

LEARNING FROM RIDER SECURITY AND SERVICE PROGRAMS IN OTHER U.S. TRANSIT SYSTEMS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
for
SENATE JUDICIARY AND PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

FEBRUARY 28, 2022

“You have to have an environment where people feel safe and secure because we want people to use this train.”

- Rep. Paul Torkelson, 2/13/2020

Legislators their constituents want to know: what steps can we take to get closer to the goal, perfectly expressed by Rep. Torkelson, of a transit system that people are eager to use because it safe and comfortable, and people feel welcome whether they are regular users, new users, or visitors?

To help answer, East Metro Strong commissioned this research. East Metro Strong is a public-private partnership of counties, cities, and private employers; our members value transit as a cornerstone of regional prosperity. We know that our transit is not as safe or comfortable as it needs to be. This research describes what other regions have learned about how to make transit safer, and our residents more secure in using transit.

This Executive Summary is taken from the research report “Learning from Rider Security and Service Programs in other U.S. Transit Systems.” The research was peer reviewed and presented to the National Academy of Sciences / Transportation Research Board. The full report is at: <https://bit.ly/3e69K9K>

1 Executive Summary:

Transit rider security and service staff produce substantial safety benefits

Transit is an essential service that connects us to work, to education and opportunity, and to our broader communities, including our families. We began this research just as Metro Transit was reporting record ridership on its rail and Bus Rapid Transit lines, and as we complete it, Metro Transit and every other transit agency in the state (and the country) is asking people *not* to use transit except for essential trips. A large number of essential workers continue to use our transit system. Our first lesson, then, is that we need safe, comfortable, welcoming transit services, across Minnesota, *in all kinds of conditions*.

Transit safety is a priority goal for the Legislature. COVID-19 has not changed the need for improvement.

We urge that the lessons from this research—lessons from other regions as they met similar safety challenges—will inform of our conversations about what works, whether those conversations are between legislators, in the press, or between Minnesotans as we talk by phone and over the internet.

1.1 Key findings

How do transit systems around the country work to create safe, comfortable travel on buses and trains?

Part of the answer is: transit security and service staff who are not sworn police officers.

For this research, we spoke with chiefs of police and chief safety officers on other transit systems. They told us that *their* non-sworn security and service staff produce substantial safety benefits.

Chiefs of police and chief safety officers on other transit systems told us:

- *We use non-sworn, unarmed, officers and/or other staff to check fares, administer a code of conduct, and offer various kinds of assistance, on trains, buses, and platforms; and*
- *We find that doing so improves actual and perceived safety.*

Safety is paramount; we also want to ensure that customers comply with fare policies.

We reviewed national-level research on best practices. The Transportation Research Board of the National Academy of Sciences studied transit systems across the US, and recommends:

- “Using a customer-oriented approach to fare payment rather than a traditional policing approach”
- “Creating a focused fare inspection team with nonsworn officers.”

Overall, the lessons from national experience, as shared in interviews and in published research, are:

- Adding non-police staff lets police focus on policing.
- Non-sworn staff
 - Act as presence and force multipliers
 - Deter and reduce crime
 - through presence, by projecting authority and multiplying eyes and ears
 - through actively creating a positive culture of safety
 - Reduce calls to police for non-police needs, and increase calls to police for actual police needs
- More police alone do not necessarily make a place feel safer

We were struck by the consistency of what we heard from chiefs of police. What those chiefs of police said was, in turn, consistent with findings from earlier national research on best practices.

Together, these consistent lessons lead to recommendations for action in Minnesota.

1.2 Recommendations for Minnesota

Prior to COVID-19, the existing transit police force was stretched by covering a large, multi-modal, seven-county system. That remains the case. So, we also support additional police and police resources.

Transit police are also stretched because we as a state are asking them to do work that could be done by non-sworn staff: checking fares, giving directions, and connecting people to social services. Metro Transit police officers do those things with dignity and compassion.

Other agencies, with the same goals as ours, have faced similar decisions about how best to size and use their police forces.

We recommend implementing the lessons they learned:

1. Add a substantial number of non-sworn staff as an important *part* of creating a safe, comfortable, welcoming experience for all Minnesotans and visitors using transit.
2. Classify fare non-payment as a petty misdemeanor to allow such non-sworn staff to enforce fare policy.