

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

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY  
for  
SENATE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE**

**MARCH 15, 2023**

What steps can we take to provide 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?

East Metro Strong values 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 comfortable and 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>

**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 need safe, comfortable, welcoming transit services, across Minnesota, in all kinds of conditions. 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.

**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 the chiefs of police said was, in turn, consistent with findings from earlier national research on best practices.

COVID has reinforced the need for non-sworn staff. As riders return, or think about returning, they will be looking for safe, welcoming service. As Bay Area Rapid Transit Police Department Chief Ed Alvarez put it: “Increasing our presence in the system is vital to making sure returning riders feel safe. We...take the approach of using non-sworn staff in this way.”

## 2. Recommendations for Minnesota

Prior to COVID, the existing transit police force was stretched by covering a large, multi-modal, seven-county system. That remains the case.

Transit police are also stretched because we 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 consistent 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.