

## **Highway & Bridge Contractors Ramp up Employment, but Challenges Continue**

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Highway and bridge contractors added 19,300 more workers to the payroll in April 2023 compared to April 2022, according to the latest employment data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. This accounted for nearly one in 10 new jobs in the construction industry.

While the job gains are welcome news, additional data suggests construction contractors continue to have high levels of jobs openings and would be hiring more workers, if possible.

### **Highway & Bridge Contractor Employment**

Total highway and bridge contractor employment was 367,800 in April, with 78 percent of those jobs classified as “production workers,” meaning they are non-supervisory employees working onsite.

- New production workers for highway and bridge construction sites accounted for eight out of 10 new jobs in April.
- The six percent increase in April employment outpaced job growth in the broader economy (+2.7%); general construction (+2.6%); manufacturing (+1.7%); transportation and warehousing (+1.7%); and retail trade (+0.3%).
- Highway and bridge contractors increased average hourly wages by five percent, which was in line with wage gains in the broader economy (+5.1%) and other major industries.

Industry employment is one indicator of real growth in transportation construction activity.

As more projects get underway, contractors need more workers in the office and on the jobsite. Employment is expected to ramp up further over the summer construction season as businesses add more seasonal workers.

### **Working Longer Hours**

One sign of the higher demand for workers is the amount of time existing employees spend on the jobsite. Highway and bridge contractor employees worked an average of 43.7 hours per week in April, compared to 41.6 hours in April 2022. This additional 2.1 hours is twice as much time as put in by general construction workers (+1 hour) and private sector employees overall (+.09 hours).

The number of weekly hours worked was also up for utility system contractors (+2.2 hours); roofing contractors (+3 hours); and oil and gas pipeline construction (+5.6 hours).

Overall, highway and bridge contractor employees worked about 15.7 million hours per week in April, up from an average of 14.5 million hours per week in April 2022, an increase of 8.3 percent.

### **More Jobs Available**

The number of unfilled job openings in the construction industry stood at 438,000 in April, one of the highest monthly levels. This means there are still more open jobs than workers to fill them.

Construction unemployment remains very low at 3.5 percent, indicating most workers looking for a construction job have found one.

### **Construction Materials, and Planning & Design Firms**

April employment was also up across major industries that supply goods, services, and materials for transportation construction compared to a year ago:

- Cement and Concrete manufacturers added 8,300 jobs.
- Cement and concrete pipe manufacturers added 3,800 jobs.
- Employment was up by 4,500 jobs for ready-mix concrete suppliers.
- Construction machinery manufacturers added 5,299 jobs.
- Architectural, engineering, and related services increased employment by 79,300 workers, for total employment levels of 1.65 million.

April wages were up five percent for architectural and engineering firms and increases ranged from 1.4 to 1.8 percent for other major supplier industries.

These industries are expected to continue to add jobs in the next few months as highway and bridge construction work continues to grow.