many fleet managers say one of the biggest challenges is in finding qualified technicians for their operation. Public fleet maintenance is not a well-known profession, and unfortunately, for those who do know about it, it’s not known as a well-paid profession. What it does offer, however, is stability and benefits. Or, at least, that’s what most people think.

However, in a survey of public sector technicians, some are saying the public sector is not the secure environment it used to be. “With the continual assault on public sector employee benefits, no one knows what the benefits will end up being,” a technician commented.

To make matters worse, fleet managers worry about a wave of technician retirements in the near future, as many are approaching retirement age. In fact, 37% of respondents to Government Fleet’s public fleet technician survey plan to retire in 10 years or less.

Meanwhile, demand for technicians is expected to continue growing. The job outlook for automotive and diesel service technicians and mechanics is projected to grow 9% from 2012 to 2022, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Despite these disadvantages, the public fleet industry can take steps to overcome the “technician shortage” problem. As Cal Macy from Long Beach (Calif.) City College recounted: “There are two ways to get a technician: You can grow them or you can steal them.”

**Recruiting Technicians**

Macy is project director of the Advanced Transportation Technology Center at the college. In addition to heading up the center, he also teaches classes about alternative fuel technology.

When it comes to recruitment, fleet managers want someone like Macy on their side, as he’s a strong advocate for public fleet positions. After 25 years teaching at the college, his conclusions are that students don’t know about fleet opportunities and benefits, and they think “the dealership is the big prize upon graduation,” Macy explained.

What students often don’t realize is that technicians at dealerships make commission sales, “it’s a hustle-hustle environment, and you’re scrambling all the time to survive,” he said. In contrast, public fleet technicians have steady incomes and hours and get the same benefits the mayor or city manager does. People who get fleet jobs tend to stay at their positions longer, and the work is more varied and interesting.

“But these guys don’t know that fleet exists,” Macy said.

In his compressed natural gas (CNG) classes, Macy takes his students to a nearby CNG fueling station. They watch which vehicles come in to fuel, and he asks them to look at the logos on the sides of the trucks.

“Every vehicle that’s got a name on the side of it is owned by a company [or agency], and they have to have maintenance done. And they don’t take it to the dealership in a lot of cases,” he explains to his students.

Jerry Rutter, vice president of Industry Employment & Solutions at Universal Technical Institute (UTI), said dealers, manufacturers, and businesses are recruiting students through branding, interaction, and incentives. UTI provides technical education to students at 11 campuses.

**At a glance**

Fleets can solve the “technician shortage” problem by:

- Educating current automotive students about public fleet positions
- Creating apprenticeship programs to train future techs
- Making sure current employees are happy.
“You need to be able to interact with them earlier because if you just try to catch them at the end, chances are they already have a job or they have a few competing offers,” he explained.

Macy agrees that fleets need to reach out directly to students, and he recommends fleet managers and technicians talk to automotive classes about the opportunities available. Because as often as he says it, it’s not as effective as when someone who’s working in the industry says it.

Stealing Technicians

Can government fleets “steal” technicians from the private sector? Potentially, if they can reach technicians who are seeking new employment and who were unaware of fleet.

In Government Fleet’s survey of private sector technicians, 26% of respondents said they didn’t know government agencies employed technicians, and another 25% said they would like to move to public fleet in the future.

However, some respondents commented that it is difficult to find a job in government, or that there are no jobs in their area.

On a positive note, respondents were asked about their perception of government fleet work and most thought public sector technicians have it better. They said private sector technicians get paid more, work more, and work faster than public sector workers, but they get less benefits, have worse tools and equipment, have less warranty repairs.

“Differentiate yourself to the student so you don’t have to compete on who can offer the most money. Compete on how meaningful it’s going to be to work for your fleet,” Rutter said.

For those looking to attend career fairs, Rutter suggests coming early and often.

About the Technician Surveys

In March and April, Government Fleet conducted two technician surveys: A government fleet technician survey went out to GF readership and received 161 responses (see graphs on pages 12-13). A private sector technician survey went out to readers of a sister Bobit publication and received 102 responses (see graphs on page 10). These respondents work at dealerships, tire shops, independent repair shops, preventive maintenance shops, and commercial fleets. For the full results of these surveys, visit www.gfleet.com/TechShortage2015.

Across the nation.

“If I were a fleet owner and wondering how I could make sure that people were aware of my jobs, I would do those same things,” he recommended.

Incentives can be monetary, such as signing bonuses, relocation packages, and tool allowances, but they don’t have to be, Rutter said. In fact, money may not be the main driver for millennials. Rutter suggests fleets offer mentorship programs and talk about a step-by-step path for growth. Since students often feel an affinity toward particular brands, it may be helpful to talk about specific truck or engine brands they would be working on. Or let students know that it’s not all preventive maintenance — that they’d get to work on a variety of equipment or even warranty repairs.

Differentiate yourself to the student so you don’t have to compete on who can offer the most money. Compete on how meaningful it’s going to be to work for your fleet,” Rutter said.

For those looking to attend career fairs, Rutter suggests coming early and often.
More private sector technicians said they found out about their jobs through direct inquiry with the company (33%) than public fleet employees (10%, see page 12). This suggests that technicians are much more aware of private sector jobs.

**PLEASE RANK YOUR REASONS FOR CHOOSING AND/OR STAYING AT YOUR CURRENT JOB**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Private Sector</th>
<th>Public Sector</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compensation</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stability &amp; security</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity for advancement</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State-of-the-art facility and equipment</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagnostic tools</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Updated computers &amp; software programs</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Few/no other options</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**WHAT IS YOUR PERCEPTION OF GOVERNMENT FLEET JOBS?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception</th>
<th>True</th>
<th>False</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private sector technicians get paid more than government fleet technicians</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private sector technicians get more benefits than government fleet technicians</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private sector technicians work more than government fleet technicians</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private sector technicians work faster than government fleet technicians</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private sector technicians have better tools/equipment than government fleet technicians</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private sector technicians have more stability than government fleet technicians</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private sector technicians have better long-term and retirement benefits than government fleet technicians</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most respondents thought government fleet technicians had it better than private sector technicians, getting more stability and benefits, better tools, and better retirement benefits.
More technicians said they would turn down a slightly higher income and stay at their current jobs than those who said they would leave.

Benefits and stability rank highest on the list of reasons employees stay their jobs. This is despite some technicians’ worries that their benefits are under attack. *More than one response possible. Only the top selections were included in this chart. View the online article for full statistics.*

Compensation ranked highest on the list of improvements requested by technicians, but more professional development is also highly desired. *More than one response possible. Only the top selections were included in this chart. View the online article for full statistics.*

**WHAT CAN FLEET MANAGEMENT DO TO IMPROVE YOUR JOB?**

- More compensation: 56%
- Provide professional development: 45%
  - Technical training
  - Bonuses for accomplishments (such as certifications)
- Provide professional development: 43%
  - Attending local fleet/vehicle events
  - A more state-of-the-art fleet facility
- Provide professional development: 36%
  - Other training such as for software, financial management, etc.

**WHAT KEEPS YOU AT YOUR JOB?**

- Benefits: 82%
- Stability & security: 78%
- Compensation: 51%
- Co-workers: 48%
- Location: 41%

**IF APPROACHED BY ANOTHER AGENCY OR COMPANY FOR ANOTHER POSITION WITH SLIGHTLY BETTER COMPENSATION AND COMPARABLE BENEFITS, HOW LIKELY ARE YOU TO LEAVE YOUR CURRENT POSITION?**

- I would not leave: 13%
- Definitely: 16%
-Probably not: 44%
- Probably: 27%

Personal referral ranked highest in terms of how technical staff heard about public fleet positions. In comparison, private sector technicians ranked direct company inquiry highest in terms of how they got their current jobs (see page 10).
DO YOU FEEL TECHNICIANS AND PARTS EMPLOYEES WORKING FOR PRIVATE COMPANIES RECEIVE MORE COMPENSATION/BENEFITS THAN WHAT YOU RECEIVE AS A PUBLIC SECTOR FLEET EMPLOYEE?

Public sector fleet employees were divided on whether they had it better than private sector technicians.

WOULD YOU RECOMMEND A CAREER IN PUBLIC FLEET MAINTENANCE TO YOUR FRIENDS AND FAMILY?

Those who chose no said their reasons were: not enough pay, reduced benefits make it not as worthwhile as it was in the past, and too much politics.

SOURCES:
- Cal Macy, project director, Advanced Transportation Technology Center, Long Beach City College, Calif. E-mail: cmacy@lbcc.edu
- Jerry Rutter, vice president of Industry Employment & Solutions, Universal Technical Institute www.uti.edu