

Muni Staffing

Fiscal Year 2022



To: Supervisor Dean Preston
From: Jeffrey Tumlin, Director of Transportation
Date: July 2, 2021
Subject: Muni Staffing, Fiscal Year 2022

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jeffrey Tumlin'.

We want to thank you for your continued interest and attention to SFMTA's service delivery and restoration in the wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic. We have never experienced the pace or volume of change that we have encountered over this past year and it continues to present challenges. We apologize for the delay in responding to your request regarding the impacts of our staffing on our service restoration timeline. As you will see, this is a complex set of issues with data points that move on a daily basis. All the data shared below is subject to change but does provide a snapshot of the challenges we face rebuilding our staffing and restoring service. We will also continue to report on this information over time and document our progress towards our ultimate goal of providing robust and reliable transit service.

Background

Delivering Muni service that functions successfully and is sustainable, is arguably one of the most complex issues facing the SFMTA as the COVID-19 pandemic ends. The SFMTA has been working through the pandemic to deliver on recommendations that came from the 2019 Muni Reliability Working Group. Our aim is to build a transit system that successfully delivers the service San Francisco wants and is sustainable both operationally and financially. This requires a responsible and deliberate public process and requires that we confront many unknowns as San Francisco emerges from the pandemic. Most immediately, we are preparing for an August 14 service change that will deliver service to 98% of San Francisco residents. The agency is also working on ensuring operationally that the staffing is in place to continue to grow the service in early 2022 and have a sound and stable base on which to expand service in the future.

The delivery of Muni service requires the contribution of operators, fleet maintenance, maintenance of way, capital delivery, scheduling, and planning staff. A balanced and holistic staffing approach has been in development since the 2019 Muni Reliability Working Group. That report, completed by the Controller's Office, noted that Transit Supervisor and related classifications at the agency had vacancy rates of up to 17% and that existing positions were insufficient to address increasing system complexity and deliver the full potential of service management technology. Maintenance classifications in the agency had vacancy rates between 20% and 45%. These were all pre-existing conditions, that were only exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In April 2020, the SFMTA enacted a hiring freeze for vacant positions with very narrow exceptions for some operations-essential roles, such as car cleaners. Mandatory public health measures established during the beginning of the pandemic halted our ability to establish new civil service lists or continue other similar hiring activities. Training of existing staff was also curtailed. Unfortunately, we could not implement our staffing plan due to these restrictions. Indeed, it was not until March 2021, when we were able to submit an approved Health and Safety Plan to the City Administrator's office, that modest training and hiring activities resumed.

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While we were unable to continue significant training, we did take the opportunity to advance other recommendations within the Muni Reliability Working. We reorganized training functions moving them from our Human Resources Division to the Transit Division, to ensure training schedules aligned better with the service demands. We also maintained and funded our continuing partnership with the Office of Economic and Workforce Development on the CityDrive Program to support a pipeline of future operators. While completing our Health and Safety Plan, in March 2021 we advanced 9136 Transit Training Specialist hiring to have them in place for the recovery and train the staff we need. While these actions have improved our hiring and training infrastructure, it will take time to fill all the critical vacancies we have to restore and further expand service.

The Transit Division’s vacancy rate has been at 10% or higher since fiscal year 2019. This includes both budgeted and temporary positions required to plan, manage, maintain and deliver transit service and infrastructure maintenance. While, prior to the pandemic, the plan was to reduce this overall vacancy rate, the pandemic made it near impossible to do so. Table 1 shows that the division has 331 non-operator vacancies currently in the hiring process in addition to many vacancies in our 9163 Operator positions (the hiring plan is shown in Table 2 below)An additional 116 positions are planned to be filled in the current fiscal year (FY22). Adequately staffing the service is currently the agency’s top priority. We have evaluated our Human Resources division and added capacity to better support the high rates of hiring detailed in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: Transit Division Vacancies Hiring Plan (excluding operators) for FY21 and FY22

Transit Function	FY 2021 Vacancies	FY22 Planned	Total
Transit Operations & Training (non operator)	146	26	172
Vehicle Maintenance	92	36	128
Maintenance of Way + Mechanical Systems	50	31	81
Planning/Administration	19	6	25
Transit Capital Delivery	7	11	18
Cable Car	17	6	23
Total	331	116	447

In the end, successful resourcing of Muni service depends on five key processes to all work together: recruiting new, qualified staff; completing the city hiring process; training new operators; and anticipating upcoming attrition accurately.



Operator Availability and Service Levels

Prior to the pandemic, Muni's scheduled service required approximately 2,250 active operators (excluding operators on long term leave)—the number fluctuates across the year due to regular service changes. When we have fewer operators available to deliver service, whether due to vacancies, short or long-term leave, one of the tools available is the use of unscheduled overtime to close the service gap. While we did use this tool, the agency was still unable to deliver 3 – 5% of the service in 2018 and 2019. This issue began in February 2018, with 97% of the service being delivered and declining over time until July 2018, when we were delivering only 91% of scheduled service. We worked to manage this with overtime in the short term, and to redouble our hiring and training efforts as detailed above, however we were unable to fully address this issue ahead of the onset of the pandemic. This missed service was a result of years of insufficient recruitment, hiring, training and attrition planning. The Muni Reliability Working Group was critical in diagnosing and recommending specific actions the agency could take to correct this situation.

Current Status

In late 2019 and early 2020, the agency was taking direct steps, as detailed above, to address operator availability issues. As of June 2021, we believe that the resumption of these efforts will result in sufficient operators to deliver 85% of pre-COVID service sustainably starting in winter 2022. Operator hiring efforts will be matched with Transit-wide hiring initiatives to address the related problems of high vacancies across a variety of key functions, such as maintenance. This service plan is funded in part through one-time Federal relief to deliver service this fiscal year and into next fiscal year.

Upcoming Efforts

As the Muni Working Group revealed, the SFMTA faces several challenges in hiring ranging from insufficient staffing in Human Resources (HR) division to challenges competing with private sector companies like PG&E for overhead line workers. During the pandemic, we worked on recruitment and training initiatives, most recently working on a side letter with Local 6 to establish a pilot program to incentivize hiring through referral bonuses, signing bonuses and reimbursement of relocation expenses. We are hoping this pilot program will help resolve vacancies in critical overhead lines maintenance classifications, with some having vacancy rates as high as 67%.

We started our first new operator training class on June 14, 2021 and will hold new classes approximately every 5 weeks. The summer classes are expected to be small, due to vacancies in our training section, which we are currently working to fill, and the need for people on the operator civil service lists to renew their class B permits, many of which expired during the pandemic. By Fall 2021, we plan to increase classes to approximately 35-40 students every 5 weeks now that COVID restrictions are being eased. Table 2 shows the 2021-2022 Operator Hiring and Training plan.



Table 2: 2021-2022 Operator Hiring and Training Plan

Class Name	Class Start Date	Class End Date	Estimated Graduates	Average pass rate	Cumulative New Operators
01-TM-21	6/14/2021	8/27/2021	16	80%	12
02-TM-21	7/19/2021	10/1/2021	21	80%	29
03-TM-21	8/23/2021	11/5/2021	21	80%	46
04-TM-21	9/27/2021	12/3/2021	21	80%	62
01-TM-22	11/1/2021	1/21/2022	36	80%	91
02-TM-22	12/6/2021	2/23/2022	36	80%	120
03-TM-22	1/10/2022	3/25/2021	36	80%	149
04-TM-22	2/14/2021	4/29/2022	36	80%	178
05-TM-22	3/21/2022	6/3/2022	36	80%	206
06-TM-22	4/25/2022	6/8/2022	36	80%	235
07-TM-22	5/30/2022	8/12/2022	36	80%	264
08-TM-22	7/4/2022	9/23/2022	36	80%	293
09-TM-22	9/12/2022	11/28/2022	36	80%	322
10-TM-22	10/10/2022	12/23/2022	36	80%	350

Attrition and Leave Planning

Pre-pandemic vacancies have grown through attrition of staff over this past fiscal year. Additionally, we are also expecting a higher than average number of retirements at the end the fiscal year and approximately 80 promotions to supervisor and training specialist roles. Presently, we have a large pool of available operators because our service restoration is underway. However, as we add more service beginning in August, and complete additional promotions, training, and attrition, this surplus will be quickly absorbed.

Operators have faced the same pandemic-induced challenges as the rest of society. To account for higher leave usage we have adjusted our Extra Board ratios. The Extra Board is a pool of operators assigned to fill acute, short-term staffing issues when someone is unexpectedly out or uses vacation leave, they're what prevent missed service. As a standard transit operating practice, there should typically be 20% more operators available than total runs, or shifts, in a day. Prior to the pandemic, our operator shortage meant many divisions did not have this 20% buffer, which resulted in missed service. Now, as a result of the increased variability from the pandemic and its effects on our workforce, our staffing plan now requires 30% additional operator availability to ensure full service delivery. We are hopeful as life stabilizes over the next few months; we will be able to restore this again to 20%. Anticipated operator demand and availability by service period is shown in Table 3 below.



Table 3: 2020-2022 9163 Operator Demand vs. Availability

	Pre-COVID	May 2021	August 2021	Winter 2022
Total Operator Demand	2,288	1,719	2,042 ¹	2,145 ²
Available Operators ³	2,169	1,915	2,085	2,035
<i>Delta</i>	-119	196	43	-110 ⁴

Available Operators includes those in the 9163 Operator classification who are not on long term leave (defined here as leave lasting longer than 30 days.) Some staff were also temporarily reassigned during the COVID-19 pandemic as Disaster Service Workers (DSWs) and are removed from the Available Operator category in the month of May 2021 in Table 3. The increase in available operators between May 2021 and August 2021 is due to the return of Cable Car operators from these temporary assignments supporting a range of functions including testing and vaccination sites. Despite our hiring program, due to promotions out of the 9163 Operator classification (to Trainer and Supervisor classifications), anticipated retirements, and general attrition we do not expect to grow our operator class beyond August 2021 levels until Summer 2022, in short: attrition will outpace our hiring and for several more months.

As we increase frequency and coverage, we will increase the number of operators required to deliver service. The current (May 2021) schedule requires 1,719 Operators and we are projecting that the Winter 2022 service plan will require approximately 2,145 operators to deliver. At present, we are including the higher Extra Board ratio (30%) in our planning figures. However, we are hopeful that the use of short-term leave will diminish as the pandemic comes to a close, which will reduce our reliance on the Extra Board for service coverage and permit us to redeploy these resources towards service delivery. We also plan to use some overtime, if necessary, while training is underway to cover acute shortages. This should permit us to reliably deliver the service planned for winter 2022 despite these challenges.

Service Restoration

We eventually plan to grow our service beyond pre-pandemic levels. However, we first are planning to conduct a public dialogue regarding tradeoffs and investment decisions both now and in the future. The pandemic has challenged us to find new ways to deploy our resources that will better serve San Francisco. For example, during the pandemic we addressed a long-standing equity need for connecting the Bayview to downtown San Francisco by establishing the 15-Bayview. This reallocation of resources closed this gap and has improved the mobility for San Franciscans.

¹ These are draft figures. At the time of writing, the August schedule is being built, and this number is expected to change moderately.

² This is preliminary and will change as the schedule is built and our operator availability figures solidify.

³ Note that Available Operators excludes Operators that have been off work for more than 30 days and for May 2021 also exclude Cable Car Operators on Disaster Service Worker Assignments.

⁴ These figures are utilizing a 30% extra board, rather than the standard 20%. If society's post-pandemic recovery is sustained, and the pandemic-induced disruptions related to things like childcare abate, we expect to see the current use of short-term leave return to more normal levels. If this does happen, the delta changes from -110 to a positive 55.

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To that end, our service planning team is examining how to prepare our transit system for forthcoming demands. The service changes we have enacted since April 2020 were directly focused on responding to the pandemic, keeping customers and operators safe and serving essential workers. However, as we look to winter 2022 and returning Muni to support a full recovery of the city, we are evaluating a number of alternatives for public consideration that use the same funding and offer different service choices. We will be presenting these options for the Winter 2022 service restoration this fall and will be performing community-based public outreach citywide to determine what comes next. As we have done throughout the COVID pandemic, we will also be monitoring our ridership recovery, examining changes in travel and behavior that we need to incorporate into our recommendations.

Our long-term vision includes a plan to deliver 110-120% of pre-pandemic service levels providing a dense network of transit routes centered around a 5-minute network of protected transit travel throughout the city as revenue recovers and new revenue is identified. We will continue to work towards this vision; we want nothing more than to serve more riders with better, more frequent service. We just do not have the sustained resources in hand to deliver it – yet.

CC:

Julie Kirschbaum, Director of Transit
Kimberly Ackerman, Chief People Officer
Jonathan Rewers, Acting Chief Financial Officer