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Chief Operating Officer

WMSC Background

The Washington Metrorail Safety Commission (WMSC) is recruiting a technically qualified and experienced leader to serve as the Chief Operating Officer (COO).

The Washington Metrorail Safety Commission is the designated state safety oversight agency (SSOA) responsible for overseeing the safety of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) Metrorail system, which operates rail transit in the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia. The WMSC safety oversight program complies with the WMSC Compact, federal law, and other applicable safety standards.

As a member of the WMSC Senior Leadership Team, the COO reports directly to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and plays a key role in directing the agency's technical oversight activities including investigations, safety certification, audits, inspections, as well as, supporting organizational priorities, and advancing its mission of improving Metrorail safety through independent oversight and effective enforcement. This recruitment may also be used to identify qualified candidates for other senior technical leadership opportunities within the WMSC.

The selected candidate will ensure that the technical activities support agency priorities and are completed accurately and on time. Working under the direction of the CEO, the COO will manage technical managers, technical specialists, and contractors; and hold staff accountable for the quality and completion of their work. The COO will advance the WMSC Strategic Plan through rigorous audits and risk-based inspections, effective use of safety data, verification of corrective actions, and continued development of staff capabilities. The position requires constructive working relationships with WMATA and other external stakeholders while maintaining independent regulatory judgment. The position will be expected to clearly communicate safety concerns, recommendations, and emerging risks to the CEO, WMATA, and stakeholders.

Responsibilities and Duties

The Chief Operating Officer is responsible for:

State Safety Oversight Program:

- Lead strategic, safety-focused oversight, and with technical staff, design and conduct audits, investigations, inspections, safety certifications and other tests to evaluate the effectiveness of WMATA Metrorail System safety procedures and policies.
- Evaluating and incorporating emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, into technical oversight activities to improve data analysis, identify safety trends, and support efficient review of technical information, while ensuring appropriate validation, protection of sensitive information, and staff accountability for findings and decisions.
- Leading the WMSC's technical response to critical safety events at WMATA in coordination with the CEO, including staff deployment, investigation activities, and timely communication of significant findings and emerging risk, at times with incomplete information.
- Identify key operational and performance metrics to enhance measurement and evaluation of progress toward achieving the WMSC Strategic Plan's goals and objectives.
- In addition to metrics in the WMSC Strategic Plan, developing key operating and performance metrics aligned with WMSC goals and priorities.
- Reviewing, commenting and conditionally approving WMATA Metrorail's Agency Safety Plan update process.
- Monitoring Metrorail's execution of its Agency Safety Plan with applicable Federal Transit Administration (FTA) regulations.

- Implementing the WMSC Program Standard, policies, and requirements for comprehensive safety oversight of the WMATA Metrorail System under the general direction of the CEO.

Staff development

- Collaborate with the Chief Financial Officer (CFO), General Counsel, and Human Resources, to manage staff and ensure employee development, compliance requirements, and best practices are met. This includes staff evaluation, development, support, and management.
- Ensure that all appropriate program staff are designated under the applicable federal regulations.
- Take appropriate steps to ensure staff designated under applicable federal regulations achieve and maintain training currency and ensure records are maintained accurately and for the requisite duration.
- Conduct an annual staffing assessment to meet the WMSC's staffing needs.

External agency interactions

- Support public communications and engagement on legislative and regulatory matters under the direction of the CEO, including providing technical analysis, briefings, and recommendations.
- Prepare and present technical reports for FTA, the WMSC Commissioners, and others.
- Maintain awareness of rulemakings and regulations that directly affect the WMSC's state safety oversight program.
- Ensure compliance with all applicable FTA requirements.
- Establish and maintain interactions with other State Safety Oversight Agencies (SSOAs).

Skills

The successful candidate will demonstrate the ability to:

- Translate strategic priorities into practical work plans with clear responsibilities, deadlines, and measures of success. Track progress and resolve barriers to completion.
- Evaluate information and distinguish between urgent hazards and issues requiring further analysis.
- Lead technical managers and subject matter experts through clear expectations, effective delegation, coaching, and timely feedback. Address performance concerns directly and consistently.
- Implement and further identify consistent quality review processes so that findings, reports, and safety recommendations are accurate, supported by evidence, and completed on time.
- Present WMSC data, findings, and relevant information in small and large meeting settings.
- Exercise critical thinking, analysis and managerial judgment.
- Effectively organize, access, and produce a variety of written materials for different audiences.
- Consistently meet deadlines.

Qualifications

Experience

A minimum of 7 years of progressively responsible experience in an executive- or senior-level position within the transportation industry is required, including demonstrated responsibilities related to safety management systems (SMS), investigations, audits or inspections.

An advanced degree (beyond a bachelor's degree) in a relevant field may be substituted for a portion of the required professional experience.

Knowledge and familiarity of applicable Federal, State, and Local laws and regulations is required.

Education

A bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university is required, preferably in Engineering, Transportation, Business Administration, Public Administration, or a related field. A master's degree or higher in a relevant field is preferred.

Residency Requirement

The COO is expected to have a regular, routine presence at the offices of the WMSC. Telework/remote work is permissible on an occasional basis. It is required that the COO live within 30 miles of any WMATA Metrorail station no later than 90 days from the first day of employment.

Physical Requirements

WMSC inspection, audit, and investigation work may take place at any time of day as warranted by emergency conditions or scheduled inspections (e.g. responding to a Metrorail event or conducting observations of overnight maintenance work). Work may take place on or about WMATA property where the WMSC personnel must always be alert for: the approach of trains or rolling equipment; slips/trips/fall hazards; and hazardous materials. While on site, WMSC personnel must take precautions with electrical hazards associated with revenue and non-revenue vehicles and equipment, the third rail, and other traction power equipment throughout the Metrorail System. The WMSC personnel may be exposed to unfavorable weather conditions, including temperature extremes and precipitation, and other environmental discomforts such as insects and vegetation on or about rail property.

Personal protective equipment (PPE) will be required for specific job functions. All WMSC personnel will comply with WMATA requirements for PPE as applicable to the circumstances, as well as with applicable industry standards.

Certifications

All WMSC staff positions require possession of a valid driver's license or reliable transportation to travel to meetings, inspection locations, or event scenes as necessary, including during overnight hours. The COO is required to complete and maintain applicable Public Transportation Safety Certification Training Program (PTSCTP) requirements, including Safety Management Systems training and required refresher training, within applicable timeframes. Other industry-recognized transportation safety certifications or relevant professional licensure are desirable.

Salary

Salary is regionally competitive and will be commensurate with skills and experience.