Recommending Action(s):

Consider receiving a report on Operator absenteeism and efforts underway to improve operator attendance.

Background/Rationale:

The Board asked District staff to take a closer look at operator absenteeism. Staff previously reported combined scheduled and unscheduled operator absences averaging 24.80 percent throughout 2016. Scheduled absences include vacation, floating holidays, birthday holidays, and other pre-scheduled time off included in the collective bargaining agreement. In this presentation, the board will see the dollar valuation associated with previously discussed absenteeism totals.

The full cost of the Unscheduled Absenteeism is made up of two parts: the direct costs to the District for wages and benefits paid to the absent employee; and the extra costs associated with maintaining scheduled service because of the unscheduled absences, such as overtime for other employees. The direct costs to the District for the period of December to January 2016 are $3,692,689.99. The extra costs associated with maintaining scheduled service due to unscheduled absences are more difficult to quantify and staff is working on a method to capturing them reliably.

For the first six months of 2017, Unscheduled Absenteeism averaged 15.99%, an increase of 1.02% over the same period of time in 2016. This is due to the increased number of operators as well as a large amount of system growth. Due to the significant amount of new operator training by line instructors, these phenomena created additional overtime in order to maintain satisfactory service levels.

The greater cause of absenteeism has been that operators have for the past several years noted concerns about stress from the reduced running times on routes that occurred during the economic downturn in 2008. To address this concern, the schedules were modified to include additional layover time in accordance with new provisions in the collective bargaining agreement, which allows for more rest time in between runs. Early indications are that the run time modification has improved on time performance and service delivery.
The District is looking working with the leave management team to establish a return to work program. The return to work program is designed to give injured employees with temporary medical limitations and work restrictions the opportunity to return to a safe and productive work environment while they are recovering. When employees are released by their primary treating physicians to return to work, their temporary limitations and restrictions may allow them to return to work in a Modified Duty capacity in their regular positions; or they may be medically precluded from their regular duties on a temporary basis in which case, they may be given Temporary Transitional Assignments (TTA) doing transitional work—not their usual and customary duties.

We will continue to work on this to also help with our absenteeism to get operators back to work.

Efforts to Control Operator Unscheduled Absenteeism

The District has several programs in place that focus on controlling the number of instances and days off that occur with the multiple categories of absenteeism. The following are some of the major efforts that the Transportation Management staff have in place to control absenteeism as much as possible within the confines of the current collective bargaining agreement. These items were reflected in the previous Absenteeism Staff Report:

1. **Improved Communication with Operators** - The Transportation Director and Assistant Transportation Director are scheduling monthly site visits to hold informal meetings in the Gillie rooms with the operators, which will allow operators to express any issues where they have concerns and allow management to address these issues in a timelier manner. There have also been and will continue to be regularly scheduled Town Hall style meetings to review, discuss and determine how best to reduce Unscheduled Absenteeism.

2. **Non-Monetary Incentives** – Transportation management is initiating a program to recognize operators in front of passengers and their peers on the road to encourage good work performance that goes above and beyond the normal work requirements.

3. **Operator Coaching/Mentorship Program** – A new Operator coaching/mentorship program was entered into between ATU 192 and the District during the recent contract negotiations. The coaching/mentorship program is currently under development, but is envisioned to include assigning new operators to more seasoned senior operators to help mentor and transition to be an effective operator. The program is expected to assist in motivating new operators to minimize sick time and improve morale.

4. **Superintendent teamwork** – Superintendents will monitor all workforce on a daily basis and take active steps to allocate additional extra board operators to provide more complete coverage of AC Transit service, which will reduce instances where operators and customers are impacted by heavy loads resulting from missing assignments.

5. **Planning and Scheduling Interaction** – The Transportation Director will take a more proactive role in ensuring that the operators are provided with run cuts with adequate running time based on available workforce projections provided by Operations and Human Resources.
6. **Pre and Post Sign-up Meetings** - The objective of this workshop is to create teams for each division. This session will not allow a finger pointing session. This is designed for our teams to understand how our actions affect our customers and our operators. The session teams work as a group in “breakout” sessions to develop communication and timeline plans for each group. As a team the facilitators present the baseline flow chart for each department. The facilitators oversee the process to make sure that all groups stay on time and they give input when needed. We have also designated a time for each group to have a mid-way presentation on their planning stages, which is presented to the entire group. Each team then prepares their final presentation to the group before the end of the session. These groups are made up of employees from scheduling, planning, maintenance, HR, operations, marketing, ATU Local 192, and finance. This has paid huge dividends with collaboration between departments.

**BUDGETARY/FISCAL IMPACT:**

There are no current direct fiscal impacts related to this report; however, any improvement to operator attendance has a positive impact on the District’s operating budget.

**ADVANTAGES/DISADVANTAGES:**

The continued analysis of operator absenteeism has several advantages in that it allows management to focus in on the root cause for types of absences and allows the development of plans to address the high rates of absenteeism, which should result in improved employee morale, reduced customer complaints, and potential reductions in overtime costs.

There are no disadvantages in efforts to improve operator absenteeism.

**ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS:**

There are no alternative actions.

**PRIOR RELEVANT BOARD ACTION/POLICIES:**

There are no relevant board action/policies.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

None.

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