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Santa Cruz METRO Launches New Recruitment Incentives to Attract Bus Operator Applicants Including an Increase in Starting Salary & Hiring Bonus

Santa Cruz, CA (Wednesday, July 6, 2022) - The Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District (METRO) is introducing a variety of new incentives to attract qualified Bus Operators in the agency's latest recruitment, which opened June 13th and runs until July 13th.

"We are living in a time when public transportation is facing an unprecedented crisis in staffing levels. All through the state, agencies are finding themselves short on people and becoming increasingly more overtime reliant," said Brandon Freeman, SMART Local 0023. "Here in Santa Cruz, under the direction of our new CEO, Michael Tree, SMART Local 0023 and HR Director, Dawn Crummié, have been empowered to implement new and creative solutions to attract new operators."

In May 2022, the METRO Board of Directors approved contract extensions for all three Union's representing METRO. Along with this extension is a pilot program with SMART Local 0023 that eliminates the trainee rate and increases the starting salary rate for new Bus Operators from the original Step 1 rate to Step 2. Now new Operators will have a starting salary of \$23.75 versus the previous rate of \$19.97. Additionally, METRO will continue to offer a 5% yearly salary increase for the next six years on an 8-Step progression period.

"At METRO we are facing the same challenges with recruiting Bus Operators as our sister transit agencies," said Dawn Crummié, METRO HR Director. "We are striving to create new ideas to recruit and retain talent. One such idea is a pilot program that temporarily eliminates our Step 1 training wage so that new operator's salaries start 5% higher. Additionally, in lieu of negotiating the SMART Local 0023 contract this year, we have agreed with the union on a one-year increase of 3.5%. This along with temporarily eliminating the training wage, has increased the starting wage in total by 8.5%. This is equal to a total compensation, of \$94,863 (\$51,126 in wages & \$43,737 in benefits), in year one alone."

Another incentive METRO is offering is a \$4,000 hiring bonus to all new Operators that will be paid out in three installments, \$500 after completing training, \$1,500 after completing probation, and \$2,000 one-year after completing probation, in aims of attracting new talent. Furthermore, to increase the pool of talent METRO has also implemented an Employee Referral Incentive Program for current employees in the amount of \$2,000 if they refer a Bus Operator candidate to the position, which will be paid out over a two-year period.

"By offering a higher starting wage, industry leading benefits and rich incentives such as a \$4,000 hiring bonus, every effort is being made to bring on new operators. A new referral program is the latest step in turning all current staff into recruitment agents and I think this really shows the commitment we have at METRO and within SMART Local 0023 to our community. We understand how critical public transportation is to our county and we are taking every possible step to maintain the highest levels of service possible." – Brandon Freeman, SMART Local 0023

Over the past few recruitment cycles METRO has received an underwhelming amount of applicants and is trying to backfill vacant Operator positions so it can maintain its' current service levels with minimal impact to riders. The agency is hoping that these new incentives will be the key to attracting more talent.

To be a qualified candidate, applicants must possess strong customer service skills and interact with the public. Previous driving experience is not required as METRO will provide all training in-house.

METRO's current Bus Operator recruitment runs from June 13th through July 13th. Please visit www.governmentjobs.com/careers/scmtd for more information or to apply.

For information on METRO visit scmtd.com.

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About Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District:

Established in 1968, Santa Cruz METRO provides directly operated fixed-route and Highway 17 commuter service throughout Santa Cruz County, with limited service connecting to Monterey Salinas Transit at our Watsonville Transit Center and Santa Clara County, transporting more than 5 million* passenger trips a year. METRO also directly operates ParaCruz paratransit service to Santa Cruz County, providing about 73,500* trips per year. METRO's operating budget in FY21 is almost \$55 million and is funded through a combination of farebox revenue, sales tax, and state and federal sources. Today METRO operates a fleet of 94 buses on at least 24 fixed-routes and 32 paratransit vehicles. For more information, visit www.scmtd.com. Like METRO on Facebook at www.facebook.com/SantaCruzMETRO or follow us on Twitter at www.twitter.com/SantaCruzMETRO.

*Reflect pre-pandemic ridership numbers