



NEWS

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(* * Special to TRANSIT CALIFORNIA * *)

LACMTA KICKS OFF COMMUNITY-BASED TRANSIT POLICE PROGRAM

The Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority's (LACMTA) Transit Police Department has instituted a community-based transit police program in south central Los Angeles, utilizing a \$1.1 million Department of Justice grant. The 15-officer detail will work in a 30-square-mile area that includes 27 MTA transit lines and 300,000 daily riders.

The new unit will rely heavily on the active support and involvement of community leaders and residents. The officers have received advanced training in police-community relations and early intervention techniques, and will employ both vehicle and foot patrols in their crime detection and suppression activities.

"For most residents, the transit system is a vital lifeline, and it must be made safe for them," said MTA chairman and L.A. County Supervisor Michael Antonovich.

The grant, made under the Police Hiring Supplement Program, is the first of its kind for a transit police department. It is the largest in the nation for a department the size of the MTA Transit Police. The funding award, made last May, allowed the Transit Police to recruit, train and equip 12 new officers. The addition of those officers to the force allowed 12 veteran officers and three supervisors to be assigned to the community police detail.

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"Our officers will work to form close bonds of trust and mutual support with the groups and individuals who want to improve the community," said MTA Transit Police Chief Sharon Papa. "We've already demonstrated a strong community commitment with our NO TAG anti-graffiti program, participation in DARE and Adopt-A-School programs, and our Miracle On Broadway footbeat program. We want our police officers to be seen as an asset by the people we serve."

The South Central detail will serve an area bounded by Martin Luther King Boulevard on the north, the Metro Blue Line on the east, Imperial Highway on the south and Crenshaw Boulevard on the west. The majority of the service area, home to more than 200,000 residents, is within the city limits of Los Angeles, but also includes portions of the cities of Hawthorne and Inglewood.

MTA officers will make routine calls on business owners, community leaders and various interested individuals. Working relationships within the community are expected to help police to gather intelligence and develop a clear understanding of transit-related crime patterns, and the root causes of those crimes. The unit will coordinate with the Los Angeles Police Department, Los Angeles County Sheriff's Office, gang diversion programs, the Probation Department, and the court system.

"This program is designed to make our transit service safer for our patrons," said MTA Chief Executive Officer Franklin E. White. "We believe this special deployment of officers will deter crime and create a safer environment on our services."

The unit consists of 12 patrol officers, two senior officers, and one sergeant, J.T. Willis, a resident of south central Los Angeles, as the officer in charge. "All of the officers in this special deployment have volunteered. They are professionals with people skills, and a commitment to the success of the program," said Willis.

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During the first year, comprehensive analysis of crime statistics, as well as customer satisfaction surveys and focus groups, will assess the effectiveness of the program every three months. Thereafter, the program will be evaluated once a year.

The federal grant covers one half the cost of 12 officers for three years. The MTA will match the grant and cover the cost of the extra three senior positions using local funds.

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