



LA Metro Leaders Want To Rethink Policing On The County's Transit System

by [Ryan Fonseca](#) in [News](#) on [June 18, 2020 4:02 PM](#)

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Los Angeles Police Department officers patrol an L (Gold) Line station in this file photo. (Courtesy L.A. Metro)

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Does the person who checks your fare at the Metro station need to be armed?

That's one of the questions Los Angeles County's public transit agency is asking itself, amid the [local and national conversations](#) over when and whether armed policing is necessary.

At Thursday's meeting of L.A. Metro's Operations, Safety, and Customer Experience Committee, Chair Mike Bonin said he's co-authoring a motion calling on the agency to rethink the roles of armed law enforcement on the county transit system.

According to a draft of the motion, it calls on L.A. Metro to establish a special committee that would work to develop new programs and policies designed to shift resources away from armed police in favor of more community-based approaches to safety. That includes social workers, mental health professionals and "transit ambassadors."

"We hear routinely from young people, particularly young people of color, that they feel that they are treated differently on the system," Bonin said.

"Metro needs to be at the forefront" as a growing number of cities and public agencies, spurred by the national outcry against police brutality and systemic racism, look to redesign public safety, he later added in a statement.

"That starts by acknowledging that we cannot rely on an armed police presence for every issue, and we need smarter, more effective solutions," Bonin said.

Fellow board members and county Supervisors Hilda Solis and Janice Hahn co-authored the motion, which will be formally introduced Friday, according to a Bonin spokesperson.

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UNARMED RESPONSE FOR NON-VIOLENT CRIMES

The draft motion suggests boosting care-based approaches for several types of regular interactions on the system, including:

- An unarmed response model for non-violent crimes and code of conduct violations.
- "Greater community stewardship of transit spaces," like allowing street vending on some Metro properties
- Expanding and better promoting fare discount programs
- Improving outreach and connecting homeless people to services
- Enacting the "[Universal Blue Light](#)" program to expand emergency call boxes on the system

Metro will be eyeing these new approaches while also working to address general safety concerns on the system, which are the top barrier women face in taking public transit, according to a [2019 report looking at gender inequality](#), on the county's transit network. Many women [who shared their experiences with LAist](#) last year said the lack of Metro staff at stations and riding trains and buses made them feel less safe, particularly at night.

The draft motion suggests a program in which those unarmed "transit ambassadors" could be that visible presence for riders on the system.

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EXAMINING USE OF FORCE



(Ryan Fonseca/LAist)

The committee also approved a motion co-authored by Metro board member and Supervisor Janice Hahn, which calls for a report on the use of force policies of the various law enforcement and security agencies that patrol Metro's system. Five different entities do this based on jurisdiction: the L.A. Police Department, the Long Beach Police Department, the L.A. County Sheriff's Department, Metro's own security force and private contractor RMI Security.

"While law enforcement agencies play an important role in protecting public safety, it is imperative that Metro review the use of force policies that the agencies we contract with and guards we employ follow, in order to protect the lives of the transit riders that they encounter," [the motion states](#). The report is due in 90 days.

Hahn is not on the committee, but called in to voice her support for both motions, saying they go hand-in-hand in providing a more equitable, safer transit system for everyone.

"That's what the people on the street are asking us to do," Hahn said. "When we begin to look at our use of force policies, that's only one half of this equation. The other half is redirecting resources to services that really can make a difference."

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