

West Region Transportation Workforce Center

West Region Job Needs and Priorities Report, Phase 1

Executive Summary

The West Region Transportation Workforce Center has completed a preliminary study on current and emerging workforce trends in western states. The **Phase 1 Job Needs and Priorities Report** provides:

- 1) a broad overview of the transportation industry and workforce in the West Region,
- 2) an analysis of labor market data on transportation industries and occupations in the region, and
- 3) a synthesis of stakeholder feedback on priority occupations of concern for the region as a whole.

The Center identified 10 priority occupations based on regional industry drivers, labor market data, and stakeholder input. The priority occupations highlight common needs region-wide that warrant focused attention from the Center. The Phase 2 report will showcase the programs or partnerships needed to address regional workforce priorities.

Transportation in the West Region

For the purposes of the Center, the West Region comprises ten states: Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Washington, and Wyoming. The region is characterized primarily by geographically large states with relatively low population densities. The region makes up 36% of the total landmass of the United States, while only containing approximately 6% of the U.S. population. Seven out of the ten states spend over 86% of their total transportation budgets on highways, which are mainly rural (84%). Given the predominantly rural and small urban character of the West, the vast majority of public transportation in the region relies on busses. The West additionally contains a comparatively high concentration of Federal and American Indian and Alaskan Native lands, which present unique transportation management and workforce issues.

Priority Occupations

The Center analyzed Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) data for occupations that comprise the West Region's transportation workforce to identify high demand/high growth occupations that are important across the region as a whole and would therefore benefit from additional focus and attention in Center activities. The team identified twenty transportation occupations with a projected demand increase of at least 10% or more by 2022 and with more than 200 projected annual openings in the region. Industry perspectives on priority occupations were gathered to validate the preliminary BLS data analysis. The stakeholder engagement process resulted in a list of 10 priority occupations for the region, grouped as STEM, Vocational & Skilled Trades, and Supply Chain and Logistics occupations.

STEM Occupations. Priority STEM occupations for the West include Civil Engineering and Construction Managers, two cross-industry occupations. Input from stakeholders repeatedly pointed to difficulties in competing for in-demand, high skilled workers. States with booming energy sectors noted that recruitment difficulties tended to match the boom-bust cycles experienced in the oil patch. Ability to offer competitive wages and geographical isolation were listed as two additional issues compounding recruitment and retention issues.

Vocational and Skilled Trade Occupations. The vast majority of priority occupations in the West are in the vocational or skilled trades. The needs assessment identified a common demand in the West for increased pools of skilled vehicle and equipment operators, diesel mechanics, and both supervisors and workers in the skilled trades more broadly. The need to increase the size of the pool of available workers in the skilled trades overall was repeatedly emphasized in stakeholder interviews. Of the initial list of high growth/high demand occupations presented to stakeholders for feedback, many had overlapping skillsets and exchanged workers. For these related occupations, the Center prioritized the higher wage position. In the construction fields, stakeholders had difficulty pinpointing specific priority occupations as there is high demand across the skilled trades generally. For simplification, occupations that required skillsets representative of occupations across the trades were prioritized. Priority skilled trades occupations in the West include:

- 1) First-line supervisors of transportation and material-moving machine and vehicle operators;
- 2) Bus drivers (transit and intercity);
- 3) Heavy and tractor-trailer drivers;
- 4) Bus and truck mechanics and diesel engine specialists;
- 5) Maintenance and Repair Workers;
- 6) First-Line Supervisors of Construction Trades and Extraction Workers; and
- 7) Operating engineers and other construction equipment operators.

Supply Chain and Logistics Occupations. The only Supply Chain and Logistics priority occupation identified in the region was “Laborers and freight, stock, and material movers, hand,” needed to move stock for warehouse operations.

Conclusion

The priority occupations identified in this report are important across the region as a whole and would therefore benefit from additional focus and attention in West Regional Transportation Workforce Center activities. Phase 2 activities will involve additional stakeholder engagement to validate Phase 1 results and to identify existing or needed programs to address job needs and priorities in the West.