

Chapter 4

PRACTICAL FIELD TEST AT SAN DIEGO TROLLEY ***Comparing Security Perceptions and Storefront Patrol at*** ***Santee and El Cajon Stations***

The San Diego Trolley is in many ways representative of the renaissance of rail transit in the United States. This light rail system was one of the first built during the move back to rail transit as an important mode of urban transportation. San Diego is a regional hub city along the California-Mexico border, occupying an important niche in both the cross-border and Pacific Rim economies.

Its light rail system—the San Diego Trolley—is operated by the San Diego Trolley, Inc., a wholly owned subsidiary of the Metropolitan Transit Development Board (MTDB), a public agency responsible for stimulating transit system growth and usage in the Metropolitan San Diego area. The Trolley, as it is generally referred to by residents, serves a diverse, multi-ethnic community. It moves people from the suburbs to San Diego's Central Business District, and from the CBD to the busy Mexican border crossing at San Ysidro. Its riders include commuters, students on their way to school, tourists, and shoppers.

BACKGROUND

The East Line brings commuters from San Diego's eastern suburbs into the central core. Opened in 1986, the East Line was extended to El Cajon in 1988. A 3.6-mile extension to Santee, costing \$109 million, was opened in August 1995.

After a March 18, 1995 murder approximately three blocks from the Trolley's East Line's Lemon Grove Station, MTDB commissioned a security survey of Trolley patrons.¹ The 2,220 patrons, who were polled at 16 East and South line parking lots specifically about Trolley security, gave the system a mixed review. One-third of the

¹ Jo Moreland, "East County line seen as riskiest," Daily Californian, May 31, 1995.

respondents cited the East Line as the place where most security problems occurred. But the survey also noted that while feelings of safety declined at public places throughout the region, Trolley patrons felt safer on-board trains and at stations than they did while using ATM machines or while in downtown San Diego. Nevertheless, the patrons surveyed viewed Trolley security funding as their number one issue. Longtime Trolley riders favored funding for security enhancements over system improvements.

Storefront security or police offices were explored as a security option in light of the public reaction to the March murder. Two stations on the East Line, El Cajon and Santee, provide an interesting contrast in the interaction between security and the community on a public transit system. Both stations currently employ storefront offices.

For this Practical Field Test, a storefront office is defined as a location where police or security personnel are stationed to facilitate interaction with the public through high visibility and accessibility. A storefront is distinguished from a sub-station, which generally has a higher level of support facilities and a supervisory or command and control element which can dispatch officers to respond to calls for service, process and temporarily house prisoners, and accept complaints of officer misconduct, among other duties.

The Santee storefront is staffed by community sheriff's deputies, while the El Cajon storefront utilizes "MTS Security" officers. The Santee storefront was the first to open, with the opening of the station itself on August 26, 1995. In the wake of positive public reaction to the Santee effort, the El Cajon storefront was instituted to combat an ongoing security problem at that station.

This study contrasts the experiences at each site.

TROLLEY SECURITY PERCEPTIONS

The MTDB has periodically gauged security perceptions regarding the San Diego Trolley. Drawing upon the experience of the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG), periodic surveys measuring security perceptions of Trolley riders and San Diego residents are conducted.

In a December 1992 report recounting a survey of transit patrons conducted in November 1992, SANDAG reported that 89 percent of riders rated safety on-board the Trolley as *good* or *average*. Security at Trolley stations was rated as *good* or *average* by 79 percent of the respondents, while 77 percent rated security at station parking lots as *good* or *average*. When asked to rate their feelings of safety on the system, 80 percent of those riders said they felt safe on-board the Trolley, and 63 percent said they felt safe at Trolley stations. Almost one-quarter noted a need for improved security at stations and parking lots and advocated additional funding for security personnel.²

In its November 1993 survey report, SANDAG recounted a September 1993 survey of San Diego residents that combined both transit users and non-users. The 1993 survey showed that 60 percent of the respondents felt safe on-board, while only 47 percent felt safe at stations. Concerning the East Line, 53.8 percent of respondents felt it was safe; 37 percent felt it was unsafe.³

In the 1993 survey, SANDAG observed that public transit users generally found the Trolley and its stations to be safer than did non-users. Of the respondents who found the system unsafe, 47.4 percent based their perception on news reports, 37 percent based their perception on personal experience, and 25.5 percent based their perception on the experience of acquaintances. SANDAG believed this indicated that news coverage of crimes or negative events on public transit plays an important role in forming negative impressions of safety on-board the Trolley and at Trolley stations.

SANDAG analysts also observed that transit users were more likely to base transit security perceptions on personal experience, while non-users tended to base theirs on news reports. Rumors and the perception of safety in the areas proximate to Trolley lines were also cited as factors in respondents' perceptions.

The impact of crime in areas adjacent to the Trolley may influence both patron and non-patron perceptions of security, particularly at stations. An October 1992 analysis of crime trends in the San Diego region by SANDAG found that "for most types of crimes, including violent crimes and malicious mischief, the largest increases have occurred within 1/8 mile of Trolley stations." Accordingly, SANDAG observed that this

² SANDAG, December 1992.

³ SANDAG, November 1993.

preliminary data supports an enhanced focus on enforcement and security within a 1/8 mile radius of Trolley stations.⁴

TROLLEY SECURITY EFFORTS

The San Diego Trolley has a unique approach to transit security. While the system has authority to establish its own police force, or retain a dedicated contract law enforcement provider, it has not opted to exercise either alternative. Rather, the Trolley security package includes armed contract security officers, unarmed public code enforcement officers, and contracts with off-duty peace officers to patrol the system. In addition, the system's security administration works to stimulate a variety of system-centered efforts by jurisdictional police agencies.

Security Officers

The system contracts with a private security vendor to provide armed, uniformed patrol of the system and its property. These security officers wear distinctive uniforms with an "MTS" (Metropolitan Transit Service) emblem and their supervisors drive marked "MTS Security" vehicles. There are sixty-five security officers authorized in addition to the 27 Code Compliance Inspectors described in the next section.

Trained to the state standard for security officers, including familiarization with the laws of arrest required by California Penal Code Section 832, these officers can make private persons arrests for crimes which occur in their presence. In California, security officers have no authority to issue citations. They are regulated by the California Department of Consumer Affairs, which requires familiarization with the laws of arrest, firearms and weapons (baton) training, as well as first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) training. These officers currently receive no transit or Trolley specific training.

The security officers' primary function is patrolling to serve as a visible deterrent to crime and disorder. Both supervisors and officers have system surveillance duties.

⁴ See SANDAG, October 1992; this analysis evaluated changes in FBI, Uniform Crime Report Index Crimes reported to San Diego's Automated Criminal Justice Information System (ARJIS) by nine municipal police departments and the San Diego County Sheriff's Department. The incidence of crime at specific distances from Trolley stations was assessed from 1987 through 1991.

Supervisors, who are also responsible for monitoring security officers and maintaining liaison with local law enforcement, patrol in marked vehicles.

Security officers patrol on foot. These foot patrols are primarily train patrol and fixed site patrols of passenger station and park-n-ride areas. The objective at fixed posts is increased quality-of-life enforcement.

If a quality-of-life violation is observed, the violator may be warned, ejected from the system, or held while the security officer calls a law enforcement officer or Code Compliance Officer to the scene to issue a citation. During train patrol, the officers also perform fare compliance duties. In either case, since the security officers have no citation authority, they must either eject the violator or call upon the system's Code Compliance Officers, local police, or Sheriff's deputies⁵ to issue citations (formally known as a Notice to Appear under California law).

In addition to these functions, two security officers are permanently assigned to revenue protection duties, that is, safeguarding cash collections from the system's ticket vending machines (TVMs). The system security administration encourages a high degree of interaction between the contract MTS Security officers and the Code Compliance Officers.

Code Compliance Officers

The system's Code Compliance Officers (CCOs) are public officers (thus able under California law to issue citations for infractions—including both fare and quality-of-life violations). They form the system's primary transit enforcement arm. Currently, twenty-four Code Compliance Officers are allocated to the system. The CCOs are equipped with hand-held radios, Mace for personal protection, and handcuffs. They carry no weapons, but receive instruction in officer safety techniques.

Code Compliance Officers perform fare inspection (the system utilizes a barrier-free, proof-of-payment fare framework), quality-of-life enforcement, and parking enforcement at the system's park-n-rides.

⁵ In California the Sheriff is the county law enforcement officer, while police are municipal entities. Both Sheriff's deputies and municipal police officers are peace officers under California law, deriving their authority through Section 830.1 of the California Penal Code.

When a fare or quality-of-life violation is observed, the violator may be verbally warned or issued a written warning notice, ejected from the system, or issued a citation. No specific provisions are in place for addressing repeat violators. When a person fails to appear (known as an FTA) in court for Trolley infractions, the no-shows are referred to a collection agency for collection and a civil penalty for the FTA. This approach was developed to replace the criminal warrant process, which became unworkable due to jail overcrowding.

Training provided to CCOs currently consists of an in-house orientation which includes instruction in the MTDB's manual of policy and procedures, the MTDB administrative code (including MTDB ordinances), familiarization with citation and report writing, and familiarization with court procedures and testifying. CCOs also receive training in first aid and CPR, a two-hour class in the use of Mace, an eight-hour defensive tactics and handcuffing course, and a forty-hour powers of arrest (832 P.C.) course from external providers.

New officers are assigned to work with a senior officer for a flexible time period after pre-service training to hone their skills. Pre-shift briefings provide an opportunity to review procedures and reinforce officer safety information. Officers are reminded to offer assistance to all Trolley patrons, including the large number of occasional users attracted to the San Diego area.

The transit security administration is currently working with the California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) toward the development of a POST-certified transit enforcement and security curriculum for Code Compliance Officers and contract security officers assigned to the Trolley.

An informal collaboration between these two "security" entities has existed for many years. Recently, the system security administration has formalized these efforts, arranging formal joint efforts. Currently, the contract security officers frequently team up with Code Compliance Officers for system patrols and fare enforcement efforts. Supervisory security officers and Code Compliance Officers meet once a month to further such interaction and coordinate efforts. The two sets of patrolling officers have also been encouraged to work together more closely as a way to address patrons' concerns about safety on-board the Trolley and in stations.

Off-Duty Officers

In addition to the above efforts—which form the foundation of the Trolley's security program—the system utilizes the services of off-duty peace officers to supplement security and code compliance efforts. These officers are obtained through a vendor and are generally off-duty San Diego area police officers or Sheriff's deputies. Currently, two officers are deployed on the Trolley and two are deployed on San Diego Bus.

These officers work in plainclothes, providing directed patrol in response to specific problems (such as juveniles pulling emergency stop cords). While they receive no specific transit training, these officers are provided pre-shift briefings by Trolley transit security administration staff. The purpose of these briefings is to set targeted patrol objectives.

Typical duties include station surveillance at high profile "gang" stations (such as stations with a high visibility street gang presence) and train patrol at known trouble spots during school travel hours. These officers are encouraged to take positive action up to and including arrests, with an emphasis on transit incidents, especially vandalism. When required to attend court for Trolley-related arrests, the officers are paid by the vendor which in turn recoups the expense from the MTDB.

In response to transit security concerns within the city of San Diego, the San Diego Police Department began providing uniformed saturation patrols on city segments of the Trolley in the spring of 1996. The goal is to provide high visibility patrols when possible on Thursday and Friday evenings. The San Diego Police attempt to place between four and six uniformed officers on each of two shifts (11:00 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. to 2:30 a.m.). These officers work closely with Trolley Code Compliance Officers.

MEASURING TROLLEY CRIME AND DISORDER

The MTDB currently tracks its own enforcement activity. This includes citations issued by CCOs for fare and quality-of-life violations, as well as crimes or incidents reported to CCOs or system security officers.

A mechanism for capturing all crime occurring on the system or in its facilities does not exist. Local law enforcement agencies, which have police jurisdiction on the system, handle incidents, make arrests, or process reports of crime on the system. No universal, formal mechanism for cross-reporting of transit crime data exists. Each agency makes its own report, but separate tracking categories for transit crime are not in place. Trolley stations and lines fall within broader reporting districts within each jurisdiction, but their specific location is not distinctly identified. Once crime data are entered into automated data bases (generally designed to meet state and federal Uniform Crime Report guidelines, neither of which separately track transit events), they are difficult to recover. As a result, the full extent of transit crime or disorder is not known.

Of course, this is not unique to the Trolley. Much the same situation exists throughout the United States. Transit security and police seek to overcome these structural obstacles to precision analysis in a variety of ways. For example, MTDB tracks its own activity or incidents where CCOs or security officers are present and periodically researches statistics at individual stations when problems⁶ become known.

Trolley CCOs also have the ability to query the regional Automated Criminal Justice Information System (ARJIS) for information about offenders and specific incidents. Moreover, CCOs and security officers encourage patrons who are victimized to report the incident to the local law enforcement agency; in turn, local police encourage victims to advise MTDB. Of course, not all victims do so, resulting in a potential leakage of some transit crime data.

MTDB currently tracks its activity by hand, and is exploring development of an automated system for tracking in-house activity by Code Compliance Officers, security personnel, and off-duty officers assigned to the Trolley. In addition, ARJIS is currently being updated to provide enhanced tracking and analytical capabilities. These enhancements will include provisions for capturing and tracking crimes at Trolley stations, on-board trains, and on the Trolley right-of-way. As a result, more precise data will be available in the future, with implementation of these features slated for 1997.

⁶ Problems are defined as a cluster of individual criminal or non-criminal incidents that impact patron security or the quality-of-life within the system.

EXPERIENCES AT THE SANTEE AND EL CAJON STATIONS

The security experience at these two stations provides an interesting case study for transit police and security planners.

The El Cajon Station is perhaps the system's most blighted. A storefront security office was added as a remedial effort. The Santee Station, conversely, is one of its newest, incorporating sound Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) concepts and an on-site storefront Sheriff's community office from its inception.

The actual trolley platforms at both stations are designated "fare paid zones." As part of a systemwide effort to maintain order, signs are posted restricting access to platform areas to persons in possession of proper proof-of-fare payment.

El Cajon Station

The El Cajon Station (formally the El Cajon Transit Center) is one of the system's most problematic stations. The center is located within the city of El Cajon, which has its own police department. El Cajon Police occasionally patrol on-board Trolley vehicles and have jurisdiction for response to incidents at the station.

The Transit Center consists of a two-platform trolley stop, a park-n-ride lot, and a waiting room/station building. Formerly open twenty-four hours per day, the building is now open for only twelve hours (5:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.) each day. Security officers are posted at the facility twenty-four hours per day, but the center's waiting room is only open during the twelve-hour period. The station/transit center building houses a Greyhound bus ticket office (open from 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.) and a waiting area.

A recent addition is a storefront-type "Transit Enforcement Office" staffed by a contract MTS Security officer. The center's restrooms are permanently closed due to severe vandalism. Portable toilets outside in the parking lot have taken their place. Graffiti, etched windows, and dim lighting complete the interior ambience.

Etched windows, such as those found at the El Cajon Station, have become especially common throughout southern California and are spreading to transit properties throughout the country. They result when graffiti vandals carve their graffiti into a

**Figure 4.1: The elevated El Cajon Station is not inviting to commuters.
Figure 4.2: The Station's dark interior is marred by heavily etched windows.**



glass or plexiglass window, leaving a permanent, hard to remove symbol. These etches are seen both on-board transit vehicles and at station facilities.⁷

Not only are etching devices easier to obtain than spray paint, an added benefit to the vandal is the increased difficulty in removing his or her mark. Paint or pen-based markings can and frequently are removed daily—the Trolley even employs roving cleaners to remove graffiti while the trains are in service. Etchings are harder to remove. Often the window must be removed and replaced. New plastic window liners (known as "sacrificial film") are now available to limit damage to train and bus windows. The liner can be changed, while the window remains unmarred.

While only a small number of serious crimes are known to have occurred at the center, the center itself visually reinforces perceptions of fear. Table 4.1 summarizes crimes known to MTDB officials which have occurred at the station. (All data have been provided by the MTDB security administration.)

**Table 4.1: Crimes Known to MTDB;
June 1990 - February 1996**

Against Persons		Against Vehicles	
Robbery	4	Theft	22
Assault	4	Theft (attempt)	6
Battery	7	Burglary	31
		Stripping	30

Of course, this represents only the crimes known to the transit system. Additional crimes may be known to the local police; and it is expected a larger number are known to their victims and assailants alone. While much of the actual crime picture potentially remains hidden, the visual signals of disorder—graffiti, vandalized fixtures, etched windows, litter, urine, and excreta—serve as a disincentive to potential transit patrons. As such, these subtle clues can act as precursors to serious crime.

⁷ Their rise is believed to correspond with laws banning the sale of spray paint to minors (persons under 18) and banning the possession of spray paint by minors. Carving implements became easier to obtain, and possessing them was not proscribed by law. This was remedied by Section 594.2 of the California Penal Code which now prohibits minors from possessing such devices with the intent to inscribe graffiti.

As part of the MTDB security administration's emphasis on combating disorder and anti-social behavior which compromises the quality of a patron's transit experience, the storefront approach was exported from Santee to the El Cajon Station.

Despite the visible blight, it is clear that the transit enforcement office has improved the situation, alleviating both the endemic disorder and confrontations that were commonplace prior to the assignment of a routine security presence. Nevertheless, staffing constraints limit around-the-clock staffing, and total closure of the entire facility is a potential remedy.

The actual—distinct from the psychological—costs of patron perception is real, so real that the MTDB is considering demolishing the 80 x 25 foot building. The building originally cost \$355,000 to construct and open; demolition costs are estimated at about \$200,000.

Santee Station

The Santee Station opened on August 26, 1995. It has clear sightlines and a general layout that obviously reflects the incorporation of CPTED concepts into its site plan. A "Sheriff's Trolley Storefront Sub-Station," actually a storefront office despite its name, is located in a double-wide trailer in the park-n-ride. It has been there since the station opened.

Santee has the lowest crime rate in San Diego County. Prior to opening the station, SANDAG surveyed residents and businesses about the perceived impact of the station on community crime. Residents overwhelmingly felt the station would have a negative impact, with 30 percent feeling their community would be *much less safe* and 49 percent feeling it would be *less safe*. Business owners had similar concerns, with 25 percent feeling the station would make the community *much less safe* and 45 percent feeling it would make the community *less safe*.⁸

Citing concerns by residents that the Trolley would carry vandals, gang members, and vagrants to their quiet community, the Santee City Council decided to embrace a proactive approach to security at the station. In addition to the storefront office, staffed

⁸ SANDAG, July 1995. Respondents to the SANDAG survey included 453 households and 53 businesses in Santee.

**Figure 4.3: The Santee Station police trailer presents a positive image to patrons.
Figure 4.4: A Sheriff's deputy meets each arriving Trolley.**



by a deputy paid for by 1994 federal crime law funds, the Council adopted ordinances to prohibit aggressive panhandling, loitering, and sleeping in public places.

The storefront office is funded by the city of Santee (which contracts with the San Diego Sheriff's Department for police services). It is open between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 9:30 p.m. on weekdays and 10:00 a.m. through 10:00 p.m. on weekends. It contains a public information desk and a work area for sheriff's deputies. It is staffed by a deputy and a community service officer (a CSO is a civilian who handles non-confrontational functions such as report taking, public information, parking citations, and the like). The deputy will respond to calls for service in the surrounding area, but the facility is always staffed by the CSO.

Detectives in the proximate area are encouraged to utilize the storefront as a base of operations. Many frequently do so since office supplies, computer terminals, facsimile transmission machines, and telephones are available for their use.

The goal of the Santee storefront is to place high emphasis on quality-of-life issues and order-maintenance, thus bolstering feelings of security, reducing fear, and limiting serious crime.

While detailed crime statistics and post-opening survey results are not yet available, preliminary activity reports are encouraging. No serious crimes or incidents have been reported at the site.⁹ Table 4.2 provides an overview of arrest activity at the Santee Station.

⁹ Events and activity at the Santee Station are tracked in the handwritten activity log at the storefront. No significant criminal incidents are noted.

**Table 4.2: Arrests at Santee Station;
August 26, 1995 - March 26, 1996**

Assault	1	Drunk in Public	4
Burglary	9	Truancy	4
Theft (attempt)	1	Evade Railroad Fare	5
Vandalism	3	Receive Stolen Property	1
Narcotic Offenses	22	Possess Burglary Tools	5
Weapons Offenses	4	Misc. Misdemeanors	14

This enforcement pattern is clearly consistent with an order-maintenance approach. The experience at the Santee Sheriff's Trolley Storefront shows that the early positive presence and attention to quality-of-life concerns through vigorous order-maintenance activities are successful. The Santee Station lacks the visual clues that signal legitimate transit users that "disorder prevails."

Santee appears to confirm the value of initiating an order-maintenance effort as early as possible in a transit system's development.

CONCLUSIONS

Why does the same approach have a different impact at each site? If visible and accessible storefront offices are a valuable security tool, to what can one attribute the differential success at each of these two sites?

In both cases, a storefront office was implemented. At Santee, the storefront is staffed by a combination of sworn and non-sworn general service law enforcement personnel (that is, Sheriff's deputies and community service officers), while at El Cajon staffing is provided by non-sworn yet armed, contract security officers. Although it is beyond the scope of this overview to measure the relative benefits of these distinct staffing approaches, this may be an area deserving future research.

Perhaps the greatest difference between the two storefront experiences is the timing of their implementation. The Santee storefront was a fixture of the Santee Station from the very beginning. A clear commitment to site security was thus readily visible to all users—patrons and potential assailants alike. The Santee storefront is also linked to ongoing community crime control efforts, providing a unified, seamless approach. The El Cajon storefront, conversely, was implemented late in the station's life, only after disorder and vandalism became rampant.

In both cases, the transit security administration is seeking to bolster the linkages between these station-specific efforts and systemwide security endeavors. It will be interesting to see how this focus progresses. Nevertheless it appears that initiation and integration of security efforts at an early stage yield the greatest benefit to controlling disorder at transit facilities.

SOURCES

This study was constructed after site visits to the San Diego Trolley. Site visits to both the Santee and El Cajon stations were conducted as were rides on both the East and South Lines. Discussions with transit security and operations personnel were combined with researcher observations to frame extensive interviews conducted with key system security administration staff. In addition, various reports on security issues were reviewed, as were pertinent articles in area newspapers. Detailed sources are listed below.

Interviews

Chuck Lacy, Transit Security Administrator, Metropolitan Transit Development Board
Jeff Martin, Senior Transit Planner, San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG)
Dan Portuguese, Code Compliance Supervisor, Metropolitan Transit Development Board

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Chapter 5

PRACTICAL FIELD TEST AT NYPD ***Uniformed Officers Board Buses in Two Boroughs***

New York City Transit (NYCT), one of five affiliates and subsidiaries of New York's Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), is the largest transit system in the United States and one of the largest in the world. Rail and bus operations are divided into two separate departments—rapid and surface; policing arrangements have also differed.

Personnel of the Rapid Transit Operations (RTO) department operate and maintain 469 subway stations and more than 6,000 subway cars in four New York City boroughs (Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx) serving a daily ridership of 3.5 million. The city's fifth borough has a rapid transit system of its own, Staten Island Railroad (SIR), a separate division of the MTA. A quasi-state agency, the MTA has responsibility for a significant number of metropolitan area bus routes, rail lines, and bridges connecting the five boroughs.

Personnel of NYCT's Surface Transit Operations (STO) operate and maintain the 233 bus routes and 3,500 buses in all five boroughs, which operate daily on a twenty-four hour basis. Bus ridership has been dropping annually; figures for 1995 show 460 million riders, or, approximately 1.25 million daily compared to previous years' figures which show almost 1.5 million riders.

Although subway ridership increased in 1995 to a 21-year high, bus ridership continued to decline. Transit officials credit the growth in subway ridership to increasing perceptions of safety—even during discretionary, non-rush hours.¹ Ironically, some of the new subway riders seem to be coming from the buses, traditionally the preferred mode of transit for those fearful of riding the subway.

¹ Gary Pierre-Pierre, "With fare up, subway use drops sharply: Ridership had reached a 21-year peak in '95," New York Times, February 17, 1996, p. 25:5.

While clogged streets, unlicensed and uninspected vans competing with city buses, the discretionary nature of many bus trips, the rising fare, and the age and physical conditions of the buses have contributed to ridership losses, many believe that customer perceptions of safety have also diminished. Reversing a two-decade-long trend, many transit patrons now find the subway a safer, more hassle-free ride than the bus.

FEW OFFICERS RIDE THE BUSES

Anticipating this change in customer comfort levels and responding to an unusual summer of violent bus crime, in late 1993 Michael F. O'Connor, then Chief of the New York City Transit Police Department (NYTPD), applied for a federal grant to fund 53 uniformed officers to ride New York City Transit buses.

The Transit Authority maintained a separate Transit Police Department until April 2, 1995, when the more than 4,500 members of that department were merged into the New York City Police Department (NYPD). Even before the merger, though, policing of the city's buses and bus routes had been the duty of the NYPD. The Transit Police, except for a small Surface Crime Unit, were responsible only for policing the subway system and other New York City Transit properties; a mission made clear by virtually all Transit Police literature, but often misunderstood by the riding public.

New Yorkers over the age of 40 may remember seeing uniformed police officers on buses, but these sightings were of officers riding to or from their post assignments. Today these officers either walk to or are dropped off at their posts by marked police vehicles. Some officers also rode buses within their patrol areas to get to banks to cash their checks, a task now performed at virtually any corner with an ATM machine. Other than these and recent trips of convenience, NYPD officers were not assigned to uniformed patrol on buses or along bus routes.

Although NYPD responded to calls for service originating on buses, the only scheduled policing of buses was conducted by the Transit Police Department's Surface Crime Unit. This 60-officer group provided plainclothes, anti-crime patrols on buses, concentrating on routes that reported high levels of violent crimes, pickpocketing, or certain sexual offenses that could easily occur undetected in crowded buses. In recent years, Surface Crime officers were also responsible for stopping and summoning the increasing number of uninsured and unlicensed private vans operating along bus routes. No officers were assigned to uniform patrol of buses until January 1995, when

28 officers, whose salaries were paid out of a \$2.1 million grant to the Transit Police from the 1994 federal crime law, were added to the Surface Crime Unit.

THE GRANT-FUNDED OFFICERS

Initial indications were that these 28 officers would be involved in patrolling buses that were on school routes, somewhat similar to a successful Safe Passage subway program.² The Safe Passage initiative involves assigning an officer on each of 100 trains serving 85 key schools at dismissal time, from 1:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. A uniformed officer rides in one of the last three cars, providing a measure of safety not only to riders who find the noisy youths threatening, but also to school-age riders themselves, who are often fearful of the intimidating and harassing behavior of students from their own or other schools.

Although the Transit Police grant request for these officers highlighted plans to eventually assign 200 uniformed officers to patrol buses, the April 1995 merger of the Transit Police Department into the New York City Police Department altered these plans. In addition, only 28 of the requested 53 officers were funded for the first year of what was viewed as a three-year project to reach a total of 200 officers assigned to ride buses. At the time of this Practical Field Test, the 28 officers were funded for a total of three years, but no additional officers had been added or were anticipated.

THE SUMMER OF 1993

The original grant to fund uniformed officers to patrol the city's buses had been motivated by a series of unusual bus crimes in 1993 that seemed to bring to life tales of the old West and stagecoach and train robberies. Events included three teenagers boarding a bus in Queens and firing a number of shots as they robbed 22 passengers and escaped with cash and jewelry. Even the Transit Authority's media spokesman could not help referring to the event as "a 1993 version of the great stagecoach robbery."³ Although the teens were arrested within days of the heist, the Transit Authority stated publicly that there were only 50 transit officers assigned to buses to

² Ralph Gardner Jr., "Parent & child: Protecting children going to school," New York Times, December 15, 1994, p. C1:1-2.

³ Mike Koleniak and Jim Nolan, "Teen bandits open fire in bus heist," New York Post, July 31, 1993, p. 5:1-4.

"assist the NYPD" since the TA "didn't have the manpower to patrol" the buses.⁴ Moreover, it was not assigned this task.

While this robbery did not result directly in copycat crimes, the summer of 1993 did little to enhance patron perceptions of safety on the buses. Other crimes that were cited in Chief O'Connor's request for federal funding included: a bus hijack in upper Manhattan during which the bus travelled approximately 30 blocks before the hijacker fled; the robbery of a woman boarding a bus in Queens; another robbery during which a female passenger was assaulted; and a robbery in Brooklyn during which three young men boarded a bus and removed gold chains from a female patron. A series of crimes against drivers were also recorded, although, amazingly, there were no serious injuries to either drivers or passengers in any of the incidents during which weapons were displayed.

These spectacular events tended to overshadow the daily quality-of-life violations that had become commonplace on buses. In addition to graffiti and vandalism, loud music and marijuana and/or regular smoking provided symptoms of a lack of control on the system. Passengers were also exposed to intoxicated, often noisy passengers and to those who appeared disoriented or emotionally disturbed, often haranguing drivers or specific passengers for no apparent reason.

To minimize these problems, the New York City Police Department assigned the 28 funded officers to enforcement efforts on buses.

THE PRACTICAL FIELD TEST

This Practical Field Test compared reported incidents for a three-month period on two bus lines that received enforcement attention from the funded officers with reported incidents on the same lines during the same three months for the prior two years.

The officers who participated in this test are assigned to the 58-officer Bus Unit, a section of the Surface Transportation Enforcement District, one of seven units that comprise the Traffic Control Division of the New York City Police Department. The Bus Unit, therefore, is not a part of the Transit Bureau, which has inherited most of the work and personnel of the former Transit Police Department. The majority of the

⁴ "Bus bandits still sought," New York Newsday, August 1, 1993, p. 38:1.

officers assigned to the Bus Unit, including the lieutenant in charge during the PFT, were former Transit Police officers. This is becoming less so, as officers replacing those who retire or transfer may come from either the city police or the former Housing Police Department, the third party in the merger agreement. While the staffing of the Bus Unit was not the subject of this study, it is interesting that it is one of the first since the merger that is becoming truly integrated at the officer rank.

The 28 funded officers, all of whom worked in uniform, were augmented by others from the unit, who may have been assigned in either uniform or plainclothes to either marked or unmarked police vehicles and who may have been concentrating on traffic enforcement in and around bus stops rather than on actual enforcement on the buses. For this reason, the activities of the entire unit were not considered a part of the PFT.

Because of the large number of police officers involved in this test as well as the large number of buses on the selected routes on a daily basis, the test involved two distinct types of "bus boardings."

Bus Rides

A "bus ride" was defined as a police officer riding a bus from one point to another, getting on at one stop and riding at least until the next official bus stop. Officers were not required to fill out any trip sheets, so the only way to determine the number and length of rides would have been a daily review of their memo books. Such a review would have been unwieldy, since memo books contain far more than recordings of an officer's police activities (meal and personal requests, for example). Thus, the actual number and duration of rides were not tallied.

Bus Checks

A "bus check" was defined as an officer getting on a bus at a bus stop and getting off before the bus departed from that stop. This technique is common in areas where large numbers of children board buses after school hours. Officers checking a bus are mandated to complete a "Public Bus Inspection Report," which requires them to record, for each check, the route and bus number, time of check, the operator's name and ID number, the location at which they checked the bus, and any remarks. Officers are not required to complete a specific number of checks (a policy instituted in San Francisco in 1996) but are encouraged to check buses regularly as time permits.

Figure 5.2: Bus riding is a new tactic in NYPD's quality-of-life enforcement.
Figure 5.3: An NYPD officer assists a bus patron.



SELECTING THE ROUTES

Because of the size of New York City's bus system, it was decided to limit this Practical Field Test to two matched bus routes, neither of which operated in the borough of Manhattan. Among the criteria considered were that the matched lines would:

- Travel within two different boroughs
- Travel through identifiable communities representing a number of socio-economic levels
- Travel past a number of New York City public high schools and have high levels of student ridership
- Travel past at least one private high school
- Travel past at least one public or private college or university
- Have as a terminal or interim destination at least one well-known shopping district within the borough

A number of considerations played a role in the decision to exclude Manhattan, all of which were based on the view that few of its routes met the criteria of the experiment. Many travel primarily through business areas, do not travel through solely residential areas, or do not adjoin schools, which meant that the common nationwide mix of bus riders (primarily teenagers and older riders on discretionary trips) would be missing.

Of the 133 routes within the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens, two were selected due their close match on each of the listed criteria.

The Bx12, which operates mainly within Bronx County, commences in the Inwood section of upper Manhattan (207th Street and Broadway) and travels through middle-class, family-oriented neighborhoods, and through a number of lower-income, primarily minority (often Hispanic) areas, ending at Barstow and Edson Avenues near Co-op City and the Bay Plaza Shopping Center in the Bronx. The route is extended in the summer months to provide service to Orchard Beach in the Bronx. Riders include students from four public high schools, three Roman Catholic high schools, one college and one university. In addition, the Bx12 travels for much of its route along Fordham Road, a major shopping area for Bronx residents. The Bx12 travels through five New York City police precincts, with a wide range of reported crime within them. Precincts include the 45, 47, 49, 50, and 52.

The B41 route travels from Kings Plaza in Brooklyn to the borough's downtown business district. In addition, the B41 travels for much of its route along Flatbush Avenue and stops at Kings Plaza, a major shopping mall that attracts patrons arriving and departing by bus as well as by private auto patrons. Riders include students from four public high schools, two public lower schools, one Roman Catholic prep school, and one college. The B41 travels through six New York City precincts, with a wide range of reported crime within them. Precincts include the 63, 67, 70, 71, 78, and 84.

Table 5.1 explains the demographic information used to match the two routes.

Table 5.1: Comparison of the Two Selected Bus Routes; Bx12 and B41

CHARACTERISTICS	Bx12	B41
Length of route (miles)	8.20	7.25
Number of daily trips	476	680
Daily ridership	35,000	35,000
Number of buses daily	35	57
Hours of operation	24	24

TESTING THE EFFECTS OF POLICE VISIBILITY

To determine reported incidents on or along the routes of these lines, Bus Briefs for February, March, and April of 1994, 1995, and 1996 were tallied. Bus Briefs are the records of all incidents reported into the Transit Authority dispatch center by drivers. They differ considerably from police incident reports, in that they include a large number of situations that do not involve police response and for which the police are never called.

Types of incidents might include an object thrown at a bus from the street in which the driver cannot identify from where the item was thrown, vandalism to a bus where the driver is unable to identify the vandal(s), mechanical problems with the bus (flat tire, overheating, and the like), or an aided or injury case in which the passenger declines medical attention and leaves the bus unassisted or continues on his or her trip.

Police and Transit Authority officials estimate that about 200 daily Bus Briefs (approximately 9 percent of the daily total) are criminal incidents, ranging from those to which police are not called to those in which arrests are made. At the initiation of the PFT, consideration was given to comparing the Bus Briefs with crime reports filed in the precincts through which the buses travelled. Because of the large number of precincts involved, as well as the inability of the basic police incident report to fully capture whether or not an incident was related to a bus ride, this portion of the experiment was discontinued.

New York City, along with most cities, lacks the capability to fully record transit-related crime because its basic incident report asks an officer merely to indicate whether the location is or is not visible from the street. On May 1994, a Transit Police Operations Order informed members of the department that the New York City Police Department would begin altering its incident report to better track bus-related crime. Even with this change, though, there is no specific mechanism to prompt an officer to inquire whether the victim may have been waiting for a bus or had ridden a bus anytime prior to the crime being reported. This would be particularly useful, for example, in missing property reports that might in fact be pickpocketing crimes or in assaults that might have occurred in or around a bus shelter, particularly if the victim was waiting for or had just exited a bus.

Figure 5.3 is a completed Bus Brief reporting an object having been thrown at and striking the right side windshield of a bus on the B41 line on April 28, 1996 at 6:15 p.m. (shown on the Brief in military time of 18:15).

**Figure 5.3
Sample Bus Brief**

2376 | T | BUS# | 1418 | Flatbush | Sunday, April 28, 1996 | 18:15

804611	DOB:	DOA:	T/F	Tour	14 09	Student	No	Instr Oper I	N/A			
Route	B41	Run:	33	Destin:	Empire Blvd	Street On:	Flatbush Ave	Street At:	Foster Ave	Mid Block		
Envis Clear	Street:	Dry	Pave	Smooth	Level	Street Typ:	Blacktop	Lighting:	Daylight			
Bus Stop	No	Stop Loca:	N/A	Stop Conditio:	N/A	Delay to Service	5	Delay Bus	5			
Bus Statu	To Yard	By	B O	Dmg. Bus	Slight	T. Cust:	15	Bus Injuries #	0	POI	N	
Vehicle #1	N/A	Plate #1	N/A	NA	Damage	N/A	Passengers	0	Injuries#:	0	POI:	N
Vehicle #2	N/A	Plate #2:	N/A	NA	Damage	N/A	Passengers#	0	Injuries #	0	POI	N
EMS At	N/A	Hospital	N/A	N/A	Police #	No	Precinct #	No				
Console Calle	Yes	Control Desk Call	No	Cont Desk Mgr:	N/A	Time Called:						
Action:	Mov. Sight	V.#1:	N/A	Cust. Action	N/A	Pedes.:	N/A					
Classificati	Cnme	Cod	9310B	Type:	Vandalism	Date Rec	4/28/96	18:58	19:59			
Brief Description of Incident Bus moving. Unknown youths threw a bottle striking and cracking right side windshield of bus. Youths fled scene. Operator cannot identify. B/O Seaforth DOA 1/15/96 DOB 4/18/67												
Reported By:	Sid Block					Pass/Badge:	0771 10	At Scene:	No			
Transmitte	Date	4/28/96	Time	19:10	Time Lapsed	4:06	Initials	THB				

Table 5.2 and 5.3 present the figures on selected incidents on Bx12, the Bronx route, and the B41, the Brooklyn route, respectively. The data are derived from Bus Briefs for February, March, and April of 1994, 1995, and the 1996 test period.

**Table 5.2: Comparison of Selected Bus Briefs, BX12
February - April 1994, 1995, and 1996**

TYPE OF INCIDENT	1994	1995	1996
Bus accidents (total)	23	12	10
with police response	7	7	4
w/out police response	16	5	6
Aided cases (total)	14	10	5
with police response	4	3	2
w/out police response	10	7	3
Criminal Mischief	22	9	2
Criminal Possession of a weapon	0	0	0
Grand Larceny	0	2	1
Assault	0	3	0
Robbery	0	0	0
Disorderly Conduct	0	0	0
Harassment	0	2	1
Missile ⁵	4	4	0
Total incidents recorded	63	42	19

⁵ Because the crime category for an object thrown at a bus may differ depending on a number of circumstances surrounding the crime, and because the source and intent of the missile is often unknown, items thrown at or striking a bus are labeled "missile." In those instances when an arrest is made, the appropriate criminal charge is determined.

**Table 5.3: Comparison of Selected Bus Briefs, B41
February - April 1994, 1995, and 1996**

TYPE OF INCIDENT	1994	1995	1996
Bus accidents (total)	41	50	24
with police response	13	13	11
w/out police response	28	37	13
Aided cases (total)	17	19	13
with police response	5	10	4
w/out police response	12	9	9
Criminal Mischief	14	4	6
Criminal Possession of a weapon	1	1	0
Grand Larceny	2	2	1
Assault	3	3	1
Robbery	0	1	0
Disorderly Conduct	1	0	1
Harassment	1	1	0
Missile	4	3	8
Total incidents recorded	84	114	54

CONCLUSIONS

The nature of police work is such that the reliance on raw numerical data can often lead to false conclusions. In this case, though, numbers have been augmented by interviews with some of the officers assigned to the test, permitting a richer analysis of the data. These conversations were supplemented by monthly meetings with the lieutenant in charge, who frequently patrolled with the grant-funded officers.

On both test bus lines, the number of incidents reported on Bus Briefs by drivers declined considerably. Total incidents on the Bx12 fell from 63 in 1994 to 42 in 1995,

to 19 during the 1996 test period, a total decline of 70 percent. Total incidents reported on the B41 route increased from 84 in 1994 to 114 in 1995, and then decreased to 54 during the test period. The two-year decline represents a 35.7 percent decrease; the one-year decline is an impressive 52.7 percent.

Criminal mischief, defined generally by the New York State Penal Law as intentionally damaging property without the right or reasonable ground to do so, declined from 22 incidents to 2 in the Bronx and from 14 to 6 incidents in Brooklyn. Officers reported that drivers attributed this decline to the presence of the officers during the high-traffic school hour periods, when boisterous students are responsible for the majority of criminal mischief incidents.

What is striking about the figures, particularly in light of the 1993 concerns, is how little major crime occurs on either of these routes, reinforcing the view that rider perceptions of crime are often far in excess of actual criminal activity.

Moreover, this test reinforced the oft-described blase qualities of New York's bus riders. Surprisingly, none of the officers reported having patrons ask them why they were boarding or riding the buses; nor did the change in policy receive any press coverage in citywide or neighborhood newspapers.

The lack of citywide coverage had been anticipated by the Police Department due to a small, semi-official test that had assigned officers earlier in the year to ride or board a busy Manhattan bus line during its travels through midtown. Although this short test received high marks from drivers, there was no response—positively or negatively—from riders and no recognition by the press of the change, probably indicating that no one had contacted them asking why officers were riding buses.

This PFT provides a number of areas for further study, many of which would be more easily controlled on a smaller system. The ability to coordinate reports to the transit system with local police agency reports would provide a transit agency with a mechanism to learn whether it is accurately capturing incidents occurring on its property. Selecting one bus route that travels through a single police jurisdiction or multiple jurisdictions that have a relatively low incidence of reported crime would facilitate capturing this comparison data far more easily. In fact, such a test would provide the opportunity for a meaningful partnership project between a transit agency's police or security department and local police department(s).

This Practical Field Test also raised interesting questions pertaining to police or security partnerships with drivers and their unions, many of which are demanding increased uniformed presence for the safety of employees. Lastly, and, again, probably more feasible in a system smaller than New York's, customer perception surveys might gauge whether patrons were aware of officers riding the bus (see the Houston PFT in this study for a markedly different perception result). It is also more likely that local media in a smaller market would provide coverage of this type of change in policy, although this did not occur in Houston. It would be important to transit police and security managers, as well as operations managers, to know whether the knowledge that police or security officers were riding buses made passengers feel more secure, or, on the other hand, whether it frightened them into believing that a serious crime problem was the reason for the change in policy. If the latter proved true, managers would be faced with the contradiction that providing more security results in patrons feeling less safe.

SOURCES

This Practical Field Test was constructed after visits to the Traffic Control Division and to the Bus Unit, as well as site visits to the two target bus lines. Statistics are based on New York City Transit Authority and New York City Police Department records. In addition, a project researcher was assigned to the Bus Unit to review and tally incidents on the two matched lines for the period of the three months of study and for the same months for the preceding two years.

Interviews

Deputy Inspector Vincent Kennedy, Traffic Control Division; Commanding Officer of the Surface Transportation Enforcement District, to which the Bus Unit reports
Lt. Richard Baggs, Commanding Officer, Bus Unit

Reports

Memorandum of Understanding Among the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, the New York City Transit Authority and the City of New York on Merger of the New York City Transit Authority Police Department and the New York City Police Department, original document dated March 31, 1995.

New York City Transit Police Department, Police Hiring Supplement Program, December 1, 1994. (This is the grant proposal submitted to and funded by the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance, for 58 uniformed officers to patrol New York City's buses.)

Underground Under Control: The Transit Police Take Control of the Subway. 1994 booklet (New York: NYCT, 1994.

Articles

"Bus bandits still sought," New York Newsday, August 1, 1993, p. 38:3.

Gardner Jr., Ralph, "Parent & child: Protecting children going to school," New York Times, December 15, 1994, p. C1:1-2.

Koleniak, Mike and Jim Nolan, "Teen bandits open fire in bus heist," New York Post, July 31, 1993, p. 5:1-4.

Pierre-Pierre, Gary, "With fare up, subway use drops sharply: Ridership had reached a 21-year peak in '95," New York Times, February 17, 1996, p. 25:5.

Singleton, Don, "Hijack of city bus thwarted by crowd," New York Daily News, August 5, 1993, p. 46:1-2.

Chapter 6

PRACTICAL FIELD TEST AT HOUSTON METRO

Riding the Bus: Community Policing in the Transit Environment

The Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County in Houston, Texas, known as METRO, was voted into existence in 1978 and began operation on January 1, 1979, providing bus service to metropolitan Houston and its surrounding area. The development of METRO was tied to the "boomtown" development of Houston in the late 1970s, when traffic jams were threatening to thwart additional growth and the bus system was viewed as too old and untrustworthy to compete with private car travel.

Like so much of Texas and other southwestern states, METRO reflects the reality of wide open spaces and a growth pattern based on building out rather than building up. Although downtown Houston boasts the Astrodome and a large number of high-rise office buildings, the dominant development pattern in Harris County has resulted in METRO covering a vast area of numerous overlapping governmental jurisdictions.

In 1973 the Texas State Legislature authorized creation of local transit authorities and permitted voters to dedicate a special sales tax to subsidize public transit and provide for long-range mobility improvements. Five years later, the Houston area created METRO, whose service area includes all of the city of Houston, 14 additional communities, and major portions of unincorporated Harris County.

In 1979, METRO began service with the aging fleet it inherited and 100 new buses. Today METRO, reflecting the geographic spread of its system, maintains a bus fleet of 1,391 (including METRO-owned buses operated by private companies under contract), 1,154 passenger shelters, more than 10,000 bus stops, 125 bus routes, 23 park-and-ride routes each with an accompanying park-and-ride lot (total parking spaces are 26,089), and 14 transit centers that are transfer points for riders who must use more than one bus to get from their originating point to their final destination.¹

¹ All figures are as of November 30, 1994 and taken from METRO Facts, except for the number of bus stops, which comes from Discover METRO: A Guide to Using METRO.

The system covers 3,000 route miles, crisscrossing a 1,279-square-mile area extending from downtown Houston to a number of suburban areas. Bus ridership has increased from 33 million annual passenger trips (not boardings) in 1979 to more than 58 million in 1995.

In an attempt to further accommodate the relatively large distances passengers must often travel on the system, METRO has devised three distinct types of routes. Local bus service, serving mostly city streets, stops at every other corner along the route. The basic, one-way adult fare is \$1.00, although METRO provides a large number of fare options and discounts in all its fare categories. Express buses stop less often than do local buses and frequently make use of High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes to offer faster service to downtown. The basic, one-way fare is \$1.50. Lastly, specially designated park-and-ride buses provide nonstop service between the park-and-ride lots and downtown Houston, the Texas Medical Center, and two major shopping malls. Fares vary depending on distance.

METRO also encourages travel pools through its RideShare and METROVan programs, a Subscription Bus program, and "Guaranteed RideHome" which allows bus or van users who require home emergency transportation three trips a year when certain emergencies must be tended to and regularly scheduled transportation is unavailable.

In recognition of the fact that even this large variety of public transit patterns will not meet the needs of all commuters, METRO also maintains approximately 70 miles of HOV lanes (barrier-protected and usually in the median of a freeway). The lanes are reserved for buses, vanpools, and carpools in an attempt to speed vehicular traffic through the interstate highway network that winds through METRO's service area. Reversible to accommodate commuter traffic during peak periods, the lanes are used each workday by more than 80,000 people.²

THE METRO BUS SYSTEM AND ITS POLICE FORCE

METRO's approach to policing is somewhat unique. It is one of the few bus-only systems that maintains its own police department and is the sole transit agency whose

² METRO Facts; METRO: A Promise to the Community. Additional HOV lanes are expected to be in operation by the year 2000.

police officers are also responsible for enforcement of all laws and regulations pertaining to the High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes that assist in traffic flow throughout the city of Houston.

The Police Department was formed in 1982; three years after creation of METRO itself. It was the first such department in the state of Texas. Starting with a small force of security guards who initially lacked police powers, the department has grown rapidly, particularly in recent years. In 1992, the department had 85 officers; by 1996, the number has increased to close to 200 officers, all of whom are armed. All officers are commissioned, with full police officer powers under the authority of Article 1118X, Vernon's Civil Statutes for the purpose of providing law enforcement and police services for METRO's property, personnel, and patrons. Officers have the same powers of arrest as city police officers operating within their jurisdiction and are responsible for investigating all crimes occurring on METRO property, buses, and rights-of-way. The Police Department also has on its staff a small number of security officers who are assigned to corporate facilities. It also contracts with a private firm for security officers assigned to transit centers and park-and-ride lots. The annual police budget is just under \$14 million. Tom Lambert has been the chief since the department's inception; in another unusual configuration, Chief Lambert is also the Assistant General Manager for METRO.

Established specifically to address crime affecting both employees and patrons, the department began with a philosophy of traditional reactive patrol. By 1987, it had shifted to a more proactive, crime prevention focus. As early as 1988 (well in advance of the majority of transit police agencies), the department began contacting neighborhood groups to institute a Transit-on-Watch program. A multifaceted attempt to involve the public and civic groups in assisting METRO in reducing vandalism on the system, Transit-on-Watch includes adopt a shelter and adopt a transit center programs, a safe haven program, and a specific anti-vandalism program that involves rewards of up to \$200 for those providing information that leads to the arrest and conviction of anyone who has vandalized METRO property. Officers assigned to the Community Services Unit publicize these programs and also participate in a school outreach program which teaches safety to students and makes them aware of the METRO code of conduct. Students are permitted to participate in the reward program.

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) is also an integral part of the policing philosophy. A number of bus transfer points have been renovated based on CPTED principles and a number of other renovations are planned.

In 1993, the METRO Board of Directors took the unusual step of expanding the Police Department's responsibilities to include developing, implementing, and policing a traffic management program for area freeways and major thoroughfares. Approximately 40 METRO police patrol and enforce HOV routes and regulations, including all traffic laws; remove stalled or abandoned vehicles; assist stranded motorists; investigate accidents; and develop traffic safety programs for the 200 miles of freeways, including approximately 70 miles of HOV routes (which account for 80,000 passenger trips daily).

THE PRACTICAL FIELD TEST: DIRECTED BUS RIDING

Since its inception, the METRO Police Department has provided both plainclothes and uniformed foot patrol of downtown bus stops and directed vehicle patrol of parking lots and transfer points. A number of parking lots and transfer points are also staffed by private guards who report to the police department.

Ridership surveys indicate that for many regular patrons, using the bus system is a discretionary decision that can be highly influenced by both actual crime as well as the perception of an unsafe environment. For this reason, METRO Police have, for a number of years, maintained a policy of periodically assigning plainclothes officers to ride buses on routes with higher than average security risks to patrons.

Although patrons had previously suggested that uniformed officers, preferably police rather than security guards, ride the buses in uniform, the costs of such a program mitigated against its adoption. Because the idea remained under active consideration by Chief Lambert and his staff, the opportunity to test the benefits of and reaction to assigning a uniformed police officer to ride the bus formed the basis of this Practical Field Test.

Over a period of more than five months—from February 5 to July 19, 1996—a uniformed police officer rode two selected buses for three hours (3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.), Monday through Friday, to examine this deployment tactic.

To test actual changes in crime reports, patrons' and operators' perception of crime, and the general community relations value of an officer riding a particular bus line at specified times, test conditions included:

- A uniformed officer assigned to directed bus riding beginning and ending at the Southeast Transit Center for the hours of 3:00 to 6:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. An unmarked van driven by a plainclothes officer trailed the officer in the event he required assistance or transport due to observing an offense resulting in arrest. If the officer made an arrest during the course of the three-hour riding period, rides were to be discontinued for that day
- The officer boarded bus line 52 (which travel primarily along Scott Boulevard), riding for any number of stops up to and including Holman Street, at which point the officer exited the bus, crossed the street, and awaited a bus returning to the transit center
- The same officer boarded bus line 5 (which travels primarily along Griggs Road) riding for any number of stops up to and including Mykawa Street, at which time the bus crosses a set of railroad tracks. The same procedure as outlined for line 52 was followed by the officer
- The officer continued with these rides for the full three-hour period, recording distance ridden (by name of stop at which the officer exited and made the return ride), number of buses ridden, and time spent at Southeast between rides

The test called for the officer to use his discretion as to the number of stops to ride within the targeted area. This permitted the officer to become more involved in the project. It also precluded concerns that the officer would ride an empty bus in a mindless routine with little or no opportunity to interact with the riding public.

In addition to recording all police actions taken, the officer was required to record any community-oriented, patron interactions, including: questions answered, crime prevention information distributed, other information provided, community contacts made, assistance rendered, and interventions which might not normally be recorded as police activity (such as patrons quieted, minor disputes adjusted, and the like). A form

was devised by METRO to capture this information. (It is reproduced at the end of the PFT as Figure 6.1.)

No press announcement accompanied this PFT as a means of testing whether the public would indicate awareness of the change either by letters or telephone calls to METRO or to the local media, or if the local media would discover the officer riding the bus and treat it as a local news story. Reactions from operators on the bus lines were also obtained to gauge their perceived level of safety and whether they believe the bus rides resulted in any changes in patron behavior.

The last experimental condition was the officer selected, who would be the only officer assigned to bus riding during the test period. The reason for this was the belief, ultimately substantiated, that potential benefits to bus riding were at least in part dependent on the personality of the officer assigned.

While at least theoretically all officers within a department are subject to identical assignment, the recognition that this project contained elements of community policing led to selection of an officer who would support the program and who was willing to interact regularly with riders (including school age-children, teenagers, and the elderly) and to establish a rapport with bus operators. Thus, the officer was not randomly chosen but was selected specifically by his commanding officer for his personality and his past record of police and community activity.

The officer selected for the experiment held the rank of sergeant. To preclude any unintended messages that his rank might have conveyed, Sgt. Carl Clark consented to "become a police officer for the experiment," trading in his sergeant's badge and shirt with stripes for a police officer's badge and shirt. Those aware of the culture of policing know that a sergeant riding a bus would send a message of supervision or investigation of wrongdoing either on the part of police officers or bus operators and would also seem inappropriate to patrons familiar with military rank structures. Houston's size, as well as the size of the METRO Police Department, assured that few riders or operators would have interacted directly with Sgt. Clark and, therefore, would view his presence in a police officer's uniform as having negative implications about him personally.

Figure 6.2: Sgt. Carl Clark improved quality-of-life on the buses he regularly rode.



Figure 6.3: Conditions at the Southeast Transit Center improved during the PFT.



SELECTING THE ROUTES

Since this was to be a demonstration project, the routes and the times the officer would ride the bus were selected to achieve maximum visibility.

Routes with the highest number of patron complaints were reviewed. Reinforcing prior research that only a few incidents are required to create a climate of fear for transit patrons, none of the lines had reported any serious, violent offenses over the prior two years. Their designation as "crime prone" was more an indication of the small amount of criminal activity on the other lines than an indication of any serious crime on these lines.

The test centered on two bus lines operating from the same transit center. A major reason for selecting two lines using the same transit center was to assure the presence of the uniformed officer at that location before, between, and after directed bus boardings and rides. It also provided a reporting place for the officer.

The Southeast Transit Center, which had the highest number of recorded incidents of all transit centers for the period January through November 1995, was selected as the starting point for the test. Two bus lines operating from it were paired for rides based on the following similarities or contrasts:

- The 52 line had the seventh highest number of recorded incidents for the period January through December 1994 (the last full year of data at the time the test was devised); travelled through a mixed-use, residential area, passed by one high school and two colleges, and carried a large number of high school and college students
- The 5 line, not listed among those with a high number of incidents, travelled through a commercial area and carried mostly adult riders
- The two lines do not intersect at any point, but the 5 line intersected at Martin Luther King Boulevard with the 77 line (which had the highest number of reported incidents in 1994)

MEASURING POLICE ACTIVITY

As anticipated by METRO management, traditional measures of police activity provided only a small picture of the experiment's results. Although the numbers themselves are quite small, they were viewed satisfactorily within the context of a proactive agency that is very conscious of servicing its patrons and of raising its profile within the community.

Table 6.1 provides a summary of the actual time spent by the uniformed officer either riding the bus or patrolling the transit center or stops along his designated route. It also reviews his activities based on the traditional police measurements of arrests, summons, and warnings issued.

Table 6.1: Summary of Activities; February - July 1996

Number of buses ridden	839
Time spent riding buses	106 hours, 13 minutes
Time spent at route locations ³	208 hours, 14 minutes
Number of patrons on buses	21,625 (officer's count)
Arrests	13
Class C citations ⁴ issued	2
Warnings for Class C violations	304

None of the thirteen arrests were for violent crimes or crimes against patrons or operators. The most serious offenses were six arrests for possession of marijuana; all other arrests were for such quality-of-life offenses as public intoxication and urinating in public. Reinforcing the view that active quality-of-life enforcement results in fewer occurrences of these offenses over time, six of the thirteen arrests made during the PFT occurred during the first month of patrol. The final two marijuana possession and

³ Route location is defined as either the transit center or a bus stop along either of the two bus lines.

⁴ Class C citations are issued primarily for such violations of such city ordinances as drinking, littering, or obscene or abusive language in a public place. The most serious violations for which Class C citations may be written are simple assault (pushing or shoving) and petty theft of items valued at under \$20.

one crack cocaine possession arrests were made within 30 days of the start of the study. After that date, all subsequent arrests were for public intoxication.

The two Class C citations (one is a juvenile using abusive language, another to an adult for the same infraction) were both issued within the first 30 days of the field test.

Warnings by the officer were either written or oral. An oral warning is, quite obviously, less serious than a written one. Yet, because the same officer rode the same buses, his oral warning carried weight with those warned when they soon learned that he would return and that he remembered having spoken to them previously. Because of this, the oral warning, particularly for teenagers, came to be viewed as just as serious as a written warning.

The number of warnings issued followed the identical pattern of the few arrests and citations. The largest number of warnings were issued during the first month, when 111 people were advised that their behavior was either illegal or a violation of codes of conduct. By the second and third months, the number of people warned decreased to approximately 70 each month. Thereafter the numbers continued to decline; by July warnings averaged slightly fewer than 1 per day.

COMMUNITY POLICING IN A TRANSIT ENVIRONMENT

The major findings of this experiment must be viewed within the context of community policing. As shown above, the numbers of arrests, citations, and warnings were small in comparison to the number of patrons who observed the officer riding the bus. One police officer riding two bus lines for only a short period of time was observed by more than 21,600 patrons. He had at least minimal conversation with the operators of the 839 buses he rode, as well as with other operators at the Southeast Transit Center. In addition, Sgt. Clark spoke with a large number of METRO supervisors and with administrators of schools along the bus routes. He was also seen by numerous Houstonians picking up or dropping off riders at the transit center.

The discussion that follows, based on observations of the experiment monitors, the officer who rode the buses, and his commanding officer, provides a deeper analysis of the test than the traditional activity measures of reactive policing.

Sgt. Clark reported that his presence was initially viewed as a sign of trouble. Patrons, who were not accustomed to seeing a uniformed officer on board a bus unless there was a problem, questioned him as to whether a violent crime had recently occurred. Operators were also cool, suggesting concern that they were being watched for fare collection or driving techniques.

Although previous customer surveys had indicated that a large percentage of riders were aware of METRO's separate police department, Sgt. Clark was asked many questions similar to those answered by transit agency police around the nation. Patrons wanted to know the officer's duties and powers; could he arrest people like the Houston police; could he arrest people who were not on the bus or at bus stops? Patrons were also unaware of a code of conduct that forbade eating, drinking, playing loud music, using abusive language, or littering on buses or at bus transfer points.

By midway through the test, attitudes toward the program became more positive. Some operators began to solicit the officer to ride their bus, voicing disappointment when he did not. Operators also reported noticing a change in patrons' conduct, especially among young people riding the bus. Operators also reported, and patron comments substantiated, that fewer young people were loitering about the transit center. Women particularly commented on this since the groups of teenaged boys had often called to them or generally made them feel uncomfortable.

The absence of the teenagers was not achieved by Sgt. Clark's presence alone. He approached the groups repeatedly, concentrating his efforts on learning what schools they attended and why they were not in school. He met formally and informally with teachers and administrators in schools along his route, often changing buses at the school stops both as a way of interacting with adults at the schools and also providing an unofficial "safe passage" program for adults as well as teens who may have been intimidated by the unruly behavior of some of the school children.

The absence of loiterers was not the only environmental change at the Southeast Transit Center and stops along the routes. Less debris was observed at stops and shelters, particularly after a more personal relationship between the officer and patrons, including the teenagers, began to develop.

Adult patrons told the officer they were more comfortable waiting for buses when he was there. Patrons began to look for and expect the presence of the officer on a daily

basis. They asked why more officers did not ride buses, and they suggested times and routes to which officers should be assigned.

Bus operators, initially suspicious of the officer's presence, came to view the officer as an ally. Many encouraged him to ride their particular bus or brought information to him of problems occurring along their routes, some of which he handled and many of which he referred either to other METRO officers, to the Houston Police Department, or to school officials.

An unanticipated series of contacts occurred with shopkeepers along the two bus routes. Many of these individuals were unaware of METRO Police's existence until Sgt. Clark stopped in and encouraged them to report to him any problems that may have been caused by teenagers waiting for buses outside their stores. On at least one occasion, a store manager who observed the officer waiting at a bus stop asked him to come into the store to discourage a group of youths the manager perceived to be potential shoplifters. Sgt. Clark recognized the youths as regular bus patrons on their way home from school and urged them to take the next bus with him, which they agreed to do.

Sgt. Clark also established positive relationships with a number of the young people who had been perceived by bus operators as the major cause of the on-board rowdy behavior. Within two months of bus riding, Sgt. Clark began to chat regularly with many of the male students. Some began to confide in him their fears of other students, usually from other schools, and to inform him in advance of any threats or potential problems among different groups of youths.

The types of relationships that Sgt. Clark established make up part of the classic definition by Robert Trojanowicz and David Carter of community policing, namely: "... a proactive, decentralized approach, designed to reduce crimes, disorder, and by extension, fear of crime, by intensely involving the same officer in the same community on a long-term basis, so that residents will develop trust to cooperate with police by providing information and assistance to achieve those three crucial goals."⁵

⁵ Robert Trojanowicz and David Carter, The Philosophy and Role of Community Policing, Community Policing Series No. 13 (East Lansing, MI: National Neighborhood Foot Patrol Center, School of Criminal Justice, Michigan State University, 1988).

Figure 6.1: METRO Police Department PFT Daily Activity Log

5 - Kashmere / Southmore Route
 52 - Scott / Hirsch Route

METRO Police Department

Uniformed Patrol Study

Monday / 02 - 05 - 1996
 Day of Week / Month - Day - Year

Location		Time Spent	Time Out	Time On	Bus Number	Route Information	Patrons Aboard	Time Off	Ride Time	Action Taken	Incident Numbers	*W
1	SE Southeast transit center	10	3:00	3:10	2250	52 Inbound	33	3:21	11			F CY
2	3700 Scott	14	3:21	3:35	2233	52 Outbound	50+	3:47	12	1 Issued citation juvenile Abusive language, 1 Oral warning adult Eating on the bus		-
3	SE Southeast transit center	20	3:47	4:07	2253	52 Inbound	30	4:19	12	1 oral warning juvenile Abusive language		-
4	Scott at Holman	3	4:19	4:22	2031	52 Outbound	29	4:28	6	1 oral warning juvenile Abusive language on the bus.		-
5	SE Southeast transit center	14	4:28	4:42	2021	5 Outbound	34	4:56	14			-
6	Griggs at Mykawa	28	4:56	5:24	2072	5 Inbound	37	5:31	7			-
7	SE Southeast transit center	29	5:31	6:00						1 oral warning juvenile Abusive language on the bus. End of Tour		-
8.												

123

*W - Weather	Bus Service Schedule	Total Buses Boarded	Total Number of Patrons Onboard	Tour Time	Action Taken
C - Clear R - Rain TS - Thunderstorm F - Cold ** H - Hot CY - Cloudy **	1 - Weekday ** 2 - Saturday 3 - Sunday 4 - Modified Holiday 5 - Holiday Y/(N)	6	213	Start: 3:00 PM End: 6:00 PM	Arrests _____ Citatlons <u>1</u> Warnings _____ Oral Warnings <u>4</u> METRO Information _____ Directions _____ Advice _____ Med Assist _____
		Total Time Out Location	Total Ride Time		
		1 hr. 58 min.	1 hr. 2 min.		

Figure 6.1: METRO Police Department PFT Daily Activity Log (continued)

Location	Time Spent	Time Out	Time On	Bus Number	Route Information	Patrons Aboard	Time Off	Ride Time	Action Taken	Incident Numbers	•W
					5 - 52						
					In/B - Out/B						
					5 - 52						
					In/B - Out/B						
					5 - 52						
					In/B - Out/B						

Notes

- Observations of Transit Centers/ Bus Stops: Approximately 400 total people at Southeast transit center during tour. Three black males were observed smoking marijuana and ran when they saw officers.
- Questions/requests asked by patrons/citizens/employees: Patron requested officers to be at transit center at 11 pm. Patrons want smoking areas. Patron asked if he could wait in his vehicle at transit center for his wife.
- Information disseminated: Crime Prevention Lit. / Bus Schedules / Phone Numbers / Advice / Directions
- Operators perception of on board officer: Several operators stated they were pleased to see officer at transit center and riding buses.
- Patrons perception of on board officer: Some patrons were glad to see officer riding buses.
- Request from business.
- Information received reference complaints, crimes, suspects and suspicious activities: Street supervisor advised that female operators were having problems on the 5 line from 3:30-3:45 pm. Female patron who ride the 52 line outbound from the 3700 block of Scott advised that juveniles are creating problems on that route. Operators are also not paying attention to their driving duties.
- Information reported/forwarded to transportation, maintenance or outside agencies: Grass needs mowing at 4936 Griggs, inbound.
- Change in conditions at transit centers, bus stops or bus shelters:
- Any notable changes in ridership:

Additional Notes

Citation Information

Citation number / Charge	Citation number / Charge	Citation number / Charge	Citation number / Charge

Carl Clark
Officer Assigned

CONCLUSIONS

This Practical Field Test was deemed a success by METRO Police officials. Capt. Milton O'Gilvie, commanding officer of the Transit Services Bureau, described the experiment as having created an "avoidance zone" for those who were unwilling to conform to METRO's rules or to use the system in a positive manner. This is similar to the zero-tolerance policy that a number of rail agencies, particularly the Washington Metro Area Transit Agency (WMATA) and Atlanta's Metropolitan Regional Transit Agency (MARTA), have worked to enforce since their systems began operation. The large number of buses operated by METRO makes a zero-tolerance policy impossible to enforce, but temporary "avoidance zones," based on directed patrol in response to clusters of complaints, seem to have brought about the same results.

Chief Lambert also viewed the figures positively. Due to the high percentage of discretionary riders on METRO buses, a nuisance-free environment has an effect quite similar to a crime-free one, since many passengers report that quality-of-life offenses are what keep them from riding buses regularly. Chief Lambert also termed the enforcement as cost effective for the Police Department's budget. Crimes and violations that do not occur represent a real dollar savings of the time off patrol for report writing and arrest processing that are often neglected in calculating the costs of traditional police response to incidents and crimes.

Sgt. Clark raised the same issues. Listing the number and types of people with whom he had contact and the different services he provided to each of these populations, he described himself as a "mobile police storefront."

While the vast majority of transit agencies lack the staff to assign officers to multiple bus or train rides and, therefore, have tended to use this assignment in a reactive way, usually only after receiving numerous complaints of specific crimes, this PFT suggests that agencies might assign one officer to one route for a specified period of time to provide more proactive police services. The benefits of the officer's presence, once operators, patrons, and potential troublemakers were assured he would return regularly, became apparent within no more than two months. Using a three- or four-month, rather than six-month time period, even agencies whose staffing is thin, might consider assigning officers to particular problem routes as a way of preventing crime and disorder and raising their own profile within the community.

SOURCES

This study recounts a Practical Field Test (PFT) conducted by the METRO Police to assess the effectiveness of having a uniformed police officer ride two selected bus routes. The case study was constructed after site visits to the METRO system, including site assessments of the Southeast Transit Center, assessment of METRO police incident reports and crime statistics, and interview with key police personnel.

Interviews

Tom C. Lambert, Assistant General Manager and Chief of Police, Houston Metropolitan Transit Authority METRO Transit Police
Captain Tim Kelly, Support Operations Commanding Officer, METRO Transit Police
Captain Milton O'Gilvie, Transit Services Commanding Officer, METRO Transit Police
Sgt. Carl Clark, METRO Transit Police

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