Riding on the Same Bus
Workplace Culture Toolkit

Operator Guidelines
July 2024

APTIA
Industrial Arm of the Bus Industry Confederation
moving people

BIC
BUS INDUSTRY CONFEDERATION
moving people

Contents

Acknowledgement of Country

The Bus Industry Confederation acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which we work, live and play. We pay our respects to Elders past and present and emerging and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal people and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of Australia.

Many of the transport routes we use today, from rail lines, to roads, to water crossings, follow the traditional Songlines, Trade Routes and Ceremonial Paths in Country that our nation's First Peoples followed for tens of thousands of years.

The Bus Industry Confederation is committed to honouring Aboriginal peoples' cultural and spiritual connections to the lands, waters and seas and their rich contribution to society.

Image courtesy of Kinetic

Kinetic's bespoke Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan design symbolises our acknowledgement, role and commitment in reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The centrepiece of the design represents Kinetic's approach to reconciliation surrounded by our connection and work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The background represents the lands on which we move people and the continued connection to community, country and culture.

The design was created by Indigenous design agency, ingeous studios, in collaboration with the Indigenous Design Labs, a program inspiring young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people into creative industries.

The Australian bus and coach passenger industry is experiencing severe shortages of drivers and mechanics.

As a result, the industry is struggling to provide the essential service of bus route and runs that our communities rely on.

The implications for the industry are significant, with operators facing abatements and fines as well as significant reputational damage due to late or cancelled routes. There is also significant cost to business by way of recruitment and induction.

Operators are experiencing a vicious cycle of shortage in drivers and mechanics leading to added stressors on the remaining staff resulting in increased churn and further loss of experienced staff.

APTIA Working Group

> The Bus Industry Confederation (BIC) Council and members of APTIA, the industrial arm of BIC, provided funds through a special levy to undertake extensive qualitative research to identify the underlying factors impacting the image of the bus and coach industry. The aim was to make recommendations that would improve recruitment and retention of drivers across the industry.
>
> This toolkit focuses on those factors that are within the scope of operators to address. It provides a series of actions members may consider to improve their recruitment and retention by addressing factors that impact on job satisfaction.
>
> A second document titled 'Riding on the Same Bus - Policy Manifesto' outlines a range of policy recommendations to address the structural issues impacting on the industry.
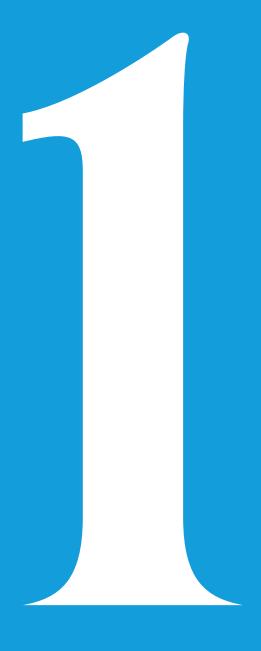
Navigate Work and the Hero Co were engaged as consultants to BIC and APTIA for this project. For six weeks during October 2023 to November 2023, qualitative research was conducted across 15 bus and coach depots nationally*, resulting in over 120 hours of face-to-face interviews with drivers, mechanics, middle and upper management.

The consultants also completed online and face to face meetings with senior management from Transport for NSW (TfNSW), Translink Queensland, Transport Workers Union (TWU), Rail, Train and Bus Union (RTBU), SBS Transit Singapore, Institute of Transport and Logistics (ITLS), Transport for Brisbane, Bus & Coach Association NZ and American Public Transport Association (APTA).

A special thanks goes to BIC and those APTIA members and supporters who contributed to the funding of the Manifesto & Toolkit.

*Due to time constraints no depot visits occurred to Northern Territory or ACT

Toolkit Overview and Key Workplace Recommendations

1

The aim of this toolkit is to outline a raft of interventions that a bus and coach operator could implement to significantly improve workplace culture

Metro TAS

It is evident from academic research and this qualitative research that the current difficulties in recruitment and retention in the bus industry is due to issues across the entire Australian passenger transport ecosystem. This includes structural issues associated with the current contractual model which promotes behaviours in operators and a workplace culture that increases the psychosocial stressors on drivers.

For non-contracted services tight cost margins and employment markets also challenge operators and impact work conditions and culture.

This toolkit focuses on what operators can do to improve workplace culture and conditions in an operating system that is described as a race to the bottom with respect to procurement of services.

Within an environment with diminishing returns, the cost of poor recruitment and retention is significant and should be factored into the business case to support the cost of introducing the recommendations outlined in this toolkit. Positive workplace culture helps to attract quality drivers and importantly retain them. Workplace culture is an area all operators have full control over.

International research* outlines the significant relationship between a low level of job satisfaction and high turnover rates across all industries. A 2006 systematic review of bus driver well-being over a 50-year period confirmed that ***"stressors for bus drivers include poor cabin ergonomics, rotating shift patterns and inflexible running times. Over the past few decades, the heightening of other work stressors such as traffic and violence from passengers have compounded the situation".***
Some 20 years later and this research has identified that the causal factors impacting on retention of drivers remains the same.

*Tse,LM; flin, R; Mearns,K (2006)

To support operators to improve the bus driver's job satisfaction this tool kit will interrogate the following key aspects of working conditions:

- Physical Environment (which is broken up into the following 3 areas)
  - Workstation: the cab of the bus where the driver drives the bus
  - Workplace:the bus that they share with passengers/the public and the depot where the shift starts and ends and where the manager resides
  - Work Environment: Public roads and the community, including interchanges and bus stops where they attend for meal breaks, toilet stops and where they may assist passengers
- Workplace Health and Safety
- Workload and Work hours
- Job Responsibility, Accountability and Stability
- Social and Organisational Culture
- Wage, Reward and Recognition
- Training and Career Development
- Communication and Feedback

The toolkit refers to Psychosocial demands which is a relatively new term and refers to aspects of work design, the work itself, and the interactions between employees which can negatively influence their mental health and emotional wellbeing. These hazards are things at work which create stress and in turn reduce the ability to cope.

Across Australia, all federal, state and territory governments have made changes to their Work Health and Safety regulations so that all employers are now obliged to address hazards to ensure psychological health and safety in the workplace.
Safe Work Australia define a psychosocial hazard in a workplace as anything that could cause psychological harm (e.g. harm someone's mental health).

The top 4 psychosocial hazards at work as identified by Safe Work Australia include:
- Job demands
- Low job control
- Poor support
- Lack of role clarity

This toolkit is not an exhaustive list, but rather a compilation of findings from our study. It serves as a starting point of consultation and collaboration within your workplace, helping you understand and address the key 'drivers of engagement' and 'job satisfaction' that shapes workplace culture.

We recognise that many of the structural problems in the industry need to be addressed by government and policy makers. These issues are covered in a separate document called Riding on the Same Bus, a policy manifesto with recommendations based upon our research.

We acknowledge the enormous cost pressures that many operators are impacted by. The policy manifesto highlights that the lowest price should not be the determining factor for governments in choosing a successful tenderer. Quality, customer service, workforce capacity along with past performance if applicable, should take precedence over cost. This would allow for better wages, training, supervisor staffing ratios, and depot facilities.

To view and download the Policy Manifesto please follow this link.
Riding on the Same Bus Policy Manifesto

In addition to government and policy makers, the bus and coach industry should lead and address generic industry issues such as:	
Depot and Facility Standards	The industry needs to adopt clear standards for fit for purpose depot facilities and cleanliness for both private and publicly owned depots. This needs to also include set standards for facilities for drivers to access when breaks occur within the community. We should not be losing drivers due to the lack of toilet facilities nor due to poorly maintained depots. To address gender diversity a real effort is required to tackle the short comings within facilities at the Depot level and within the community.
Career Pathways	A working group needs to assess how to establish career pathways across the industry. This would include the introduction of micro credentialing that identifies, teaches and assesses all competencies required of a bus driver and within other roles vital to day to-day operations. Career pathways will assist in altering the image of the industry and help to attract a younger demographic.
Gender Diversity	Further research and industry wide strategies need to be developed to address the low representation of women across the Bus and Coach Industry. Further extensive work is required across the entire industry to ensure the necessary behaviour change occurs to address the reported entrenched sexism in the industry.
Ageing Workforce Issues	The industry needs to adopt clear and effective strategies to deal with the range of health conditions consistently seen across an aging Australian workforce. This includes obese drivers who are approaching or are over 130kgs and therefore no longer meeting the ISRI seating ratings, diabetes, heart disease and impacts of prescription medication on driving capability.
Diversity and Inclusion	It is recommended that appropriate industry training be developed to support operators to address diversity and inclusion as a critical function of a depot.

Gender Diversity

Prior to commencement of the research, it was identified that the Bus and Coach Industry has very low gender diversity, with women being poorly represented in driver and mechanic numbers as well as within the managerial roles

The research was able to identify the key reasons women do not join or do not stay within the bus and coach industry including:
- The prohibitive cost of gaining a HR license
- A perception that buses are difficult to drive
- Rotation rosters/split shifts are not compatible with family responsibilities
- Entrenched culture of sexism
- High psychosocial hazards not mitigated
- Poor visibility of women across the industry
- Lack of female specific facilities

BusVIC

Work is currently being done on this topic by the **The Workplace Gender Equality Agency** who are completing research and providing employers with gender specific tools.

We have not specifically addressed gender diversity in this toolkit, however it is recommended that it be a topic for future study and work to be completed by the industry.

Across the 120 plus hours of face to face interviews conducted during the Riding on the Same Bus research* project the top three causes of low job satisfaction that directly impacts on recruitment and retention of staff are:

1	The challenging work conditions that included: • Unachievable scheduling/split shifts • Lack of/poor workplace facilities • Disrespect and violence from passengers
2	The constant workplace stress and burnout due to the psychosocial hazards of lack of autonomy, micromanagement and pressure to meet contractual KPI's
3	The general feeling of being undervalued and unappreciated by both the community and the operator's management team or structure

*For further information on the reasons for and approach taken in conducting the Riding on the Same Bus research refer Section 4.

Key Recommendations

The top 4 recommendations for
Operators to improve workplace culture are:

1	Provide greater levels of supervision to drivers through well trained and accessible front-line supervisors
2	Provide high levels of training to address the various competencies required as a driver
3	Invest in a range of technology options to decrease psychosocial hazards for drivers
4	Review the current scheduling and roster system to reduce /eliminate split shifts and rotating rosters

Detailed Recommendations and Insights

2

Working Conditions

The working conditions within the Bus and Coach Industry were identified as having a significant impact on job satisfaction and driver retention.

Recommendations & insights are outlined under the following *Key Aspects of Working Conditions* that were assessed so that operators can assess their conditions against the research findings.

Key Aspects of Working Conditions
- Physical environment
- Workload and work hours
- Job responsibility, accountability, and stability
- Social and organisational culture
- Wages and rewards and recognition
- Workplace Health and Safety
- Training and career development
- Communication and feedback

Ventura Dandenong Depot

Physical Environment

Unlike many other occupations, a bus driver operates within three distinct spheres of influence with respect to their physical place of work.

Workstation	The cab of the bus where the driver drives the bus.
Workplace	The bus, including passengers, and the depot where the shift starts and ends and where the manager is typically based.
Work Environment	Public roads and the community, including interchanges and bus stops where drivers take meal breaks, bathroom stops and assist passengers.

This toolbox differentiates these areas to support operators to implement necessary changes, enhancing job satisfaction and improving driver retention

Recommendations

- Provide ergonomic training to support drivers to set up their seat to avoid Musculo-skeletal conditions
- Allocation of funding to ensure that any defects in seat and wheel adjustments are addressed immediately to ensure an ergonomically appropriate workstation
- (Where not mandated by the state government) consultation prior to the introduction of cages or security screens in cabs should be undertaken with drivers and their representatives to enable choice (where appropriate) to ensure widespread adoption
- Undertake further investigations as to the feasibility of drivers being allocated to a set of buses which best meets the drivers' ergonomic needs and decreases the changing environment of the cab
- Training should occur with all drivers to address and mitigate the musculoskeletal stressors associated with prolonged sitting
- Fit all cabs with CCTV and a microphone/speaker to support drivers with real time visibility into the bus by the Operations Control room
- Fit all cabs with technological enablers for navigation to reduce workplace stressors
- Audit buses to maintain an appropriate standard of cleanliness within the bus

Insights
Areas of focus for operators to improve, which have an impact on driver comfort, safety and job satisfaction

Seat and Cab Setup - A driver needs to ensure that the seat and cab are set up to ensure increased comfort and decrease musculoskeletal stress. Defects in adjustability of the seat and steering wheel are common issues, leading to discomfort and inability to adjust ergonomically, resulting in body stressors.

Cab Enclosure - The presence of a "cage" or security screen around the cab was very divisive amongst drivers. Opinions varied from disliking the cage, saying it eliminates speaking with passengers, which was the best part of the role, to complaints about the glare and heat. Some drivers felt the cage does not go far enough as passengers can still throw drinks/items over the top of the cage and/or punch and or rattle the cage, causing distress. It should be noted that two state governments have mandated security screens on route buses contrary to Australian Design Rules (ADRs). Further work at an industry and government level is being undertaken to resolve issues in relation to enclosures.

Variation in Fleet - Many operators utilise a varied fleet of buses. As a result, the driver needs to orientate themselves to the type and set up of each bus that could be very different in look, feel and drivability. For new drivers this is another level of adaptation that they struggle with when learning to drive. For drivers with a health condition, some ergonomic setups may create greater musculoskeletal loading and overreach patterns, and therefore, aggravation of an existing condition.

Consistency in Workstation - Drivers expressed that they would prefer to stay with the same bus or same type of bus, for ease of driving, sense of place and familiarity. However, some operators rotate the buses across runs and drivers and consciously move drivers throughout the fleet. Whilst there isn't a specific study on the health impacts of changing workstations for drivers, parallels can be drawn from research on office workers in open plan offices, which found negative impacts of open plan offices and hot desking on health, satisfaction, productivity, and social relationships, which outweigh the financial benefits for the company. Humans it would appear find moving their workstation (and change in general) stressful, yet rotation of buses is an organisational strategy used by many operators that should be reviewed and addressed.

Recommendations

- Operators should determine who is responsible for the cleanliness of the bus and ensure that this task is completed to an appropriate standard
- Design and planning of sleeping areas for drivers needs to include that the areas is well maintained and effectively addresses fatigue management risk
- Each depot to assess and ensure that facilities are clean and accessible for female staff
- Identification or negotiation of appropriate facilities within the community to be used during runs
- Recruitment and funding of a diversity and inclusion officer for large depots. For smaller depots, thea design and implementation of a specific diversity and inclusion strategy within HR or operational teams
- Design, implement, monitor and review a workplace culture strategy to build and communicate the unique value proposition to staff and the broader community

Insights
Factors impacting job satisfaction for drivers across the depot/workplace included:

Depot Infrastructure Maintenance - There was significant variance across the 15 depots visited from clean, well planned and inviting workplaces, to dirty, dark and unkept areas.There was also a difference between private and government owned depots. If a depot is owned by the Government, an appropriate facilities management budget must be allocated to keep it to an appropriate standard. Further, there was a distressing level of dirty and dark "sleeping rooms" observed filled with defined cultural groups that utilised their split shifts to sleep in makeshift beds.

Poorly Maintained Buses - There was a significant variance across the cleanliness of buses. Drivers reported a consistent lack of attention to detail to the cleaning of the buses, and minimal resources allocated to support effective cleaning. There was a marked difference to the quality of cleaning between smaller operators' buses compared to the larger ones, and further a difference between coaches and buses. There is also a lack of consistency on who cleans the bus. Some depots pay the drivers to clean the bus at the end of the trip, others use cleaning teams.

Ride and Comfort Differences - Drivers noted a difference between ride and comfort between buses but as the buses are bought by the government in some jurisdictions, there is limited engagement with the drivers regarding comfort and ease of operation.

Layover Area Facilities - Layover areas between runs do not always have an accessible bathroom for drivers. It is understood that the unions are working to address this issue. The current reality is that due to On Time Running (OTR) pressures and lack of facilities drivers feel that they are often unable to use a toilet during their shift.

Low Levels of Gender Diversity - There was very poor visibility of women within the depots outside of administration areas.

Gender Disparities in Facilities: - Female facilities were subpar to the male facilities. As an example, in one depot, the female toilets were outside, not undercover and a significant distance from the driver's room, whilst the male facilities were close to the common area, large and well maintained.

CALD (Cultural and Linguistic Diversity) - Bus driving attracts new immigrants to Australia with a diverse set of nationalities observed within some depots. To promote CALD, a conscious effort is required to design appropriate interventions to achieve cultural competence within the workplace.

Recommendations

- Fit all buses with CCTV and a microphone/speaker system or other back to base system to provide for real-time support for drivers (decision making and analysis of antisocial behaviour) by the Operations Control room
- Provide training on de-escalation through behavioural economic techniques and other strategies to support drivers to effectively manage anti-social behaviour
- Fit all buses with technology enablers for navigation to reduce workplace stressors on drivers associated with driving with a left and right sheet only for directions
- Introduce a graded approach to OTR for new starters to set them up for success, starting with lower targets and gradually increasing as their skills and confidence improves
- Identification or negotiation of appropriate facilities within the community to be used during runs

Insights

Factors impacting job satisfaction for drivers across the work environment included:

Level of Training and Competence - The level of training and competence of drivers to complete the allocated run remains a concern. While most managers reported that new drivers are provided with training for any new route or run, in practice, due to operational demands, drivers reported that they are asked to complete new routes and runs without training and with only a paper printout of the schedule (exact time the bus was due)and left and right sheet as support. The level of distress drivers reported due to dealing with traffic, customers and also not knowing where to stop on time is significant due to the lack of training and support.

Type of Run - The type of run that a driver undertakes appears to have a significant impact on job satisfaction, and overall health and wellbeing. The differentiator appears to run across regional versus metro route runs, day versus evening route runs, known hot spots for anti-social behaviour, school versus route runs and coach work. However, while these require different sets of skills and capabilities, the Enterprise Agreement appears to award the same hourly rate irrelevant of difficulty. Drivers are allocated runs and routes without the necessary assessment and training to ensure they have the required skills and competencies to master the run and experience a sense of achievement and job satisfaction.

On Time Running (OTR) - On time running is considered unachievable by experienced drivers across certain routes and runs due to passenger mix, traffic and congestion and/or road changes. It is also generally understood that a new driver will not reach the OTR targets. However, an achievable OTR goal is not set with these drivers, nor are they given a graded OTR so they can see over time that they are getting closer to reaching the benchmark OTR number. As a result, new drivers feel disempowered and a failure in their role.

Antisocial Behaviour - Antisocial behaviour appears to occur more frequently on certain routes or at certain times. Most drivers across Australia were able to identify the route and run where they were most likely to experience occupational violence, including verbal abuse, spitting, hitting the cage and or throwing drinks and items over the cage. A key theme was the constant threat of low-level violence and little to no skills to address this hazard while working alone. Furthermore, drivers reported if a passenger complains, the driver is "presumed guilty" and subjected to a range of interviews and camera reviews. Drivers consistently reported that the fear of complaints seems more important to the bus operator than the wellbeing of their staff.

Recommendations

- Design a OTR approach that is realistic and graded in line with the skills and ability of drivers
- Reduce/ rotating shifts so that drivers can develop routines and roles outside of work. Consider implementation of a hybrid model
- Eliminate/reduce split shifts for all runs except School runs
- Seniority as a mechanism for retention be replaced with a transparent reward and recognition program that support all staff
- All buses be fitted with technology enablers for navigation to reduce workplace stressors on drivers associated with driving with a left and right sheet only for direction

Insights
This was broken into three areas -   Split Shifts   On Time Running   Rotating Rosters

Split Shifts The segmented bus industry relies on split shifts to deliver school runs and peak services. While there are a small proportion of drivers that enjoy split shifts and have tailored it to meet their lifestyle (this is evident with school bus drivers where retirees enjoy working short morning and afternoon shifts and have all school holidays off), most drivers interviewed and feedback from management indicates that split shifts create significant retention issues for the following reasons:	- Drivers are often at work for 12-14 hours a day but only get paid for 8 hours. As a result, the real hourly rate is much lower than stated - Split shifts significantly impact on a driver's ability to participate in family, community and sporting activities Drivers advised that they are at work at the depot or at home asleep. Typically, a route driver leaves home at 4.30am to get to the depot for the morning peak, stays at the depot all day, and returns home around 7pm at which point drivers are only interested in sleeping - Drivers who do not live near the depot are unable to return home during the long break between shifts - There is a notable representation of migrant workers working split shifts. These drivers reported that they could work as their families were still back in their country of origin, or their partner was responsible for caring for their children. There was a clear understanding that if you worked split shifts, you could not actively and consistently participate in child rearing activities. As a result, this arrangement ruled out women and a proportion of men who culturally are expected to assist with child rearing and home making tasks - There was evidence that some staff are working split shifts, sleeping during the day at the depot, and working nights in alternative gig economy roles. This is a potential breach of fatigue rules and poses a significant risk that needs to be addressed

On Time Running (OTR) On time running sets drivers up for failure:	**Unrealistic Requirements -** Most operator contracts require 95% OTR, designed for the best-case scenario. Considering traffic congestion and road changes, as well as passenger needs and behaviour, drivers consistently state that meeting OTR requirements is nearly impossible **Complaint Management -** Contracts have a strong emphasis on complaints management, however, complaints may be related to factors outside the driver's control, such as OTR, behaviour of other passengers, fare evasion and traffic congestion. Drivers stated that they are always "guilty until proven otherwise" and feel that they are constantly blamed for issues beyond their control or skill set **Break Times -** The route runs have allocation for short breaks in line with the Enterprise Agreement or fatigue management schedules under the Heavy Vehicle National Law. However, if the run is behind schedule, OTR requirements impact toilet/required breaks times and therefore drivers always feel that they are rushing **Job Demands -** Drivers are unable to control their job demands and employ problem solving strategies. For example, if they try to make up time and start a BAT run early, they are punished for being early at a stop **Uniform Expectations -** The OTR expectations do not change, regardless of whether you are new to driving, new to the route, or an experienced driver who has completed the bus run many times previously. The expectations of the OTR benchmark remain the same for everyone
Rotating Rosters	• Another workload stressor is the rotating rostering of drivers, which change every two weeks on average, making it difficult for drivers to commit to social and community activities due to constantly shifting work hours • Some operators utilise seniority for rostering, where the longest serving drivers get first choice of runs and shifts. While this was designed to retain drivers, it has the perverse effect. If long standing drivers chose the best runs, new starters are required to drive the "worst runs and routes" (longest split shift and or nights/ areas with high levels of anti-social behaviour). New drivers reported that the runs and routes were too hard, they couldn't cope, and consider leaving or leave

Job Responsibility, Accountability and Stability

Recommendations
- Ensure induction and annual training addresses the diversity of skills and competencies required as a driver
- Ensure drivers KPIs and scorecards reflect what is inside their locus of control only
- Review current attraction and retention strategies to ensure that they are complimentary and not opposing
- Ensure induction and annual training addresses the diversity of skills and competencies required as a driver

Insights
The role of the driver is broad and extends beyond simply operating a bus

- Drivers are expected to:
  - Drive the bus
  - Collect, and monitor fares
  - Manage passenger behaviour
  - Perform minor mechanical repairs
  - Serve as personal carers/assistants to the elderly and passengers with diverse needs including people with disability and parents with prams
  - Provide first aid
  - Act as a marshal and evacuation coordinator
  - Navigate and act as tour guide
  - Provide customer service, including cash handling in some states
- The consistent feedback is that drivers are not skilled or adequately trained for all these roles and responsibilities but nonetheless are held accountable for them.
- Security and stability of employment was seen by all drivers as a positive if they are full-time permanent as the role is perceived as recession proof. In contrast, casual drivers did not have the same level of job security and expressed a desire to go full time. However, employers often cannot offer full time roles because their business are limited to school runs or peak services only
- Drivers also report feeling punished for reasons outside their control. For example, when a passenger complains that the service wasn't on time

Social and Organisational Culture

Recommendations
- Develop site specific events that supports communication between all drivers and promotes an inclusive team environment
- Design and maintain kitchen facilities to promote social inclusion
- Ensure that the front-line supervisor is visible and present in areas for which drivers are present at the beginning/end of their shift

Insights
Bus drivers work alone all shift, often in a cage. The sense of belonging to a crew occurs back in the driver's room. Some key success points for drivers' rooms included:

Ease of Access to a Supervisor - In some depots, supervisors were difficult to find, or behind a locked door or upstairs. Access to support is critical and should be made easy for the drivers. The research identified that some large depots had a ratio of 1:300 of supervisors to drivers. Accessibility to a supervisor needs to be addressed along with the capacity and capability of the front-line supervisors to provide support.

Well Maintained Kitchens - Kitchens should be well equipped to support drivers returning to the depot to eat. The best depot had a fully equipped kitchen used to improve relationships with multilingual drivers through cooking schools and 'cook offs' between drivers during their split shifts.

Organised Sporting Events - Introduce sporting events or other recreational events to promote engagement such as dart tournaments and pool competitions.

Adequate Space - Depots need to provide sufficient space for all drivers. Some depots were very small and could not be used as a communal space.

Focus on Organisation Culture - Depots where the operators focused on organisational culture events such as regular social BBQ's, recognition of cultural events and festivals and the effective and considered use of space to encourage social interactions were addressed as being active in supporting diversity in the workplace.

Wage and Reward and Recognition

Recommendations

- Design and implement a reward and recognitions program for all staff that includes
    - Removal of seniority as a mechanism for retention and promotion
    - Introduction of a referral reward
    - Removal of the current sign on cash bonus arrangements
    - A skill matrix linked to remuneration, so drivers are rewarded for skill development
- Review the current wage within a tripartite arrangement as outlined in the Policy Manifesto 'Riding on the Same Bus'

Insights
- There is no doubt that the current wage for drivers across Australia does not offer appropriate remuneration for their roles and responsibilities. Irrelevant of the current and future hourly rates, other aspects of bus drivers' conditions also need to be addressed   - Currently, the only mechanism to reward long tenure and increased skill and competency is preferential rostering(seniority). When this is not a policy position, drivers reported that rosters are often developed to favour preferred staff, with easier runs and opportunity for overtime given to a select few   - A systemic approach to rostering is necessary to eliminate these compensations, as they create a perception of inequity and contribute to high turnover. Operators who use seniority report higher levels of turnover with new starters, as these new drivers realise that the only way to get easier bus runs or have a fair share of overtime is for a senior driver to retire or to be a driver for more than 5 years. Understandably, this often leads to burnout, disillusionment and resignation   - Additionally, the fact that a driver can earn more money in one depot per hour compared to another driver at an adjacent depot due to the Enterprise Agreement is in the researchers view flawed and adds to turnover rather than attracting and retaining more drivers   - Currently many operators use a referral mechanism to attract drivers. This was consistently reported as the most effective mechanism for recruitment across operators. If a current staff member recommends a friend or family member who is subsequently employed, the referrer gains between $1 000 - $2 000   - Industry wide, operators are currently offering up to $5000 sign on bonuses for new drivers to join. The researchers do not support the use of sign on bonuses due to the risk of perverse outcomes such as current long-term drivers unjustly treated for not receiving a bonus for their loyalty   - Reward and recognition programs were not readily observed or spoken about with drivers. Most drivers spoke about being managed with a "big stick", rather than with incentives. Drivers mentioned only seeing their front-line supervisor if something went wrong

Recommendations

- Ensure fatigue management strategies effectively mitigates the risks associated with secondary employment in the gig economy
- Implement effective strategies to deal with obese drivers who are approaching or are over 130kg and no longer meet the weight rating of bus seats
- Allocate funding and resources to support completion of risk assessments of psychosocial hazards
- Develop and implement a strong fitness for work process that addresses the ageing nature of the workforce and the impact and risks their comorbid conditions have on their ability to work
- All buses be fitted with telematics that track & alert driving habits as a training tool for safety

Insights

- In line with all state & territories psychosocial hazard regulations all operators need to undertake appropriate hazard identification and risk assessments. It was out of the research scope to review risk assessments across depots, however the qualitative research indicates that drivers operating government contracted services are not being provided with a safe workplace in accordance with Safework Australia's Risk Management regulations and Psychosocial Hazard regulations **Managing Psychosocial Hazards at Work - Code of Practice**
- There is no doubt that the current wage for drivers across Australia does not offer appropriate remuneration for their roles and responsibilities. Irrelevant of the current and future hourly rates, other aspects of bus drivers' conditions also need to be addressed
- The fitness for work of drivers is not regularly assessed by either drivers or operators consistent with the emerging health risks present in an ageing workforce. As drivers age and develop health conditions the risk of a medical episode increases and needs to be addressed in a systematic way. Further due to the sedentary nature of driving, drivers are at risk of developing a range of health conditions that impact on their ability to complete their role in a safe manner
- All buses are fitted with ISRI seats that are rated to 130kgs (ISRI do make a bariatric seat for greater than 150kg however these are not routinely fitted to buses)however there are drivers currently driving who would appear to be close to exceeding the current 130 kg rating

Recommendations

- Develop and implement induction and annual training to ensure driver competency across
  - De-escalation of violence & antisocial behaviours through behavioural economics and other tactics
  - Critical incident management
  - Psychosocial hazards
  - Musculoskeletal stressors of sitting, adjusting the ISRI seat, ergonomics and appropriate stretching during breaks
  - Disability and cultural safety
  - Technical driving skills including defensive driving
  - Resilience for drivers
  - Fatigue management
  - Effective communication
  - Inclusion of a graded approach to On Time Running (OTR) for new starters and/or new allocation of runs to set them up for success - For example, first week 50%, then 55% OTR as skill and confidence improves
- Introduce a skill and competency matrix to be used by schedulers to allocate runs. This will ensure that drivers are only allocated runs that they have been assessed as having the necessary skills to complete. The matrix would match the run and driver across key criteria such of:
  - Navigation
  - Technical driving
  - Time management/problem solving
  - Disability and cultural safety
  - Fatigue management
  - Likelihood of antisocial behaviour
  - Resilience

Insights

- A significant concern reported by all drivers was the lack of appropriate training and support for new drivers. The following is required to enable a new employee to feel comfortable with their new role:
  - Skills with driving the bus
  - Knowledge of the route, the bus stops, and the required time
  - Skills with navigating the route at different times of day and across changing traffic conditions
  - Skills with customer service
  - Skills in behaviour management
  - Skills across hazard identification and risk mitigation associated with driving
  - Time management
  - Resilience
- There is no consistent industry-wide or best practice approach to the training and skill development of drivers. While operators appear to assess driving skills to varying degrees, the remaining competencies as outlined above appear to be inconsistent across the industry
- Some operators use technology such as tablet devices (e.g. iPads) and navigation systems to support new drivers in navigating the routes. These navigation devices are often removed when the drivers are deemed competent, requiring them to rely on printed left and right sheets for directions
- All drivers reported issues with the use of left and right printed sheets including dropping the sheets and needing to ask passengers for assistance. Many detailed completing the run themselves, without pay, the night before to familiarise themselves with the run. This is not acceptable when appropriate and safe technology is available and widely used by the broader community

A real story...

- Johnny, a 48-year-old driver joined the bus company following recently moving to the capital city and wanting to try something new. He had an HR license that he has held since he was in his 20's living on a farm

- Johnny was taken out by a driver trainer as part of his recruitment who did a forty-five-minute assessment of his driving skills. He reports he "passed with flying colours" stating that he had always been a good driver and grew up with trucks

- Johnny reports he was encouraged to join the company by a report of two weeks training but said this has been grossly inadequate stating the training was classroom based for the first week going through orientation to the company, including the policy and procedures and did not involve any driving. He said in the second week he went out in the bus across two separate routes observing his co-driver. He was orientated to the support tools to enable him to successfully complete his role including a BAT run that outlined his stops and times and a left and right sheet outlining where he needed to turn

- On the 3rd, 4th and 5th day was told he would drive with his co-driver providing instructions. He stated he managed ok as the co-driver was behind him indicating when he would need to turn. On the third week of employment, he was told he was assessed as being able to independently drive and was provided with a BAT run, left and right instruction sheets, and allocated to a run he had not been on previously

- When he protested, he was told the operations team were short of drivers, and that he could just "do his best". Johnny stated that he was yelled at by passengers when he missed the bus stops as he didn't hear the buzzer as he was focusing on the traffic. He also reported that he really struggled to read his left and right sheet, watch the traffic and try and make the OTR. Johnny reported he finished his shift and tried unsuccessfully to find his manager and went home. He stated when he returned from his split shift, he was experiencing high levels of anxiety

Johnny's story is consistent with how drivers explained their training and induction. There is mixed use of technology or training to ensure that drivers are competent, skilled and confident to complete what is a very complex task.

There was limited discussion regarding career progression within drivers and this would appear a real area of opportunity. Only one of the fifteen depots visited during the research project was able to share a formalised emerging leaders' program to improve the skills of the drivers. Drivers reported that "they fell into" driving and had not considered that it would be a career option.

It is evident from the research that if there are career opportunities within depots, they are poorly articulated and shared with drivers. However, most managers had come from the driving ranks but reported that they were approached or responded to the advertisement and applied for the senior role.

In contrast, the mechanics interviewed all had clear training programs and are monitored by management on their progression.
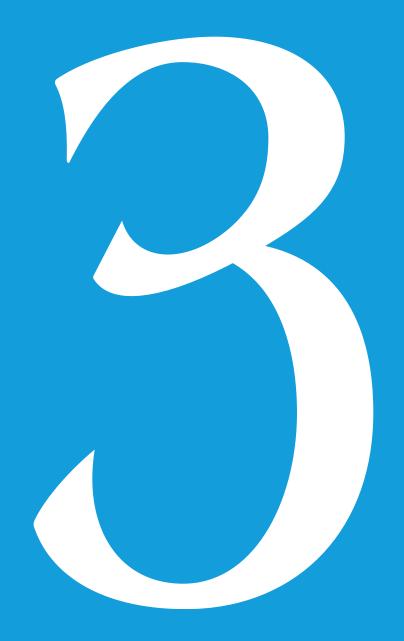
Recommendations

- Provide greater levels of supervision to drivers through well trained and accessible front-line supervisors
- Operators invest in adequately resourced, appropriately skilled front-line supervisors to support drivers
- The ratio of supervisor to driver be best practice of supervisor to 45 drivers (1:45) and no more than 1:75
- Supervisors must be visible and able to meet the vast range of driver needs
- Specialist training be provided to driver supervisors on how to support drivers considering the high levels of unmitigated psychosocial hazards

Insights

- Drivers across Australia highlighted that they typically interact with their managers or shift supervisors only when a complaint has been made against them. The lack of visibility of management in depots was explored, and the researchers believe that there is a significant under investment in the support and effective management of drivers
- Every depot appeared to resource their operations team well (e.g., schedulers, roster clerks, OTR operational staff and customer experience officers) to monitor OTR, measure and ensure compliance with other contract KPIs and handle complaints. These staff were very visible to the researchers and the drivers. However, staff that support the drivers, to talk through potential problems on their shift and to address any psychosocial hazards, appeared non-existent except at one depot that had visible staff with mental health first aid training
- Consequently, drivers are not receiving the level of support for which they need, nor consistent with the psychosocial hazards present in their roles. At almost every depot the researchers observed drivers with high levels of distress including crying during the interview and repeatedly reporting that they felt burnt out, overwhelmed, and defeated
- The ratio of first line supervisors to drivers was examined at depots to understand the reported and observed lack of visibility. Ratios varied significantly:
  - At its worst the ratio was one supervisor for every 300 drivers
  - At its best, the ratio was one supervisor for every 45 drivers
  - The smaller, family run businesses had the best ratio, with numbers as low as 1 supervisor for every 45 drivers
  - The reported average was 1 supervisor for every 100 drivers
- For a role with such significant unmitigated psychosocial hazards including working alone for the entire shift, the ratio should be significantly lower than the current average of 1 supervisor to every 100 drivers. Front line supervisor requires both role capacity (aligned to ratio of drivers) and specific skills to successfully meet the diverse and high psychosocial needs of drivers. This is a critical function to address the operators' regulatory requirements related to psychosocial hazards. It is the researcher's opinion that the accessibility and skills of the front-line supervisors have a significant impact on retention of staff

Operator
Checklist

3

	Provide ergonomic training to support drivers to set up their seat to avoid Musculo-skeletal conditions
	Allocation of funding to ensure that any defects in seat and wheel adjustments are addressed immediately to ensure an ergonomically appropriate workstation
	Consultation prior to the introduction of cages or security screens in cabs should be undertaken with drivers and their representatives to enable choice (where appropriate) to ensure widespread adoption (Where not mandated by the state government)
	Undertake further investigations as to the feasibility of drivers being allocated to a set of buses which best meets the drivers' ergonomic needs and decreases the changing environment of the cab
	Training should occur with all drivers to address and mitigate the musculoskeletal stressors associated with prolonged sitting
	Fit all cabs with CCTV and a microphone/speaker to support drivers with real time visibility into the Operations Control room including duress button
	Fit all cabs with technological enablers for navigation to reduce workplace stressors
	Audit buses to maintain an appropriate standard of internal cleanliness

	Operators should determine who is responsible for the cleanliness of the bus and ensure that this task is completed to an appropriate standard
	Design, planning and maintaining of sleeping areas for drivers that effectively address fatigue management risks
	Assess and ensure that facilities are clean and accessible for female staff
	Recruitment and funding of a diversity and inclusion officer for large depots. For smaller depots, design and implement a specific diversity and inclusion strategy within HR or operational teams
	Design, implement, monitor and review a workplace culture strategy to build and communicate the unique value proposition of your bus company to staff and the broader community

	Fit all buses with CCTV and a microphone/speaker system or other back to base system to provide for real time support for drivers (decision making and analysis of antisocial behaviour) by the Operations Control room
	Provide training on de-escalation through behavioural economic techniques and other strategies to support drivers to effectively manage antisocial behaviour
	Fit all buses with technology enablers for navigation to reduce workplace stressors on drivers associated with driving with a left and right sheet only for directions
	Introduce a graded approach to OTR for new starters to set them up for success, starting with lower targets and gradually increasing as their skills and confidence improves

☑️ Workload and Work Hours

	Design a OTR approach that is realistic and graded in line with the skills and ability of drivers
	Reduce/eliminate rotating shifts so that drivers can develop routines and roles outside of work. Consider implementation of a hybrid model
	Eliminate/reduce split shifts for all runs except School runs
	Seniority as a mechanism for retention be replaced with a transparent reward and recognition program that support all staff
	All buses be fitted with technology enablers for navigation to reduce workplace stressors on drivers associated with driving with a left and right sheet only for direction

	Ensure drivers KPI's and scorecards reflect what is inside their locus of control
	Review current attraction and retention strategies to ensure that they are complimentary and not opposing

☑ Social and Organisational Culture

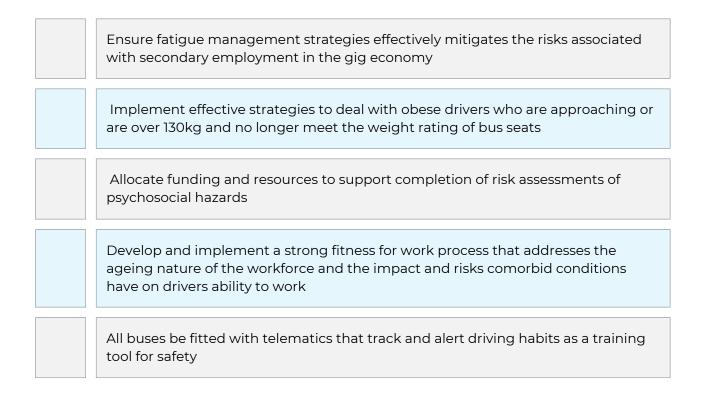|	
	Develop site specific events that supports communication between all drivers and promotes an inclusive team environment
	For large operators recruit and fund a diversity and inclusion officer to enable an inclusive and culturally diverse workplace that is accepting for all staff
	For smaller operators a specific diversity and inclusion engagement strategy needs to be developed, implemented, monitored and reviewed by senior management
	Develop social media campaigns to build brand awareness across: • Illustrating career pathway for drivers into management • Address bias that trucks are easier: they are heavier and harder • Emphasise the social good of public transport • Showcase the bus green credentials and decreasing carbon footprint • Focus on the "security" of employment as an essential service
	Design, implement and monitor a workplace culture strategy that builds on their employee brand proposition to supports recruitment and retention

☑️Wages, Reward and Recognition

Design and implement a reward and recognitions program for all staff that includes:

- Removal of seniority as a mechanism for retention and promotion
- Introduction of a referral reward
- Removal of the current sign on cash bonus arrangements
- A skill matrix linked to remuneration, so drivers are rewarded for skill development

☑️ Workplace Health and Safety

	Ensure fatigue management strategies effectively mitigates the risks associated with secondary employment in the gig economy
	Implement effective strategies to deal with obese drivers who are approaching or are over 130kg and no longer meet the weight rating of bus seats
	Allocate funding and resources to support completion of risk assessments of psychosocial hazards
	Develop and implement a strong fitness for work process that addresses the ageing nature of the workforce and the impact and risks comorbid conditions have on drivers ability to work
	All buses be fitted with telematics that track and alert driving habits as a training tool for safety

Develop and implement induction and annual training to ensure driver competency across
- De-escalation of violence and antisocial behaviours through behavioural economics and other tactics
- Critical incident management
- Psychosocial hazards
- Musculoskeletal stressors of sitting, adjusting the ISRI seat, ergonomics and appropriate stretching during breaks
- Disability and cultural safety
- Technical driving skills including defensive driving
- Resilience for drivers
- Fatigue management
- Effective communication
- Inclusion of a graded approach to On Time Running (OTR) for new starters and/or new allocation of runs to set them up for success
  - For example, first week 50%, then 55% OTR as skill and confidence improves

Introduce a skill and competency matrix to be used by schedulers to allocate runs. This will ensure that drivers are only allocated runs that they have been assessed as having the necessary skills to complete. The matrix would match the run and driver across key criteria such of:
- Navigation
- Technical driving
- Time management/problem solving
- Disability and cultural safety
- Fatigue management
- Likelihood of antisocial behaviour
- Resilience

✅ Communication and feedback

	Specialist training be provided to front line driver managers on how to support drivers consistent with the high levels of unmitigated psychosocial hazards
	Allocate a best practice maximum of 45 drivers to each supervisor, or a maximum ratio of 1:75
	Ensure front line managers are visible to drivers as they start/finish shift
	Invest in front line managers to ensure they have the necessary resources, capacity and capability to meet the needs of their drivers
	Introduce telematics as a method to improve communication and further training of drivers to improve their skills

Research Methodology

4

The long held belief within the industry of the main reason for the current severe driver shortage was due to the low wages paid to drivers.

However, the Riding On the Same Bus research has been able to clarify that the hourly rate is not the primary barrier in attracting or retaining staff.

The key reasons for poor recruitment and retention are:

- Challenging work conditions that are not effectively managed including:
  - Unachievable scheduling of runs
  - Split shifts
  - Lack of facilities
  - Disrespect/violence from passengers

- The omnipresent workplace stress and burnout due to psychosocial hazards, including lack of autonomy, micromanagement, and pressure to meet contractual KPI's. Burnout is further compounded by increased workloads because of staff shortages.

- The general feeling of being undervalued and unappreciated by both the community and the operator's management team/structure

Kinetic Molendinar Depot

The current level of job satisfaction of drivers within the Australian Bus and Coach Industry is poor, affecting External Customers (passengers, general community, and Government contract managers) and Internal Customers (drivers, maintenance and management staff).

External customers and passengers are frequently exposed to negative media reports about poor on time running, cancellation of services, fire and evacuations, children being left on buses and accidents causing multiple injuries and deaths. Unfortunately the messaging is all negative.

There is silence on the proven benefits of public bus services on well-connected communities. These include improved health, employment, environment, and social outcomes.

From an internal brand perspective, staff at bus companies speak negatively of poor workplace culture impacting on safety, infrastructure, and job satisfaction. They describe tight contract requirements and the pressure to deliver the service in a way that sets them up for failure.

Until there is a government funded campaign to change the publics perceptions and behaviours towards bus drivers the struggle to attract drivers will remain. The issue is not just of attraction but of retention.

It is evident that there are structural issues with the current contracting model, which prioritises company profits (avoiding abatement) and results in punitive measures for drivers.

To address these issues, a broad review of the contracting system is needed and is addressed in Riding on the Same Bus manifesto. Additionally, bus operators need to build a workplace culture around community engagement and the values of an essential service, rather than meeting KPIs and avoiding abatement

How the research was conducted

To better understand these issues the APTIA Research Team, comprising BIC's National IR Manager and Navigate Work conducted qualitative research through a visitation schedule across 15 bus depots nationally* over a 6 week period in October and November 2023 .

Face to face interviews were conducted with:
- 50 Drivers
- 20 Mechanics
- 20 Depot/Yard staff
- 5 board room meetings with senior management totalling 92 participants.
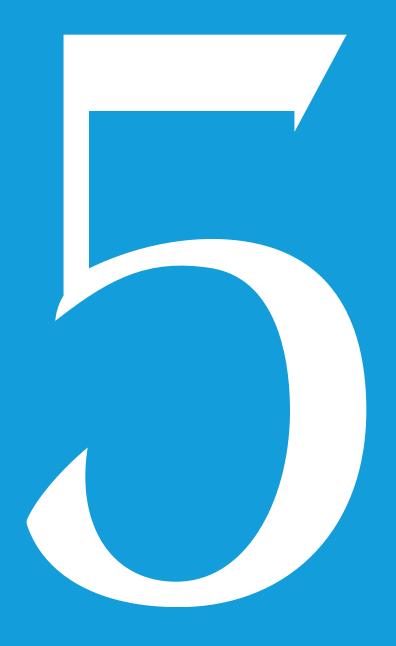- 15 front line supervisors/operations managers

On line and face to face meetings were conducted with:
- Senior management in the union movement inclusive of the Rail, Tram & Bus Union (RBTU) and Transport Workers Union (TWU)
- Regulators including TfNSW and TransLink Brisbane
- SBS Transit Singapore
- Bus and Coach Association of New Zealand and representatives from their larger operators
- America Public Transportation Association (APTA)
- Institute of Transport and Logistics Studies-Sydney University

*Due to time constraints no depot visits occurred to Northern Territory or ACT

Transdev Capalaba Depot

Acknowledgements

The Workplace Culture Toolkit Operator Guidelines was authored by Nikki Britt (Occupational Therapist) with content and editorial contribution from James Mitchell.

Nikki and James would like to acknowledge and thank all of the drivers, mechanics and managers at depots, unions, government authorities and international industry associations, who honestly and fearlessly shared their experiences, ideas and frustrations with the hope of improving their industry.

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DISCLAIMER

The purpose of this manifesto is to provide information and a policy position with respect to the recruitment and retention of employees within the bus and coach industry. The issues raised in this manifesto are not intended to refer to any specific bus or coach operator or persons within the industry. The matters raised in this manifesto should not be relied upon without separate advice on the matters of interpretation and without reference to appropriate authorities and professional advice

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