

# Pathway to Promote Diversity within Public Transit Workforce

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## Introduction

The present research includes a review of diversity literature and practices within the transit workforce and an interview study with transit agencies. The interviews explore: 1) existing knowledge of diversity in the agency's data availability; 2) current practices promoting diversity; and 3) barriers each agency faces to diversity implementation.

## Study Methods

The interview participants were recruited based on a national sampling and represented 18 states across the U.S. The research team used purposive sampling based on criteria relevant to the research questions: geographical locations of transit agencies, types of services, and size of agencies. The team also sought out and purposely recruited agencies from underrepresented regions in transportation research in the sample, including Rocky Mountain and Plains.

## Findings

The transit system has a well-known weakness: its lack of diversity and inclusion. We already know a more diverse workforce would help the industry better serve surrounding communities. But one thing missing in existing research is how a diverse and inclusive workforce can change public views about the transit system. We aimed to untangle the existing barriers that agencies face when diversifying their employees and examine what practices are already being used by industry leaders. The existing societal imbalance is an issue that is interconnected with a lack of diversity in the workforce. One obvious roadblock for many members of society is being unable to receive the education needed to enter the workforce—this barrier adversely impacts different sectors across the entire transit industry.

### Policy/Practice Recommendations

Transit agencies should take the following steps toward developing and implementing a diversity and inclusion plan:

- Conduct a comprehensive assessment of existing issues.
- Communicate constantly with employee groups to develop an inclusive plan.
- Establish a diversity leadership team outside of employees' committees.
- Engage meaningfully in community activities, which will lead to changed public perception of transit opportunities.
- Collaborate closely with local education centers and grassroots organizations.
- Participate in existing national programs, such as APTA's racial equity commitment.
- Learn from innovative practices/policies across the country to ensure an equitable approach to recruitment, retention, and promotion that considers everyone's specific needs.

To adequately serve the surrounding community, a transit agency must strive for diverse representation across all positions.

### About the Authors

**Dr. Mehri Mohebbi** is the director of the Transportation Equity Program at the University of Florida Transportation Institute (UFTI). She received her Ph.D. from the University of Cincinnati in Urban and Regional Planning. She has more than 15 years of experience addressing equity and inclusion in transportation policy and practices. Her work focuses on promoting an inclusive workforce and developing effective community engagement methods toward equitable transportation decision-making. She is interested in the equitable engagement of diverse (and sometimes contradictory) ideas to enhance people's sense of attachment to their community and promote accountability for key players in transportation policymaking and planning. Since 2006, she has been involved in international professional organizations (such as American Planning Association) in different capacities.

**Dr. Sumita Raghuram** is the Endowed Professor of Human Resource Management at San Jose State University, USA. She received her Ph.D. from University of Minnesota in Human Resource Management. In her early career she was a faculty member at Fordham University, New York and at Pennsylvania State University, Pennsylvania. She is a pioneer in studying remote work and hybrid work and has been researching this area for past 30 years. In addition, she examines international human resource management and careers of tech workers. Topics such as employee identity, diversity, employee turnover and engagement, well-being and impact of tech work on human resource management are of particular interest to her.

**Dr. Ahoura Zandiatashbar** is an Assistant Professor of Urban and Regional Planning and co-director/co-founder of Spatial Analysis and Visualization institute (SAVi) at San José State University (SJSU). He has a rich experience in application of geospatial analytics and statistical modeling and mapping. His research activities have resulted in multiple publications in top ranked journals, two national awards and more than 20 presentations and talks. Prior to joining SJSU, Dr. Zandiatashbar was a key member in developing Illinois Map the Count 2020, Illinois COVID-19 Vulnerability, and Chicago's Tap Water web-maps through the Urban Data Visualization Lab at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

### To Learn More

For more details about the study, download the full report at [transweb.sjsu.edu/research/2135](https://transweb.sjsu.edu/research/2135)



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