

RTAP National Conference

Improving Transit Workforce Mental Health, Wellness and Resiliency

Best Practices, Strategies, and Lessons Learned
from National Research

December 2025



Prepared by:



Foursquare ITP

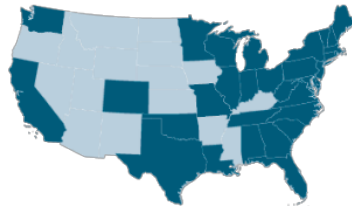
Founded
in **2006**



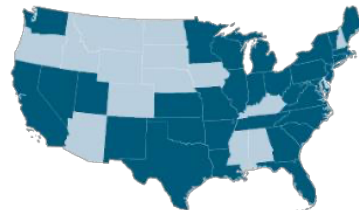
**Woman
owned**



Nearly **70 transit
planners** and
specialists



DBE certified
in **33 states**



Projects in
34 states + DC

 Learn more at FoursquareITP.com

Service Area Expertise



**BRT, Bus Priority, &
Corridor Planning**



**Microtransit &
New Mobility**



**Micromobility &
Active Transportation**



**Transit
Service Planning**



**Strategic &
Financial Management**



**Transportation
Data Science**



**Transit Operations
& Facilities Planning**



**Regional &
Statewide Planning**



**Transportation Demand
Management (TDM)**



Lets get to know each other!

Raise your hand if...

- You work for a public transportation agency/provider
- You work for a human service transportation provider
- You are an MPO or DOT that supports transportation providers but does not operate transportation directly
- Consultant or vendor interested in supporting transportation workforce
- Someone else!

What comes to mind when you hear “worker quality of life”?

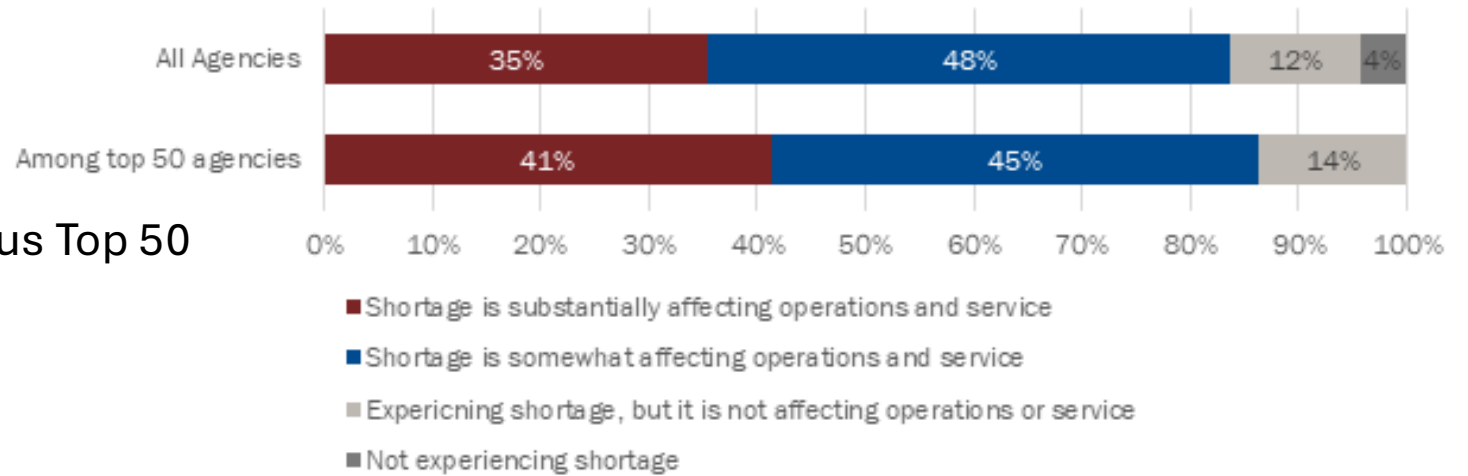
Shout out!



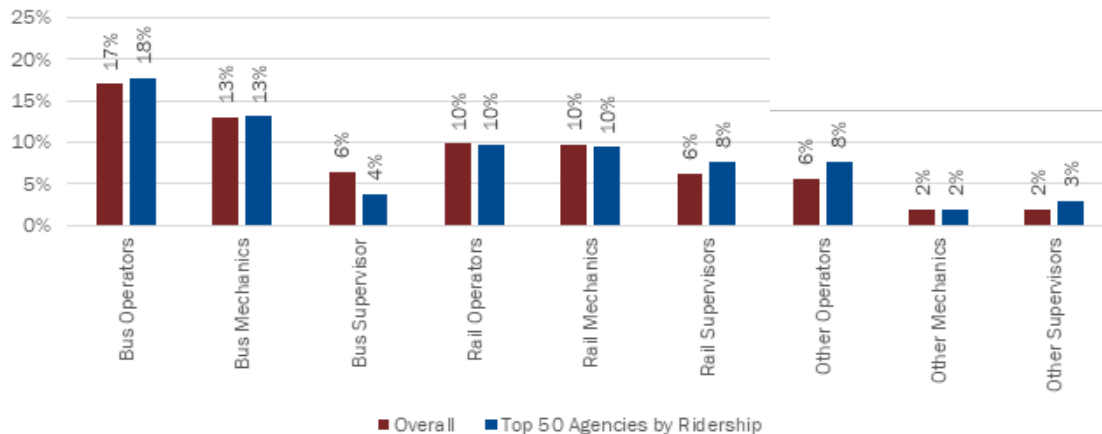
Setting the stage

Workforce by the Numbers (APTA Transit Workforce Shortage - Oct 2022)

Severity And Impact Of Transit Workforce Shortage By Agency Size



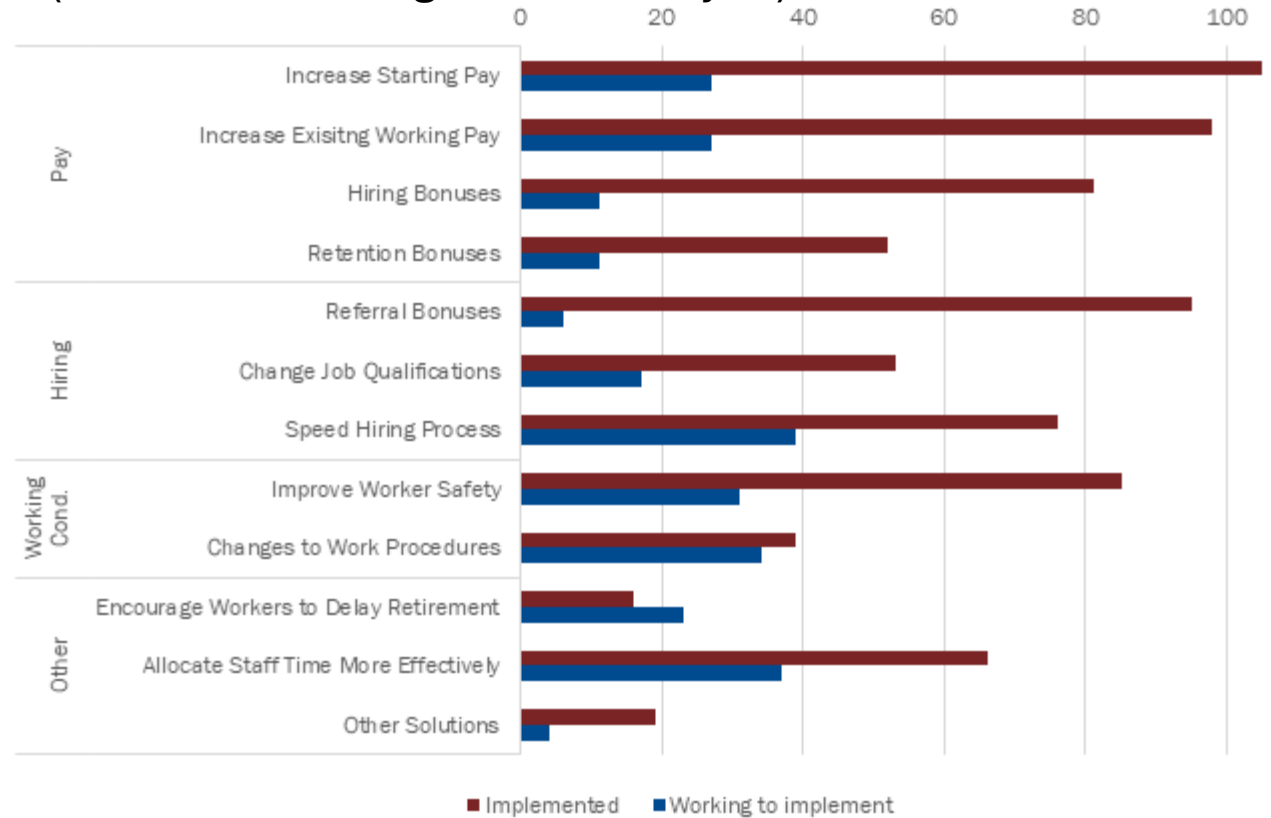
Vacancy Rates by Role – Overall versus Top 50 Agencies



Workforce by the Numbers

(APTA Transit Workforce Shortage - Oct 2022)

Solutions to Workforce Shortage by Implementation Status
(Number of 190 Agencies Surveyed)



Average Rank of Factors Causing Workers to Quit Since COVID-19 (1 is greatest, 5 is least)

	Compensation	Work Schedule	Harassment and Assault	Other Conditions	COVID-19
All Respondents	2.2	2.0	4.2	3.3	3.2
Top 50 Agencies	2.1	2.1	4.1	3.3	3.4

Workforce by the Numbers

(TCRP F29 – Mental Health, Wellness, & Resilience for Transit System Workers)

□ Retention Challenges

- ▼ 62% of agencies report difficulty retaining employees
- Top reasons workers quit (2023 survey):
 1. Work schedules
 2. Compensation
 3. Working conditions
 4. On-the-job harassment/assault
 5. COVID-19 concerns
- 32% of frontline workers blamed management for their leaving.
- 45% of current workers & 53% of former workers say agency isn't responsive.

□ Barriers to Mental Health

- Lack of time (36%)
- Missed pay (33%)
- Privacy concerns (33%)
- Too tired/exhausted (32%)

□ Workplace Stressors

- 81%: verbal threats/harassment
- 60%: spitting
- 38%: projectiles thrown at buses
- 26%: objects thrown inside buses

Another study found 85% experience body pain from work conditions



Report 245: Mental Health, Wellness, and Resilience for Transit System Workers

Research Objectives

The objective of [Report 245](#) was to develop a comprehensive guidebook and interactive products that would assist transit agencies and other stakeholders in exploring or implementing approaches to identify and mitigate the factors that cause negative impacts on mental health, wellness, and resilience for transit system workers.

The research will address the contributing factors to a transit employee's mental health by:

- Documenting the stressors experienced by transit system workers during pre-and peri-pandemic times;
- Documenting the impacts of those stressors at the individual and organizational levels;
- Documenting any differences seen by race, ethnicity, gender, age, and occupation;
- Identifying protective factors and actions that would help proactively develop, promote, and sustain a culture that supports the mental health, well-being, and resilience of transit workers (methods, models, and programs);
- Evaluating the impacts of existing programs, policies, and practices, including labor-management relations and work organization, to address mental health issues;
- Documenting the role of supervisory support in helping employees to manage exposure to stressors; and
- Recommending best practices for transit systems to support the mental health of transit employees (including programs, outreach, education, and bargaining).

Research Stats

Review of Literature
and Previous Research



80 References

Interviews of Agency
and Union Staff



65+ Participants

4 Large Agencies
4 Medium Agencies
2 Small Agencies
2 Sets of Union Reps

National Survey of
Frontline Workers



1,000+ Responses

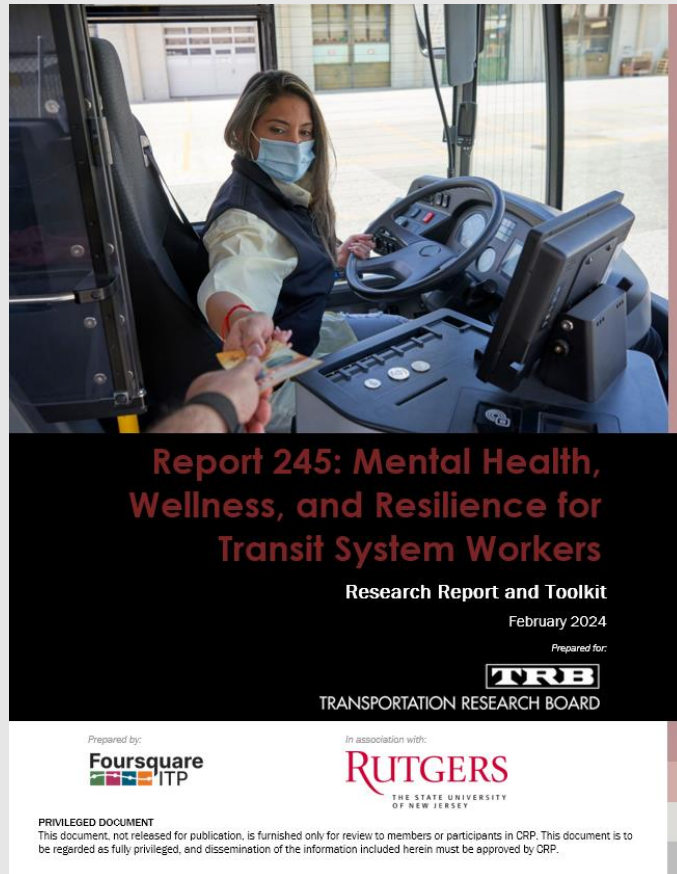
Frontline Worker
Focus Groups



2 Rounds

14 Participants
from 10 Agencies

Final Product



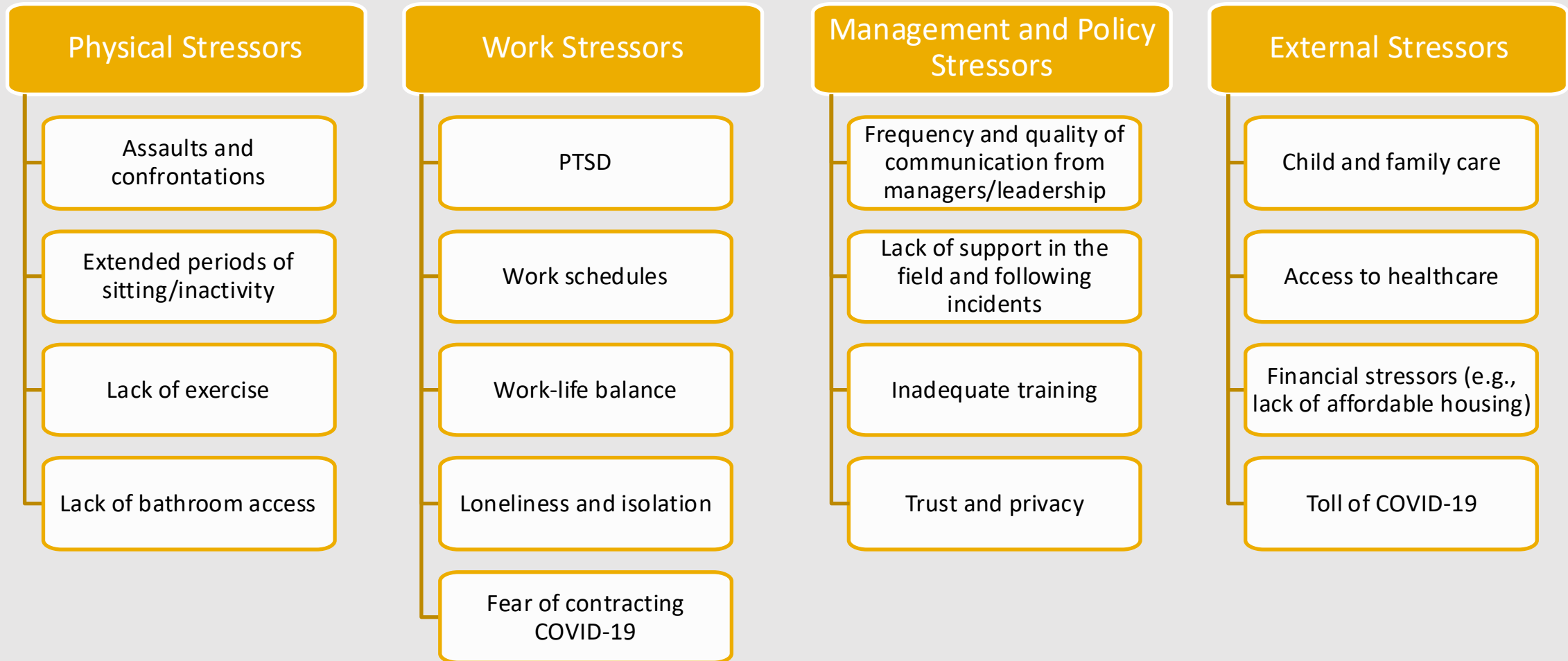
Section 1:
Research Report

Section 2:
Resources & Toolkit

Section 1:

RESEARCH REPORT

Section 1: Research Report – Key Findings



Section 1: Research Report – Key Findings

- Survey Results from frontline workers

Understaffing is a major cause of stress

Exposure to drugs and substances

Verbal and physical assaults

Elevated anxiety and depression

Mix of awareness of employer resources

Challenges utilization employer resources (lack of time, missed work/pay, privacy concerns)

Moderate satisfaction of resources

Preferences for 1-on-1 services

Section 1: Research Report – Recommended Responses

Improve the physical safety of the workplace

- Physical barriers
- Enforce existing policies

Adjust benefits and policies to provide more support for good mental health and a better work-life balance

- Change practices around scheduling/work assignments
- Increase flexibility of time-off

Improve and diversify communication and marketing efforts of resources

- Use a variety of formats for marketing
- Offer a mix of times/locations for accessing services
- Build awareness through constant reminders (e.g., discuss regularly)

Evaluate quality and effectiveness of EAPs/UAPs

- Align services with employee needs
- Involve employees in selection / feedback on services
- Develop monitoring process to improve offerings

Section 1: Research Report – Recommended Responses

Address privacy concerns

- Consider 1-on-1 services
- Employ mental health professionals
- Off-site or separated services

Strengthen and enforce policies to protect frontline workers

- Clearly outline and enforce policies
- Passenger code of conducts

Provide more support in the field and ongoing support after incidents

- Offer specialized staff trained in incident response
- Ongoing support is also needed following incidents

Provide peer support and mentoring

- Develop formal programs

Section 1: Research Report – Recommended Responses

Strengthen relationships among frontline workers and between frontline workers

- Provide opportunities for socializing and connecting

Provide more training to empower employees for adverse conditions

- De-escalation training
- Incident response

Empathy training for managers

- Increase understanding and support for frontline workers

Build trust

- Reduce stigmas
- Collaborate to find solutions

Section 2:

RESOURCES & TOOLKIT

Section 2: Case Studies

MARTA
Using technology to
connect employees
with support

VTA/ATU Local 265
Increased access to
mental health services,
trained professionals,
and other benefits

MARTA
Incentives for wellness
program participation

IndyGo
On-site health clinic
services

IndyGo
Creative marketing

VTA/ATU 265
Critical Incident Support
Teams

Metro Transit
Red Kite Project
Resiliency Training

TriMet
Lactation van for
nursing operators

VTA/ATU 265
Training and mentorship
for retention and
advancement

MTA Operator
Restroom Workgroup

TWU Local 100
Union Assistance
Program

Section 2: Toolkit

Program evaluation framework

- Provides guidance on using a **capability maturity matrix** for program evaluation.

Evaluating and Improving EAPs and UAPs

- Provides a **worksheet** to guide the evaluation and improvement of EAPs and UAPs.

Establishing a Wellness Program

- Lays out **example wellness programs** and **steps** to establish a program.

Support Mental Health in the Workplace

- Offers a **checklist** for leadership and senior managers to ensure a supportive workplace

How to Make the Case for Increased Benefits to Support Mental Health and Wellness

- Provides **example messages, related statistics, and guidance** on building a message.

Improving Communications and Marketing of Resources

- Presents **recommendations** for the improvement of internal marketing. Includes a **worksheet** with key considerations.

Building Trust Between Parties

- Offers a **three-step process** and **worksheet** for building trust among frontline workers, management, and union leadership

Section 2: Toolkit

Increasing Training Offerings

- Offers **guidance** on creating empathy trainings, leadership ride-alongs, and intervention training.

Providing Support During and Post-Incidents

- Provides **guidance** on creating critical response teams. Includes a **drill** to prepare teams for interventions.

Modernizing Operational Policies for a Healthy Workforce

- Lays out **policy suggestions** and **implementation guidelines** for the modernization of operational policies.

Fostering Community Among Frontline Transit Workers

- Provides **example activities and programs** to foster community.

Developing and Implementing Mentor and Peer Programs

- Provides **guidance** for the development of a mentorship program and lays out **types of programs** available.

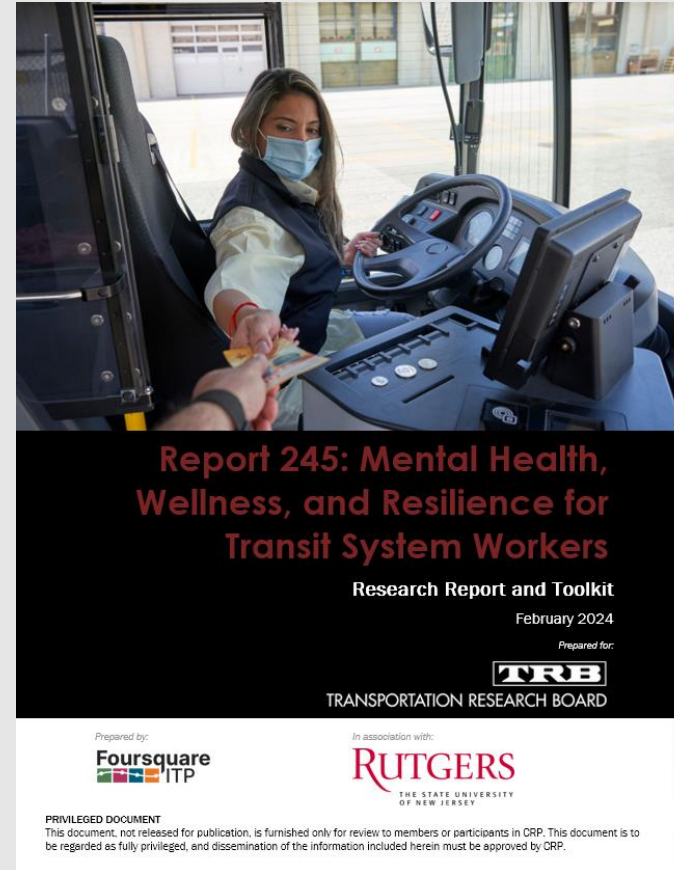
Self-Advocacy Tools

- Provides **strategies and tips** for understanding worker rights, dialogue with managers, partnering with HR, and peer advocacy.

DOWNLOAD THE REPORT & TOOLKIT



Scan to access Report 245
www.trb.org/Publications/Blurbs/183206.aspx



Thank you!



Sandy Brennan

Vice President & Project Manager

sbrennan@foursquareitp.com

240.205.7469