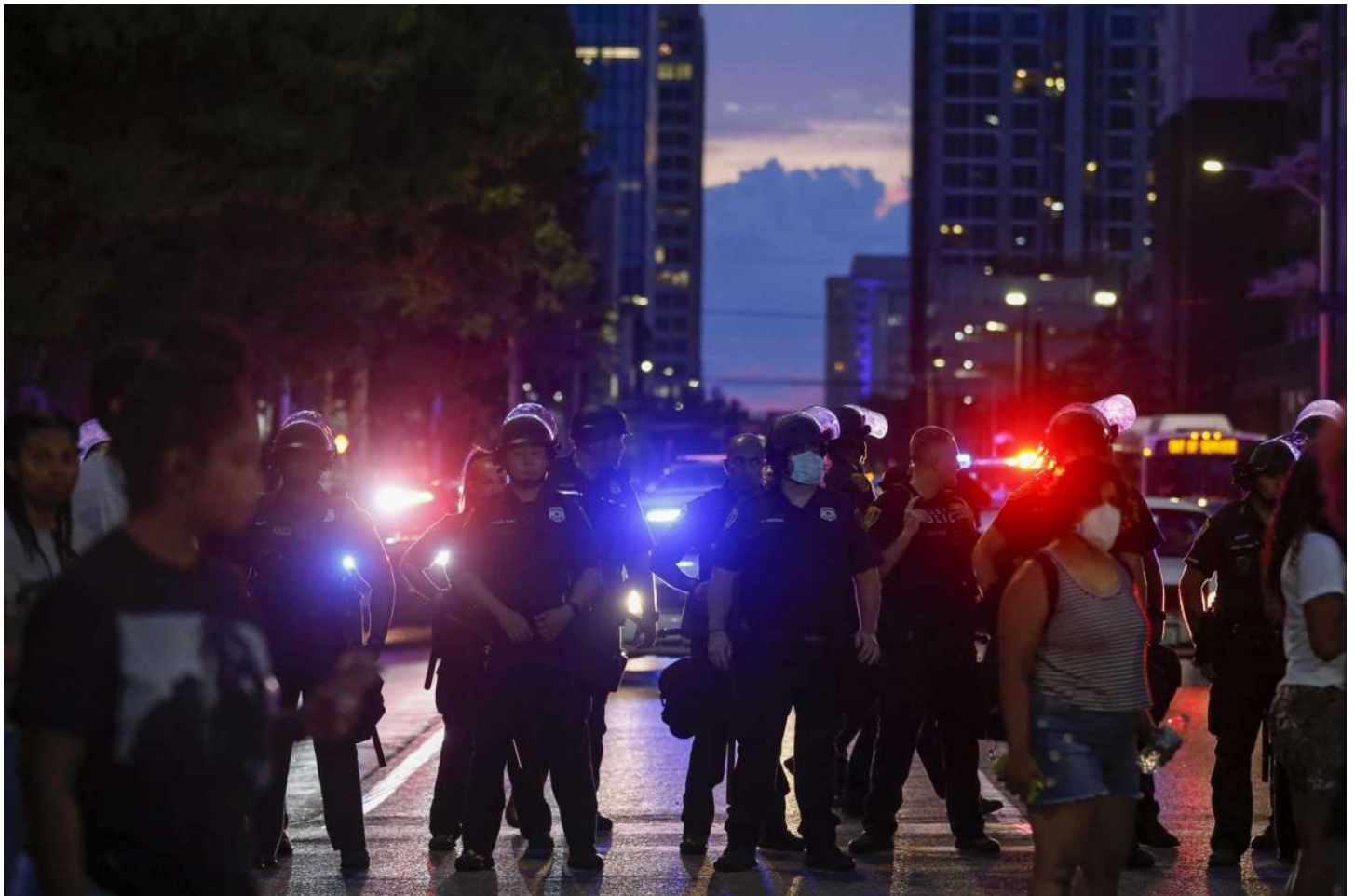


LOCAL // HOUSTON

Metro bus used to transport detained protesters an error in heat of moment, Houston police say

Dug Begley

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Houston Police officers block off a street during a protest May 30, 2020, in downtown Houston. Demonstrators marched to protest the death of George Floyd, who died while in custody of Minneapolis Police last Monday night. Behind the officers is one of the Metropolitan Transit Authority buses used to ferry riot-clad officers around the central ...

Photo: Godofredo A. Vásquez, Houston Chronicle / Staff photographer

About 50 people detained by Houston police Saturday night were transported by a Metro bus, against the transit agency's policies, a mistake officers and bus leadership said was resolved quickly.

During mass arrests in downtown late Saturday or early Sunday morning, police opted to place the detainees on the Metropolitan Transit Authority bus to expedite efforts to get them off the curb and provide them with water at an initial processing location, police spokesman Kese Smith said.

Though Metro often helps police in emergencies — riot-gear-clad officers were hauled through downtown via Metro buses and could cool off on the idling buses as they deployed — there are limits to the cooperation.

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“Our normal protocol does not call for Metro to transport arrestees,” agency spokesman Jerome Gray said. “It turns out that happened with one bus without Metro being asked permission. HPD has access to other vehicles designed for transporting people who are arrested, not our buses.”

Once Metro learned of the use, they notified police, who then used a Harris County bus to ferry people to the joint processing center.

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Gray said drivers shortly after the errant trip were reminded of the policies, and police commanders have reiterated to officers that detainee transport is not allowed on Metro buses.

As protests have led to scores of arrests in many metro areas across the country, transit agencies have come under greater scrutiny for their responses. In Los Angeles, where buses have been used to transport prisoners, critics have said it erodes goodwill between the transit provider and riders, many of whom are out marching. Agencies also faced jeers when protests led to transit being scaled back or canceled, in some cases stranding riders.

Former Metro board member Christof Spieler, who has studied transit systems worldwide, said on social media over the weekend many agencies find themselves focusing too much on issues like aggressively enforcing train tickets and not riding the system themselves that pit them against their riders.

“If you are part of a transit agency, you should be spending time thinking about systemic racism and making sure you're part of the solution, not part of the problem,” Spieler wrote on Twitter.



dug.begley@chron.com

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