

# STREETSBLOG

## Divesting from Police and Investing in Community Safety on L.A. Metro

Transportation agencies must reimagine safety beyond armed law enforcement

By Mariana Huerta Jones | Jun 19, 2020 | 6 COMMENTS



ACT-LA Reimagining Safety transit ambassador Silver Line Station event in 2019. Photo by ACT-LA

Amid a global pandemic with disproportionate impacts on low-income communities of color, and the eruption of mass civil unrest, Metro created another source of anxiety for its majority Black and brown transit riders when it took unprecedented action to shut down service throughout L.A. County on May 30, effectively leaving thousands of riders

stranded in the name of “safety.” To add insult to injury, the [buses were then used to transport dozens of detained peaceful protesters](#) to a holding area, which Metro claimed to be obligated to do. But transit riders and advocates saw this action as another clear example in which [Metro closely aligns itself with police](#) agencies like the LAPD.



From 2017 through 2022, Metro is spending \$797 million (and possibly millions more in overtime pay) for law enforcement patrol and response on the region’s transit system through a multi-agency contract with LAPD, L.A. Sheriff’s Department, Long Beach PD, and private security. Metro also has its own transit security officers. This 5-year contract is an almost 60 percent increase from the agency’s previous \$500 million police budget, at a time when [crime on Metro is going down](#).

Spending nearly a billion dollars on policing has come at the [expense of transit infrastructure and service improvements](#), but more importantly, youth, Black and Latinx riders who make up Metro’s core riders have reported feeling less safe and secure due to increased police. Greater police presence on Metro has resulted in [racial profiling](#), criminalization of poverty and often makes [transit riders of color feel uneasy](#).

Protests across the US against police brutality and to call on local governments to defund police departments are having enormous impact and helping significantly shift how cities reimagine safety. In just over two weeks, the groundswell of support has already led some elected leaders to pledge to reduce police budgets or even [dismantle their local police departments](#).

After weeks of mass mobilizations led by Black Lives Matter L.A. and a [powerful presentation by the People’s Budget L.A. coalition](#) to city leaders earlier this week, L.A. City Councilmember Herb Wesson proposed a motion to shift emergency response to non-violent calls for service, like mental health crises, substance abuse, and neighbor disputes, away from LAPD to unarmed trained professionals. L.A. Mayor Eric Garcetti also proposed to cut a meager percentage from LAPD’s \$1.8 billion budget and divert those funds along with another \$100 million into programs that support communities of color. But \$250 million is a trivial amount and falls short of the real investments needed to uplift distressed Black communities.

As a regional transportation agency with one of the largest police budgets, Metro must take action to divest from policing and reimagine safety on public transportation. Armed law enforcement patrol should not be the default approach that Metro implements to respond to people experiencing homelessness or mental health episodes, or to enhance rider’s



experiences. Police officers are not social workers or mental health professionals, and being first responders to service calls has often led to escalations and violent outcomes. Metro must expand its idea of who can provide safety and security, and consider alternative crime prevention measures through design and infrastructure.



There is evidence that alternatives to police on public transit are indeed viable and effective solutions. [\*Off the Rails: Alternatives to Policing on Transit\*](#), a new report by UCLA urban planning researcher Ma'ayan Dembo, includes case studies on safety interventions implemented by transportation agencies in the US, Mexico and Colombia that do not involve law enforcement. These alternative interventions include social workers, transit ambassadors, elevator attendants, performance artists, and other crime prevention measures through design which provide security without law enforcement and help reduce riders' fears. Her research finds that in many cases transit riders expressed feeling more safe when non-law enforcement workers were present.

The report looked at Metro's partnerships with LAPD Homeless Outreach and Preventive Engagement (HOPE) and long standing homeless services provider, People Assisting The Homeless (PATH), to provide outreach and services to individuals experiencing homelessness and other challenges on Metro. The report found that PATH teams are more cost effective and have higher success rates than HOPE teams in providing meaningful services for people experiencing homelessness. Additionally, *Off the Rails* analysis of transit ambassador programs in the Bay Area and New York City found that programs like these provide the extra eyes and ears that help prevent crime, reduce operator assaults and prevent youth from entering the criminal justice system.

For a decade, Metro has shortchanged its customers by overspending on police, and underfunding critically needed increases in bus service, maintenance, and infrastructure, resulting in a 25% decline in bus ridership. Now with the COVID-19 outbreak, [crime in L.A. has significantly decreased](#), further demonstrating that dollars spent on police could be better spent on improving transit reliability, scaling up social workers on transit, and piloting a transit ambassador program.

Metro must take heed of this historic moment of public outrage over systemic racism, abuse of power, and the failure of police to protect citizens. The agency must do right by its loyal riders who want community safety over policing. The nation has reached a juncture that demands a reimagination of safety. What is required is the rebuilding of cities that eliminates the need for police by redirecting the billions of dollars spent on police



departments toward housing, education, job opportunities, affordable healthcare, mental health services, and fare-free transit. That is what keeps communities safe. Local government leaders and transportation agencies need to lean in to help create community safety together.



*Mariana Huerta Jones is the Senior Coalition and Communications Manager with [Alliance for Community Transit – Los Angeles \(ACT-LA\)](#), a coalition of transit equity and housing justice advocates, working to improve housing stability and transportation options in LA. Follow ACT-LA online at [@All4Transit](#) and [#PeoplesTransit](#).*





ACT-LA #PeoplesTransit transit ambassador. Photo by ACT-LA

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## Metro Board Approves Steps Toward Reworking Transit Policing

By Joe Linton | Jun 25, 2020

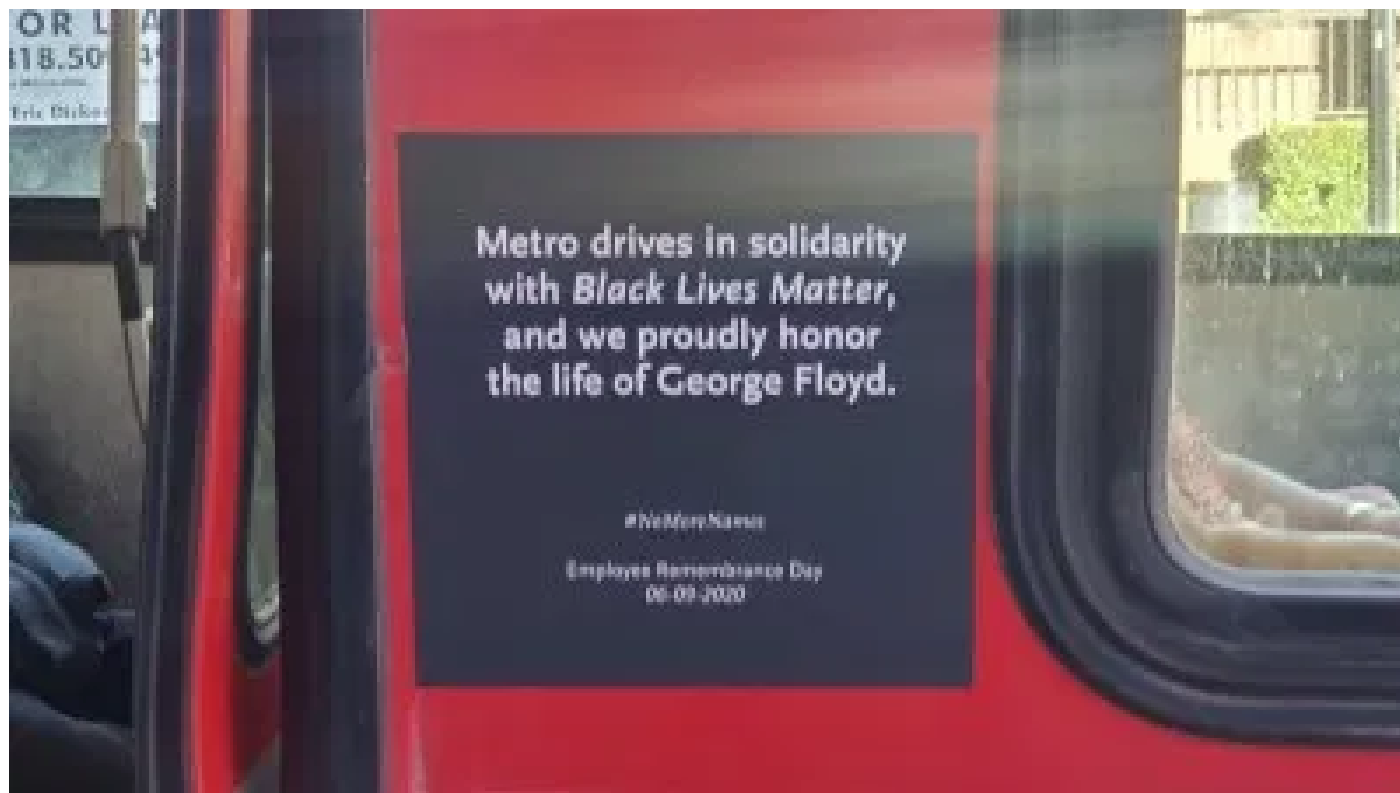
Metro is establishing a Transit Public Safety Advisory Committee that will develop a community-based approach to public safety on the transit system, including shifting resources away from armed law enforcement



## Metro Sides with Police, Against Riders – Shuts Down System, Shuttles Arrestees

By Joe Linton | Jun 2, 2020

By suspending service and shuttling arrestees, Metro leadership sided with the police, against the need of its largely Black and brown ridership



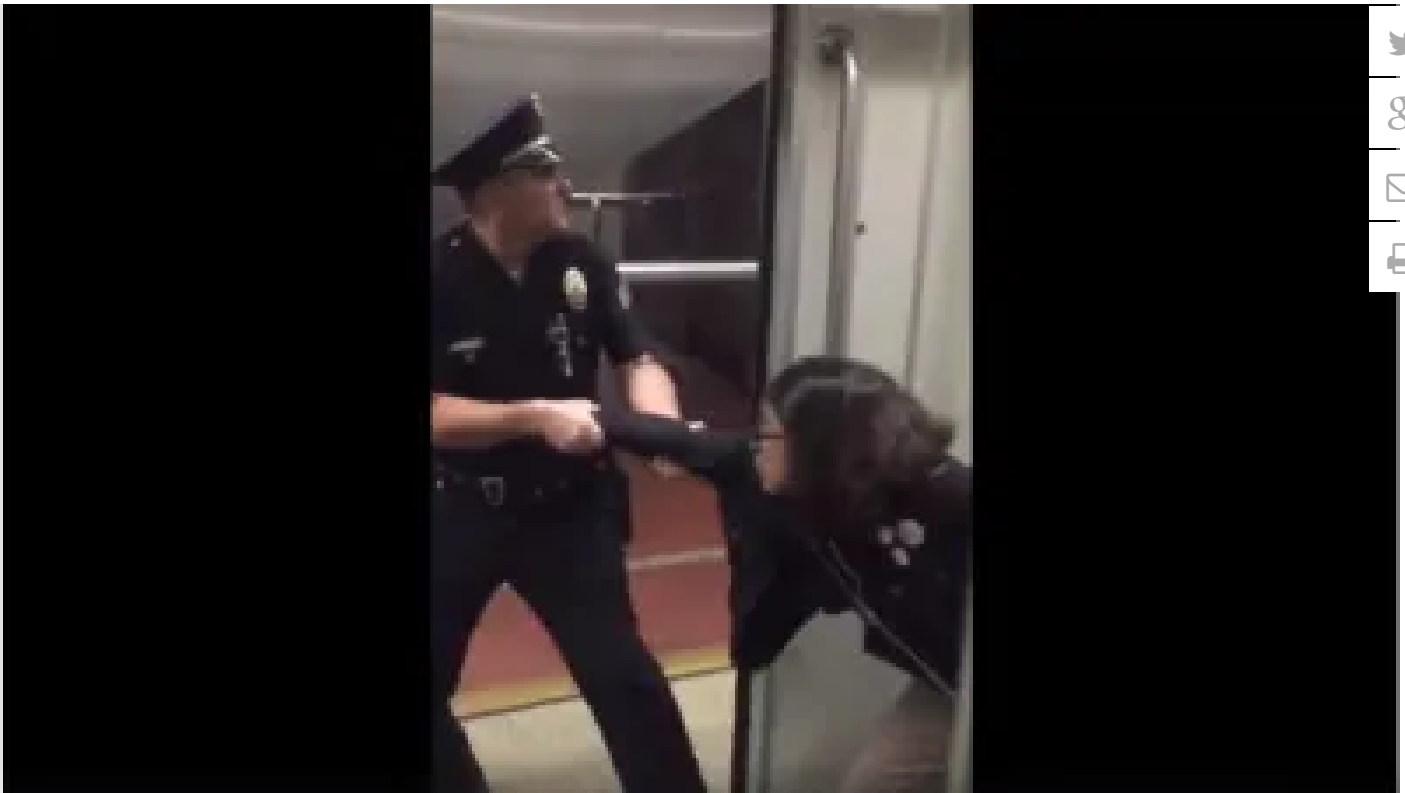
## Editorial: Metro's Black Lives Matter Statement – Fixed It for You

By Joe Linton | Jun 16, 2020

Despite some worthwhile Metro fails to take ownership of what the agency has done, situates current ongoing wrongs in the past, and fails to commit to actionable changes







## Four New Motions Would Reimagine Metro Law Enforcement on Transit

By Joe Linton | Jun 18, 2020

Boardmember Mike Bonin says Metro "cannot rely on an armed police presence for every issue, and we need smarter, more effective solutions"



## Metro Board to Consider \$547M Multi-Agency Transit Policing Contract

By Joe Linton | Nov 28, 2016

This Thursday, Metro's Board of Directors will consider a new contract for policing the agency's transit systems. Metro staff has recommended a five-year multi-agency policing proposal totaling \$547 million. The proposal would split policing between the city of Los Angeles Police Department, LASD, and the city of Long Beach Police Department:



## Strategy Center Files Lawsuit Seeking Arrest, Citation, and Deployment Data from Metro, Law Enforcement Agencies

By Sahra Sulaiman | Dec 18, 2017

Between May and September of this year, the lawsuit Public Counsel filed on behalf of the Labor/Community Strategy Center (LCSC) this past December 13 states, both Metro and the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department (LASD) failed to adequately respond (or respond at all) to multiple requests for public records regarding policing and fare enforcement practices, breakdowns [...]

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**Clee00** • a month ago

Maybe NOW Metro staff will listen. We told you! The first-last mile manager, a white girl lemon repeatedly ignored the requests of vulnerable communities along the blue line to include LAPD on Metro in the discussion. How is safety going to be taken into account if a white woman from the west side is running these projects and won't listen to the real Community.

^ | ▾ • Reply • Share ›

**maddog49** • a month ago • edited

MARIANA HUERTA JONES CONT'D -- Big city public transportation faces a BLEAK FUTURE.

Between COVID-19 concerns which make people afraid of crowds and the righteousness of rioters/looters in big cities, support for urban mass transit is disappearing. Moreover, the well-to-do people are desperate to leave cities for the countryside.

You probably have no idea that the livelihood of ordinary people is being KILLED by "money printing" by the Federal Reserve Bank. Every stimulus, bailout or subsidy from government is funded by Fed "money printing," which makes money LOSE VALUE. We shall pay for all our benefits involuntarily through higher prices, smaller packaging or the loss of access to goods we want.

Not only are we going to lose a lot of our mass transit, as computerized cars get old, drivers will have to face not being able to fix the cars themselves and not being able to afford to hire professionals to fix them. As money loses value, new cars shall be too expensive.



Kids on skateboards demonstrated for Black people in San Francisco. They don't know that they are the future of American transportation, not self-driving cars. When cars break down and can't be fixed, they'll be "homes" for people priced out of housing.



Affordable apartments in L.A. already cost \$1 million per unit. This cost will NOT go down due to rioting because it is a cost of supply, not the willingness of a private buyer to pay (demand).



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**maddog49** • a month ago • edited

MARIANA HUERTA JONES -- There is a bigger question which Police Defunding Advocates like you won't address. Are rioters/looters "righteous?" Or did they monstrously VIOLATE the rights of city residents and business owners?

L.A. Times editorial writers ridicule concern about rioters/looters, pointing to George Floyd's obvious death. What makes them think that rioting didn't kill anybody? In the worst 10 days, 17 people died by violent means. Only one was shot by police and he was shooting at them.

Are you pro-union? The reason that bad police officers have gone unpunished is that police unions have been flexing their muscles. The need for better policing is a lot different from shaming them out of town.

Middle class flight, much of it, but not all White, is already occurring. They are fleeing to countryside areas. Home prices and rent in San Francisco housing are finally dropping for this perverse reason.

You need to understand that Minneapolis is going to have a huge SHORTAGE OF STORES in the near future. If they really do try to live without a police department, nobody has to obey the Minneapolis government. Forget COVID-19 mandates. Forget anti-discrimination. Forget collecting taxes, fees or fines. Forget protection against more violence.

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**Eric Brightwell** • a month ago • edited

It's natural for mass transit riders to have safety concerns but how is an armed law enforcement officer supposed to keep anyone safe from coronavirus or other diseases? Demanding an unhoused passenger prove that they've paid fare doesn't make us safer -- it just wastes money.

Metro has 93 train stations and just one, as far as I know (Union) has a public restroom where one can wash one's hands. We have more than 78,000 confirmed cases of COVID1 in Los Angeles County.

Compare this with Taipei, where they've had fewer than 500 cases of COVID19... in the entire country! In the Taipei Metro (used daily by 49% of the city's population) there are 131 stations. All are equipped with accessible restrooms. Of course, they also have safe waiting zones, help buttons, intercoms, and breast-feeding rooms -- not to mention shops and cafés, the rent of which presumably helps maintain the public facilities.

Meanwhile, Los Angeles County Metro stations are cavernous, empty, and as inviting as a parking garage -- albeit one where people are forced to pee in the corners whilst evading





harassment from gun-toting cops. Our "safety" priorities are completely out-of-whack.

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**Jack** ➔ Eric Brightwell • a month ago

Ah, the bathroom guy.

LA isn't Taipei. People wear masks religiously in Asia and are much more hygienic and law abiding in general. Compare that to here. Station restrooms would be destroyed the first day they would be commissioned. A Metro official told me once what a nightmare it was to clean the Union Station restrooms and keep them crime free and it took tremendous financial resources.

Unless you can find another \$200M - \$300M for such an endeavor, you'll have to give up your dream of pinching off a loaf in every station or buy some Depends. It isn't ever happening,

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**LarryLurex70** • a month ago

I've been advocating de-funding (or, at the very least, massively reducing budgets) for police - including transit cops - for a quarter century. Amazing how it's now a front-and-center issue. We'll see for how long.

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