

# FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS: TRANSIT AMBASSADORS

## ATTACHMENT C

### About these recommendations.

In 2020, Metro's Board formed the Public Safety Advisory Committee and directed agency staff to "work in partnership with community leaders to re-envision transit safety and community-based approaches to policing." As part of its charge to reimagine public safety on transit, the Committee was tasked with developing a robust ecosystem of community-centered approaches to safety that would serve as an alternative to traditional law enforcement. This alternative vision would adopt a people-centered approach to safety that involves shifting resources away from traditional law enforcement and directing those resources to support things like mental health services, support for unhoused riders, assistance for people with disabilities, aid for vulnerable riders, social service providers, and other community-based interventions.

As part of this reimagined ecosystem, Metro is establishing a transit ambassador program that consists of a community-facing, unarmed, welcoming, and compassionate team of diverse individuals. As articulated in the recommendations below, transit ambassadors are imagined as a critical component of a holistic public safety landscape that includes community-based organizations, mental health professionals, homeless service providers, unarmed security, and (when absolutely needed) armed law enforcement.

Metro's Public Safety Advisory Committee (PSAC) is providing high-level recommendations regarding the roles, responsibilities, and structure for a transit ambassador pilot program. These recommendations are intended to provide enough structure to establish the initial framework for the pilot; they are not intended to be exhaustive or final. The committee expects to refine and revise these recommendations, in collaboration with Metro staff, as the pilot program is further developed.

### Transit ambassadors play a rider-facing and welcoming role.

**Recommendation #1:** Transit Ambassadors will be a significant and identifiable presence on Metro vehicles, as well as at transit stations and stops. Alongside Metro Operators, Ambassadors are likely to have frequent contact with the riders and the general public.

**Recommendation #2:** Transit Ambassadors will deliver a high level of customer service and are expected to treat all riders with dignity and interact in a manner that is welcoming, respectful, and kind.

**Recommendation #3:** Transit Ambassadors will be knowledgeable about the Metro system and act as an official "face" of the agency, guiding folks to resources, assisting with wayfinding, and answering riders' questions.

**Metro staff Response:** Metro staff concurs.

## Transit ambassadors' presence promotes safety for all riders and operators.

**Recommendation #4:** Transit Ambassadors will be a significant non-law enforcement presence on the Metro system. Their role is to identify potentially unsafe situations and determine whether they are able to intervene and address the situation. They will be trained to respond judiciously to difficult situations and armed with de-escalation techniques to diffuse tense encounters. At the same time, Ambassadors will be able to call upon a broad array of service providers, security professionals, and/or law enforcement if the situation merits.

*(Note: intervention and de-escalation will not be the responsibility of all Transit Ambassadors and will vary based on position level & description, and level of employee training.)*

**Recommendation #5:** If an Ambassador determines that they are not able to intervene, then they will have access to a larger ecosystem of service providers, community-based interventionists, and/or law enforcement. Each of these support services will have the capacity to respond quickly when the situation merits.

**Recommendation #6:** The ecosystem of service providers that support Transit Ambassadors will include the following entities: (1) unhoused service providers, (2) mental health service providers, (3) system maintenance/janitorial staff, (4) vehicle operators, (5) supervisory staff, (6) emergency medical professionals, (7) care-centered public spaces, (8) public education, and (9) law enforcement. Note that armed law enforcement will only be involved when absolutely needed.

**Metro staff Response:** Metro staff concurs.

## Transit ambassadors can connect vulnerable riders to resources and/or assistance.

**Recommendation #7:** Transit Ambassadors will be culturally competent professionals that reflect the diversity of Los Angeles County. This includes having familiarity with the geographies they serve and (where appropriate) possessing multilingual skills.

**Recommendation #8:** Transit Ambassadors will be sensitive and responsive to the diverse needs of Metro riders. They are trained to respect riders' privacy, check assumptions or pre-judgments, and respond to situations with empathy and compassion.

**Recommendation #9:** Transit Ambassadors will be equipped with the information, tools, and contacts to connect vulnerable riders to resources. They have specific training to identify situations where a mental health service provider, homeless service provider, community-based organization or other Metro services may be the best entity to respond to a rider's expressed need.

**Metro staff Response:** Metro staff concurs.

## Transit ambassadors provide communities with access to good jobs.

**Recommendation #10:** As Metro employees, Transit Ambassadors will have a defined career path that includes an opportunity to grow within the program (e.g., from entry-level ambassador to mid-level ambassadors with increased training to management positions) and/or shift to other careers within the agency.

**Recommendation #11:** To ensure that Ambassadors reflect the communities they serve, Metro will reduce barriers to hiring. This includes recruiting that focuses on communities impacted by harmful policing, low-income communities of color, individuals with disabilities, and those facing barriers to employment.

**Recommendation #12:** Metro will partner with community-based organizations to build a pipeline of qualified workers that reflect the diversity of Metro's ridership. These organizations can work with Metro to identify candidates with non-traditional skill sets, those with relevant language proficiencies, and/or specialized training.

**Recommendation #13:** Benefits and opportunities for advancement will be key features for Transit Ambassador positions and Ambassadors will be Metro employees. Metro will ensure that Ambassadors have the following: (1) a family-supporting wage, (2) union jobs, (3) professional development opportunities, (4) diverse leadership (incl. women and people of color), (5) bilingual pay differentials, and (6) access to health care.

**Metro staff Response:** Metro staff partially concurs with recommendations 10-13 but does not support the recommendation to launch the ambassador program using in-house Metro employees. Metro needs flexibility in the delivery of the ambassador program to allow for faster program deployment. Additionally, Metro needs the ability to rapidly adjust the ambassador program's scope and responsibilities based upon real-time data during a pilot performance period. Metro would like to pilot the ambassador program for 3-5 years using contracted services in order to mature the program fully.

Metro is fully committed to an ambassador program and staff recommends a pilot period only to learn how to best customize and execute the program. After the pilot period, Metro would initiate the process to negotiate to bring the work in-house. Metro has a living wage and service worker retention policy that requires Metro at the end of a contract term to ensure the contract workers are retained. This policy would apply here if Metro were to initially contract out the ambassador program.

We recognize the proven benefits of a Transit Ambassador program and our goal is to implement effective alternative policing strategies as soon as possible. Metro estimates it will take up to two years to stand-up an in-house ambassador program. If Metro utilizes contracted services to staff the ambassador program, Metro could be ready to advertise a scope of work for those services by January or February 2022 with a contract award in the summer. The scope of work could be advertised to CBO's with expertise in homeless outreach, disability services, and/or hiring, training, and overseeing formerly incarcerated members of our

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community. Finally, Metro's overhead is high, and the \$20 million authorized for the ambassador program will go much further using a contract service model.

Metro's goal is to move forward with a model that best delivers a Transit Ambassador Program in a timely way that is responsive to the sense of urgency that our Board members and public have expressed for this program.

**Ad-Hoc Committee response to Metro staff:** The ad-hoc committee understands that Metro has certain constraints and agrees that the Transit Ambassador program should be launched as quickly as possible. Likewise, the ad-hoc committee's understanding is that Metro staff's primary disagreement is with Recommendation #13, related to having the Ambassadors involved in the pilot serve as Metro employees. The committee believes that Ambassadors, whether contracted or Metro employees, should have access to the benefits enumerated in Recommendation #13. If Metro does decide to use contractors for the pilot program, the ad-hoc committee members would like Metro staff to address the following questions:

- How will Metro ensure that contracted staff have access to professional development opportunities?
- How will Metro ensure that the selected contractors have diverse leadership/management overseeing the scope of work?
- Will the contract require bilingual pay differentials?
- Will contracted staff have access to health care?

If Metro does decide to use contractors to launch the program, PSAC would like to review and provide input on the scope of work.

### Metro's Next Steps

As Metro CEO Stephanie Wiggins announced to PSAC last month, Metro will house the ambassador program outside the System Security and Law Enforcement Department. The emphasis will be on creating positive and compassionate engagement with all riders. Metro believes the ambassador program is a critical component in reimagining public safety on the Metro system and urges PSAC to expeditiously complete their recommendations so that we may launch the program in the near future.

Thank you for your commitment to reimagining public safety. We look forward to our continued collaboration to improve safety and security for all on the Metro system.

### Ad-Hoc Committee Next Steps

Once the framework for the Transit Ambassador program is approved by the full committee, the ad-hoc committee will continue to work with Metro staff to refine the recommendations, and define the specifics of the pilot program. Next steps include the following:

- Determining a deployment strategy for the pilot Transit Ambassador program
- Working with Metro to define contracting and/or hiring parameters for the pilot program launch
- Identifying evaluation metrics and recommendations for accountability measures
- Defining training requirements and providing input on a job description

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- Further defining the supportive ecosystem (e.g., additional service providers) for Ambassadors