

**From:** [David Powe](#)  
**To:** [Steele, Brian](#); [Barreto, Denise](#)  
**Cc:** [Ted Villaire](#)  
**Subject:** Re: CTA adding 2 rail operator training classes?  
**Date:** Tuesday, October 24, 2023 12:40:15 PM  
**Attachments:** [image001.png](#)  
[image003.png](#)  
[image005.png](#)  
[image007.png](#)

---

**\*\*EXTERNAL EMAIL\*\*** This email originated outside of CTA. **\*\*NEVER CLICK or OPEN\*\*** unexpected links or attachments. **\*\*NEVER\*\*** provide User ID or Password. CTA IT Support will NEVER ask you for such information. If this email seems suspicious, contact CTA Help Desk at x12345.

Thanks, Brian and Denise. We'll hold off on letting the press and our partners across the city/state know until you get back to us. This is a massive priority for hundreds of thousands of CTA rail riders. It'd be a shame to have to let General Assembly members, the City Council, and Mayor's office know that CTA isn't prioritizing adding at least 2 more rail operator training classes. That would not be positive press ahead of the legislative session and DNC.

**David Powe** (he/him/his)

*Director of Planning & Technical Assistance*

Active Transportation Alliance

---

**From:** Steele, Brian <bstele@transitchicago.com>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, October 24, 2023 12:33 PM  
**To:** Barreto, Denise <DBarreto@transitchicago.com>; David Powe <David@activetrans.org>  
**Cc:** Ted Villaire <Ted@activetrans.org>  
**Subject:** RE: CTA adding 2 rail operator training classes?

Adding: I have been trying to get info related to your question as well...and haven't tracked down the info yet, either.

Between Denise and me, we'll get this info and provide soonest. Thanks again.

---

**From:** Barreto, Denise <DBarreto@transitchicago.com>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, October 24, 2023 12:24 PM  
**To:** David Powe <David@activetrans.org>; Steele, Brian <bstele@transitchicago.com>  
**Cc:** Ted Villaire <Ted@activetrans.org>  
**Subject:** Re: CTA adding 2 rail operator training classes?

And my apologies

I have been working independently of our communications area to speak directly with my peers Tom McKone (administration Chief) and Don Bonds (transit Chief) to get your answers and cannot nail a

final yes or no and why.

I am en route to Springfield and commit to tracking this down for you when I am back in office.

Thanks for your patience and my apologies for the continued back and forth. I am still getting my arms around how we communicate here and it's is very verbose and often confusing.

Please know I am on it and will come back to with you an answer.

Get [Outlook for iOS](#)

---

**From:** Barreto, Denise <[DBarreto@transitchicago.com](mailto:DBarreto@transitchicago.com)>

**Sent:** Tuesday, October 24, 2023 12:18:02 PM

**To:** David Powe <[David@activetrans.org](mailto:David@activetrans.org)>; Steele, Brian <[bstele@transitchicago.com](mailto:bstele@transitchicago.com)>

**Cc:** Ted Villaire <[Ted@activetrans.org](mailto:Ted@activetrans.org)>

**Subject:** Re: CTA adding 2 rail operator training classes?

Thanks David for this

Please include me in the Illinois Clean Jobs Coalition work related to transit. In my past role at Cook County Offices Under the President I was one of Madame President's liaisons for our environmental justice work.

I want to work with you on those position statements as I am asserting my work as the Chief of Equity and Engagement- of which communications is a tactic of engagement. We are still working through how those functions intersect with my equity work as they are intricately intertwined. Again... I am in week 14 (was saying that last week - every weeks feels like 7... love it but it's a heavy lift here) and sprinting to learn all I can about to the transit world. New to transit not justice, equity, communications or customer experience - industry agnostic we are not "meeting the moment," and are committed to doing better.

Thank you for your diligence and persistence and please know I am here to work with you and the advocates to get CTA the support we need to be the transit agency this area deserves and desires. Literally writing you from the Amtrak to Springfield.

Have a good day.

Get [Outlook for iOS](#)

---

**From:** David Powe <[David@activetrans.org](mailto:David@activetrans.org)>

**Sent:** Tuesday, October 24, 2023 11:07:46 AM

**To:** Steele, Brian <[bstele@transitchicago.com](mailto:bstele@transitchicago.com)>; Barreto, Denise <[DBarreto@transitchicago.com](mailto:DBarreto@transitchicago.com)>

**Cc:** Ted Villaire <[Ted@activetrans.org](mailto:Ted@activetrans.org)>

**Subject:** Re: CTA adding 2 rail operator training classes?

**\*\*EXTERNAL EMAIL\*\*** This email originated outside of CTA. **\*\*NEVER CLICK or OPEN\*\*** unexpected links or

attachments. **\*\*NEVER\*\*** provide User ID or Password. CTA IT Support will NEVER ask you for such information. If this email seems suspicious, contact CTA Help Desk at x12345.

Thanks, Brian - **I pasted my previous email as you didn't answer my question below.**

Denise, can you also help me understand the answer to my question below so I can let our partners know? I think that would go a long way toward helping us help legislators know why you can't increase class size and frequency. I'd like to request answers to both of those questions with specific reasons. Thanks!

Thanks, Brian! I appreciate you getting back to me and Ted about this. I'll let our lobbyists and friends in the press, city hall, governor's office and partner organizations know.

We've been encouraging advocates, agency partners, and elected officials to push CTA and Geisha Ester to implement these changes/innovations:

- Increase rail operator class training size to 30 people and then eventually to 40
- Hold at least 8 rail operator trainings a year and eventually more
- Employ tech and innovation to speed up procedures (simulators, iPads, alleviate front-line employee painpoints, etc.)
- Focus on job satisfaction and employee needs (mothers, women, public safety, bonuses, pay, flexibility, hire off the street temporarily to boost numbers, boost morale, etc.)
- Continue to the bus operator sign-on bonus after Dec 31

For what it's worth, I worked in bus operators and service planning before I joined the advocacy sphere. I'm well versed on FTA rules, the union agreement, and the mayor's purview over CTA. Happy to chat more about what advocates can do to support CTA and Geisha toward increasing class size and frequency for rail operator trainings asap. We've heard from agency contacts that rail ops and planning have been asking Geisha to increase rail operations training classes to 30 for 3 years, but she says she doesn't have the resources to do it and cites FTA regulatory hurdles. However, other agencies (including Metra) have figured out how to turn the corner on training rail operators. Can you shed any light on which specific hurdles prevent her from increasing class size and frequency of rail ops trainings?

We love what you've done to consolidate/improve/streamline bus operator trainings and hope you can do something similar with rail ops training. From what we're hearing, if you miss one class, you're kicked out of the rail training program which seems unreasonable

- especially for folks caring for family or who might get sick.

We've been briefing national organizations and agencies on these opportunities CTA can take so they can inform our congressional delegation who are hearing about how the CTA and Mayor Johnson haven't been able to address these problems. We want to make sure you've got all the support you need in Chicago, Springfield, and DC to help Geisha get more rail operators trained.

The Illinois Clean Jobs Coalition is launching a clean and equitable transportation campaign soon - centering transit in NE Illinois. It's going to be tapping into its national teams ahead of the legislative session and I'm their primary contact for Chicago transit. Brian, I've also joined the ICJC communications team, so I'll be responsible for drafting their positions on CTA-related matters with the NRDC and Sierra Club's national teams. We generally share any comms with IL's congressional delegation and the governor's office, so I'll share anything CTA-related with you in advance.

Thanks!

David

**David Powe** (he/him/his)

*Director of Planning & Technical Assistance*  
Active Transportation Alliance

---

**From:** Steele, Brian <[bsteale@transitchicago.com](mailto:bsteale@transitchicago.com)>

**Sent:** Tuesday, October 24, 2023 10:55 AM

**To:** David Powe <[David@activetrans.org](mailto:David@activetrans.org)>; Barreto, Denise <[DBarreto@transitchicago.com](mailto:DBarreto@transitchicago.com)>

**Cc:** Ted Villaire <[Ted@activetrans.org](mailto:Ted@activetrans.org)>

**Subject:** RE: CTA adding 2 rail operator training classes?

Good morning. Just following up with some more information in response to your inquiry.

As you know, the continuing shortage of rail operators is one of the biggest obstacles to CTA restoring service to pre-pandemic levels, but not the only one. We are aggressively addressing that shortage and are making consistent progress.

Other major factors impacting our ability to restore to pre-pandemic levels of service include attrition, which CTA continues its ongoing efforts to retain personnel—namely to those looking to retire—which would provide more time for CTA to train and add additional operators to service. Further, construction and slow zones also impact service and the number of operators needed to provide that service.

### CTA rail operator hiring

Like all industries across the public and private sectors across the country, the CTA is still seeing the effects of a workforce shortage and talent vacuum. CTA is amid an unprecedented, comprehensive recruitment and hiring effort to bring in more bus and train operators. We've made notable progress toward hiring both bus and rail operators, hosting a dozen job fairs for a variety of positions, attracting more than 3,200 participants.

That said, it's important to note that the hiring for rail operators is a far more complex process and simply cannot be expedited. Rail operators require the most extensive training of any CTA position, given the complexity of the job duties. CTA hires rail operators from within existing rail operations staff, as these workers already have the basic training and familiarity with the rail system. Already this year, CTA has also hired over 100 rail flaggers who will ultimately be trained to become rail operators.

CTA has nearly **doubled** its rail operator training class sizes, from 12 students to 20, and we're training at an unprecedented pace, using every instruction and training resource we have available. We've trained a new class of rail supervisors and rail instructors to handle the increased instruction demand. We've also brought back 9 retired rail instructors to supplement training.

The results: We've trained more employees to operate trains this year than we have in decades. Rail Operator headcount jumped from 709 in July to 721 in September; that number continues to grow. We recently graduated a class of 16 operators who will be put to work on the Blue, Red, and Brown Lines. We are still about 100 below our optimal number, but we continue to make progress, with another graduating class of rail operators scheduled for December.

Rail operators are hired from within CTA's existing staffing ranks: flaggers and customer-service representatives/assistants. This is to ensure that each operator has been thoroughly trained on right-of-way safety, rail operations, and system communications with our control center. This training and experience in railroad operators are an important prerequisite for the job-- a standard that allows us to maintain the highest safety standards for both riders and employees.

Training rail operators is extensive and takes approximately two-three months to complete. CTA has one of the most robust training regimens of any US transit agency, which is reflected in our strong performance, as measured in comparison to our US transit agency peers, in operational performance and safety. We won't compromise safety to achieve expediency in hiring.

As noted earlier, we have over 100 flaggers currently on staff who are in the queue to become rail operators. So we have a clear path to increase rail-operator hiring, and as soon as operators are fully trained, we'll be able to return service to lines that have seen schedule reductions, as well as where we've seen the strongest ridership growth. And all our decisions will be made to ensure an equitable approach to our decision-making.

Hope this information is helpful. Of course, should you have any questions, happy to provide whatever info you need.

Regards,  
Brian

---

**From:** Steele, Brian <[bsteele@transitchicago.com](mailto:bsteele@transitchicago.com)>  
**Sent:** Friday, October 20, 2023 5:56 PM  
**To:** David Powe <[David@activetrans.org](mailto:David@activetrans.org)>; Barreto, Denise <[DBarreto@transitchicago.com](mailto:DBarreto@transitchicago.com)>  
**Cc:** Ted Villaire <[Ted@activetrans.org](mailto:Ted@activetrans.org)>  
**Subject:** Re: CTA adding 2 rail operator training classes?

Good evening and apologies for the delay in getting back.

We'll gather the latest information on hiring regarding rail operators and get to you soonest. As discussed in a previous conversation, CTA:

- has increased rail operator training class size from 12 to 20
- has deployed every available resource for training—including bringing back nine retired rail instructors to supplement training
- is on track to train nearly 100 new rail operators this year, the largest total in years.

We'll gather more information and provide to you soonest. We appreciate your efforts to amplify the progress the agency is making.

Many thanks and have a good weekend.

Get [Outlook for iOS](#)

---

**From:** David Powe <[David@activetrans.org](mailto:David@activetrans.org)>  
**Sent:** Friday, October 20, 2023 5:12:49 PM  
**To:** Barreto, Denise <[DBarreto@transitchicago.com](mailto:DBarreto@transitchicago.com)>; Steele, Brian <[bsteele@transitchicago.com](mailto:bsteele@transitchicago.com)>  
**Cc:** Ted Villaire <[Ted@activetrans.org](mailto:Ted@activetrans.org)>  
**Subject:** Re: CTA adding 2 rail operator training classes?

You don't often get email from [david@activetrans.org](mailto:david@activetrans.org). [Learn why this is important](#)

**\*\*EXTERNAL EMAIL\*\*** This email originated outside of CTA. **\*\*NEVER CLICK or OPEN\*\*** unexpected links or attachments. **\*\*NEVER\*\*** provide User ID or Password. CTA IT Support will NEVER ask you for such information. If this email seems suspicious, contact CTA Help Desk at x12345.

Denise, thanks so much for your reply! I'll let the journalists and advocates who have reached out to us about rail operator trainings know we're awaiting confirmation.

I do anticipate that advocates will be raising questions related to the rail operator pipeline at the upcoming CTA budget hearings. Given the Mayor's purview over the agency, we've also encouraged advocates and partners to reach out to the 5<sup>th</sup> floor and

alders about how their offices can help CTA address the rail operator pipeline issues. I'm keeping our legislative partners apprised as well. Hope we can work together to get more rail operators trained asap.

If the agency is scheduling more rail ops trainings, I do see this as an opportunity for the CTA to own a piece of positive news ahead of these hearings. We'd also be happy to provide a statement and do some social media around it, too!

I believe our lobbying team will be down in Springfield next week, too. Hope it's a good trip. Talk soon.

David

**David Powe** (he/him/his)

*Director of Planning & Technical Assistance*

Active Transportation Alliance

---

**From:** Barreto, Denise <[DBarreto@transitchicago.com](mailto:DBarreto@transitchicago.com)>

**Sent:** Friday, October 20, 2023 4:57 PM

**To:** David Powe <[David@activetrans.org](mailto:David@activetrans.org)>; Steele, Brian <[bsteeler@transitchicago.com](mailto:bsteeler@transitchicago.com)>

**Cc:** Ted Villaire <[Ted@activetrans.org](mailto:Ted@activetrans.org)>

**Subject:** Re: CTA adding 2 rail operator training classes?

Good afternoon David -my apologies for not responding sooner

I cannot get confirmation on this just yet and I am out today.

I will circle back on Monday -either way. Heads up - I am headed to Springfield next week for veto session and will touch base before I leave.

Thanks for your patience.

Get [Outlook for iOS](#)

---

**From:** David Powe <[David@activetrans.org](mailto:David@activetrans.org)>

**Sent:** Friday, October 20, 2023 4:40:42 PM

**To:** Steele, Brian <[bsteeler@transitchicago.com](mailto:bsteeler@transitchicago.com)>; Barreto, Denise <[DBarreto@transitchicago.com](mailto:DBarreto@transitchicago.com)>

**Cc:** Ted Villaire <[Ted@activetrans.org](mailto:Ted@activetrans.org)>

**Subject:** Re: CTA adding 2 rail operator training classes?

**\*\*EXTERNAL EMAIL\*\*** This email originated outside of CTA. **\*\*NEVER CLICK or OPEN\*\*** unexpected links or attachments. **\*\*NEVER\*\*** provide User ID or Password. CTA IT Support will NEVER ask you for such information. If this email seems suspicious, contact CTA Help Desk at x12345.

Brian and Denise,

Circling back on this. We'd love to highlight any positive step CTA is taking on this front.

Thanks!

David

**David Powe (he/him/his)**

*Director of Planning & Technical Assistance*  
Active Transportation Alliance

---

**From:** David Powe <[David@activetrans.org](mailto:David@activetrans.org)>

**Sent:** Tuesday, October 17, 2023 9:28 AM

**To:** Steele, Brian <[bsteale@transitchicago.com](mailto:bsteale@transitchicago.com)>; Barreto, Denise <[DBarreto@transitchicago.com](mailto:DBarreto@transitchicago.com)>

**Cc:** Ted Villaire <[Ted@activetrans.org](mailto:Ted@activetrans.org)>

**Subject:** CTA adding 2 rail operator training classes?

Hi Brian and Denise,

I hope you're both doing well. We've gotten word that CTA is planning to hold 2 additional rail operator training classes this year. If so, that is absolutely fantastic news that we'd love to highlight as a positive step by the agency. Let me know and we'd be happy to share this news with our partners.

Thanks!

David



**David Powe (he/him)**

Director of Planning & Technical Assistance  
Active Transportation Alliance  
35 E. Wacker Dr., Ste 1782  
Chicago, IL 60601  
312.216.0467

[david@activetrans.org](mailto:david@activetrans.org)



Do you like safe biking options, walkable communities, and excellent public transportation? Consider [becoming a member](#) of the Active Transportation Alliance. [Watch this brief video](#) to learn about us.