the region's roadways.

"Our employees are our greatest asset," Snow says. "We trust them and look to them to lead us to success."

Thirty percent of the RTC's employees have at least 10 years with the agency and the longest-serving employee has been with the RTC for 28 years. Snow believes that this type of retention results from a combination of compensation, communication and employee empowerment.

RTC employees are well compensated for their efforts. This was

## EMPLOYEE Perspective

"We're a progressive organization that likes to explore new ideas and technology. Every manager in the agency has an open-door policy, and I feel that I can address issues freely."

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ensured through a recent agency-wide classification and compensation study.

Free communication between RTC employees and the executive team is also critical to the agency's success. To that end, the RTC holds quarterly "all hands" meetings, providing an opportunity for staff at all levels to share the latest happenings of the agency. They're also utilized as a litmus test for management.

"All hands meetings help us gauge employee morale and enthusiasm," Snow says. "We have a very passionate group here, dedicated to making a difference for the community. That passion permeates the culture of our agency."

Communication is also cultivated in more informal ways. Each month, various staff members are invited to have lunch with Snow and RTC Deputy General Manager Tina Quigley. "It's an opportunity for more intimate discussions," Quigley says. "It's conversations with employees that often inspires me to try a different solution or to question a current practice — that helps make us innovative as an agency."

Snow's leadership has brought vision and stability to the agency, but it's also brought some more exciting things. "Double-deck

buses," says Assistant General Manager Jerry Keating. "I don't know that many other people would have had the insight and the guts to bring these huge vehicles to what's arguably the most visible transit corridor in the world — the Las Vegas Strip."

"It could have failed," Snow says. But it didn't. The RTC's Deuce buses carry more than 30,000 people up and down the Las Vegas Strip every day. "By taking risks at the top, he inspires the rest of our staff to do the same in their everyday work," says Keating. "The RTC is an exciting place to be."

For more information about the RTC, visit [www.rtcnv.com](http://www.rtcnv.com).



The agency has taken on exciting projects, such as its double-decker Deuce bus service, which carries more than 30,000 people up and down the Las Vegas strip every day.

## Key Employment Data

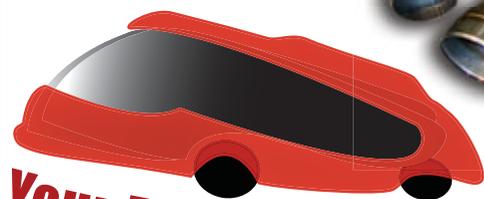
Total number of employees:	285
▶ Female employees:	133
▶ Male employees:	152
Turnover rate for 2007:	15.6%



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# 10 GREAT Transit Systems to Work For

ORANGE, CALIF.



OCTA, which celebrated 35 years of operating bus service in Orange County in 2007, honored longtime coach operators (pictured).

## Orange County Transportation Authority

The Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA), one of only a handful of multimodal agencies in the nation, serves a region of 3.2 million people and 1.5 million jobs in Southern California. The agency takes a comprehensive approach to the region's transportation challenges through planning, funding and implementing bus, rail, freeway, streets and roads, and rideshare operations and programs.

OCTA's success hinges on developing its more than 2,800 employees (including contractors), beginning with an extensive onboarding process. New employees are welcomed and acquainted with OCTA's culture through an all-day New Employee Orientation (NEO), which features guest speakers, a bus base tour and scavenger hunt in the administrative offices. NEO feedback is consistently positive, and other organizations have attended to view the program.

Opportunities to learn more about the organization are offered through an innovative Thirst for Knowledge lecture series, which features guest speakers on topics ranging from retirement to health to generational differences in the workforce. Lectures are held six or more times per year with up to 50 employees attending each session.

Additionally, employees can take advantage of internal training opportunities, including a variety of Franklin Covey training programs and OCTA's own Step Up Program that selects a group of employees for year-long leadership development designed to increase personal and strategic competencies.

OCTA's philosophy on developing employees is summed up by CEO Art Leahy: "I believe it's critical to give people the opportunity to go out and prove themselves and give them a chance to use their skills and show what they can do. Those who succeed are given increasing responsibilities and are encouraged to move up."

OCTA also offers its employees opportunities to improve their physical and emotional dimensions. For example, the agency's Wellness Group offers monthly Learn While Lunching

sessions and fitness centers are available at each of the transit bases. Fitness is also promoted through annual health fairs and organized events such as a beach walk for employees and families.

Employee recognition also receives strong emphasis. Employee of the Month awards are presented at public board meetings. Other awards are handed out for Safe Driving Recognition and Special Performance.

Additional benefits include the Scholarship Program, which will award \$23,000 this year to family members of employees and OCTA college interns. This program is funded through money earned by recycling at their facilities, as well as voluntary employee contributions.

OCTA rewards new coach operators with a graduation bonus, and all employees can earn referral bonuses. In addition, employees can cash out accrued sick and vacation time. These benefits have helped to reduce the turnover rate by 5 percent from FY 2006-07 to FY 2007-08.

"From top to bottom, OCTA is an organization that challenges employees to achieve outstanding results," says Leahy. "We have created a positive culture that encourages and rewards innovative thinking. The agency is continuously evolving and exploring ways to improve, and we are never satisfied doing business the way in which it has always been done."

One area that could still use some improvement, Leahy says, involves its talent pool. "The success of OCTA depends upon attracting and retaining the top transportation industry talent in the nation," he says. "While OCTA has accomplished this at many levels, there is always room to improve. We are aggressively pursuing the best people in the industry — and elsewhere — to join the excellent team at OCTA."

For more information about OCTA, visit [www.OCTA.net](http://www.OCTA.net).

### Key Employment Data

Total number of employees:	1,999
▶ Female employees:	578
▶ Male employees:	1,421
Turnover rate for 2007:	14.7%

### EMPLOYEE Perspective

"My opinion counts. I get to work with people and projects in every department of the authority. The people are genuinely interested in doing good work."

# 10 GREAT Transit Systems to Work For

RIVERSIDE, CALIF.



The agency has provided award-winning bus service to western Riverside County in Southern California for more than 30 years.

## Riverside Transit Agency

It's been said that if you choose a job you love, you will never have to work a day in your life. That might explain why there's so many smiling faces at the **Riverside Transit Agency**, which, for more than 30 years has provided western Riverside County in Southern California with award-winning bus service.

"RTA is a place that doesn't feel like work," says CEO **Larry Rubio**. "It feels like an organized team working toward continued success. We share a common desire to do our best and a belief that what we do makes a difference in people's lives, our community and the environment."

Striking a balance between professional and personal commitments is a common challenge for today's employees. RTA incorporates a number of practices and activities to foster a productive workplace and friendly environment for all of its 400-plus workers.

"Happier employees are more productive and more willing to go the extra mile," says Rubio, who has been with RTA for 20 years. "And, when people push themselves to reach greatness, the results are truly phenomenal."

RTA may be a medium-sized company, but it retains the intimate feel of a small one. And that intimacy can be a big plus.

It's not uncommon to see free pizza in the breakrooms on Friday afternoons. Cakes come out on birthdays, and healthy snacks are served at employee of the month announcements. And during the spring and summer, RTA holds barbeques where management grills for the coach operators and mechanics.

Such events get employees talking, and often it's during these informal times that workplace issues get solved and staff harmony is fostered. "It's nice to get together, have a laugh and remember that work is supposed to be fun," says coach operator **Dohn Ryder**.

With Americans spending roughly 23 percent of their lives on the job, it's easy to see how too much work can drain employ-

ees' energy, making them more prone to errors, absenteeism and burnout. That's why even RTA's top executives set examples of good work/life balances and make it known that the same is expected from rank-and-file employees.

Roughly one-third of RTA's administrative employees participate in compressed workweek or flextime programs, which allow them to meet their family or personal needs. "We get the chance to be human beings rather than drones," says parts clerk **Jaime Hernandez**. "That way, we're more content in our jobs, more productive and have happier families."

The average RTA employee has spent nine years with the organization, and some have been employed by RTA since it launched service more than 30 years ago. One of those employees is Maintenance Manager **Willie Jones**. "When you join RTA, you quickly realize that you're part of something extraordinary," he says.

RTA provides tools for employees to excel in their jobs. Employees are encouraged to assume more responsibilities over time, empowered to make key decisions and motivated to make RTA a part of their long-term career plans. Even the CEO got his start in the maintenance department.

Training in customer service, ethics, and computer skills is available — and in many cases, required — for employees, and the agency pays a portion of college tuition for employees who also attend school.

Employees say RTA's friendly environment and culture of success is key to their happiness. But perhaps it's the importance of the job itself that keeps them there.

For more information about Riverside Transit Agency, visit [www.riversidetransit.com](http://www.riversidetransit.com).

### Key Employment Data

Total number of employees:	393
▶ Female employees:	153
▶ Male employees:	240
Turnover rate for 2007:	11.0%

### EMPLOYEE Perspective

"The opportunity for advancement here is limited only by an employee's willingness to work hard and do good work. What more could you ask for?"

# 10 GREAT Transit Systems to Work For

THOUSAND PALMS, CALIF.



General Manager, C. Mikel Oglesby, unveiled SunLine's new fleet of technologically advanced CNG vehicles before an audience of the press, employees and customers.

## SunLine Transit Agency

**S**unLine Transit Agency provides public transportation to the Coachella Valley in the desert about 100 miles southeast of Los Angeles. The area is known for its resort hotels, golf courses and blistering summer heat. But SunLine is making a name for itself with environmentally friendly buses, including a hydrogen fuel-cell bus, and its emphasis on continual improvement.

"The environment within the agency demanded change due to mismanagement by the prior administration," says General Manager Mikel Oglesby. "Change was not only accepted, but welcomed."

Oglesby is credited with instilling a vision of success throughout the organization through teamwork, open communication and providing each employee with the tools to succeed through education and training. He believes in "management by walking around," engaging in conversation with all employees and demonstrating his accessibility as a leader.

Keeping the Board of Directors engaged in the agency's mission of providing great service has been a key goal for the general manager. Through Oglesby's encouragement, the board participates in many agency activities, such as the annual holiday event and celebrations of SunLine milestones. Employees consistently voice appreciation of the board's participation.

Innovative practices in maintaining high employee morale are apparent in programs created within the agency. Acknowledging the importance of diversity and celebrating the differences that unite, SunLine invites all employees to participate in the Black History Month barbeque, Cinco de Mayo feast and holiday events. Also, to celebrate SunLine's 30th anniversary, the general manager and directors prepared and served breakfast to all employees at both divisions.

Giving to the community bolsters employee morale and encourages employees to experience the benefits of helping those less fortunate. During the holidays, SunLine created the "Fill-A-

Bus" program, placing its high-profile hydrogen fuel-cell bus at stores throughout the Coachella Valley to accept food for a homeless shelter. The program's success was evident as the bus collected a record amount of food for the shelter.

Another innovative program uniting employees and highlighting the value of a healthy lifestyle is the "Weight-No-More" program. Under the eight-week program, teams of employees compete against each other to see which one can lose the most collective weight. Employees on the winning team are recognized at the end of the program. All employees are provided with valuable information on health issues in a newsletter distributed every two weeks during the program. Healthnet, SunLine's healthcare provider, supports the program, providing incentives to participants. In addition, directors play a role in the health program by leading participants in an exercise class twice a week. Oglesby has actively participated in the program and has been a "guest instructor" of the exercise classes.

Employees also benefit from monthly safety training programs. SunLine's director of safety and security provides the training to all employees, focusing on protecting riders, drivers and the rest of the general public. To further interest in safety, the agency created a safety incentive program that rewards employees with points for safety-related accomplishments. They can then use the points to purchase merchandise from a catalog.

As an employer, SunLine offers traditional benefits, including 100 percent paid medical for employees and dependent, a car pool program and free bus passes for dependents.

For more information about SunLine, visit [www.sunline.org](http://www.sunline.org).

### Key Employment Data

Total number of employees:	270
▶ Female employees:	77
▶ Male employees:	193
Turnover rate for 2007:	14.0%

### EMPLOYEE Perspective

"SunLine provides a number of exciting programs to benefit the employees, including a weight-loss program with twice-weekly exercise classes and ongoing nutritional information. Employees are also recognized through the Employee of the Quarter program, which recognizes outstanding work. It's a joy coming to work each day."

# 10 GREAT Transit Systems to Work For



SunLine's Employee Family BBQ, which featured a water balloon toss, is one of many well-attended employee functions hosted by the agency.

Orange County (Calif.) Transportation Authority CEO Art Leahy and Transit GM Beth McCormick during OCTA's annual Rodeo competition.



CATA's Dave Smith, operations director; Pat Gilbert, marketing director; Craig Allen, director of maintenance; Sandy Draggoo, CEO/executive director; Mike Cullimore, president, ATU Local 1039; Deb Alexander, asst. exec. director; and Marty Mecher, finance director dressed to the nines.



RTC of Southern Nevada employees Nick DiArchangel, Julie Chapman, Courtney Lancaster, Tammara Williams, Jerry Keating, Christian Ollono and Jesse Diaz share a laugh in Jerry Keating's office (pictured). Thirty percent of the RTC's employees have at least 10 years with the agency.



Throughout the year, DASH provides many opportunities to bring employees together in social settings. Activities include luncheons, monthly birthdays, company picnics, cookouts and "Breakfast Bowls" (pictured), which the agency tries to hold 2 to 3 times a year.



Riverside Transit Agency's Planning Communications Specialist Mike McCoy, Senior Planner Lorraine Moe and Planning Analyst Mila Nelson.