



Chief Operating Officer – Transit Operations

The Memphis Area Transit Authority (MATA) is seeking a seasoned and strategic transit leader to lead the Authority into the future.

MATA is seeking a Chief Operating Officer for Transit Operations to lead the agency’s core service delivery functions during a critical period of operational strengthening and system modernization.

This executive will serve as a key member of the leadership team, working in close partnership with the Chief Executive Officer and Board of Directors to enhance system performance, improve service reliability, and elevate the overall rider experience. The COO for Transit Operations will bring disciplined operational leadership to a highly visible public service organization that plays an essential role in the economic vitality and daily life of the Memphis region.

This is an opportunity for a proven operator—someone who understands the realities of running a complex, service-driven system and is motivated by both the challenge and the impact of public transportation.

ABOUT MEMPHIS AREA TRANSIT AUTHORITY

The Memphis Area Transit Authority (MATA) is the primary provider of public transportation services in Memphis and Shelby County, delivering essential mobility to residents, workforce populations, and visitors across the region.

MATA operates a multi-modal transit system that includes fixed-route bus service, ADA-compliant paratransit (MATAPlus), and historic trolley operations serving downtown Memphis. These services connect communities to employment centers, healthcare institutions, educational opportunities, and commercial corridors—making MATA a vital economic and social lifeline.

The agency manages a fleet of more than 100 buses, trolley vehicles, and support equipment, and delivers millions of passenger trips annually. Supported by a workforce of hundreds of employees across operations, maintenance, safety, and administrative functions, MATA operates within a complex, highly visible public environment where service delivery, safety, and customer experience are paramount.

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As the region continues to evolve, MATA is focused on strengthening operational performance, rebuilding rider confidence and advancing modernization efforts that position the system for long-term sustainability.

ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT & STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

MATA is at a pivotal inflection point. The organization is actively working to enhance operational consistency, stabilize and develop its workforce, and improve service delivery outcomes in a competitive and resource-constrained environment.

The COO will play a central role in advancing several key priorities, including improving on-time performance and service reliability, strengthening workforce recruitment and retention, ensuring rigorous adherence to safety and regulatory standards, and elevating the customer experience. In parallel, the agency is pursuing modernization initiatives related to fleet, infrastructure, and technology—requiring operational leadership that is both pragmatic and forward-looking.

SCOPE OF LEADERSHIP

The Chief Operating Officer will oversee a large, multi-functional transit operation with responsibility for daily service delivery across all modes. This includes direct and indirect leadership of operations, maintenance coordination, safety, security, and customer-facing functions.

The role requires managing both unionized and non-union workforce segments, driving accountability across departments, and ensuring alignment between operational performance and organizational goals. The COO must be equally comfortable addressing immediate service challenges and advancing longer-term strategic improvements.

This is a hands-on leadership role—one that demands visibility, decisiveness, and the ability to execute in a dynamic operating environment.

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

The COO for Transit Operations is responsible for directing and coordinating all aspects of transit operations in alignment with the strategic vision established by the CEO and Board.

This includes developing and implementing both short- and long-term operational strategies that improve efficiency, reliability, and overall system performance. The COO will oversee daily service delivery, working closely with departmental leaders to identify challenges, resolve issues, and ensure consistent execution across the system.

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A critical component of the role is establishing performance expectations and accountability measures that drive continuous improvement. The COO will ensure compliance with all federal, state, and local regulations, including oversight of system safety programs and associated budget priorities.

The position also carries responsibility for overseeing security operations across all facilities and divisions, including both internal staff and contracted services, as well as participating in procurement and contracting processes related to operational functions.

Equally important is the ability to lead through people—coaching, developing, and holding leaders accountable while fostering a culture grounded in safety, professionalism, and service excellence.

LEADERSHIP & TALENT MANAGEMENT

Success in this role will depend heavily on the ability to build, lead, and sustain high-performing teams.

The COO will recruit and develop operational leaders, provide ongoing coaching and performance management, and create an environment where accountability and continuous improvement are expected and supported. Given the nature of public transit operations, experience working within a unionized environment and navigating labor-management relationships is essential.

The COO must be a visible and engaged leader—someone who can connect with frontline employees while also setting clear expectations at the executive level.

THE CANDIDATE

MATA is seeking a collaborative, decisive, and operationally grounded executive with a strong track record of leading complex service organizations.

The ideal candidate will bring at least eight years of progressively responsible leadership experience, including a minimum of five years in a management role within a transit agency or similarly complex operating environment. A bachelor's degree in public administration, business administration, engineering, construction management, or a related field is required.

Candidates should possess a deep understanding of transit operations, fleet management principles, and the regulatory environment governing public transportation. Strong analytical, organizational, and communication skills are essential, along with demonstrated experience managing large teams and improving operational performance.

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In addition, the strongest candidates will bring experience leading organizational change, navigating labor relations, and leveraging data and technology to improve service delivery.

WHY THIS ROLE MATTERS

This role is central to MATA's future.

The Chief Operating Officer will directly influence the reliability and effectiveness of a system that thousands of residents depend on every day. From improving access to employment and healthcare to supporting economic development across the region, the impact of this role extends far beyond operations.

For the right leader, this is an opportunity to drive meaningful change, strengthen a critical public institution, and leave a lasting imprint on the Memphis community.

TO APPLY

MATA has engaged POLIHIRE to lead the search process to identify the COO of Transit Operations. If you are prepared for this opportunity, please submit a cover letter outlining your qualifications and your resume to: MATA_COO@polihire.com. The target salary for this position is \$200,000.