





Skills for the Next Generation of Transit Leaders

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TASC
SUPPORTING MOBILE INFRASTRUCTURE

Roadmap for today's exploratory session

- Identify gaps
- Understand why they persist
- Explore power skills
- Identify strategies





Where the Gaps Show Up

Part 1: Leadership Readiness Check

Instructions: Rate your current confidence in each area using the scale below:

1 = Not confident | 2 = Somewhat confident | 3 = Developing | 4 = Strong | 5 = Highly confident

Skill Area	Rating (1–5)
Public speaking & presentations (internal/external)	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
Board or executive-level communication	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
Understanding transit funding & budgeting	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
Strategic thinking (big picture vs daily operations)	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
Negotiation & conflict management	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
Media/public communication	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
Influencing without authority	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
Emotional intelligence under pressure	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
Navigating political/stakeholder environments	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
Leading through change and uncertainty	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Transit Unplugged interview with Transit CEO's



Sources: FTA | APTA | Transit Workforce Center | Mineta Transportation Institute

What the Data Tells Us

- **Leadership Development is unstructured and reactive**
  - Learn-as-you-go approach
  - Lacks formal pathways
- **Mismatch: technical expertise vs leadership capability**
  - Employees are promoted because they are great operator, strong planners and/or skilled technicians
- **Leadership shortages**
  - 98% of transit agencies report workforce shortages



Sources: FTA | APTA | Transit Workforce Center | Mineta Transportation Institute

What the Data Tells Us

- **Institutional knowledge is not being transferred**
  - The challenge of capturing, transferring knowledge before retirement.
  - Emerging leaders lack: Historical context, political awareness and how things actually get done" knowledge
- **Rapid industry change - outpacing skill development**
  - Transit is evolving quickly, but can't keep up with training
  - Technology, funding complexity, public scrutiny

When Gaps Go Unaddressed

- Struggles in the Boardroom
- Miscommunication with stakeholder/public
- Burnout in new leaders (silent quitting)
- Slower organizational progress
- Reduced confidence and credibility



Question: What is one leadership moment you wish you had been better prepared for?

Real-World Impact: Let’s Apply This

Scenario: A high-performing operations manager is promoted into a director role. Within the first six months, they struggle during board presentations, feel unprepared to answer funding questions, and experience conflict with peers across departments. Confidence drops, and their team begins to feel the impact.

Q1: **What leadership gaps do you see in this scenario?**

Q2: **What specific skills are missing or underdeveloped?**



So what skills actually matter?

- It’s not just technical expertise
- It’s not just experience
- It’s **power skills that drive leadership success**

Core Leadership Skills

Communication Mastery	Business & Strategic Acumen	People & Influence Skills
• Public speaking & board engagement • Media communication • Translating technical info to public audiences	• Funding & budgeting basics • Strategic thinking • Understanding policy & governance	• Negotiation • Conflict management • Leading through influence vs authority



Communication Mastery

- Translate complex transit issues clearly
- Data storytelling
- Proper communication with the Board, the public and the media

Strategic Thinking

- Funding and financial literacy
- Big-picture thinking, long-term impact
- Understanding policy and governance



Influence Skills

- Negotiation and Conflict management
- Influence across departments, sometimes without authority
- Emotional intelligence





Advanced Power Skills

- Political navigation
- Systems thinking
- Adaptive leadership
- Change leadership
- Learning agility

The Leadership Pipeline Disconnect

Group A: Executive Leaders / HR / Senior Management	Group B: Emerging & Mid-Career Leaders
You are responsible for developing the next generation of transit leaders.	You are preparing for or currently growing into leadership roles in transit.
1. Where do you see the **biggest breakdowns in your leadership pipeline?** Skills? Experience exposure? Organizational structure? Culture? 2. Why do these gaps persist even when training exists? 3. What do you believe is the **organization's responsibility vs. the individual's responsibility** in leadership development? 4. If you could redesign leadership development in your agency, what would you change immediately?	1. What leadership situations do you feel **least prepared for today?** Board presentations? Funding conversations? Conflict management? Strategic decision-making? 2. What opportunities are currently **missing from your development?** 3. When you observe senior leaders, what skills do you think they rely on most that you are not being exposed to? 4. What would help you feel **more confident stepping into senior roles?**

Joint Action Planning

What is ONE practical change that would strengthen the leadership pipeline in the next 12 months?

Exposure Opportunities	Structured Development	Cultural Shifts

Gen Z: 6-12 Month Learning Cycle Thinking

Timing	Task Title	Your Responsibility
Day 1 to six months	Onboard	Learn your job
6-12 months	Whole business	Understand the transit business
12-18 months	Leadership development	Learn the qualities of what it takes to be successful
18-21 months	Leader shadow	Get partnered with one of our leaders & watch them in action
24-30 months	Project management	You will be assigned a task to lead and execute
30-36 months	Onboard mentor	Coach a new person
36-42 months	Innovation Task Force	Make us better



Key Takeaways

- Leadership gaps are predictable—and fixable
- Power skills drive success
- Development must be intentional
- Responsibility is shared

Final Reflection: Your Next Step

- One skill
- One action
- One word



What did we explore?

- Identified gaps
- Have a better understanding of why they persist
- Explored power skills
- Identified strategies



Thank you and keep in touch!



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Data Sources Informing this Presentation

Federal Transit Administration (FTA)
Workforce Development & Training Needs
https://www.transit.dot.gov/research-innovation/identifying-current-and-future-training-needs-public-transportation-industry

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https://www.transitworkforce.org

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Transit Workforce & Training Research
https://transweb.sjsu.edu/research

American Public Transportation Association (APTA)
Workforce Development Resources & Shortage Reports
https://www.apta.com/research-technical-resources/workforce-development/