

Keolis Commuter Services Case Study

Executive Search for a CFO





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- Client:** Keolis Commuter Services
- Client contact:** Robert Anderson
Executive Vice President of Human Resources, Safety & Organization at Keolis North America
- Placement:** Chief Financial Officer, Keolis Commuter Services

About Keolis Commuter Services

Keolis Commuter Services operates and maintains the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority commuter rail system, carrying more than 127,000 passengers daily throughout Greater Boston.

Keolis Commuter Services is owned by Keolis North America. Keolis North America specialises in helping transportation authorities meet the needs of their communities through public contracts for trains, buses and taxis.

Challenge



This was a key hire for us. Boston represents our largest contract in North America and is a showcase for our capabilities.

The transport sector has seen significant disruption in recent years, with new technologies and new players reshaping the structure of the industry. Consequently, we are transforming our capabilities and repositioning ourselves from the type of traditional operator that clients might have sourced in the past.

For this crucial position, we wanted to appoint an individual who could bring with them a contemporary perspective and fresh ideas, someone who could help us to adapt and anticipate future challenges. To this end, we were keen to extend the search beyond our sector and to meet candidates from parallel industries.



Robert Anderson
Executive Vice President of Human
Resources, Safety & Organization
at Keolis North America





Solution

“We engaged Cobalt Search to assist us in finding a new Chief Financial Officer. **Cobalt is a preferred supplier to Keolis and has helped us with a range of recruitment projects.** Although we have our own internal recruitment team, we use Cobalt to help us with high-level assignments – particularly those where we need to accelerate the recruitment process or where confidentiality is a critical factor.”

“Ahead of starting work on the project, Cobalt received a comprehensive briefing from stakeholders within Keolis. As well as setting out a detailed description of the role and communicating the qualities and experience we wanted to see in an ideal candidate, the briefing covered business priorities and key issues.”

“During the initial search stage, Cobalt provided weekly updates, giving us a detailed overview of progress and enabling us to see how candidates were flowing through the process. Cobalt carried out pre-screening interviews with candidates, ascertaining their suitability against the initial briefing, and their level of interest.”

“Once candidates had been qualified, Cobalt prepared an executive summary for each of them, enabling us to undertake a desktop review. **The level of rigour in Cobalt’s initial conversations with candidates was extremely helpful.** Our senior executives’ time is in high demand, so ensuring those shortlisted were of the right quality was a vital part of the service we required.”

“Ahead of us meeting face to face with candidates, Cobalt highlighted specific areas that might benefit from a more in-depth discussion at interview. This proved extremely useful, helping us put in place a holistic selection process where any points of attention were tested and retested.”

“Throughout the recruitment process for this pivotal role, **Helen Goddard of Cobalt was the face of Keolis**, and all communications were channelled through her to ensure consistency of contact. Helen coordinated all aspects of the search and interview process, managing all stages of the candidate experience and presenting us with all the necessary information so that **all we needed to do was select the most appropriate candidate based on our interviews.**”

Result

“**Cobalt did an excellent job** sourcing and putting forward candidates that met our remit. By the time we had concluded our interviews, **we had several candidates who were suitable for the role.**”

“The individual we selected to appoint meets with all the criteria we set out in our brief. Bringing experience from a tangential industry – rolling stock leasing, he has a track record of transforming finance departments. Since taking up his position over a year ago, he has introduced new tools and capabilities, reinforced his teams’ focus on supporting the regional transformation process and played an important role in re-negotiating our contract with Boston’s public transport agency.”

“In 2016, the Massachusetts Department of Transportation stated it did not expect to extend Keolis Commuter Services’ contract. However, **our new CFO was heavily involved in helping to successfully re-negotiate a 4-year extension to the contract**, ensuring the terms were acceptable to our client, the Fiscal & Management Control Board and our shareholders. The new contract balances commercial risk with operational opportunity and gives us the bandwidth to provide a better service to our customers.”



Stephan Oehler
VP Finance, Strategy & Transformation
at Keolis Commuter Services

Testimonials

"We found the maturity and capability of Cobalt to be materially different from our experience of using other suppliers."

Robert Anderson

Executive Vice President, Human Resources, Safety & Organization, Keolis North America

"Cobalt helped us during the whole process to find the most appropriate candidate. We were amazed by the candidates shortlisted and struggled to choose only one! The work Stephan has done in a tough environment (COVID-19 crisis and renegotiation of our contract with our client) has confirmed that we made the right choice."

Yannick Ouvrard

Executive Vice President of Finance, Strategy, Risk & Performance at Keolis North America

"Cobalt presented several highly credible and suitable candidates, all of whom would have been a great fit with the role and our organization. It was a challenge to settle on our eventual appointee because of the exceptional quality of the field, but, once we had made our choice, Cobalt provided excellent support to both ourselves and the candidate through the appointment process. I'm very pleased with the outcome of this process."

David Scorey

Chief Executive Officer & General Manager at Keolis Commuter Services

