

# NHRTAP News



New Hampshire RTAP Quarterly Newsletter Quarter 2 2026 Newsletter

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Have an idea for the newsletter? Let us know!  
Call 937-299-5007 or email Julie Schafer at [jschafer@rlsandassoc.com](mailto:jschafer@rlsandassoc.com)



## Leadership Spotlight: Teri Palmer, New Executive Director of Advance Transit

### Supporting Community Mobility Through Leadership and Connection

Teri Palmer recently stepped into the role of Executive Director at Advance Transit, bringing with her a strong background in community transportation and regional mobility. With experience ranging from local transit leadership to serving as New Hampshire’s statewide mobility manager, Teri brings a thoughtful, community-focused perspective to her new role.

### A Path Rooted in Service

Teri’s career in public transportation began with a desire to help and teach others.

“My background has a little bit of everything, but I’ve always been drawn to helping people,” she shared. “I applied for a public transportation director position in Claremont, and that experience shaped my path in this field.”

Her role as New Hampshire’s statewide mobility manager further deepened her understanding of the challenges rural residents face.

“That experience showed me how important coordination and partnerships are in breaking down transportation barriers.”



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## A Strong Foundation at Advance Transit

Advance Transit's reputation and strong community support were key factors in Teri's decision to join the organization.

"Every person I've encountered has spoken highly of the agency's impact," she noted. "That level of community support really stood out."

As she begins her first year, Teri is focused on understanding operations, supporting leadership transitions, and strengthening relationships.

"We're navigating several staffing transitions, and it's important that we do that in a way that supports long-term stability."

## Leading with Transparency and Collaboration

Teri emphasizes the importance of communication and teamwork in building a strong organization.

"I'm committed to fostering transparency and collaborative leadership," she said. "It's about supporting our team while continuing to build a reliable and sustainable system."

## Supporting the Workforce

Like many transit agencies, Advance Transit faces workforce challenges. Teri sees listening and engagement as key.

***"The small things matter—clear communication and listening to staff."***

I'm also making it a point to ride the buses to better understand the driver and rider experience." She also highlighted the importance of professional development:

"Training builds confidence and helps staff manage customer interactions, which leads to better service and a safer environment."

***"Transportation isn't about the bus—it's about connection. Our work is about bridging gaps and supporting the lifelines that help communities thrive."***

## The Role of Regional Transit

Advance Transit's fare-free model plays an important role in connecting communities across the Upper Valley.

"Being fare-free removes barriers," Teri said. "It allows people to participate fully in their community without worrying about cost."

She also emphasized the importance of partnerships: "Public transportation is shaped by the voices of our community—from riders to local leaders. Those partnerships are essential."

## Looking Ahead

Teri is closely watching emerging trends that could improve rural mobility.

"Microtransit and mobility hubs offer opportunities to address first-mile and last-mile challenges and better connect rural areas."

## Perspective from the Field

Teri also shared insight into common misconceptions about transit:

"People often see an empty bus and assume it's not needed, but that same bus may be full during peak times. Another misconception is that smaller buses significantly reduce costs—when in reality, labor is the largest expense."

## A Personal Reflection

One of the most important lessons Teri has learned in her career is the broader role transit plays in communities.

## Transit Driver Wage Benchmark Update—Peer Agencies (2021 vs. 2025)

### What this mean for Transit Agencies

Transit agencies across New Hampshire continue to face workforce challenges, particularly in recruiting and retaining drivers. Updated wage data from NHRTAP provides insight into how peer agencies are responding and where compensation trends are shifting.

To support workforce planning and compensation discussions, NHRTAP conducted a follow-up wage survey in 2025 and compared the results to a 2021 benchmark.

This analysis focuses on five peer rural transit agencies that participated in both survey years, allowing for a consistent comparison across similar systems. Agencies are anonymized to maintain confidentiality.

#### Non CDL Driver Key trends:

- Entry-level wages increased by \$3.74/hour (33.2%)
- Median wages increased by \$2.26/hour (13.3%)
- Average wages increased by \$2.29/hour (13.2%)
- Top-end wages increased modestly by \$0.88/hour (3.7%)

# Transit Driver Wage Benchmark Update-Peer Agencies (2021 vs. 2025)

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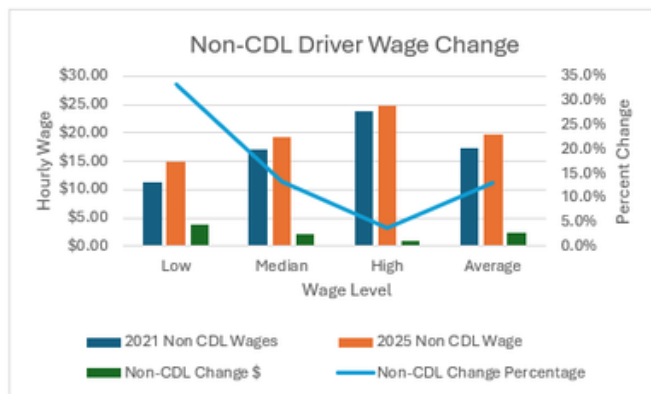
These trends indicate that agencies are prioritizing recruitment-focused wage adjustments, particularly at lower wage levels, to remain competitive in the current labor market.

More limited growth at the top end may indicate wage compression, where increases are concentrated at entry and mid-level positions while upper wage ranges remain relatively stable.

Table 1. Transit Driver Wage Benchmark-Non CDL with Percent Change

| Wage Level | 2021 Non CDL Wages | 2025 Non CDL Wage | Non-CDL Change \$ | Non-CDL Change Percentage |
|------------|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|
| Low        | \$11.26            | \$15.00           | \$3.74            | 33.2%                     |
| Median     | \$17.00            | \$19.26           | \$2.26            | 13.3%                     |
| High       | \$23.94            | \$24.82           | \$0.88            | 3.7%                      |
| Average    | \$17.40            | \$19.69           | \$2.29            | 13.2%                     |

Figure 1. Non CDL Driver Wage Trends Across Peer Agencies (2021-2025)



## CDL Driver Wage Trends

CDL driver's wages show a different pattern, reflecting increased competition for experienced operators.

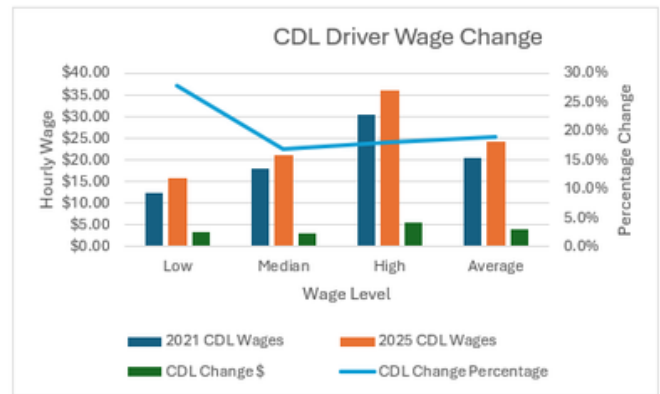
### CDL Driver Key trends:

- Entry-level wages increased by \$3.50/hour (28.0%)
- Median wages increased by \$3.04/hour (16.9%)
- Average wages increased by \$3.89/hour (19.0%)
- Top-end wages increased by \$5.55/hour (18.2%)

Stronger growth at the high end suggests agencies are focusing on retention strategies for experienced CDL drivers, who remain in high demand.

Overall, the data reflects continued upward pressure on CDL compensation across the peer group.

Figure 2. CDL Driver Wage Trends Across Peer Agencies (2021 vs. 2025)



## Key Takeaways for Transit Leaders

- Entry-level wages are rising fastest, reflecting recruitment pressures
- CDL drivers continue to command higher wages, particularly at the top end
- Wage compression may be occurring in non-CDL positions
- Benefits remain an important part of the overall compensation picture
- Compensation strategies are becoming more targeted by role and experience

### Workforce Insight

**Entry-level wage growth is outpacing top-end increases, highlighting the need for competitive starting wages to support recruitment in today's labor market.**

## What This Means for Agency Planning

These trends reflect a changing compensation landscape across New Hampshire transit systems.

Agencies are adjusting wages in different ways to address both recruitment and retention challenges.

This data can support:

- Budget development and wage planning
- Recruitment and retention strategies
- Discussions with boards and municipal partners
- Long-term workforce sustainability planning

## Methodology

This analysis is based on matched SurveyMonkey responses from the same five New Hampshire rural transit agencies in both 2021 and 2025. Results are presented using low, median, high, and average values. Agencies are anonymized for confidentiality.

Table 2. Transit Driver Wage Benchmark-CDL with Percent Change

| Wage Level | 2021 CDL Wages | 2025 CDL Wages | CDL Change \$ | CDL Change Percentage |
|------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|-----------------------|
| Low        | \$12.50        | \$16.00        | \$3.50        | 28.0%                 |
| Median     | \$18.00        | \$21.04        | \$3.04        | 16.9%                 |
| High       | \$30.56        | \$36.11        | \$5.55        | 18.2%                 |
| Average    | \$20.49        | \$24.38        | \$3.89        | 19.0%                 |

Rural transit agencies implementing incentive programs should ensure the program aligns with agency personnel policies and approved budgets. In many cases, governing boards may also need to approve incentive programs.

When designed effectively, employee incentives can help agencies:

- Improve workforce retention
- Increase employee engagement
- Promote safe transit operations
- Strengthen organizational culture

## Practical approaches for designing incentive programs that support recruitment, retention, and employee engagement.

Across the country, rural transit agencies continue to face challenges recruiting and retaining qualified transit professionals. Bus operator shortages, increased competition for workers, and rising service demands have created workforce pressures for many agencies.

One strategy gaining traction among transit providers is the use of **employee incentive programs** designed to recognize and reward employees for performance, safety, and service.

State RTAP programs can assist transit agencies by providing guidance, policy templates, and examples of successful incentive programs.

These programs help agencies reinforce organizational priorities while demonstrating appreciation for employees' contributions.



Incentive programs are most effective when they include:

- Clearly defined performance metrics
- Transparent evaluation processes
- Consistent administration
- Alignment with agency goals

### **Workforce Insight**

**Small, consistent incentives can have a meaningful impact on employee engagement and retention, particularly in rural transit system**

Employee incentives can take many forms, including:

- Driver referral bonuses
- Safety recognition programs
- Attendance incentives
- Recruitment bonuses
- Professional development support

For agencies interested in developing an incentive program, the **Transit Employee Incentive Program Guide** provides a model policy and program design worksheet to help agencies get started.

## Title VI Plan Updates: What Transit Agencies Need to Know

### Why This Matters Now

Title VI Plan updates are due, and now is the time for transit agencies to review, update, and prepare their plans to ensure continued compliance with federal requirements.

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin in programs and activities receiving federal funding. For transit agencies, this means ensuring that services, policies, and communications are accessible and equitable for all riders.

### A Brief Overview of Title VI in Transit

Title VI requirements have long been a foundational part of federally funded transit programs. Agencies receiving funding through programs such as Section 5311 are required to maintain a current Title VI Plan and demonstrate ongoing compliance.

#### A Title VI Plan typically includes:

- A public notice of rights
- Complaint procedures and forms
- A record of complaints and investigations
- Public participation plans
- Language assistance plans for individuals with limited English proficiency
- Service and fare equity analyses (as applicable)

These elements help ensure that transit services are delivered fairly and that agencies are responsive to the needs of all community members.

# Title VI Plan Updates: What Transit Agencies Need to Know

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## What Agencies Should Be Doing Now

With plan updates due, agencies should begin reviewing their current Title VI Plans to ensure all required components are up to date and reflect current operations.

### Key steps include:

- Reviewing existing policies and procedures
- Updating public notices and complaint processes
- Confirming language assistance and public engagement strategies
- Ensuring documentation is current and complete
- Preparing for submission in accordance with state and federal requirements

Starting early helps avoid last-minute updates and allows time to address any gaps.

## Training Opportunities to Support Plan Updates

NHRTAP is offering two upcoming webinars to support agencies through the Title VI update process:

### Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 Webinar

Date: April 2, 2026  
Time: 1:00 PM – 3:00 PM  
Intended for those who oversee Title VI Plans

This session will provide an overview of Title VI requirements and key elements of compliance.

### Title VI Plan Update Webinar

Date: April 15, 2026  
Time: 1:00 PM – 3:00 PM

Intended for those who oversee Title VI Plans  
This session will focus on the plan update process, including practical guidance for reviewing and updating required components.



## Planning Tip

Begin your Title VI review early to allow time for updates, internal coordination, and documentation before submission deadlines.

## Key Takeaway

Title VI Plans are an essential part of ensuring equitable and accessible transit services. Taking time now to review and update plans will help agencies maintain compliance and continue serving their communities effectively.

NHRTAP will continue to provide training and technical assistance to support agencies throughout this process.

## SAVE THE DATE Tri-State Transit Conference 2027



Date:  
September 14-16, 2027

Venue:  
Double Tree by Hilton Manchester Downtown  
Hosted By:



## Save the Date

NH State Transit Association Annual  
Conference  
June 4, 2026  
Grappone Conference Center  
Concord NH  
Registration Begins at 8:30 am  
More details coming soon

If you are not receiving this newsletter directly, or know of someone who is not currently receiving it, and would like to, please contact Julie Schafer ( [jschafer@rlsandassoc.com](mailto:jschafer@rlsandassoc.com)). This publication is free.

# TRAINING CALENDAR/SCHOLARSHIPS

NHRTAP offers its courses via webinar or in-person training. The Quarter 1 2026 training has been added.

<https://www.newhampshirertap.com/training>

Please note that certificates for the webinars are valid for one (1) year, and in-person trainings are valid for three (3) years. NHDOT encourages transit agencies to review their certificates and identify trainings that are needed and get them scheduled. If there is a training that is needed and is not on the training calendar, please email NHRTAP Assistant, Dawn Tennant

## April 2026

4/2/2026 (1:00 pm - 3:00 pm) - Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 Webinar (Intended for those who oversee Title VI Plans)

4/11/2026 (8:00 am - 12:00 pm) - Defensive Driving @CAPBM Concord NH

4/11/2026 (12:30 pm - 4:30 pm) - Emergency Procedures & Evacuation @CAPBM Concord NH

4/15/2026 (1:00 pm - 3:00 pm) - Title VI Plan Update Webinar (Intended for those who oversee Title VI Plans)

## May, 2026

5/2/2026 (8:30 am - 4:30 pm) - Passenger Assistance Techniques (PAT) @CAPBM Concord NH

5/6/2026 (10:00 am - 12:00 pm) - Emergency Procedures & Evacuation Webinar

5/16/2026 (8:00 am - 12:00 pm) - Defensive Driving @North Country Berlin NH

5/16/2026 (12:30 pm - 4:30 pm) - Emergency Procedures & Evacuation @ North Country Berlin NH

5/21/2026 (10:00 am - 12:00 pm) - Defensive Driving Webinar

## June, 2026

6/20/2026 (9:00 am - 5:00 pm) - Passenger Assistance Techniques (PAT) @Tri-County, Berlin

## Scholarships

**NOTE: All Scholarship funds have been expended until July 2027**

### Who Is Eligible?

Section 5311 and Section 5310 subrecipients under contract with NHDOT

### What Events Do the Scholarship Funds Cover?

Section 5311 subrecipients are eligible to apply for scholarship funds for the following:

- Annual Tri-State Conference attendance
- Courses, seminars, workshops and conferences relating to rural passenger transportation
- Agency annual maximum is \$3,500 (this amount is in addition to attendance at the Tri-State Conference)

Section 5310 subrecipients/organizations are eligible to apply for scholarship funds for the following:

- Annual Tri-State Conference attendance
- Agency annual maximum is \$500 (this amount is in addition to attendance at the Tri-State Conference)

Please note that all 5310 subrecipients draw from an overall pool of funds; there is no guaranteed agency set aside

### Application Process:

Please visit the Scholarships page on the NHRTAP website to download an application and for detailed information on the application process.

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