



## Severe Operator Shortage to Force Suspension of Some Service

**\*\*\* FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE \*\*\***

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**Dover, NH** – Not unlike many school districts and employers who rely on commercial vehicle operators, COAST has been suffering from a severe lack of qualified operators. “We have been operating with an ongoing driver shortage for much of the past three years,” stated Rad Nichols, COAST Executive Director. Unfortunately, over the past few months the shortage has only grown, and the region’s public transit provider is now in the position of not being able to meet all of its published service schedules. “We have been doing everything we can to reduce our reliance on commercial drivers where able, and all our CDL-qualified staff that normally work in the office are working behind the wheel as much as possible,” Nichols continued.

Until COAST is able to return to sufficient staffing levels, the following service will be suspended. This service has been selected due to its lower average ridership, services being available 30 minutes before or after it, and the ongoing difficulty in staffing the block of work it represents.

### Route 2

- 5:28 PM northbound departure from Market Square

This suspension of service will begin on Monday, April 16 and will last until COAST is able to return to sufficient staffing levels. During this service suspension, the last Route 2 northbound connection with Route 1 to Somersworth and Berwick will now be scheduled to arrive at Shaw’s at 5:55 PM. Nichols confirmed, “the sole reason COAST is suspending these services is due to the severe shortage of available CDL operators to do the work.”

As mentioned in a recent news piece on the shortage of school bus operators in New Hampshire (and commercial vehicle operators nationwide), it is getting more difficult to find people who; (1) qualify for a commercial driver’s license (with passenger and airbrake endorsements), (2) can meet the increasingly rigorous DOT medical exam requirements, (3) can pass all the reasonably expected background checks, pre-employment and ongoing drug testing, and (4) cope with the challenges of operating a large commercial vehicle on congested roadways with increasingly stressed and rushed motorists zipping all around you while continually providing excellent customer service. Trade journals for the trucking industry are noting that there are 10-12 freight loads available for every one available CDL operator, which is driving up shipping and pay rates, and causing incredible competition for a dwindling CDL operator labor pool. The American Trucking Association estimates the industry needs to hire almost 900,000 more CDL operators.

That said, being a public transit operator can be an incredibly rewarding career where, on a daily basis, you help your many passengers safely get to work or school and back, go to see their doctors, make trips

to the grocery store or local retailers, meet up with friends for a day or evening out, or otherwise go about their daily lives. COAST buses are “rolling neighborhoods” that represent each of the ten communities they operate in. Friendships are formed, life stories and struggles are shared, and successes are celebrated. Our bus operators get to experience all of that first-hand and are a leader in their own “neighborhood”, comprised of all their passengers.

How short staffed is COAST currently? COAST has 25 full time equivalent CDL operators involved in fixed route driving (requiring a CDL). There are currently openings for 5 full time operators to fill this role at the organization. That is the equivalent of needing to increase their full time CDL operator workforce by 20%. This severe shortage represents a much greater staffing need than the services that are being suspended. Most of the uncovered driving hours are successfully being covered using overtime and CDL-qualified office staff driving, but even that it is hitting a point where operators are maxing out on their legal hours and/or availability for further overtime.

If you are a commercially licensed operator looking for a change and a great work environment, please visit [www.coastbus.org/careers](http://www.coastbus.org/careers). COAST offers competitive wages (start at \$16.30/hr.) and benefits, along with a great work culture. Current top operator wages at COAST, after the 4<sup>th</sup> anniversary, are \$20.00/hr. Additional opportunities exist to earn even more through participating as a trainer, and with overtime. COAST will train CDL operators on air-brakes and to get passenger endorsements if they do not currently have them.

The Cooperative Alliance for Seacoast Transportation (COAST) has provided public transit service to the Seacoast New Hampshire region since 1982. COAST is a public, non-profit transit system that relies primarily on federal and local government support to operate. COAST is governed by a board of directors representing the communities served, two regional planning commissions, and many local and state agencies.

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NPR reporting on nationwide operator shortage from January 2018:

<https://www.npr.org/2018/01/09/576752327/trucking-industry-struggles-with-growing-driver-shortage>

A local article about school bus operators from April 3:

<http://www.newhampshire.com/education/School-bus-operators-call-on-state-to-help-ease-driver-shortage-04042018>

Ohio's TARTA cuts bus service in March 2018 due to driver shortage:

<http://www.metro-magazine.com/management-operations/news/728762/ohio-s-tarta-cutting-bus-service-6-due-to-driver-shortage-ot-expenses>

Minneapolis/St. Paul transit disruptions in December 2017 due to shortage of drivers:

<http://www.startribune.com/the-drive-shortage-of-drivers-leading-to-bus-disruptions/464813723/>

Gainesville Florida service closures due to bus operator shortages, March 2018:

<http://www.gainesville.com/news/20180312/city-blames-statewide-driver-shortage-for-route-cuts>

A recent article on having sufficient operators to meet coverage needs at the MBTA, April 2018:

[https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2018/04/05/canceled-mbta-bus-trips-rise-absenteeism-increases-among-drivers/5C3sDPfjKikUSu6owZBzL/story.html?s\\_campaign=bdc:globewell:trending&s\\_campaign=bdc:globewell:trending](https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2018/04/05/canceled-mbta-bus-trips-rise-absenteeism-increases-among-drivers/5C3sDPfjKikUSu6owZBzL/story.html?s_campaign=bdc:globewell:trending&s_campaign=bdc:globewell:trending)