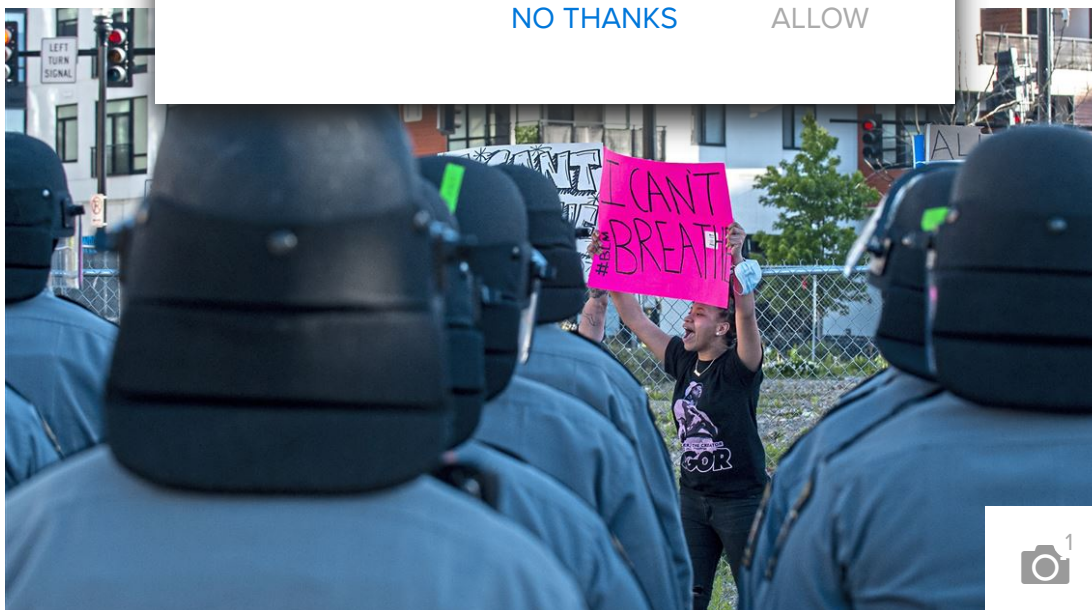




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Transit union: Port Authority operators will no longer transport police



JOSHUA AXELROD ✓

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

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JUN 2, 2020

5:09 PM

Port Authority bus operators represented by the Amalgamated Transit Union will no longer be transporting law enforcement on buses, according to the ATU's local chapter president.

The ATU told Port Authority that would be the case going forward after a weekend of protests throughout Pittsburgh over the killing of George Floyd in Minnesota, some of which resulted in violence and multiple arrests.



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“I wasn’t putting my people in harm’s way,” said Steve Palonis, president of ATU Local 85, which represents Allegheny County’s Port Authority bus operators. “If Port Authority decides they want to use the buses, that’s up to Port Authority. We have no call on that.”



Cynthia Fernandez

Gov. Wolf marches with George Floyd demonstrators in Harrisburg

Mr. Palonis said that there was one instance this weekend of a Port Authority bus operator transporting police, but there will be no others after his conversation with Port Authority CEO Katharine Kelleman. His main concern was ATU-represented bus operators driving into “hot spots” and potentially being “subject to any violence.”

Pittsburgh’s public transit agency had been facing pressure from advocacy groups like Pittsburghers for Public Transit which urged



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across the country have taken a stand in solidarity with black and brown communities against police brutality, and have refused to transport police and refused to transport arrested [protesters].”

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Port Authority spokesman Adam Brandolph also confirmed to the Post-Gazette that this was an ATU decision and not one made by Port Authority. He said Port Authority supplied two buses on Saturday and Sunday to law enforcement agencies but “made it clear that our buses were for officer transport only and couldn’t be used to transport anyone who’s been arrested or detained.”

Mr. Brandolph said that Port Authority will comply with the ATU’s request.

“Moving forward, to the extent we continue to provide buses at the request of state, county and city public safety officials, they will be operated by police officers with [commercial driver’s licenses],” he said.

He also expressed the Port Authority’s “solidarity with those



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In no longer allowing Port Authority bus drivers to transport police in its buses, ATU Local 85 was following the lead of John Costa, ATU International's president who said [in a statement](#) that “our members — bus drivers — have the right to refuse work they consider dangerous or unsafe during the pandemic” and specified that bus operators in Minneapolis — where the protests originated — “have the right to refuse the dangerous duty of transporting police to protests and arrested demonstrators away from these communities where many of these drivers live.”

That's exactly what Mr. Palonis was trying to avoid for his ATU Local 85 members, and why he was prompted to approach Port Authority and tell them his union would be implementing the same measures it put in place in 2009 when protests during the G-20 Summit in Pittsburgh [resulted in 190 arrests](#) and damage to local businesses.

“Operators were not going to be hauling people to jail or hauling police officers,” Mr. Palonis said of the ATU's strategy to keep their constituents safe during the 2009 protests.

That will now be the case during the 2020 protests as well.

Joshua Axelrod: jaxelrod@post-gazette.com and Twitter @jaxel222.

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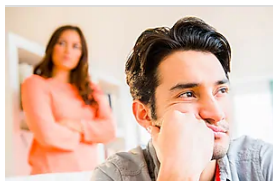
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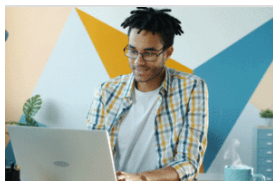
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