

# Passing on the Legacy:

## The Benefits of Mentoring in Transit Training



International Transportation  
Learning Center  
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## Introduction

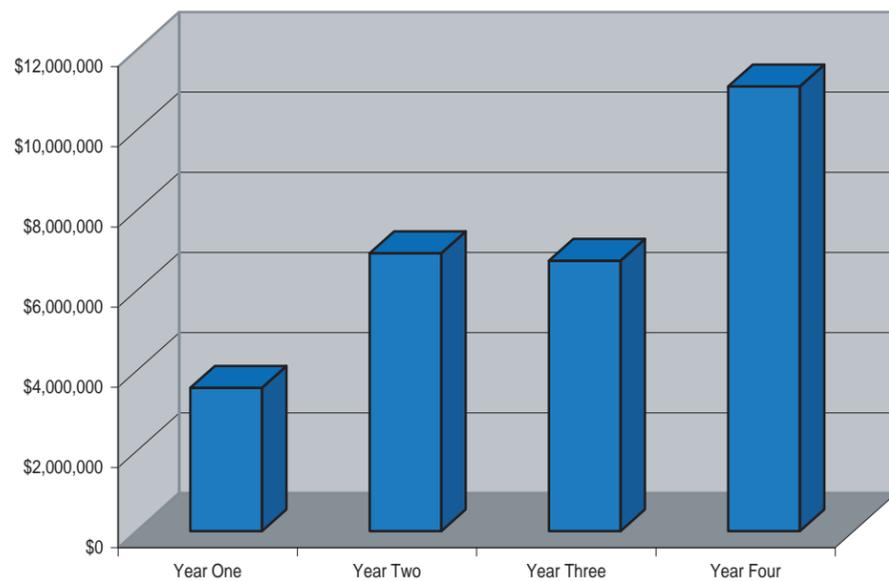
Providing quality training for transit employees benefits transit agencies through financial savings on equipment maintenance and increased employee skills, this is well-documented in the Transportation Learning Center's research series *Measuring Up*. Building upon this research, the Center investigates the role of mentoring in providing training to new workers.

### Financial Gains for Unions, Transit Authorities and Workers

Many union leaders willingly state that, "A bad employee is a bad union member," and union members understand that their welfare depends on the success of their employer.

Like the local union, the employer saves time and money from decreased discipline hearings and grievance handlings. For the employer though, good mentoring extends further. Transit systems are dangerous places to work. Employees must be aware of hazards in their jobs and the dangers of moving transit vehicles, electrical power sources, bio-hazardous materials and chemicals. Awareness of these risks requires classroom instruction in addition to on the job guidance. A good mentor teaches their trainees

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### Three Transit Properties/Three Mentoring Experiences

Mentoring programs vary by location, agency size and the relationship between the agency and the labor union. What follows are three case-study profiles of mentoring programs at three unique transit agencies.

#### Informal Mentoring

Portland, Oregon's TriMet System has no formal mentoring program. Experienced workers advise and guide apprentices about their job craft. Though "informal," these more experienced workers play the role of mentors. The informal mentors receive training as part of the apprenticeship program. Apprentices rotate to specialists who provide advanced training on specific components. TriMet's aim, given budget restrictions, is to re-engineer its training to be outcome-based with continuous improvement. In doing so, they implemented an intensive training regimen that accomplishes more in a shorter time than traditional apprenticeship schedules. TriMet has focused on developing tighter scripting for lesson plans and coordinating on-the-floor learning. TriMet's comprehensive view of training incorporates apprentices in parts of the training, including developing lesson plans. While on the floor, apprentices and specialists interact and assume one another's roles. Apprentices may be asked to perform a repair and explain, as though teaching, what they are doing and why. This develops a cadre of workers who are familiar with and ready to take on the task of training and mentoring as they develop in their careers.

## Formal Mentoring of Limited Scope

The Alameda Contra-Costa Transit District (AC Transit) adopted a formal but limited approach to mentoring. Apprentices do not receive individual mentors. The Joint Apprenticeship Committee (JAC) appoints one full-time Apprenticeship Mentor to oversee all apprentices at the agency. Acting as a liaison between apprentices and the JAC, the Apprenticeship Mentor performs a number of important functions. Foremost is monitoring the apprentices' progress and addressing concerns about the program—whether in the form of grievances, questions or general advice. The Apprenticeship Mentor coordinates class logistics and represents the training department at JAC meetings. On-the-job learning at AC Transit requires apprentices to work in close proximity to senior mechanics. The informal (and traditional) mentoring functions as an important part of AC Transit's training. AC Transit typically trains journey workers on new equipment or techniques and relies on them to take that learning back to the shop floor and the apprentices. Additionally, there are six trainers from the union's ranks and they informally help apprentices as mentors.

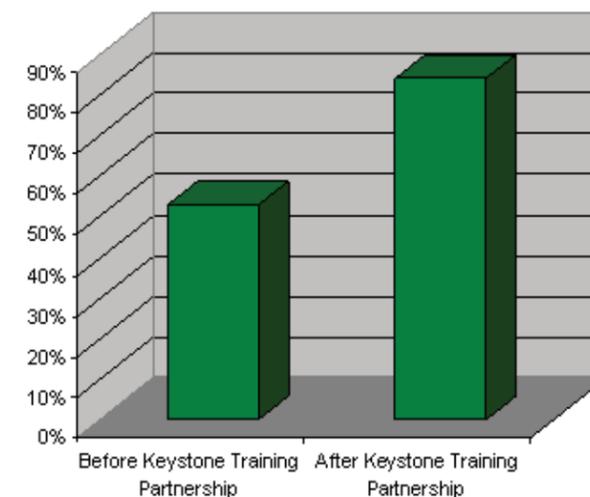
### Formal Mentoring with Mentor Training

In Pennsylvania, mentors are chosen by both Transit Workers Union Local 234 (TWU-234) and Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority. Experienced mechanics bid for mentor positions through a union process. Selection is based on expert mechanical knowledge and on an ability to communicate well. Management maintains the right to veto inappropriate candidates, but they rarely do. Trained mentors are responsible for ensuring that recent training graduates practice their newly learned skills. Mentors demonstrate how tasks are properly done and teach this to trainees immediately following training. Trainees practice in the shop what they learned in the classroom and are tested within 60 days. Since these changes, test scores rose to an 84 percent passing rate. Other factors come into play in the positive and negatives of this story, but none is more important than mentoring and a structured support system.

### SEPTA Mentor Requirements

- TWU-234 Membership
- Demonstrated Safe Work History
- Qualified in Job Craft
- Commitment to Training Program
- Attend a Mentor Orientation

**SEPTA Bus Mechanic Trainee Exam Pass Rate**



Highlights of the program include program coordination among the various participants, a step-by-step outline of each team member's responsibilities, desired outcomes and establishment of communication channels for feedback and follow-up.

### Conclusion

Attention to detail, project planning and careful integration of a mentoring plan into training programs helps ensure success. The Center researched mentoring web sites, interviewed practitioners and reviewed mentoring practices in other industries. This leads us to the conclusion that apprenticeship and training schemes should include a comprehensive and well-planned mentoring program. It is important to note that the Center does not endorse any particular mentoring scheme; rather, it emphasizes the importance of having a plan. Different and workable training and mentoring programs will evolve at transit agencies based on the environment, budget and needs. As part of the Center's on-going work in transit training, it will continue to gather and dis-

The Transportation Learning Center is a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving public transportation at the national level and within communities.

To accomplish this mission, the Center builds labor-management training partnerships that

- improve organizational performance
- expand workforce knowledge, skills and abilities
- promote career advancement.

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