
Bus Drivers

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Significant Points

- Opportunities should be good, particularly for school bus drivers; applicants for higher paying public transit bus driver positions may encounter competition.
- State and Federal governments establish bus driver qualifications and standards, which include a commercial driver's license.
- Work schedules vary considerably among various types of bus drivers.
- Bus drivers must possess strong customer service skills, including communication skills and the ability to manage large groups of people with varying needs.

Nature of the Work

Bus drivers provide transportation for millions of people, from commuters to school children to vacationers. There are two major kinds of bus drivers. *Transit and intercity bus drivers* transport people within or across States, along routes run within a metropolitan area or county, or on chartered excursions and tours. *School bus drivers* take children to and from schools and related events.

Bus drivers pick up and drop off passengers at bus stops, stations, or—in the case of students—at regularly scheduled neighborhood locations, all according to strict time schedules. Drivers must operate vehicles safely, sometimes in heavy traffic. They also cannot let light traffic put them ahead of schedule so that they miss passengers. Bus drivers drive a range of vehicles from 15-passenger buses to 60-foot articulated buses that can carry more than 100 passengers.

Local transit and intercity bus drivers stock up on tickets or transfers and prepare trip reports after reporting to their assigned terminal or garage. In some transportation firms, maintenance departments are responsible for keeping vehicles in good condition; in others, drivers check their vehicle's tires, brakes, windshield wipers, lights, oil, fuel, and water supply before beginning their routes. Drivers usually verify that the bus has safety equipment, such as fire extinguishers, first aid kits, and emergency reflectors.

During their shift, local transit and intercity bus drivers collect fares; answer questions about schedules, routes, and transfer points; and sometimes announce stops. Intercity bus drivers may make only a single one-way trip to a distant city or a round trip each day. They may stop at towns just a few miles apart or only at large cities hundreds of miles apart. Local transit bus drivers may make several trips each day over the same city and suburban streets, stopping as frequently as every few blocks.

Local transit bus drivers submit daily trip reports with a record of trips, significant schedule delays, and mechanical problems. Intercity drivers who drive across State or national boundaries must comply with U.S. Department of Transportation regulations. These include completing vehicle inspection reports and recording distances traveled and the times they spend driving, performing other duties, and off duty.

Some intercity drivers operate motor coaches which transport passengers on chartered trips and sightseeing tours. Drivers routinely interact with customers and tour guides to make the trip as comfortable and informative as possible. They are directly responsible for keeping to strict schedules, adhering to the guidelines of the tour's itinerary, and ensuring the overall success of the trip. These drivers act as customer service representatives, tour guides, program directors, and safety guides. Trips frequently last more than a day. The driver may be away for more than a week if assigned to an extended tour.

School bus drivers usually drive the same routes each day, stopping to pick up pupils in the morning and returning them to their homes in the afternoon. Some school bus drivers also transport students and teachers on field trips or to sporting events. In addition to driving, some school bus drivers work part time in the school system as janitors, mechanics, or classroom assistants when not driving buses.

Bus drivers must be alert to prevent accidents, especially in heavy traffic or in bad weather, and to avoid sudden stops or swerves that jar passengers. School bus drivers must exercise particular caution when children are getting on or off the bus. They must maintain order on their bus and enforce school safety standards by allowing only students to board. In addition, they must know and enforce the school system's rules regarding student conduct. As the number of students with physical or behavioral disabilities increases, school bus drivers must learn how to accommodate their special needs.

Some school bus drivers can take their bus home or park it in a more convenient area rather than reporting to an assigned terminal or garage. School bus drivers do not collect fares. Instead, they prepare weekly reports on the number of students, trips or "runs," work hours, miles, and fuel consumption. Their supervisors set time schedules and routes for the day or week.

Work environment. Driving a bus through heavy traffic while dealing with passengers is more stressful and fatiguing than physically strenuous. Many drivers enjoy the opportunity to work without direct supervision, with full responsibility for their bus and passengers. To improve working conditions and retain drivers, many bus lines provide ergonomically designed seats and controls for drivers. Many bus companies use Global Positioning Systems to help dispatchers manage their bus fleets and help drivers navigate.

Work schedules vary considerably among various types of bus drivers. Intercity bus drivers may work nights, weekends, and holidays and often spend nights away from home, during which they stay in hotels at company expense. Senior drivers with regular routes have regular weekly work schedules, but others do not have regular schedules and must be prepared to report for work on short notice. They report for work only when called for a charter assignment or to drive extra buses on a regular route. Intercity bus travel and charter work tend to be seasonal. From May through August, drivers might work the maximum number of hours per week that regulations allow. During winter, junior drivers might work infrequently, except for busy holiday travel periods, and may be furloughed at times.

School bus drivers work only when schools are in session. Many work 20 hours a week or less, driving one or two routes in the morning and afternoon. Drivers taking field or athletic trips, or who also have midday kindergarten routes, may work more hours a week.

Regular local transit bus drivers usually have a 5-day workweek; Saturdays and Sundays are considered regular workdays.



Bus drivers are responsible for the safety of passengers.

Some drivers work evenings and after midnight. To accommodate commuters, many work “split shifts”—for example, 6 a.m. to 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. to 7 p.m., with time off in between.

Intercity bus drivers operating tour and charter buses may work any day and all hours of the day, including weekends and holidays. Their hours are dictated by the destinations, schedules, and itineraries of chartered tours. Like all commercial drivers, their weekly hours must be consistent with the Department of Transportation’s rules and regulations concerning hours of service. For example, drivers may drive for 10 hours and work for up to 15 hours—including driving and non-driving duties—before having 8 hours off duty. Drivers may only drive for 60 hours in 7 days or 70 hours in 8 days. They are required to document their time in a logbook.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

State and Federal governments establish bus driver qualifications and standards, which include a commercial driver’s license (CDL) with the proper endorsements. Many employers provide several weeks of training and help new employees obtain their CDL. Other employers prefer those with truck or other driving experience.

Education and training. Many employers prefer high school graduates and require a written test of ability to follow complex bus schedules. Some intercity and public transit bus companies require several years of experience driving a bus or truck. Most intercity bus companies and local transit systems give driver trainees 2 to 8 weeks of classroom and behind-the-wheel instruction. In the classroom, trainees learn Department of Transportation and company work rules, safety regulations, State and municipal driving regulations, and safe driving practices. They also learn to read schedules, determine fares, keep records, and deal courteously with passengers.

School bus drivers receive between 1 and 4 weeks of driving instruction and classroom training on State and local laws, regulations, and policies; safe driving practices; driver-pupil rela-

tions; first aid; emergency evacuation procedures; and the special needs of students who are disabled or emotionally troubled. School bus drivers also must be aware of the school system’s rules for discipline and conduct for bus drivers and the students they transport. Many people who become school bus drivers have never driven any vehicle larger than an automobile.

During training, all bus drivers practice driving on set courses. They practice turns and zigzag maneuvers, backing up, and driving in narrow lanes. Then, they drive in light traffic and, eventually, on congested highways and city streets. They also make trial runs without passengers to improve their driving skills and learn the routes. Local transit trainees memorize and drive each of the runs operating out of their assigned garage. New drivers make regularly scheduled trips with passengers, accompanied by an experienced driver who gives helpful tips, answers questions, and evaluates the new driver’s performance. Most bus drivers get brief supplemental training periodically to stay informed of safety issues and regulatory changes.

Licensure. Bus driver qualifications and standards are established by State and Federal regulations. All drivers must comply with Federal regulations and with any State regulations that exceed Federal requirements. Federal regulations require drivers who operate commercial motor vehicles in excess of 26,000 pounds gross vehicle weight rating or designed to carry 16 or more people, including the driver, to hold a commercial driver’s license with the appropriate endorsements from the State in which they live. As with all commercial drivers, bus drivers who drive across State or national boundaries, as motor coach drivers frequently do, must comply with U.S. Department of Transportation regulations, State regulations, and the regulations of other countries.

To qualify for a commercial driver’s license, applicants must pass a knowledge test on rules and regulations and then demonstrate in a skills test that they can operate a bus safely. A national database records all driving violations incurred by people who hold commercial licenses, and a State may not issue a license to a person who has already had a license suspended or revoked in another State. To be issued a commercial license, a driver must surrender all other driver’s licenses. All bus drivers must also have a passenger endorsement for their license, which requires passing a knowledge test and demonstrating the necessary skills in a vehicle of the same type as the one they would be driving on the job. Information on how to apply for a commercial driver’s license and each type of endorsement can be obtained from State motor vehicle administrations.

Although many States allow those who are 18 years of age and older to drive buses within State borders, the U.S. Department of Transportation establishes minimum qualifications for bus drivers engaged in interstate commerce. Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations require drivers to be at least 21 years old and to pass a physical examination once every 2 years. The main physical requirements include good hearing, at least 20/40 vision with or without glasses or corrective lenses, and a 70-degree field of vision in each eye. Drivers cannot be colorblind. They must be able to hear a forced whisper in one ear at not less than 5 feet, with or without a hearing aide. Drivers must have normal blood pressure and normal use of their arms and legs. They may not use any controlled substances, unless prescribed by a licensed physician. People with epilepsy or

with diabetes controlled by insulin are not permitted to be interstate bus drivers. Federal regulations also require employers to test their drivers for alcohol and drug use as a condition of employment and require periodic random tests of the drivers while they are on duty. In addition, a driver must not have been convicted of a felony involving the use of a motor vehicle or a crime involving drugs, driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol, refusing to submit to an alcohol test required by a State or its implied consent laws or regulations, leaving the scene of a crime, or causing a fatality through negligent operation of a commercial vehicle.

All drivers also must be able to read and speak English well enough to read road signs, prepare reports, and communicate with law enforcement officers and the public. In addition, drivers must take a written examination on the Motor Carrier Safety Regulations of the U.S. Department of Transportation.

School bus drivers are required to obtain a commercial driver's license with a school bus endorsement from the State in which they live. To receive this endorsement, they must pass a written test and demonstrate necessary skills in a bus of the same type that they would be driving on their route. Both of these tests are specific to school buses and are in addition to the testing required to receive a commercial license and the passenger endorsement.

Other qualifications. Many intercity and public transit bus companies prefer applicants who are at least 24 years old. Because bus drivers deal with passengers, they must be courteous. They need an even temperament and emotional stability because driving in heavy, fast-moving, or stop-and-go traffic and dealing with passengers can be stressful. Drivers must have strong customer service skills, including communication skills and the ability to coordinate and manage large groups of people. In some States, school bus drivers must pass a background investigation to uncover any criminal record or history of mental problems.

Advancement. New intercity and local transit drivers usually are placed on an "extra" list to drive chartered runs, extra buses on regular runs, and special runs, such as those during morning and evening rush hours and to sports events. New drivers also substitute for regular drivers who are ill or on vacation. New drivers remain on the extra list and may work only part time, perhaps for several years, until they have enough seniority to get a regular run.

Senior drivers may bid for the runs that they prefer, such as those with more work hours, lighter traffic, weekends off, or—in the case of intercity bus drivers—higher earnings or fewer workdays per week.

Opportunities for promotion are generally limited. However, experienced drivers may become supervisors or dispatchers—assigning buses to drivers, checking whether drivers are

on schedule, rerouting buses to avoid blocked streets or other problems, and dispatching extra vehicles and service crews to scenes of accidents and breakdowns. In transit agencies with rail systems, drivers may become train operators or station attendants. Some bus drivers become either instructors of new bus drivers or master-instructors, who train new instructors. Few drivers become managers. Promotion in publicly owned bus systems is often determined by competitive civil service examination. Some motor coach drivers purchase their own equipment and open their own business.

Employment

Bus drivers held about 653,000 jobs in 2006. About 34 percent worked part time. Around 70 percent of all bus drivers were school bus drivers working primarily for school systems or for companies providing school bus services under contract. Most of the remainder worked for private and local government transit systems; some also worked for intercity and charter bus lines.

Job Outlook

Average job growth and good employment opportunities are expected for bus drivers. Those seeking higher paying public transit bus driver positions may encounter competition. Individuals who have good driving records and who are willing to work a part-time or irregular schedule will probably have the best job prospects.

Employment change. Overall employment of bus drivers is expected to grow 10 percent between 2006 and 2016, about as fast as the average for all occupations. New drivers will be needed primarily to meet the transportation needs of the growing general population and school-aged population.

Employment growth for local transit and intercity bus drivers is projected to be 13 percent over the 2006-16 decade, about as fast as average for all occupations, primarily because of the increasing popularity of mass transit due to congestion and rising fuel prices and the demand for transit services in expanding metropolitan areas. Competition from other modes of transportation—airplane, train, or automobile—will temper job growth among intercity bus drivers. Most growth in intercity bus transportation will occur in group charters to locations not served by other modes of transportation. Like automobiles, buses have a far greater number of possible destinations than airplanes or trains. Since they offer greater cost savings and convenience than automobiles do, buses usually are the most economical option for tour groups traveling to out-of-the-way destinations.

The number of school bus drivers is expected to increase 9 percent over the next 10 years, which is also about as fast as the average for all occupations. This growth is somewhat slower than in the past. School enrollments are projected to increase

Projections data from the National Employment Matrix

Occupational Title	SOC Code	Employment, 2006	Projected employment, 2016	Change, 2006-16	
				Number	Percent
Bus drivers	53-3020	653,000	721,000	67,000	10
Bus drivers, transit and intercity	53-3021	198,000	223,000	25,000	13
Bus drivers, school.....	53-3022	455,000	497,000	42,000	9

NOTE: Data in this table are rounded. See the discussion of the employment projections table in the *Handbook* introductory chapter on *Occupational Information Included in the Handbook*.

in 37 States, decrease in 12 States and stay constant in 1 State. However, the net effect will still be a slowdown in the rate of school enrollment and, therefore, in employment growth of school bus drivers. This, as well as the part-time nature of the occupation, will result in most openings for school bus drivers being to replace those who leave the occupation.

Job prospects. People seeking jobs as bus drivers likely will have good opportunities. Employment growth will create jobs, but most job openings are expected because of the need to replace workers who take jobs in other occupations or who retire or leave the occupation for other reasons.

Individuals who have good driving records and who are willing to work a part-time or irregular schedule probably will have the best job prospects. School bus driving jobs, particularly in rapidly growing suburban areas, should be easiest to acquire because most are part-time positions with high turnover and less training required than for other bus-driving jobs. Those seeking higher paying public transit bus driver positions may encounter competition. Opportunities for intercity driving positions should be good, although employment prospects for motor coach drivers will depend on tourism, which fluctuates with the economy.

Full-time bus drivers rarely are laid off during recessions. In local transit and intercity bus systems, if the number of passengers decreases, employers might reduce the hours of part-time bus drivers or consolidate routes since fewer buses would be required. Seasonal layoffs are common. Many intercity bus drivers with little seniority, for example, are furloughed during the winter when regularly scheduled and charter business declines. School bus drivers seldom work during the summer or school holidays.

Earnings

Median hourly wage-and-salary earnings of transit and intercity bus drivers were \$15.43 in May 2006. The middle 50 percent earned between \$11.56 and \$19.86 per hour. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$9.26, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$24.08 per hour. Median hourly earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of transit and intercity bus drivers were:

Interurban and rural bus transportation.....	\$17.16
Urban transit systems.....	14.07
School and employee bus transportation	12.35
Other transit and ground passenger transportation	11.51
Charter bus industry	11.50

Median hourly wage-and-salary earnings of school bus drivers were \$11.93 in May 2006. The middle 50 percent earned between \$8.99 and \$14.82 per hour. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$6.58, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$17.61 per hour. Median hourly earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of school bus drivers were:

School and employee bus transportation	\$12.55
Elementary and secondary schools	11.59
Other transit and ground passenger transportation	11.11
Child day care services	9.50
Individual and family services	9.17

The benefits bus drivers receive from their employers vary greatly. Most intercity and local transit bus drivers receive paid health and life insurance, sick leave, vacation leave, and free bus rides on any of the regular routes of their line or system. School bus drivers receive sick leave, and many are covered by health and life insurance and pension plans. Because they generally do not work when school is not in session, they do not get vacation leave.

About 41 percent of bus drivers were members of or were covered by union contracts in 2006. Many intercity and local transit bus drivers are members of the Amalgamated Transit Union. Some drivers belong to the United Transportation Union or to the International Brotherhood of Teamsters.

Related Occupations

Other workers who drive vehicles on highways and city streets include taxi drivers and chauffeurs, and truck drivers and driver/sales workers. Some local transit bus drivers enter rail transportation occupations by becoming subway or light rail operators.

Sources of Additional Information

For information on employment opportunities, contact local transit systems, intercity bus lines, school systems, or the local offices of the State employment service.

General information on school bus driving is available from:

- National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services, P.O. Box 5446, Steamboat Springs, CO 80477. Internet: <http://www.nasdpts.org>
- National School Transportation Association, 113 South West St., 4th Floor, Alexandria, VA 22314. Internet: <http://www.yellowbuses.org>

General information on motor coach driving is available from:

- United Motorcoach Association, 113 South West St., 4th Floor, Alexandria, VA 22314. Internet: <http://www.uma.org>