

TRANSIT OPERATOR ABSENTEEISM

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(The opinions, findings, and conclusions expressed in this report are those of the author and not necessarily those of the sponsoring agencies.)

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## ABSTRACT

A nationwide survey of transit operators indicated that absenteeism among transit operators is a significant problem and that the associated costs are substantial. The objective of the research reported here was to determine the scope of operator absenteeism in Virginia and to recommend strategies to improve attendance. Information on the causes of absenteeism and attendance improvement programs was obtained through a literature review and telephone requests to selected transit systems. A questionnaire survey was conducted of transit systems in Virginia to obtain information on their experience with absenteeism and attendance improvement programs.

The report presents a general plan for improving attendance that includes a comprehensive approach to examining absenteeism and model components of an attendance improvement program.



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Causes of Transit Operator Absenteeism

In general, three types of problems cause employee absenteeism: (1) personal problems, (2) work-related problems, and (3) environmental or non-work-related problems. Two reasons for avoidable absences are lack of motivation, and the paid sick leave program. Three causal factors of particular importance in transit operator absenteeism are (1) widespread availability of overtime pay, (2) scheduling inflexibility, and (3) occupational stress.

### Attendance Improvement Programs

There are wide variations in the attendance improvement programs employed by transit systems. Four categories of attendance improvement programs are (1) discipline codes and procedures, (2) reward programs, (3) quality-of-work-life programs, and (4) related personnel programs such as attendance information system, sick leave policies, and surveillance. Transit systems with low absenteeism rates tend to have a balance of codes governing discipline and programs for rewarding good performance, formalized programs with clear, written descriptions, an attendance information system, and a commitment to improve attendance.

### Inventory of Transit Operator Absenteeism in Virginia

The analysis of the data collected through a survey of public transportation managers provided an overview of transit operator absenteeism. The data were analyzed with respect to all systems (total of 15) and to five groups--one group for specialized transportation provider, and four groups based on the number of full-time transit operators.

Discipline codes are used by most systems, reward programs by half of the systems, and quality-of-work-life programs by 1/8 of the systems. The arithmetic mean percentage and number of days of all operators unexpectedly absent for all transit systems were 3.5% and 8.8 days, respectively. The weight mean percentage and number of days for all operators were 5.1% and 11.4 days, respectively. The larger the transit system is, the higher the absenteeism rate. In the opinion of the transit managers, more than 7 full-day absences in 12 months are considered excessive. Based on this definition, 4 transit systems have attendance problems. The arithmetic mean absenteeism rate for all unexpected absences for 147 transit systems was 7.9%, much higher than Virginia's average of 3.5%.

## General Plan for Attendance Improvement Program

The general plan consists of two parts, a systematic analysis of transit operator absenteeism and model components of an attendance improvement plan. The systematic analysis consists of six steps: (1) problem identification, (2) development of goals and objectives, (3) development of alternatives, (4) evaluation of the alternatives and selection of one, (5) detailed planning of the selected alternative, and (6) implementation and follow-up. This analysis provides a comprehensive approach to examining absenteeism and implementing measures to improve attendance. The model components include (1) a policy statement on attendance, (2) discipline code and procedure, (3) a reward program, (4) work rules regarding absences, (5) attendance information systems, and (6) job enrichment of transit supervisor. The general plan permits the transit manager to adapt attendance improvement strategies that were successfully used at other transit systems or to develop a system that addresses the particular needs of his system.

### Recommendations

It is recommended that the information in this report be presented in a seminar on transit operator absenteeism. The seminar will focus on discussions with transit managers with successful attendance programs. Also, the systems with attendance problems will be contacted individually and will be encouraged to use the general plan to improve attendance.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Background

Transit operator absenteeism is measured by the number of days that an operator is expected to work (which excludes scheduled days off, vacation, and holidays) but does not. It adversely affects transit service and, consequently, transit ridership, because runs may be delayed or cancelled. Also, extra-board operators are used to cover runs that are left open by the absence of the regularly assigned drivers, and this exigency and overtime pay for substitute drivers increase the transit operating costs.

Based on responses to a nationwide survey representing 50% of the transit operators, the average operator absence was 29 days (or an approximate rate of 11.6%) for calendar 1978.(1) The costs of operator absence in that year totaled approximately \$187 million, or \$1,780 per operator.(1) The average absenteeism rate for all employees in the United States was approximately 3% in 1978.(2) Consequently, average transit operator absenteeism was almost four times greater than the national average employee absenteeism. These statistics indicate that transit operator absenteeism is a significant problem and that the associated costs are substantial.

Attendance programs are strategies or methods for reducing operator absenteeism. They fall under one or more of the following four general categories:

1. discipline codes and procedures
2. rewards for attendance
3. quality-of-work-life programs
4. personnel policies and practices supporting attendance improvement(3)

Traditionally, transit operators, like most employees, are subject to discipline codes. More recently, the benefits of reward programs have been emphasized. The combination of discipline and rewards provides a balance of negative and positive incentives. The rewards provide a reason to have an exceptionally good attendance record, whereas the

discipline discourages poor attendance. Quality-of-work-life programs-- that is, approaches to organizational changes that stress human values and human resource development--offer employees the opportunity to participate in decision making, promote productivity improvement, and may, directly or indirectly, support improved attendance.(4) Personnel policies and practices such as sick leave policy, attendance monitoring, and sick leave surveillance support improved attendance.

The scope of transit operator absenteeism and the types of attendance programs used by transit systems in Virginia are not known.

### Objective

The research reported here, which was requested by the Rail and Public Transportation Division, studied transit operator absenteeism for transit systems in Virginia. The objective was to determine the scope of operator absenteeism and to recommend strategies to improve operator attendance.

### REPORT FORMAT

The remainder of this report is divided into five major sections as follows:

1. Causes of transit operator absenteeism
2. Attendance improvement programs
3. Inventory of transit operator absenteeism in Virginia
4. A general plan for attendance improvement programs
5. Recommendations

The first section describes the factors and conditions that result in transit operator absenteeism. A review of attendance improvement programs employed by transit systems with low absenteeism rates and selected private sector programs is presented in the second section. In the third section operator absenteeism and attendance programs used by transit systems in Virginia are discussed. The general plan discusses how to examine operator absenteeism, model attendance improvement programs, and implementation planning for attendance improvement programs. The recommendations suggest how the findings of the report can be made operational.



## CAUSES OF TRANSIT OPERATOR ABSENTEEISM

The causes of transit operator absenteeism were identified through a review of the literature on absenteeism and attendance programs for employees in general and specific to transit operators.

### Employee Absenteeism

Causes for employee absenteeism may be grouped into three broad categories: personal problems; work-related or internal problems; and external or environmental problems.(5) Personal problems are the most common and include illnesses, marital and family problems, and family responsibilities. Work-related problems affect the attitudes of employees toward attendance and include poor supervision, personality conflicts, unsatisfactory working conditions, and lack of challenge or job responsibility. Occupational hazards that affect the health of the employee are also work-related problems. External problems occur away from the job but impact on the employee's ability to attend work. Transportation problems and weather conditions are examples of external problems.

Absences are either legitimate and unavoidable or illegitimate and avoidable. There are two reasons for avoidable absences: lack of motivation and the paid sick leave program.(5) Lack of motivation to attend is an expression of job dissatisfaction due to attitudinal work-related problems. Paid sick leave program absence occurs when employees perceive sick leave as a fringe benefit to be used for avoidable absences, sometimes called mental health days. Where management allows sick leave abuse, absenteeism becomes a cultural norm; that is, the often unwritten, expected, supported, and accepted way of behaving.(6) Avoidable absences exhibit certain patterns. Avoidable absences are (1) highest for low-paid workers in unpleasant surroundings, (2) often before or after days off or after payday, (3) often on evening and night shifts or weekends, and (4) highest for the teenage to 30-year old group.(6)

### Transit Operator Absenteeism

Long and Perry identified three general causes of particular importance in transit operator absenteeism: (1) widespread availability of overtime pay, (2) scheduling inflexibility, and (3) occupational stressors.(7) Each factor and patterns of transit operator absenteeism are discussed below.

### Widespread Availability of Overtime Pay(7)

The availability of overtime pay makes the economic benefits of regular attendance unclear. An operator may work overtime on his day off and more than recoup the wages lost by taking an unscheduled day off. Therefore, an operator can afford to take an unscheduled day off. Moreover, operator shortages generate cycles of absenteeism. An operator who works overtime is likely to be absent on his scheduled workday, which results in more overtime, more absenteeism, and so on. In one transit system, operators with attendance problems earned an average of 40 hours per week due to overtime availability and long hours. In other words, the availability of overtime encourages operators to be absent when they are scheduled to work.

### Scheduling Inflexibility

Scheduling inflexibility reduces the opportunity of an operator to take time off when needed or desired. If an operator is denied or not likely to receive requested time off, there is a strong chance that he will report sick or take time off on a work-related injury. The schedule inflexibility adversely affects the personal and family life of the operator.

### Occupational Stressors

Several research studies from Western Europe provide evidence that transit operators are exposed to occupational stressors that are significant determinants of health, performance, and longevity on the job.(7) The occupational stressors include tight schedules, long hours and split shifts, lack of a social support network, poorly maintained equipment, difficult interaction with passengers, and threats of physical violence.(7)

Tight schedules impose pressure on the operator to maintain the schedule. If the schedule is unrealistically tight, then the transit operator is experiencing an exercise in futility. Traffic congestion makes it difficult to maintain the schedule. Transit operators have little or no opportunity to talk to other people all day long due to long hours and split shifts.(8) They also indicated limited interactions with their spouses, children, or friends, and little participation in social and community activities.(8) Consequently, the work hours of a transit operator are often not conducive to a satisfying personal or family life. Not only are operators isolated from their family and friends, but they frequently are also an independent agent of the transit system without social support from transit top management, supervisors, and unions, nor passengers and the general public.(7) Poorly maintained equipment, difficult interaction with passengers, and threats of violence are self-explanatory.

Transit operators have little or no control over these occupational stressors. Occupational stressors have consequences for health primarily when employees do not have sufficient latitude and discretion for coping with these stressors.(8) European studies have indicated that death from cardiovascular diseases is higher in urban bus drivers. One recent Swedish study showed that urban bus drivers have a much higher output of stress hormones than do rural bus drivers.(9) The Center for Municipal Occupational Safety and Health in San Francisco is investigating stress and hypertension among San Francisco bus drivers. As a first task, it concluded that bus drivers did have a higher rate of hypertension than normal.(9) Stress and hypertension probably contribute to nonmedical-related behaviors such as excessive absenteeism and accidents.

While some occupational stress of transit operators is the result of their personal characteristics and some is the result of their working environment, most is the result of the interaction between their personal characteristics and working environment.(10) Personality differences, how the individual perceives the stressors, and consequences of stress, age, sex, race, and total hours worked influence the consequences of stress.(10)

#### Summary

A multitude of factors are related to the causes of transit operator absenteeism. The foregoing discussion cites general factors that are of especial concern to large urban area transit systems. Since some conditions are unique to individual transit systems, unique causal factors may also exist.

#### ATTENDANCE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMS

Attendance improvement programs use disciplinary actions, rewards, improved working conditions, and support programs to motivate employees to improve their attendance. Information on attendance improvement programs was obtained from the literature and from a telephone survey of 14 transit systems across the nation. The 14 systems were identified in the "Typical Weekday Absenteeism of Vehicle Operators," a quarterly report representing samples from the four seasons, prepared by the American Public Transit Association (APTA).(11) The absenteeism rates for full-time transit operators in these systems were in the lowest 25 percentile for two consecutive years for their respective groups based on the number of operators. Information was received from 11 of the systems surveyed, and 4 additional transit systems that were recommended for consideration by transit professionals. The information is summarized in four sections (1) discipline codes and procedures, (2) reward programs,

(3) quality-of-work-life programs, and (4) related personnel and other programs.

### Discipline Codes and Procedures

Twelve of the 15 transit systems (80.0%) have written discipline codes and procedures for attendance problems as well as other problems. All 12 systems employed some variation of the basic progressive steps of verbal warning, written warning, suspension, and discharge. The variations include (1) omitting the verbal warning, (2) combining the verbal and written warning steps, (3) adding counseling to the warning step(s), (4) adding multiple suspensions, and (5) adding optional actions such as counseling, suspension, or both. Two systems indicated that the operator's employment record is considered in imposing disciplinary actions. One system uses corrective discipline in lieu of punitive discipline. The five steps include a verbal reminder, two written reminders, a request that the employee advise his supervisor of his intent to protect against any subsequent absence, and termination.

The discipline procedure of 9 of the 12 systems include a quantitative measure to determine when each step should be initiated. Four systems use the number of days absent in a given time period, 3 use the number of occurrences (occasions or instances of absences; that is, multiple days of consecutive absences are considered as one absence occurrence), and 1 uses both measures. Three time periods are used: 1 year, 6 months, and 90 days (or 1 quarter). The quantitative measures that initiate the first and second steps are shown in Table 1. One system provided quantitative measures based on the use of attendance credits that were not available.

### Reward Programs

A reward program, also called positive reinforcement, is a method of acknowledging a transit operator's good attendance record. Twelve of the 15 systems (80.0%) have a reward program. It is noted that 1 system had neither a discipline procedure nor a reward program. Reward programs are divided into four groups: (1) recognition, (2) incentives, (3) sick leave policy changes, and (4) job performance incentives. The criteria for recognition and rewards ranged from perfect attendance (required by 3 systems) to a maximum of 3 absent days or occurrences (required by 1 system each).

#### Recognition

Recognition is an expression of appreciation for behavior. Three methods of recognizing good attendance were noted: (1) a letter of

commendation on good attendance, (2) a photograph in a local newspaper, and (3) an announcement at a board meeting. Letters of commendation were used alone by 2 transit systems while 1 each used the other two methods in combination with a reward. One system that goes to great length to recognize and applaud exemplary attendance employed a letter of commendation, congratulatory notices in workplaces, a feature in the employee newsletter, local newspaper coverage as a press release or paid congratulatory ads, and a buffet lunch with the executive director.

Table 1

Quantitative Measures Used to Initiate Disciplinary Actions

Number of Absent Days

<u>in 1 year</u>	<u>Next step initiated for</u>
7	2 absences in 45 days
6	7 absences in 1 year
7	9 absences in 1 year
<u>in 1 quarter</u>	
5	1 absence in next 90 days

Number of Absent Occurrences or Incidents

<u>in 1 year</u>	7 occurrences in 1 year
5	
<u>in 6 months</u>	3 or more additional occurrences in 90 days
7	
<u>in 1 quarter(90 days)</u>	2nd offense (3 occurrences or 5 days in a
3 (or 5 days)	quarter) in 1 year
5	1 occurrence in next 90 days

Incentives

Incentives are given to encourage desired behavior and performance. Three forms were noted: (1) awards, (2) time off, and (3) monetary rewards. Awards of items such as certificates, plaques, and lapel pins were used by 2 systems. One system allowed an extra day off for perfect attendance. One awarded savings bonds valued at \$50 for each year of accumulated perfect attendance. Another awarded \$100 for 1 year, \$300

for 2 consecutive years, and \$500 for the third and each subsequent consecutive year of excellent attendance.

Also, it is noted that having the time period based on a calendar year is limiting in that poor attendance for any portion of the year will result in ineligibility for rewards for the entire year. An alternative is to base eligibility on satisfying the attendance requirement for any four consecutive quarters and make awards quarterly.

One reference concluded that most attendance award programs are either short-term in their effect or reward employees who would have good attendance records without the incentive.<sup>(12)</sup> There are some exceptions, one being award programs that have a shortened success cycle; that is, a shorter time period such as 1 month instead of a year. The programs, especially lottery systems, usually produce good results.

The Milwaukee County Transit System began an operator incentive program entitled "Individual Recognition Award" (IRA) on January 1, 1985, to reward operators who have excellent work records, especially attendance records, and to provide an incentive for those who may not. An operator with no missed runs due to late arrivals nor absences during a 4-month period will receive a letter of commendation and a \$30 gift certificate for dinner at 1 of 6 restaurants. All operators with no missed runs, two or fewer absences, and no written warnings or suspensions during the 4-month period are eligible for a drawing for prizes (or lottery) held at the end of the period. The prizes are a color television valued to \$400, a video cassette recorder valued to \$400, a microwave oven valued to \$300, 4 mini-televisions valued to \$100 each and a preferred parking space for a 4-month period at each station. Days off for vacations, holidays, personal days, jury duty, company required court appearances, union required absence, and military duty of 10 days or less are not considered an absence. Partial days off are considered as a full-day absence. A comparison the first 4 months of 1985 and those of 1984 (no IRA) showed that the total absence per operator decreased 18.8% with the IRA while the absenteeism rate decreased 1.7%, from 8.4% to 6.7%. It is noted that the system has over 970 transit operators.

An attendance incentive payment based on each hour actually worked is provided at the Metropolitan Transit Authority in Flint, Michigan. The incentive payment of \$0.10/hour is paid monthly and quarterly, and \$0.15/hour is paid annually for a total incentive payment of \$0.35/hour in a year. Since the base wage rate is \$8.70/hour, a 4% wage increase is realized with perfect attendance. There are also incentive payments for safety, rule compliance, and professionalism such that a total of 15% of an operator's salary can be in incentive payments. The incentive program, which costs \$90,000 a year, avoids costs of over \$300,000 a year, for a net annual savings of about \$210,000.

### Sick Leave Policy Changes

Two sick leave policy changes that encourage attendance by discouraging the use of sick leave for avoidable absences are a sick leave buy-back policy and an attendance credit system.

At VIA Metropolitan Transit in San Antonio, Texas, a 2-year trial program has been implemented in which employees with 105 days in their sick leave bank will be paid for the sick leave days over 105 days at a rate based on sick leave usage in the previous 12 months. The rates are given below.

<u>Sick Leave Usage in Days</u>	<u>Buy Back Rate Per Day</u>
0	\$30
1	25
2	20
3	15
4	10
5	5
over 6	0

In the attendance credit system at the Ann Arbor Transportation Authority, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1 attendance credit is earned for each 45 consecutive days with no absence occurrence with a maximum accumulation of 6 credits. All new employees are granted 2 credits. The disciplinary procedure for absenteeism is initiated when an employee has 1 absence occurrence in 12 months for which he has no attendance credit. The use of sick leave is considered as an absence occurrence unless hospital confinement occurs. Workers' compensation injury is exempt.

### Job Performance Recognition and Incentives

The purpose of job performance recognition and incentive programs is to recognize and honor outstanding transit operators. The 2 transit systems that employed this program (Metropolitan Transit Commission (MTC), St. Paul, Minnesota, and the Capital District Transportation Authority, Albany, New York) have two types of annual awards, the highest performance driver (gold medal, or distinguished, driver) and the above average performance driver (silver medal, or meritorious, driver). The MTC transit system awards drivers as master drivers and senior drivers for the highest performance in 5 years and 10 years, respectively, and the years need not be consecutive. Attendance is the primary performance area noted, since 6 of the 9 criteria for one system, and 5 of 9 criteria for the other are related to attendance. The criteria include the number of sick occurrences, excused absences, total of sick occurrences and

excusable absences in days, number of unexcused absences, misses, and late reports, number of accidents (chargeable and nonchargeable), number of passenger complaints, and number of written warnings or suspensions.

The awards are listed in Table 2. Where the awards differ between the two systems, the awards of one is listed in parentheses.

Table 2

Awards for Job Performance

Highest Performance Driver

1. Eight hours pay or eight hours off scheduled with management's approval
2. \$100 savings bond (or \$50 gift certificate)
3. Special uniform patch (or badge)
4. Name inscribed on honor roll in each division or garage
5. Recognition in the employee newsletter
6. Certificate

Above Average Driver

1. \$75 savings bond (or \$50 gift certificate)
2. Name inscribed on honor roll in each division or garage
3. Recognition in the employee newsletter
4. Certificate

In its first year of operation, the driver recognition program of the MTC cost \$73,056. It was noted that overall operator performance was improving. Thirty-five percent of the operators received awards. The 322 operators (25.7%) who received the distinguished driver award provided an estimated savings of \$446,770. All operators (total of 1,347) provided an estimated savings of \$883,176, with 80.5% of the savings being due to improved attendance. The benefit to cost ratio is 12:1. For a program cost of \$50 per driver, the MTC saved \$650 per driver, the equivalent of their biweekly pay check. It is noted that some of the savings may be attributed to operator training programs and a regimented absenteeism code.

Quality-of-Work-Life Programs(4)

Three quality-of-work-life techniques for transit operators are recommended for all transit systems: incentives, labor management committees, and task forces. Job enrichment for transit supervisors also affects operators. Incentives were discussed in the previous sections, the other techniques are discussed below.



### Labor Management Committees

A labor management committee is a structured group of union representatives and managers that meets regularly to solve mutual problems involving employee development and organizational goals. The variety of structures and procedures permit accommodation to almost any type of unionized environment.

### Task Forces

Task forces are commonly used to expand participation in decision making. Task forces, particularly those involving participation across departments and all levels of the organization, are especially useful for large systems or where a low-risk first step is appropriate for development of a quality-of-work-life program. Task forces can improve morale by involving employees in decisions that affect their work, and consequently can improve the productivity of the organization.

### Job Enrichment of Transit Supervisors

Quality-of-work-life programs for transit supervisors, such as job enrichment, are likely to positively influence transit operators. Job enrichment is the addition of tasks, responsibility, and autonomy of work to enhance the meaningfulness of the job and thus increase the internal motivation to perform productively. At the San Diego Transit Corporation, the authority of one manager, the director of transportation, to manage about 650 transit operators was decentralized and distributed among 26 road supervisors.<sup>(13)</sup> The group supervisors program had seven objectives: (1) to increase managerial effectiveness, (2) to reduce absenteeism, (3) to improve supervision and establish guidelines for performance, (4) to improve the operators' perceptions of management, (5) to reward supervisory performance by incentive, (6) to improve employee relations, and (7) to establish a feeling of worth within all employees. The supervisors were trained in management skills including communications, managing conflict, employee relations, and handling disciplinary actions. They provided input into the development of a computerized attendance information system, an attendance policy, including numerical standards, applied quarterly, and discipline standards. Each supervisor is responsible for from 20 to 26 operators. Also, there are annual contests between groups. The supervisors and operators were positively affected. Operator absenteeism dropped from 13.0% in 1981 to 8.2% in 1983. Approximately \$600,000 to \$700,000 were saved in 1983 alone.

## Personnel and Other Related Programs

Personnel programs that support improvements in attendance include 1) absenteeism policies, 2) attendance information systems (record keeping system) for monitoring attendance, 3) job applicant screening, 4) sick leave surveillance, 5) counseling, 6) alcohol and drug rehabilitation programs, and 7) operator availability management. Establishing operator availability levels is a related program. The no-fault absenteeism policy, and attendance monitoring, are discussed below.

### No-Fault Absenteeism Policy(14)

In a no-fault absenteeism policy, the inevitability of an occasional absence is recognized and the common tendency to blame the employee for not coming to work is avoided. Since there are no excused or unexcused absences, employees need not prove the legitimacy of their absence and managers need not determine if the absence is excused. Each absence is recorded as one occurrence regardless of the length to avoid penalizing the infrequently absent employee who is genuinely ill for 2 or more days and to place a relatively greater penalty upon the chronic absentee who claims a large number of single-day absences with a pattern. Part absences are charged as follows: arriving up to 10 minutes late--1/4 occurrence; arriving over 10 minutes late, leaving work and returning, or leaving work early--1/2 occurrence. No calls or failure to report one's intention of being absent are charged as 2 occurrences.

A limited number of absences such as funeral leave, military leave, jury duty, work-related injury, and hospital confinement may be defined as nonchargeable absences. For each month of perfect attendance, an employee may deduct 1 occurrence from his record.

The four-step progressive disciplinary procedure that is administered according to the number of occurrences accumulated by an employee in a consecutive 12-month period is applied in a corrective manner. The disciplinary method is focused on solving the employee's problem and motivating the employee to comply with the organization's policies. Suspension is avoided since it may be counterproductive to regular work attendance. The no-fault system is clear-cut and each employee is treated the same, regardless of the circumstances.

A no-fault absenteeism policy may be a viable alternative for improving attendance where

1. the absenteeism rate, especially that for single-day absences, is determined to be excessive, for example in reference 14, above 5%,

2. tardiness and other forms of part-absences are causing significant work disruptions,
3. opportunities for job redesign or work environment improvements are minimal,
4. labor leaders accept and support the no-fault concept, and
5. there is a need to implement absence-related discipline more fairly and uniformly.

### Attendance Information System

An attendance information system (AIS) can be used to identify transit operators with exceptionally good and poor attendance records for reward and for disciplinary action, respectively, to review the attendance record of operators individually, system-wide, and by division for analysis for attendance problems, and to compare trends over time. The system should be tailored to the informational needs of the transit system. Attendance records may be reviewed daily, weekly, or monthly and may consist of monthly, quarterly, semiannual, and annual reports. The reporting format and schedule should satisfy the needs of a disciplinary code and reward program. Manual and computer AIS systems are used. Also, form letters recognizing exemplary attendance, and disciplinary actions are an important aspect of individual transit operator records. Attendance information may be considered as one component of a transit management information system.

### Conclusion

The descriptions of attendance improvement programs provided information on techniques that can be implemented to improve attendance. Three weaknesses were noted in the information provided by the transit systems. Several transit systems did not monitor nor evaluate the attendance improvement programs; therefore, no data were available on their programs' effectiveness. Secondly, the operating costs of some programs were absorbed as administrative costs, so it is not possible to determine the cost of administering some of the programs. Finally, the above weaknesses, singly and in combination, make it impossible to quantitatively measure cost-effectiveness. Moreover, each transit system incorporates some unique features in its programs, possibly to better serve its needs. Consequently, there is no one set of attendance improvement programs that have been successfully demonstrated. However, there are some similarities in the programs as follows:

1. a commitment to improve attendance
2. a balance of positive and negative reinforcements
3. an attendance information system,
4. formal, written descriptions of the programs that are clear and understandable.

## INVENTORY OF TRANSIT OPERATOR ABSENTEEISM IN VIRGINIA

A survey questionnaire on absenteeism was sent to public transportation managers in Virginia to obtain information on attendance programs and levels of operator absenteeism. Responses were received from 15 of 22 (68%) transit systems. The systems that were surveyed and those that responded are listed in Appendix A. The systems were divided into 5 groups as noted in Table 3.

Table 3

Number of Transit Systems by Groups

<u>Group</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Number of Transit Systems</u>
A	Specialized transportation providers that also serve the general public	3
B	Systems with less than 10 full-time (FT) operators	3
C	Systems with 10-20 FT operators	4
D	Systems with 21-80 FT operators	2
E	Systems with 81-260 FT operators	<u>3</u>
Total		15

These groupings were selected since transit systems with similar size operating staffs tend to have similar operating environment characteristics such as service area size and population, and organizational structure. The arithmetic mean values, or typical responses, for each group are discussed in the inventory. The information is discussed in the following sections under (1) operating environment, (2) attendance improvement programs, and (3) operator absenteeism.

### Operating Environment

Previous studies and experience indicate that the operating environment influences attendance. The factors considered in the operating environment are the number of transit operators, operator-supervisor ratios, person(s) responsible for managing specific activities related to transit operators, and practices of monitoring attendance (Table 4). The mean number of operators per supervisor for all systems was 18, with a maximum group mean of 20. This ratio is reasonable and manageable. In the 3 smaller groups, the manager, and for 1 group, also the supervisor, manages the transit operator for most activities. The transit system's top executive, or the director,

sometimes handles the incentive programs. For the 2 larger groups, the responsibilities are typically divided among the dispatcher, supervisor, and director of transportation. Absences are typically monitored by a review of time sheets and attendance summaries on a daily or as-needed basis.

### Attendance Improvement Programs

In this section, the extent to which attendance improvement programs are used by transit systems in Virginia is examined in five components: (1) disciplinary codes, (2) recognition, (3) incentives, (4) quality-of-work-life, and (5) personnel programs.

#### Disciplinary Codes

From Table 5, it can be seen that 12 of the 15 (80%) transit systems reported having a progressive disciplinary code that typically has 4 steps--verbal warning, written warning, suspension, and termination. Variations include (1) multiple suspensions, (2) preventive counseling when an attendance problem is anticipated, and (3) a corrective interview in lieu of suspension for a no-fault absenteeism policy. Four of the 5 largest systems included numerical guidelines for disciplinary actions. These guidelines have several advantages: (1) they clearly specify conditions that define excessive absenteeism and warrant disciplinary action and are not subject solely to the manager's judgement, and (2) they facilitate consistent and fair administration of the disciplinary policy among all operators.

Four of the 5 larger transit systems utilize the extraboard assignment as a disciplinary measure. For example, if an operator is absent (or late) 3 times in 30 days, he is placed at the bottom of the extraboard assignment list the following day without a guarantee of work. An operator's attendance record is considered in performance evaluations by 1 system and for merit increases by 2 systems.

#### Recognition

Two techniques for acknowledging and applauding exemplary attendance used in Virginia are a letter of commendation and a monthly posting of perfect attendance. Four of the 15 (27%) systems use a letter of commendation. One system acknowledges perfect attendance over a 6-month period by a letter of congratulations sent to the operator and spouse. The family shares in the recognition. While less personal, the monthly posting also informs fellow operators of one's perfect attendance. The Greater Lynchburg Transit Company supplements the monthly notice with a quarterly notice.

Table 4

Operating Environment of Transit Operators in Virginia

	<u>Specialized Services</u>	<u>Under 10 FT Operators</u>	<u>10-20 FT Operators</u>	<u>21-80 FT Operators</u>	<u>81-260 FT Operators</u>	<u>Total</u>
1. Mean no. of transit operators (standard deviation)						
a. full-time	3(4)	6(2)	14(3)	40(7)	180(90)	46(78)
b. part-time	7(5)	4(2)	2(2)	3(4)	7(9)	4(5)
c. extraboard	0(0)	1(1)	3(3)	3(4)	32(18)	15(20)
2. Mean no. of operators per supervisor (standard deviation)	10(10)	16(6)	18(6)	20	19(1)	18(5)
3. Person who :						
monitors attendance	manager	supervisor	manager	dispatcher or supervisor	dispatcher	
monitors performance	manager	supervisor or manager	manager	supervisor	supervisor	
evaluates performance	manager	supervisor or manager	manager	director of transportation	supervisor	
handles disciplinary actions	manager	manager	manager	director of transportation	director of transportation	
handles incentive programs	manager or system director	manager or system director	manager	director of transportation	human resources director	
4. Monitoring absences: items reviewed	time sheets	time sheets summary	time sheets summary	time sheets summary	summary	
frequency of review	monthly	variable and as-needed	variable and as-needed	daily	daily	

Table 5

Number of Virginia Transit Systems Using Attendance Improvement Programs

	Specialized Services	Under 10 FT Operators	10-20 FT Operators	21-80 FT Operators	81-260 FT Operators	Total
A. Discipline Codes and Procedures						
1. Progressive discipline code	2	3	2	2	3	12
2. Numerical guidelines for discipline codes	0	0	0	2	2	4
3. Extraboard assignments	0	0	0	1	3	4
4. Considered in actions taken in performance evaluations and/or merit increases	0	2	1	0	0	3
B. Recognition						
1. Letter of commendation	0	1	1	0	2	4
2. Monthly notice posting of perfect attendance	0	0	0	1	1	2
C. Incentives						
1. Priority in selecting days off	0	1*	0	0	0	1
2. Priority in overtime assignments	0	1*	0	0	0	1
3. Annual awards banquet	0	1	0	1	1	3
4. Prizes (minor such as snacks)	0	1	0	0	1	2
5. Cash awards	0	0	0	1	0	1
6. An extra day off	1	0	0	0	0	1
7. Special social activity	0	0	0	0	1	1
8. No incentive (or recognition) program	2	1	3	0	1	7
D. Systems without a formal recognition or incentive program	2	1	3	0	1	7
E. Systems without a formal discipline procedure, recognition or incentive program	1	0	2	0	0	3

Table 5, continued

	Specialized Services	Under 10 FT Operators	10-20 FT Operators	21-80 FT Operators	81-260 FT Operators	Total
<b>F. Quality-of-work-life programs</b>						
1. Labor-management committees	0	0	1	0	1	2
2. Operator teams	0	0	0	1	1	2
3. Operator meetings	0	2	0	0	0	2
<b>G. Personnel Programs</b>						
1. Attendance information systems						
a. Manual	1	3	4	2	2	12
b. Computer	0	0	0	0	1	1
2. Job applicant screening						
a. Attendance	1	2	1	2	2	8
b. Employment tenure	0	2	1	2	0	4
c. Probation	0	2	1	2	3	7
3. Sick leave surveillance						
a. Doctor's note	2 <sup>a</sup>	2 <sup>a</sup>	3 <sup>b</sup>	2	2	11
b. Telephone calls	0	1	2 <sup>b</sup>	1	2	6
c. Home visits	0	0	0	1	3	4
4. No sick leave	1	1	0	0	0	2
5. No-fault absenteeism policy	0	1	0	0	0	2
6. Counseling	1	2	2	0	3	7
7. Alcohol/drug rehabilitation program	0	2	2	0	1	5
8. Employee assistance program	1	1	0	0	0	2

\*informal programs

<sup>a</sup>includes 1 system with a waiting period of 2 or more days

<sup>b</sup>this surveillance technique is optional for 1 system



## Incentives

Seven types of incentives were identified. One system informally gives priority in selecting days off and overtime assignments based on attendance records. Annual awards banquets that usually recognize and reward drivers for numerous areas of performance, including perfect attendance, are used by 3 transit systems. The prizes or nonmonetary awards administered by 2 systems include pins, plaques, paperweights, certificates, and surplus supplies. The Greater Roanoke Transit Company provides a cash award of \$25 for each quarter of perfect attendance and \$125 for perfect attendance throughout a year. Another transit system experimented with a cash award based on a pay incentive of \$0.10 per hour that was unsuccessful as evidenced by the following reasons: (1) there was no change in attendance, and (2) one driver who had a history of excellent attendance kept winning. A specialized transportation service provider awards a day off to operators with excellent attendance. The Greater Richmond Transit Company awards a group of operators with 1 year of perfect attendance with an evening at a dinner theater with a spouse or date, the general manager, and director of transportation.

It was noted that 7 transit systems (47%) have no formal recognition or incentive programs.

## Quality-of-work-life

Labor-management committees, operator teams, and operator meetings are each employed in the operations of 2 transit systems (Table 5). The Greater Richmond Transit Company establishes a team of 1 supervisor, transit operators, and mechanics varying in size from 18 to 21 persons each quarter by lottery pick of the supervisor. The team having the lowest combined number of unexcused absences, chargeable accidents, valid complaints, and repeated mechanical work in a quarter is awarded an evening at a popular night club (or other social activities) with a spouse or date. The group of operators that are assigned to a supervisor is sometimes referred to as an operator team as well as a group supervisor program. Operator meetings are sponsored by 2 systems.

## Personnel Programs

AIS monitoring was used by all of the public transit systems and 1 of the 3 specialized services systems. Only 1 system had a computerized AIS. Only 6 of the 15 systems (40%) submitted a copy of their AIS record or summary report. Four of these systems employ an annual attendance record for each operator. The number of categories of information reported ranged from 3-15. The remaining 2 systems provided a monthly summary for all operators, with 1 summary being part of a computerized operators information system. AIS is discussed further under "model components of attendance improvement programs." Job applicant screening

was employed to varying degrees. Sick leave surveillance by doctor's note was the most common form of surveillance, followed by telephone calls or home visits. When the operator reports sick, he is asked where he can be reached during the day if he won't be at home. With home visits as employed by the Greater Richmond Transit Company, if the operator is not at home, a card is left noting the supervisor's visit and requesting that he call the dispatcher as soon as possible. Telephone calls and especially home visits accomplish three objectives: (1) an absent operator will stay confined to his home rather than leave for personal or social activities if he is on sick leave because he expects a call or visit, (2) the supervisor, on behalf of the transit system, expresses a concern for the individual operator's health and a willingness to help such as running an errand to the store, etc., and (3) if the operator is not at home for a length of time, the legitimacy of his illness may be suspect. One way to avoid sick leave abuse is not to have sick leave, as is the practice of 2 systems. James City County Transit employs unscheduled leave and a no-fault absenteeism policy. Counseling, alcohol and drug rehabilitation programs, and employee assistance programs are methods of aiding an operator or employee to deal with personal problems that affect his employment. About half of the systems perform counseling.

#### Operator Absenteeism

Information on the absenteeism experience of transit operators in Virginia during 1984 is shown in Table 6. Vehicle operator absenteeism is measured by the number of unexpected absences (whether scheduled or not) other than scheduled days off, vacations, and holidays. This includes (1) injury-on-duty-related absences for injury, illness, and resulting medical appointments and time off that are duty-related whether paid or unpaid; (2) other medically-related absences for injury, illness, medical appointment, or family illness that is not duty-related whether paid or unpaid; (3) other excused absences with employer's approval for a non-medically-related reason such as jury duty, court appearance, bereavement leave, military leave, union business, employee-requested extra day off, suspension, etc.; and (4) unexcused absences without leave. This definition is consistent with that used by the APTA for its absenteeism data.<sup>(11)</sup> The mean percentage of all operators in Virginia unexpectedly absent for all transit systems, excluding specialized services, was 3.5%. The mean annual number of unexpected absent days per operator is 8.8, excluding specialized services. The absenteeism experience increases as the size of the system increases. The mean values are based on the arithmetic means of the transit systems. The mean percentage of absenteeism and number of absences based on the weighted mean of all operators in Virginia are 5.1% and 11.4 days, respectively.

Table 6

		Transit Operator Absenteeism					
		Specialized Services	Under 10 FT Operators	10-20 FT Operators	21-80 FT Operators	81-260 FT Operators	Total
A.	1984 Statistics						
1.	Mean percentage of all operators unexpectedly absent (standard deviation)	1.8 (1.6)	1.3 (0.9)	3.0 (1.6)	3.9 (0.9)	6.2 (1.7)	3.2 (2.2)
	APTA statistics for comparison	N/A	7.0	7.0	7.4	8.2	3.5 <sup>a</sup> (2.2)
2.	Mean number of unexpected absences per operator (standard deviation)	4.9 (3.9)	3.2 (2.5)	8.1 (5.0)	10.5 (3.5)	14.0 (3.6)	8.0 (5.2)
							8.8 <sup>a</sup> (5.3)
B.	Opinions on Absenteeism						
1.	Mean minimum number of absent days represents excessive absenteeism (standard deviation)	10.0 (12.5)	5.0 (0.0)	8.0 (3.5)	6.5 (0.7)	6.5 (2.1)	6.7 <sup>a</sup> (2.2)
2.	Absenteeism is a problem in this system since the mean number of unexpected absence is 7 or more (number of responses per group)	0	0	1	1	2	4

<sup>a</sup>Specialized services are omitted.

The most critical question in studying absenteeism is, What is an excessive number of absences? Based on the opinion of transit managers, the mean minimum number of absences considered excessive for all transit systems was 6.7, or rounded off, 7. The mean number of absences for 3 of the 5 groups, or 3 of the 4 public transit oriented groups, was above 7. Seven of the 15 systems (47%) had a mean number of absences above 7. On the other hand, only four managers believed that their systems had an absenteeism problem.

Another concern that makes comparison difficult is that transit managers and absenteeism policies tend to view absenteeism differently. Most policies are vague and leave excessive absenteeism to be defined by the manager. Two systems' policies omit absence due to personal injury or personal illness when examining absenteeism. One system omits absence with medical documentation while another excludes absences due to substantial or other extenuating circumstances. Excused leaves for medical and nonmedical reasons are not chargeable to excessive absenteeism. One system considers excessive sick absence as more than 6 short-term (14 working days or less) absences in 12 months. Chargeable absences will be further discussed in the next section.

From APTA data, it was found that the average typical weekday absenteeism rate for all unexpected absences for 147 transit systems was 7.9%.<sup>(11)</sup> Only 1 Virginia transit system exceeded this average. Moreover, this was the only system with a rate over 6.0%. The APTA average rate is 2.3 times greater than the arithmetic mean rate of 3.5% for Virginia transit systems. Therefore, it is concluded that Virginia transit systems operator absenteeism experience is much lower than the national average for transit operators. From 1979 to 1982, the average absenteeism rate steadily declined from 2.9% to 2.1%.<sup>(2)</sup> The decline is attributed to the increase in the unemployment rate over the same period.<sup>(2)</sup> Data from 274 companies revealed a 1984 annual average absence rate of 1.9%.<sup>(15)</sup> The 1983 rate was also 1.9%. Given that 1.9% (or about 5 days) is the average for all employees, the 7 days of absences in 1 year, or 2.8% rate, is reasonably considered as the threshold of excessive absenteeism, as was suggested by the transit managers surveyed.

Therefore, for the purposes of this study more than 7 unexpected absences in 12 months, an absenteeism rate greater than 2.8%, is considered excessive.

### Causes of and Possible Solutions to Absenteeism

The transit managers were asked to identify the causes of absenteeism and possible solutions. The responses are listed in Table 7.

Table 7

Causes of and Possible Solutions to Absenteeism

	<u>Number of Responses</u>
a) <u>Causes</u>	
1. injury, illness	3
2. lack of concern by the operator, i.e, poor work skills	3
3. absenteeism culture, i.e, sick leave policy encourages	2
4. absenteeism lack of follow-up, enforcement of policy	2
5. insufficient monitoring	1
6. need for a driver's manual to clearly communicate policy	1
	<u>Number of Responses</u>
b) <u>Possible Solutions</u>	
1. incentives or improved reward system	2
2. keeping operators informed of attendance problems by monitoring each operator	1
3. renegotiating sick leave in contract	1
4. development of a driver's manual	1
5. a stronger discipline procedure	1
6. sick leave surveillance by visiting homes	1
7. development of a wellness program	1
8. improving applicant screening	1

For the most part, the causes are in agreement with the earlier discussion on causes of absenteeism. The suggested solutions, in most cases, acknowledge the need to strengthen or develop an attendance improvement program. Counseling, alcohol and drug rehabilitation, and employee assistance programs are all also considered as wellness programs. Wellness is defined as a freely chosen life style aimed at achieving and maintaining an individual's good health.(16) Wellness programs related to stress management and high blood pressure may be especially appropriate for transit operators, based on their greater than normal risk of high blood pressure as found in San Francisco.

Conclusion

A variety of techniques have been incorporated into attendance improvement programs of transit systems in Virginia. Disciplinary codes

and procedures are used extensively, and the numerical guidelines in the codes are beneficial. However, 7 (47%) of the systems do not employ reward programs. It is noted that 3 of these 7 systems have the highest absenteeism rate for their respective group, while 3 of the other systems have absenteeism rates at 1.0% or lower. In general, transit operator absences increase as the size of the system increases. Consequently, the larger the system, the greater the potential benefits of an attendance improvement program.

### GENERAL PLAN FOR ATTENDANCE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

Two results from the previous sections form the framework for the development of this plan: (1) each transit system is unique in its structure, attendance and performance goals and standards, and consequently its need for an attendance improvement program; and (2) despite the uniqueness of each system, there are some key components that should be considered in an attendance improvement program.

Consequently, the general plan for attendance improvement consists of (1) a systematic analysis for identifying and addressing operator absenteeism problems for a transit system, and (2) model components of attendance improvement programs. These are discussed below.

#### A Systematic Analysis of Transit Operator Absenteeism

The systematic analysis of transit operator absenteeism is a six-step process of (1) problem identification, (2) development of goals and objectives for solving the problem, (3) development of alternatives to improve attendance, (4) evaluation of the alternatives, (5) detailed planning of the selected alternative, and (6) implementation and follow-up of an attendance improvement program. An overview of the analysis is displayed in Figure 1 and the steps are discussed under the following subheadings.

##### Problem Identification

In the first step, problem identification, all of the information on attendance and absenteeism is inventoried to determine if there is an absenteeism problem. This information comprises the following:

1. data on attendance/absence individually and system-wide
2. policies on absenteeism
3. standards on absenteeism
4. discipline codes and procedures relative to attendance
5. positive reinforcement programs related to attendance

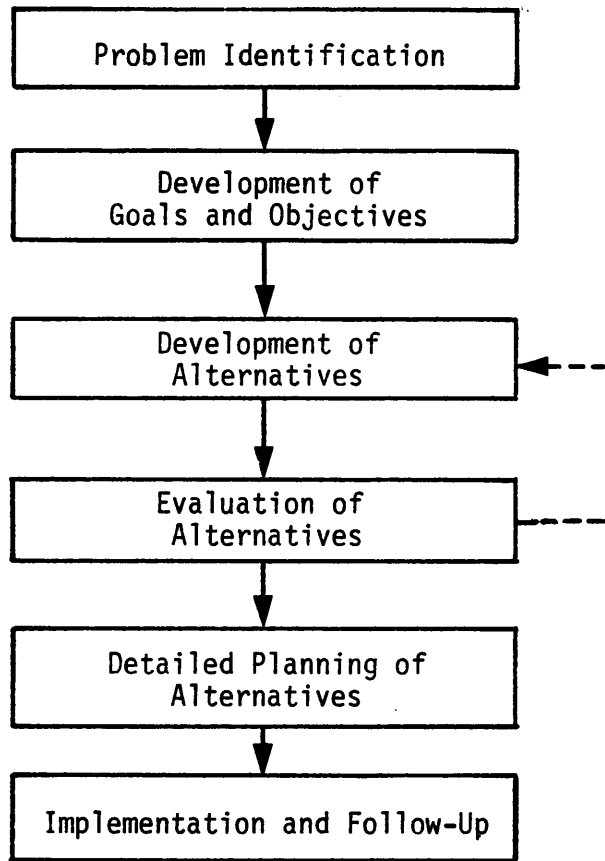


Figure 1. Systems analysis of transit operator absenteeism.

6. cultural norms relative to absenteeism--unwritten rules
7. policies and use of overtime
8. the means by and extent to which the attendance related information was communicated and the extent to which policies and standards are understood by the operators

The most commonly used measure of absenteeism is the absenteeism rate computed as

$$\text{absenteeism rate (in \%)} = \frac{\text{total no. of absence days (person-days)}}{\text{work force size} \times \text{no. of work days}} \times 100\%$$

For the computation, a time period of 1 year is preferred. Additionally, the monthly absenteeism rate over a 1-year period will identify temporal and seasonal variations. The absenteeism rate may be compared to the average rate for transit operators by the system groups and by all systems in Virginia as discussed in the previous section or by national statistics as prepared by APTA.(11) Local data on employee absenteeism are also helpful. For example, if an absenteeism rate is more than 2 percentage points above the average, then a problem may be present. This differential may be used as a rule of thumb, although much judgement is required. The organizational structure and operations, and social, economic, geographical, and cultural characteristics that affect absenteeism at a particular transit system may be considered.

Second, the cost of absenteeism should be determined. For completeness and fairness, the attendance of all employees should be inventoried. Attendance data by employment position or for non-operator employees may provide a comparison with those for transit operators.

Third, the policies, standards, discipline codes and procedures, and positive reinforcement programs related to attendance should be collected and reviewed to determine if they are weak, vague, outdated, or nonexistent. Any item that is found to be inadequate should be improved. Similarly, the enforcement of or compliance with each item should be reviewed for adequacy and considered for needed improvement. One way to examine enforcement is to compare the number of operators disciplined for attendance problems with the number of operators or employees who are considered to have attendance problems.

Fourth, the cultural norms, or unwritten rules, of absenteeism may be inventoried by informally or formally contacting persons at all levels of management and the transit operators. Concurrently, inquiries should be made on the causes of absenteeism based on the previous discussion on absenteeism. If the cultural norms conflict with the written rules, i.e., policies, standards, etc., then this conflict should be resolved.



Fifth, as discussed in a previous section, excessive use of overtime may result in a cycle that encourages absenteeism. An examination of overtime use will determine if overtime may be a problem. If overtime is a problem, then it should be resolved by using methods to improve operator availability.

Finally, it shall be determined if the formal rules on absenteeism have been communicated to the transit operators and if the operators understand the policies, standards, etc., that govern absenteeism. If it is found that knowledge and understanding of existing policies are lacking, then one solution to any absenteeism problem is to communicate the existing attendance programs to the operators.

#### Development of Goals and Objectives for an Attendance Program

Following the thorough review of current absenteeism and the desired absenteeism rate, an attendance program may be planned. To provide direction as to what the program is expected to achieve, goals and objectives are established. The goal of the program is the desired end state that it is expected to achieve. An objective is a measurable result that is to be attained. Examples of a goal and objectives for an attendance program are shown in Table 8. Participation by employees at all levels of the transit system is encouraged.

#### Development of Alternatives to Increase Attendance

Alternatives are developed to address the problems as reflected in the goals and objectives. In most cases, there are several alternatives to address each objective. An estimate of the costs of planning, implementing, and operating each alternative is important and desired. An estimate of the effectiveness of each alternative is also desirable; however, this may be difficult to assess, especially in terms of an expected reduction in absenteeism. On the other hand, the effectiveness of some components of an attendance program, such as alternative AIS, may be relatively easy to assess. Examples of alternatives are given in Table 9. It is noted that not all alternatives have significant monetary costs. Any existing attendance programs may be used as a base alternative. Other alternatives include those discussed in the previous section on attendance improvement programs in a similar or modified form, programs used locally or nationally in non-transit industries, including those in the public and private sectors, and any program that is created by the transit system staff.

## Table 8

### Examples of Goal and Objectives

Goal: Reduce transit operator absenteeism through a balanced attendance program with disciplinary and reward programs.

Objectives:

1. To reduce the annual absenteeism rate by 2% or more
2. To improve the discipline codes and procedures by adding numerical criteria and by strict enforcement
3. To develop a reward program system with periodic and annual feedback
4. To provide job enrichment for operator supervisors by giving them more responsibility for the operators and by training
5. To develop a microcomputer based attendance information system
6. To incorporate attendance rates as a factor in the performance appraisal

The participation of management and transit operators, possibly by means of a task force, is encouraged. If desired, the maximum amount of money that may be expended to solve the problems may be specified to facilitate acceptance. For example, if management is willing to commit a maximum total of \$2,000 for reward, then this limitation should be noted. On the other hand, such limitations may severely restrict the generation of alternatives. The guideline suggested here is to be reasonable or practical. The number of alternatives should range from two to five, since more than five become difficult to manage. If the preliminary planning develops more than five alternatives, a screening should be performed to reduce the number to five or fewer.

### Evaluation of Alternatives

In the evaluation of the alternatives benefit/cost and cost-effectiveness analyses are useful techniques. The benefit/cost analysis assesses the alternatives in terms of the benefits likely to be derived in monetary terms versus the annual costs of the alternative, whereas cost-effectiveness examines the costs relative to the nonmonetary

## Table 9

### Examples of Alternatives

#### A. Numerical Criteria for Disciplinary Codes

1. None
2. Number of absences in 1 year--disciplinary action: 8-verbal warning, 9-written warning, 10-suspension, 11-suspension, 12-discharge
3. Number of instances of absences in 4 months--discipline action: 3-verbal warning, 4-written warning, 5-suspension, 6-discharge
4. Number of absences in 6 months--discipline action: 4-verbal warning, 5-written warning, 6-suspension, 7-discharge

#### B. A Reward Program with Periodic and Annual Feedback

1. Annual letter of recognition for perfect attendance (existing)
2. At 6 month intervals--letter of recognition for perfect attendance and an honor roll; annually--a certificate, badge, and \$25 bonus for perfect attendance
3. At 4 month intervals--letter of recognition for perfect attendance and an eligibility lottery drawing of 2 prizes or gift certificates valued at \$100; annually--a certificate, badge, and \$100 for perfect attendance.

#### C. Microcomputer Based AIS

1. None - manual system
2. Microcomputer solely for attendance
  - a. commercially available software
  - b. custom-made software
3. Microcomputer network for payroll, attendance, and other functions
4. Microcomputer with extra capacity for expansion and the capability to decrease processing time

benefits likely to be gained. Estimated monetary benefits may best be derived from the results of similar programs at other transit systems, tempered with judgement to account for differences in operating environments. Evaluation criteria that are not measured quantitatively may be evaluated subjectively by ranking or assigning relative ratings to each objective, or an overall ranking or rating of the alternatives. These include criteria such as the probability of acceptance by top management, transit operators, and the public, ease of implementation, and the degree of simplicity (ease in understanding).

After the evaluation technique is chosen, the next step is to determine the evaluation objectives. For example, for the disciplinary code alternatives, a subjective evaluation that considers the advantages and disadvantages of each alternative will be performed; for the reward program the objective may be to maximize cost savings and reductions in absenteeism; and for the AIS, the objective may be to equally optimize all three of these evaluative criteria using subjective and quantitative measures. Table 10 provides an example of an evaluation.

#### Detailed Planning of the Recommended Alternatives

The detailed planning process will produce attendance improvement programs that are ready for implementation. The amount of effort required is dependent on the alternatives and the extent to which the alternative deviates from current practice. It is helpful to prepare a written draft of the planned programs for review and comment by management and transit operators, possibly through a task force. Their comments will not only help to resolve potential problems before implementation, but also make them participants in the final plan and prepare them for the upcoming changes. There is some merit in planning for incremental implementation of the components of the attendance improvement program. There may be less confusion, lower initial cost, and less resistance to the change. The effectiveness of each component may be assessed in relative increments.

#### Implementation and Follow-up

Two critical steps in the implementation of the programs are (1) to communicate the programs to the transit operators and managers so that they understand and accept the programs, and (2) to develop a commitment from managers to follow through with the programs and to support attendance improvement by example. The programs should be monitored continuously and evaluated periodically (monthly is preferred) to determine if they are achieving their objectives. Revisions should be made as needed to accomplish the objectives.

Table 10

Example of an Evaluation

A. Disciplinary Codes and Procedures (Subjective Evaluation)

<u>Alt.</u>	<u>Advantages</u>	<u>Disadvantages</u>	<u>Ranking</u>
1		No consistent enforcement by numerical criteria	4
2		Absences allowed over a long period before action taken	3
3	Absences allowed over the shortest period before action taken		1
	Uses same time period as Alt. 3 under positive reinforcement		
4	Uses same time period as Alt. 2 under positive reinforcement		2

B. Reward Program (Benefit/Cost and Cost-effectiveness Analyses)

<u>Alt.</u>	<u>Annual Cost Estimated Cost*, C</u>	<u>Annual Reduction in Absent %</u>	<u>Benefit, B</u>	<u>Cost Savings B-C</u>
1	\$ 100	0% or 0 day	\$ 0	\$ 100
2	200	1% or 20 days	1,300	1,100
3	1,400	3% or 60 days	3,900	2,500

\*Transit Operator Daily Wage = \$65

<u>Alt.</u>	<u>Benefit/Cost Ratio = B/C</u>	<u>Cost-effective = Cost/% Reduction</u>
1	Undefined	Undefined
2	6.5	\$200/% reduction
3	2.8	\$467/% reduction

Table 10, continued

C. Reward Program (Subjective Rating by Criteria)

Scale - 1-Poor 2-Fair 3-Good 4-Excellent

Alt.	Probability of Acceptance By		Ease of Implementation	Ease of Use	Total
	Managers	Operators			
1	2	2	4	4	12
2	4	3	3	3	13
3	3	4	2	3	12

D. Based AIS (Subjective Evaluation) Microcomputer

Alt.	Initial Cost	Annual Operating Cost	Rating		
			Ease of Use	Speed	Cost
1	\$ 0	\$1,000	High	Low	Low
2a	2,500	1,200	Medium	Medium	Medium
2b	4,000	1,200	Low	Medium	Medium
3	9,000	1,200	High	Medium	High
4	8,000	1,000	Medium	High	High

Model Components of Attendance Improvement Program

This section presents descriptions of and guidelines for components of an attendance improvement program; namely, (1) a policy statement on attendance, (2) work rules regarding absences, (3) disciplinary codes and procedures for absenteeism, (4) a reward program, and (5) an AIS.

Job enrichment of the supervisors should be added to this listing when appropriate.

Policy Statement on Attendance

The policy statement on attendance is an expression of management's position on attendance. Typically, the policy statement addresses the importance of attendance in accomplishing the organization's goals, the negative impact of absences, management's expectations regarding attendance, the organization's efforts in controlling absences, and the consequences of excessive absenteeism. A policy statement for the Capital District Transit Authority, Albany, New York, is shown in Figure 2.

CAPITAL DISTRICT TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY  
CAPITAL DISTRICT TRANSIT SYSTEM NUMBER 1  
CAPITAL DISTRICT TRANSIT SYSTEM NUMBER 2  
CAPITAL DISTRICT TRANSIT SYSTEM

**Operating Policy Statement on Attendance**

The purpose of this statement is to outline and reaffirm the official operating policy of the Capital District Transportation Authority and its subsidiaries regarding attendance and absences.

Our only business and our single reason for existing is to provide an important service to the public - regular, safe and dependable transportation at a reasonable cost. It follows therefore that we require employees to have regular, dependable attendance habits.

It is also important that we operate as efficiently as possible. Approximately 50% of our costs are supported with tax money. This gives us a high degree of accountability to the taxpayers. Poor attendance results in poor efficiency and higher costs.

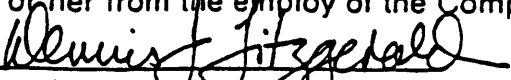
Our efficient operation requires teamwork. Without sufficient maintenance people there would be a shortage of mechanically sound buses and without sufficient drivers the mechanically sound buses would be left in the garage. The absence of an employee therefore places an undue burden upon his or her fellow employees. His or her inability to report regularly also interferes with the normal planning of our work and operation of our regular schedules. Those wanting to use our service would be left on the street corners.

We recognize that our employees will become ill, occasionally be disabled or will encounter personal problems which will require them to be away from their job. It is the Company's responsibility to provide varying levels of sick and personal leave to address these occurrences and this has been done. However, we simply cannot and should not have to employ large numbers of employees to cover for those with poor attendance habits.

It is the employee's responsibility to (a) promptly notify his or her supervisor or foreman when absence is unavoidable; (b) maintain healthful habits, and (c) when ill or disabled, do what is required (seek medical help, follow doctor's advice, etc.) to return to the job as soon as practicable.

The Company will try to assist employees with problems that contribute to poor attendance. Employees should understand, however, that an absenteeism record can become so excessive that his or her value as an employee is outweighed by business inconvenience and excessive cost to the Company. If it becomes apparent that our efforts are not effective, it will be necessary to conclude that the offending employee no longer meets our requirements of employment and to drop him or her from the employ of the Company.

Signed:



Dennis J. Fitzgerald  
Executive Director

Date: April 2, 1981

Figure 2. Policy statement on attendance.

### Work Rules Regarding Absences

It is essential that the written policy be supported by the attitude and actions of all levels of management. In other words, the policy must be practiced. The work rules, designed as a daily guide or practice for job performance, promote the success of the attendance policy by defining the procedures to be followed in the event of an absence. Work rules define the types of absences and the actions necessary to report an absence and a return to work. Figure 3 displays an example of work rules from the Greater Roanoke Transit Company. Work rules are usually part of an operator's manual, general rules and regulations. Information on sick leave and other excused leaves such as jury duty are usually in the union and transit system's agreement or municipal employee handbooks. Such information may be worth repeating in the work rules regarding absences. If attendance is considered in the performance appraisal, this fact should be stated in the work rules.

### Disciplinary Code and Procedures

The disciplinary code and procedures are often referred to as the code of performance. The purposes of the code are to standardize the types of penalties for various infractions, to inform employees of the penalties for violations of the rules and regulations, and to serve as a guide to employees and supervisory personnel involved in disciplinary matters. Under most codes, the employee's total work record is considered before determining a penalty. A code consisting of an introduction explaining its purposes and usage and a listing of the violations and the suggested penalties is shown in Figure 4. For the Greater Richmond Transit Company, it is important that the absenteeism code include numerical guidelines and a clear explanation of the types of absences considered (Figure 4).

### Reward Program

A description of the Individual Recognition Award Program sponsored by the Milwaukee County Transit System is provided in Figure 5. The Milwaukee system employs over 900 operators. The 4-month cycle appears appropriate. However, for smaller systems, less expensive and fewer lottery prizes may be acceptable. The concept of a guaranteed reward for perfect attendance and a chance for a lottery prize for good attendance is recommended for lottery systems. Group incentive programs are particularly useful for transit because they tend to focus on system performance. Figure 6 describes a group incentive program sponsored by the Greater Richmond Transit Company. Group programs also allow more persons to participate in the rewards. Four conditions for successful incentive programs, regardless of the reward, are (1) the desired behavior must be clearly specified, (2) the reward must be of value to the employee, (3) the employee must believe the reward will follow the



## II. Attendance

A. Every employee is required to report to work at the scheduled time.

### B. Reporting

1. Operators must report for duty to the Dispatcher ten (10) minutes prior to the first scheduled departure time from the garage or at such time as shown on the Extra Board.
2. Any subsequent reports must be made prior to the scheduled garage departure time.
3. Failure of an operator to report to the Dispatcher at the scheduled time will be classified as a "Missout".

### C. Types of Absences

1. Excused absence is granted absence without pay. Excused absences are granted on an operational needs basis. Absences which are not excused will be treated as missouts.
2. Vacation is granted absence with pay.
3. Leave of absence is granted absence without pay.
4. Sick absence is an absence without pay for a legitimate illness or injury. Sick absences should be kept to a minimum.
  - a. All operators reporting off sick should do so as soon as possible, but no later than thirty (30) minutes prior to the garage departure time. Operators reporting back to duty from a sick absence must do so by 2:00 P.M. of the day preceding the return.
  - b. Maintenance Department employees reporting off sick should do so as soon as possible, but no later than thirty (30) minutes prior to the start of their work shift. Maintenance employees reporting back to work from a sick absence must do so at least eight (8) hours prior to the start of their shift.

- c. Employees may be required to provide a doctor's certificate of care for any absence due to sickness or injury, if required by a Supervisor. A doctor's certificate of care is required for all absences due to sickness or injury of three (3) days or more.
  - d. The occurrences of more than six (6) separate instances of short term sick absence in any twelve (12) month period will be considered excessive sick absence.
  - e. Short term sick absence is defined as any absence of fourteen (14) working days or less.
  - f. Employees may be required to see the Company physician for physical examination prior to returning to work after a sickness or injury.
  - g. Employees will not fake illness or injury in order to be absent from work.
  - h. Female employees will be granted a leave of absence without pay in cases of pregnancies. Pregnant employees will only be allowed to work beyond the fifth (5th) month of pregnancy when there is a physician's certification of the employee's ability to safely perform her duties. After termination of pregnancy, an employee will return to work as soon as physically able, according to physician certification.
5. Missout is the failure to report to the Dispatcher at the scheduled time.
- a. Missouts are not allowed.
  - b. An extra board operator charged with a missout forfeits his forty (40) hour guarantee pay for that pay period. Any operator missing out will forfeit his assignment for that day and work from the bottom of the extra board.
  - c. Operators who miss out may not refuse work assigned to them.
  - D. Should any regular operator be off any part of his/her assignment, except for jury duty, court duty, or Union duty, the entire run must be filled from the Extra Board.

Figure 3. Attendance work rules for the Greater Roanoke Transit Company.

TRANSPORTATION DEPARTMENT

DISCIPLINE CODE

THIS CODE ATTEMPTS TO STANDARDIZE TYPES OF PENALTIES FOR VARIOUS INFRACTIONS OF RULES AND TO INFORM OUR EMPLOYEES OF PENALTIES THAT MAY BE IMPOSED FOR CONTINUED VIOLATIONS OF RULES AND REGULATIONS. THE CODE SHOULD SERVE AS A GUIDE TO EMPLOYEES AND SUPERVISORY PERSONNEL INVOLVED IN DISCIPLINARY MATTERS. IT SHOULD NOT BE CONSTRUED AS HARD AND FAST LIMITATION UPON SUPERVISORY PERSONNEL IN DEALING WITH DISCIPLINARY MATTERS.

WHENEVER DISCIPLINARY ACTION IS CONTEMPLATED, THE EMPLOYEE'S TOTAL RECORD, OR OTHER VIOLATIONS OF COMPANY RULES, WILL BE CONSIDERED BEFORE DETERMINING THE PENALTY. PENALTIES FOR MULTIPLE VIOLATIONS OCCURRING AT THE SAME TIME WILL BE DEALT WITH AT THE DISCRETION OF THE DIRECTOR. IT IS IMPORTANT, AND NECESSARY, THAT THE ENTIRE WORK RECORD BE REVIEWED TO DETERMINE WHETHER A PARTICULAR VIOLATION IS AN ISOLATED INSTANCE OR INDICATIVE OF A CONTINUING PATTERN OF VIOLATIONS.

THE PERFORMANCE CODE IS BASED ON THE PRINCIPLE OF UNIFORM AND PROGRESSIVE DISCIPLINE, AND IT REFLECTS PROCEDURES TO BE FOLLOWED IN CASES WHERE EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE WARRANTS ASSISTANCE AND/OR CORRECTIVE ACTION TO UPGRADE PERFORMANCE. IT IS NOT THE INTENT TO DISCIPLINE ANY EMPLOYEE WHEN A PARTICULAR VIOLATION IS MINOR AND IS AN ISOLATED INCIDENT, AND THE EMPLOYEE HAS AN OTHERWISE GOOD WORK RECORD.

A FAIR AND EQUITABLE DISCIPLINE CODE SHOULD HAVE ALL EMPLOYEES' PREVIOUS DISCIPLINE RECORDS CLEARED AS OF THE EFFECTIVE DATE OF THE CODE. THEREFORE, EFFECTIVE APRIL 1, 1981, ALL EMPLOYEE DISCIPLINE RECORDS WILL BE CLEARED. THEREAFTER, ALL DISCIPLINE ENTRIES WILL BE CLEARED AFTER A THREE-YEAR PERIOD, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF ABSENTEEISM, LATE, OR MISS-OUT ENTRIES.

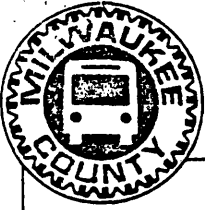
ABSENTEEISM, LATES, OR MISS-OUTS WILL BE CLEARED AFTER A ONE-YEAR PERIOD, AS FAR AS ACCUMULATION OF INCIDENTS IS CONCERNED.

THE SAFETY AWARDS GIVEN EACH YEAR WILL CONTINUE WITH NO CHANGE.

Figure 4a. Discipline code and procedures - Part A.  
Source: Greater Richmond Transit Company

NATURE OF ACTIONS	1ST OFFENCE	2ND OFFENCE	3RD OFFENCE	4TH OFFENCE	5TH OFFENCE
<p>ALL VIOLATIONS LISTED BELOW TO BE CLEARED FROM OPERATORS' RECORDS TWELVE MONTHS AFTER DATE OF VIOLATION.</p> <p><u>VIOLATIONS OF GENERAL RULES AND PROCEDURES</u></p> <p>Excessive or habitual absenteeism. (Incidents accumulated for one twelve-month period.) (A single chargeable incident may be one or more days, as long as they are consecutive.)</p> <p><u>Pardonable only when:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Current sick leave policies are satisfied.</li> <li>2. Bereavement leave.</li> <li>3. Official Union business.</li> <li>4. Jury duty.</li> <li>5. Court Subpoena</li> <li>6. Authorized military leave.</li> <li>7. Excused by the reasonable &amp; fair exercise of proper authority.</li> </ol> <p>(the above are the only non-chargeable absences. <u>ALL</u> others will be charged.)</p> <p>(Bereavement must be submitted within ten (10) work days of return to duty in order to excuse absence.)</p>	Written Caution (8th incident)	1-day Suspension (9th incident)	3-day Suspension (10th incident)	Two-week Suspension (11th incident)	Discharge (12th incident)

Figure 4b. Discipline code and procedure - Part B.



## Milwaukee County Transit System

4212 WEST HIGHLAND BLVD., MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN 53208  
414 344-4550

December 11, 1984

TO ALL OPERATORS:

Invest in yourself. Here is an opportunity to have your own IRA (Individual Recognition Award). In an effort to reward those operators who have excellent work records and provide incentive for those who may not, the Company is providing the following reward program.

Beginning January 1, 1985, operator records will be reviewed on a four month basis. Any operator with an outstanding attendance record of no misses and no absences during the four month period will receive a \$30.00 gift certificate for dinner. Operators may choose from a list of several restaurants.

Any operator with a good attendance record of no misses and two (2) or less days absent in the four month period will be eligible for a prize drawing to be held at the end of each four month period. The prizes will be as follows:

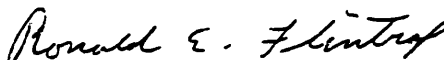
1 Color TV	- Value to \$400
1 VCR	- Value to \$400
1 Microwave Oven	- Value to \$300
4 Mini TVs	- Value to \$100 each

Also one preferred parking spot, good for a four month period, will be awarded at each station.

This program has been designed to award the operators who have exceptional records, those who come to work everyday and who do their jobs well. It is hoped that the award program will provide some incentive for more operators to strive for excellence in their work record particularly in the area of attendance.

Complete guidelines for the program are available on the attached sheet. If you have any questions concerning this program, contact your Division Superintendent or myself.

Sincerely,

  
Ronald E. Flintrop  
Superintendent of Transportation

REF/dc

MILWAUKEE TRANSPORT SERVICES, INC. OPERATOR

Figure 5a. An example of a reward program.

IRA\* Program Guidelines

\*Individual Recognition Awards

1. Operator records will be reviewed on a four month basis:  
January through April  
May through August  
September through December
2. All operators, including entry-level, in service for the full four month period are eligible for consideration.
3. Any operator receiving a written warning or suspension, for any reason, during the four month period will not be eligible for an award.
4. Any operator with a "good" record of no misses and two or less days absent in the four month period will be eligible for a prize drawing to be held at the end of the period.
5. Any operator with an "outstanding" record of no misses and no absences during the period will also receive a gift certificate for dinner at an area restaurant.
6. Days off for vacation, holidays, personal days, jury duty, company-required court appearances, Union required absence, and military duty of ten (10) days or less will not be considered an absence with respect to this program.
7. All other absences, including industrial accidents, layoffs, maternity leave, etc. will be considered an absence with respect to this program. Any partial days off will be considered as a full day of absence.

Figure 5b. An example of a reward program.

TEAM EFFORT TO INCREASE PRODUCTIVITY AND EFFICIENCY

RE: Employee Program

Effective February 1, 1985, we will begin a team oriented program for improving attendance, safety, and generally updating performance. The operators and shop employees will be divided into 17 different teams with one of the supervisors as Captain. The team with the least number of points during the period 2/1/85 through 4/30/85 will be given a suitable award. At this time, we are considering taking the winning team to a Dinner Theatre.

When we reach the halfway point in the program we will evaluate those teams that are having problems and provide incentive to encourage them to improve. A second award will be given at the completion of the program.

This program is designed to allow more people to participate in the awards & recognition than in our EOM Program.

Points will be charged as follows:

\*Unexcused absence - 1 point  
Chargeable accident - 1 point  
Valid complaint - 1 point  
Repeat work (Mechanical) - 1 point

\*The only excused absences considered excused for purposes of this program are:

Military Leave  
Jury Duty  
Bereavement  
Company business: depositions, attending court  
Change assignments at managements request  
Admittance to Hospital  
Union Business  
Credit Union

Figure 6. An example of a group incentive program.

behavior, and (4) the employee must believe the system is being administered fairly (this requires an excellent record keeping system).<sup>(3)</sup> Additionally, the incentives should have a shortened success cycle, that is, less than 1 year and preferably 4 months or less.

### Attendance Information System

A comprehensive AIS is essential for operating a disciplinary code or reward program. The system should be tailored to the information needs of the discipline code and reward program as well as management's needs for assessing individual and overall absenteeism. Many systems consist of transit operator files that contain time sheets, annual attendance records, or both. Figure 7 is an example of an annual attendance record. Using this record, the following are noted: 1) the pattern of taking a sick leave day immediately before or after a day off, holiday, or vacation; 2) cycles relating overtime and absences; and 3) different reasons for sick leave. Although it does not give totals of absences, this record provides an overview of any patterns of absences and a view of the frequency of absences. If discipline, recognition, and/or reward programs are set up for any period of less than 1 year, then a summary for that period and a cumulative summary for a 1-year period are helpful. One-month summary reports are also helpful. A computerized system will facilitate the development of attendance records, especially the summary data. If a computer data base is available from payroll or the dispatcher, the AIS may be developed through programming efforts that focus on the output records and online inquiries.<sup>(13)</sup> The Greater Richmond Transit Company has a series of monthly reports as part of an operator information system. There are reports on unexcused absences, attendance counseling, and attendance discipline. The monthly reports on counseling and discipline provide cumulative data for the previous 12 months summarizing each incident by operator (listed in alphabetical order), date, supervisor involved, and the actions taken. The unexcused absence report lists the operators in alphabetical order, the consecutive dates absent for each absence occurrence, notes patterns with vacations and days off, the reason for the absence and late reporting as shown in Figure 8. Three year cumulative summaries are provided for chargeable accidents, service violations, and pass complaints, and garnishees. These reports are made available to the dispatcher, supervisors, and directors for this information and, when appropriate, to initiate necessary actions. Surveillance of sick leave through phone calls or home visits should be considered as part of the AIS.

### Job Enrichment of Transit Supervisors

Job enrichment of transit supervisors was discussed in the section on attendance programs. The transit supervisor has been shown to be the

OPERATOR'S ATTENDANCE RECORD

Year \_\_\_\_\_

Name _____		District _____												I.D. No. _____																			
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	
JANUARY																																	
FEBRUARY																																	
MARCH																																	
APRIL																																	
MAY																																	
JUNE																																	
JULY																																	
AUGUST																																	
SEPTEMBER																																	
OCTOBER																																	
NOVEMBER																																	
DECEMBER																																	

Legend

- R - regular day off, holiday, or vacation
- OT - overtime
- S - sick operator
- SE - sick leave for examination and treatment (planned)
- SR - sick relative
- L - late arrival
- A - authorized leave, include military and civil leave
- U - unauthorized leave or unexcused absence
- /v; v/; etc. for half-days

Figure 7. A suggested annual attendance record.



TRANSPORTATION DEPARTMENT  
GREATER RICHMOND TRANSIT COMPANY

OPERATOR INFORMATION SYSTEM

UN-EXCUSED ABSENCE REPORT

Page 1

Updated Thru 09/30/85

Consec. Dates.....	Reason.....	LR?.....	Operator
841211-841212 (To Vac)	SO	NO	Aaron A B
850504-850504	SO/P	NO	Aaron A B
841116-841119 (2)	SO	NO	Allen B C
850218-850219 (Fm Vac)	SO	NO	Allen B C
850311-850510	SO/LOA	NO	Ball D M
850415-850425	SO	NO	Camp K B
850507-850507	SO/P	NO	Camp K B
841203-841203	SR	NO	Don R M
850912-850912	MH	NO	Don R M
850630-850701	SO	NO	Elf S T

Legend

Consecutive Dates

- (To Vac) Before vacation
- (Fm Vac) After vacation
- (2) Operator returned to work from sick leave too early and went back out sick

Reason

- SO Sick operator
- SO/P Sick operator part of the day
- SO/LOA Sick operator on medical leave of absence
- SR Sick relative
- MH A missed run and hold for an explanation

LR?

- Late report?

Figure 8. GRTC's unexcused absence report.

key management person for the transit operators. The support and encouragement provided by the supervisor removes some of the internal pressure from operators, especially that from isolation.

#### SUMMARY

The general plan for an attendance program is summarized in Tables 11 and 12. The summary outline provides the highlights of the systematic analysis of operator absenteeism and the model components of the program. Examples of successful components are given. Much consideration should be given to adopting the concept in a form tailored to the needs unique to the transit system. There is no one best attendance improvement program. However, the general plan provides the framework for the development of a successful program. The general plan is quite flexible as to the manner in which it may be applied.

Table 11

Summary Outline of the General Plan for an  
Attendance Improvement Program

- I. A Systematic Analysis of Transit Operator Absenteeism
  - A. Problem Identification
    1. Inventory of absenteeism and attendance information
    2. Analysis of absenteeism data
    3. Review of attendance policies, standards, discipline codes, and reward programs
    4. Inventory of cultural norms of absenteeism
    5. Review of methods of communicating attendance rules and operator understanding of the rules
  - B. Development of Goals and Objectives for an Attendance Program
    1. Goal--the desired end state that a plan is expected to achieve
    2. Objective--an operational statement of a goal that is measurable and attainable
    3. Participation by all employee levels of the transit system encouraged
  - C. Development of Alternatives to Increase Attendance
    1. A set of alternatives for either each objective or all objectives
    2. For each alternative--a description, estimated cost for planning, implementing, and operating, estimate of the effectiveness
    3. Participation of management and transit operators in a task force encouraged
    4. Number of alternatives desired--2 to 5, more than 5 alternatives, preliminary screening

Table 11, continued . . .

5. Optional--use of resource limitations; existing program as base alternative
- D. Evaluation of Alternatives
1. Selection of evaluation technique(s)
    - a. benefit/cost analysis
    - b. cost-effectiveness analysis
    - c. rating or ranking by alternative or criteria
  2. Determination of evaluation objectives
  3. Selection of a recommended alternative (or set of alternatives)
  4. Option--modification of one or more alternatives and reevaluation
- E. Detailed Planning of the Recommended Alternative
1. Preparation of written draft of planned programs for review and comment by managers and transit operators
  2. Examination of the benefit of incremental phasing of the implementation of the programs
- F. Implementation and Follow-up
1. Communication of program to transit operators and managers
  2. Commitment and support from management
  3. Initiation of program
  4. Continuous monitoring and monthly evaluation
  5. Revisions as needed

Table 12

Model Components of an Attendance Improvement Program

- A. Policy Statement on Attendance
  - 1. Importance of attendance in accomplishing system's goals
  - 2. Negative impact of absenteeism
  - 3. Management's expectations regarding attendance
  - 4. Management's efforts in controlling absences
  - 5. Consequences of excessive absenteeism
- B. Work Rules Regarding Absences
  - 1. Types of absences defined
  - 2. Actions to report an absence and to return to work
- C. Disciplinary Codes and Procedures
  - 1. Code of performance--standard penalties for violations serving as guide in disciplinary matters
  - 2. Numerical guidelines for absenteeism
  - 3. Consideration of employee's total work record
  - 4. Consistent, uniform enforcement
- D. Reward Program
  - 1. Individual or group programs
  - 2. Clearly specified desired behavior
  - 3. Reward of value to the operator

Table 12, continued

4. Operator believes reward will follow behavior
  5. Operator believes program is administered fairly
  6. Shortened success cycle for reward
- E. Attendance Information System
1. Tailored to the information needs of the discipline code, reward program, and management
  2. Annual attendance records or monthly summary attendance reports
- F. Job Enrichment for Supervisors
1. Effective where supervisor given direct authority over 20-26 operators
  2. Supervisory training in management skills required
  3. Managerial effectiveness increased
  4. Absenteeism reduced

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of this research, the following recommendations are made.

1. The Rail and Public Transportation Division should sponsor a seminar on transit operator absenteeism. The seminar will focus on discussions with transit managers with successful attendance programs and the information provided in this report.
2. The Rail and Public Transportation Division or the author should contact the transit systems with absenteeism problems individually to discuss their absenteeism problems, and should encourage them to develop an attendance improvement program or improve their programs by using the plan outlined in the report.
3. Development of or improvements in an attendance improvement program should be monitored, evaluated, and documented so useful information can be disseminated among transit systems. Knowledge gained by each system would be beneficial to the others.





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- Mark E. Huffer--Assistant General Manager, Greater Lynchburg Transit Company
- Reggie Smith--Director, Harrisonburg City Bus Service

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APPENDIX A

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS IN VIRGINIA  
THAT WERE SURVEYED AND WHO RESPONDED COMPLETELY

Alexandria Transit System  
Blacksburg Transit  
Bristol City Bus Company  
Charlottesville Transit Service\*  
Clearfork Community Association\*  
Colonial Beach Transit Service  
Danville Transit System\*  
Gateway Regional Transit Authority  
Greater Lynchburg Transit Company\*  
Greater Richmond Transit Company\*  
Greater Roanoke Transit Company\*  
Greene County Transit  
Harrisonburg City Bus Service\*  
Fairfax City/George Mason University  
James City County Transit\*  
JAUNT, Inc.\*  
Mountain Empire Older Citizens, Inc.\*  
Peninsula Transportation District Commission - PenTran\*  
Petersburg Area Transit\*  
Staunton Transit Service\*  
Tidewater Regional Transit\*  
Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority  
Winchester Transit System\*

\*Systems that responded completely (15 of 22, or 68%).

