



## Board Report

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### OPERATIONS, SAFETY, AND CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE COMMITTEE MARCH 16, 2023

**SUBJECT: METRO TRANSIT SECURITY**

**ACTION: APPROVE RECOMMENDATION**

**RECOMMENDATION:**

AUTHORIZE the Chief Executive Officer to amend the FY23 Budget to add 48 Metro Transit Security full-time equivalent (FTE) positions to include 44 Transit Security Officers, three Supervisors, and one Director, Transit Security (Captain).

**ISSUE**

Metro's multi-layer reimagined public safety plan includes a significant priority to protect our employees, including bus operators, from experiencing violence while they are on our system. Metro's Employee Assault Mitigation Task Force has recommended implementing additional Safety Bus Riding teams as a means to reduce and prevent operator assaults. This report requests authorization to amend the FY23 budget to add 44 Metro Transit Security Officers (TSO), three Supervisors, and one Captain to be deployed as safety bus riding teams for this purpose.

**BACKGROUND**

All forms of public transportation, airplanes, trains, and buses have seen a concerning increase in passengers who are unruly, angry, and sometimes violent. Public transit agencies across the nation have all seen a disturbing increase in operator assaults. The cause and contributors to operator assaults vary widely; studies have identified broader societal trends to these random acts of violence, such as mental health issues, economic and social factors, and pandemic impact.

The following chart illustrates the top reasons for assault for calendar year 2022.

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Top Reasons For Assault January 2022 - December 2022	
Reason	Count
No Reason	44
Other	30
Demand Stop	21
Disorderly	14
Mentally Ill	13
Fare	8
Missed Stop	5
Out of Service	5
Policy/Drink	4
Mutual Combat	2
Mask	2
Policy Stroller	2
Sex	1
Other/Vehicle Accident	1
Mask/Fare	1
Accident	1
Policy/Food	1
Policy Scooter	1
Accident	1
Policy Smoking	1
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>158</b>

Implemented Strategies to Prevent Operator Assaults

Metro has been proactive in our efforts in the research of best practices and analysis of data to implement safety strategies to protect our employees. Metro has been implementing prevention strategies to reduce the risk of safety incidents and create a safer environment for all Metro employees to safely perform their jobs.

1. Metro buses have on-board cameras and DVR
2. Metro buses have operator barriers (March 2020)
3. Metro buses have emergency buttons
4. Clear signage is posted about punishment for assaults on operators (“Let’s Respect Operators ... injuring an operator is punishable by up to 3 years in prison or up to 10,000 fine, or both.” .... Penal Code 243.3”)
5. We have a “See something, say something” Campaign

On July 11, 2022, based on bus operator feedback and data showing a spike in operator assaults, LAPD Transit Services Division deployed the Special Problems Unit (SPU) to address assaults on the ten bus lines having the highest number of assaults and ridership recorded during a 16-month period. The operation concluded on July 25, 2022. It was discovered that most bus operator concerns were mainly focused on issues and disruptive behavior related to Customer Code of Conduct violations.

On August 31, 2022, Bus Riding Teams were launched composed of Metro Transit Security Officers responsible for code of conduct compliance and Law Enforcement Officers responsible for penal code compliance to provide a high visibility presence. To complete this pilot, Transit Security Officers were reassigned or paid overtime.

Bus Operator feedback resulting from this initiative was overwhelmingly positive. One bus operator commented: *“With officers on the bus, riders behave and don’t start any problems. It’s a safer environment for me to drive the bus and for the passengers. I don’t have to worry about calling the BOC[Bus Operations Control Center] or having to deal with unruly riders”* and *“It’s a big help for us as Operators when we can just focus on driving the bus.”*

In November 2022, the Employee Assault Mitigation Task Force was created in collaboration with various departments to develop proactive solutions to provide safety tools to ensure employees have a safe work environment. In response to bus operator surveys and monthly meetings with operators, also known as division rap sessions, the task force identified the following strategies to reduce operator assaults:

1. Provide de-escalation training (Implemented January 2023)
2. Review bus operator barriers for increased effectiveness (underway)
3. Bus operators to provide safety input for new buses (underway)
4. Collect, review and analyze of assault data for prevention measures (underway)
5. Collaborate with operations to create new policies and procedures to reduce assaults (underway)

## **DISCUSSION**

The safety of all Metro employees and passengers remains our top priority, and Metro intends to maintain the highest safety standards in the industry. Bus operators are responsible for the safe operation of the buses while at the same time assisting our passengers. Assaults on operators during the operation of a vehicle create a serious threat to not only our operators but to our passengers and the public as well. Importantly, these assaults have a physical and mental impact on our operators and affect their overall well-being. Metro believes all employees should be able to conduct their job without harassment or threat of violence.

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Between 2018 through 2022, Metro Operations reported a monthly average of nine bus operator assaults. (Attachment A). During this period, the highest monthly average was 13 assaults in 2022. Between CY21 and CY22, Metro saw a 37.9% increase in bus operator assaults - from 115 to 158 respectively.

Although Metro has retrofitted all buses with operator shields that minimize the severity of the assaults, assailants can still reach around the shields and throw objects at, punch, or spit on the operator because the operators are not completely enclosed within the shields. Also, operators are outside of the operator shield when assisting customers such as those who use a wheelchair.

Our bus operators have been consistent and vocal regarding their concerns over their personal safety. In the 2022 Bus Operator Survey (Attachment B), 21.5% said that their biggest concern with being an Operator was safety from passenger confrontation, and 14.9% of respondents said they would leave Metro due to not feeling safe while operating the bus. During division RAP sessions and focus groups, Operators were asked to provide details about the factors that cause them to feel unsafe, as well as scenarios that lead to confrontation with passengers. Bus operators stated that riders know Metro's Customer Code of Conduct is not enforced with regularity and expressed the importance of setting an expectation for passengers that a uniformed security presence would be regularly seen on board a bus. This action, they said, would serve as a deterrent to unruly behavior on the system. Most bus operator concerns were mainly focused on issues and disruptive behavior related to violations of Metro's Customer Code of Conduct.

Furthermore, in the 2022 Customer Experience Survey, Metro customers echo bus operators' concerns, with safety from crime being a top aspect riders want Metro to improve. A combined 47% of bus riders were neutral, not satisfied, or not satisfied at all when asked about the enforcement of the Metro Code of Conduct on the Bus.

Metro's multi-layer public safety plan ensures that the right response is given to each situation. Code of Conduct violations are not criminal, and as such, Metro's Transit Security Officers - not Law Enforcement - ensure compliance. Enforcement of all violations of the code of conduct is imperative as it can lead to a more serious safety incident if not addressed.

### Metro Transit Security Officers (TSO)

Metro currently has 213 uniformed TSO FTEs. They are deployed over three shifts, as follows:

- (54) Code of conduct enforcement across the system
  - only four TSOs are available to deploy and board buses on one bus line per week
- (25) Mobile patrol
  - Responds to calls for service at Metro's division, patrol parking structures/lots, layover zones - do not conduct fare or Code compliance
- (25) Union Station Gateway
  - Fixed security inside building, interior and exterior roving patrols

- (16) Rail Safety
  - Opens and closes heavy rail stations
- (14) Revenue
  - Security oversight for revenue services
- (14) Supervision
  - Sergeants and Lieutenants
- (4) Security Control Specialists
- (2) Operations Support
  - Consists of one sergeant in Support of Special Events and one sergeant as the Training Coordinator.
- (5) Long-term leave
- (9) In training
- (45) Currently in the hiring process as of February 28

The approach is to assign TSOs to bus lines, with deployment being based on information gathered from key data sources such as operator feedback, Transit Watch App, and customer complaints.

Of the 48 TSO FTEs requested in FY23, 44 will be deployed to board approximately ten bus lines on a given shift to address bus operator safety and rider concerns, an overall increase of 79% in TSO presence on the Metro system. Dedicating safety resources to the bus system demonstrates Metro's commitment to ensuring the safety of our employees and our customers, and will ultimately enhance the experience of customers using the mode that carries most of Metro's ridership.

The positions being requested for Metro TSO include 22 unarmed and 22 armed officers which will be deployed to expand the Bus Riding Teams to ensure bus operator safety, add presence aboard the buses and ensure compliance of the Customer Code of Conduct. This effort is in the spirit of the Public Safety Advisory Committee's recommendations regarding non-policing onboard bus safety strategies and utilizing a "buddy system" where a presence would ride along during an operator's shift rather than solely responding to incidents (Attachment C). Although PSAC also recommended unarmed presence, the 22 armed officers being requested will be deployed during the owl service which can give the perception of more dangerous conditions as expressed by our bus operators.

### *Recruitment*

As of February 28, Metro Transit Security has a total of 45 vacancies (28 of which are Code of Conduct compliance officers) which are in the following stages of the hiring process:

- (11) Security Control Specialists to start March 20
- (3) TSO I (unarmed) candidates to start on March 6
- (9) TSO I (unarmed) candidates to start on March 20
- (7) TSOI (unarmed) candidates are in the background check stage
- (7) TSO II (armed) candidates are in the final stages of recruitment
- (6) Sergeant candidates are in final stages of recruitment
- (2) Lieutenant candidates are in final stages of recruitment

The average period to fill a TSO I position is six months. While the current process lends itself to

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thorough, but time-intensive, background checks and physical agility tests, staff have identified opportunities to streamline and improve the process. Metro hosted quarterly weekend hiring events in November 2022 and February 2023 where multiple steps of the recruitment process were completed in one day. Lastly, we are in the process of hiring a temporary (as needed) employee that would be dedicated to assessing the recruitment process, identifying areas to streamline, and be dedicated to recruitment and outreach. Through these efforts, we are confident we will fill the vacant and additional requested positions by the end of the fiscal year.

### *Training*

In-depth and regular training is key to providing prompt, efficient and equitable service. SSLE is updating its training curriculum to enhance accountability, legitimacy, innovation and professional development through equity, de-escalation and customer experience courses. A key and critical part of transforming our safety program is to establish a solid training foundation.

### *KPIs*

The following KPIs have been established to enhance accountability and measure the success of TSO operations.

- Bus Operator Assaults (reduction)
  - Reduce assaults by 10% year over year, with a stretch goal of zero assaults.
  - The Bus Riding Teams, staffed by Transit Security Officers, will provide a greater presence on the bus system and ensure compliance with the Code of Conduct.
- Dispatch response time to Transit Watch response incident reports.(reduction)
  - Reduce response time from 5 minutes to 4 minutes
  - Metro Transit Security is responsible for receiving and responding to Transit Watch App reports. By measuring dispatch response time, it will ensure Officers are being timely in responding to patrons submitting a report and providing them an excellent customer experience.

These KPIs will be tracked and reported in the Monthly Public Safety board report.

.Determination\_Of\_Safety\_Impact

### **DETERMINATION OF SAFETY IMPACT**

The authorization to add positions will have a positive impact on safety.

The requested positions will add security presence onboard buses - a request that has recurrently been raised by operators during division RAP sessions and by riders and address riders concerned as outlined in the 2022 Customer Survey.

### **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

This action pertains to the \$3M pilot safety strategies on board buses initiative as outlined in Motion 26.2. The annual budget required for the 48 additional FTEs is \$6.2M, and the FY23 cost is estimated to be nominal with the intent of filling all positions towards the end of the fiscal year.

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Since this is a multi-year project, the cost center manager and Chief Safety Officer will be accountable for budgeting the positions in future years.

### **Impact to Budget**

The sources of funding would be operating eligible federal, state and local resources that include fares, and operating eligible sales tax resources.

### **EQUITY PLATFORM**

Increasing the number of Transit Security personnel will allow Metro to provide dedicated safety resources to the bus system. In the Public Safety Advisory Committee meetings, one of the members was an operator and shared first-hand experiences of safety on the bus system as well as feedback from peers. These concerns and pain points are key factors that contribute to low morale, high turnover, and a key challenge in regaining ridership to pre-pandemic levels. Through this effort, we aim to increase rider and operator safety. We recognize that in the past, there has been an under-investment of safety resources for the bus system. However, this is a step in the right direction towards supporting our front-line employees and taking actionable measures to address their safety concerns.

Furthermore, this request further enhances Metro's efforts towards reimagining public safety by investing in unarmed personnel and in our Transit Security personnel by further professionalizing their training curriculum and enhancing the customer experience.

### **IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS**

The recommendation supports strategic plan goal 2.1 of committing to improving security. Metro will continue to rely on a multi-layered security program that comprises contract law enforcement, ambassadors, and contract security, along with the expansion of Metro's in-house Transit security personnel to achieve this goal.

### **ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED**

The Board could decide not to approve the recommendations. This is not recommended as only Metro TSOs conduct Code of Conduct compliance.

One alternative would be to reassign existing Metro personnel from current duties to support security expansion. This approach is not recommended because it would have a negative impact on Metro's ability to adequately maintain the current level of staffing to meet required security needs.

Another alternative would be to authorize security expansion by using overtime; however, this approach is also not recommended because it increases TSO costs, and it is not sustainable for a long period of time.

### **NEXT STEPS**

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If approved, staff will launch additional quarterly hiring events and attend weekly job fairs to increase the pipeline for Metro Transit Security positions. And report to the board monthly on the bus riding team efforts.

**ATTACHMENTS**

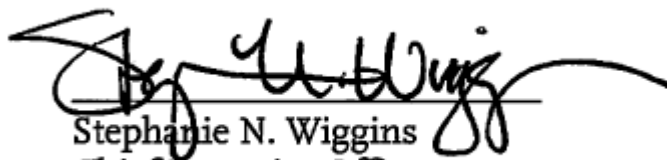
Attachment A - Bus Operator Assaults Data

Attachment B - 2022 Bus Operator Survey Update

Attachment C - PSAC Onboard Bus Safety Strategies

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