

# The Gray-Collar Advantage in Transit

How veteran field technicians are becoming the most marketable workforce in modern infrastructure - and how ESP helps find them.

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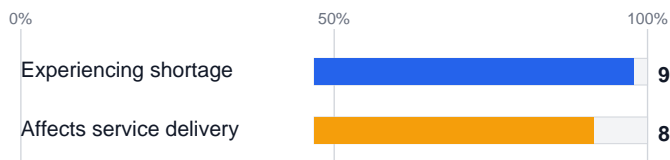
In the transit space, the most valuable employees are often the ones who can fix what other people can't: the hybrid mechanical-electric-digital technicians who keep fleets and systems operating under safety-critical constraints. We call them **gray-collar** - not because they are "older," but because their skill set lives in the gray area between traditional trades and modern technology. And they're getting harder to find.

<p><b>96%</b></p> <p>of transit agencies surveyed report a workforce shortage</p>	<p><b>43%</b></p> <p>of the transit workforce was age 55+ (2021) - a retirement cliff</p>	<p><b>57%</b></p> <p>of data center firms increased salary-related spending in 2024</p>
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## Why the gray-collar pipeline is thinning

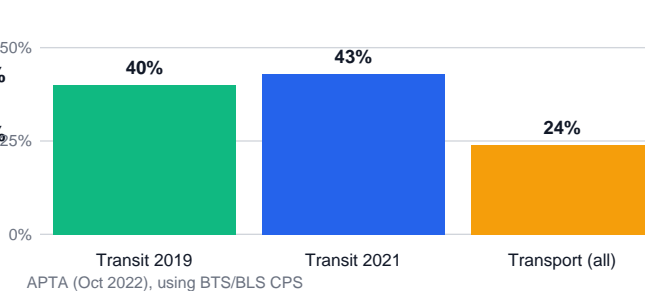
APTA's 2022 Transit Workforce Shortage report found the shortage is nearly universal: **96%** of agencies surveyed reported a shortage, and most said it is affecting service delivery. At the same time, the workforce is aging quickly, setting up a near-term "retirement cliff."

### Transit workforce pressure (APTA survey)



Source: APTA Transit Workforce Shortage (Oct 2022)

### Share of workers age 55+

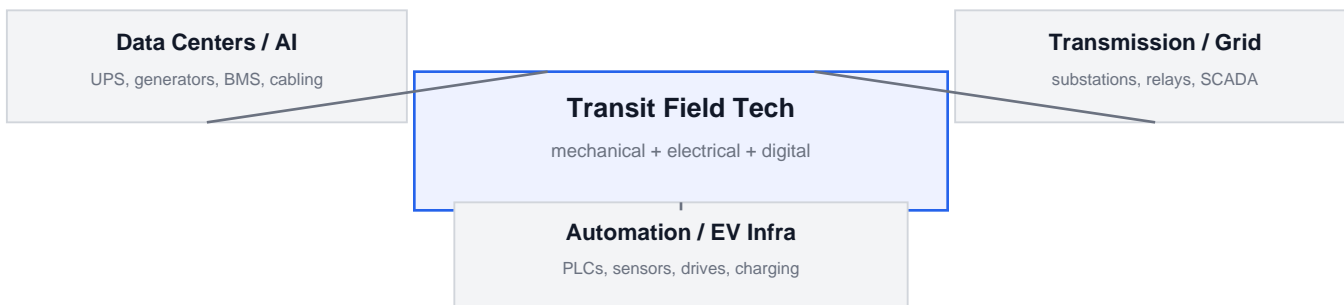


Translation: the market is paying a premium for people who can diagnose, repair, and commission equipment where downtime has real consequences - whether that's a bus fleet, a rail signal cabinet, or a high-density AI data center.

## Why transit skills travel to data centers, AI, and the grid

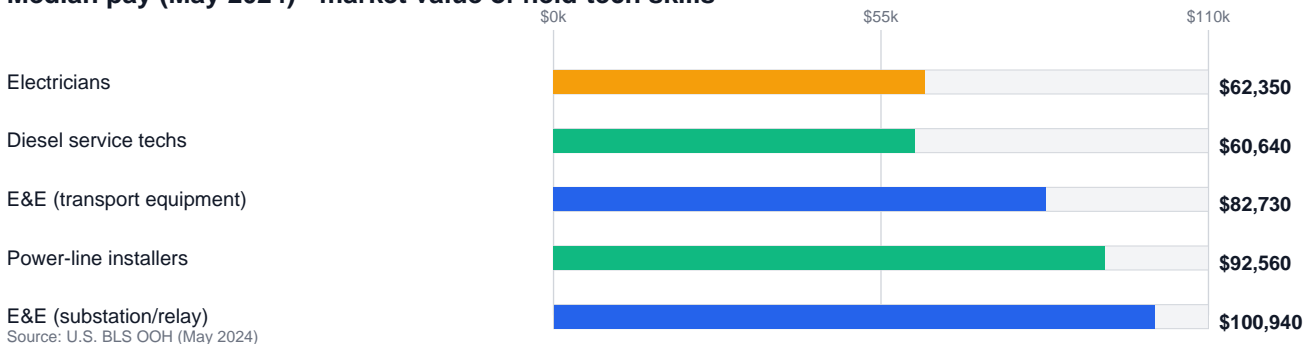
Work is shifting from job titles to **skills**. Deloitte calls this the move toward the "skills-based organization" - and transit is a proving ground: technicians learn troubleshooting, controls, power, and systems thinking.

### Skills adjacency: transit tech -> critical infrastructure



<b>57%</b> Data center firms increased salary spending (2024)	<b>349k</b> Net new construction workers needed in 2026 (ABC)	<b>456k</b> Projected net new workers needed in 2027 (ABC)
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### Median pay (May 2024) - market value of field-tech skills



#### For hiring leaders

- Scarcity is structural (retirements + electrification + digital buildout).
- Hire for adjacency, not titles (one-move-away skills).
- Time-to-identify and time-to-start become competitive advantages.

#### How ESP helps

- Transit specialization: safety, shifts, rules, and system-specific troubleshooting.
- Skill-stack screening: hands-on capability + credentials + mission-critical mindset.
- National reach: tap a broader bench when local supply is thin.

Sources: APTA Transit Workforce Shortage (Oct 2022); U.S. BLS Occupational Outlook Handbook (May 2024); Uptime Institute 2024 Staffing & Recruitment Survey (Oct 2024); ABC workforce release (Jan 15, 2026); Deloitte skills-based organization (Sep 7, 2022); FTA Workforce Development Initiative (updated Mar 2025); Transit Workforce Center research roundup.