

12-Step Plan to Improve Safety Following Taft High Shooting

By ED SCANNELL

(Oct. 21, 2003) – A multi-agency task force formed by MTA to review bus-operating procedures following the Sept. 9 shooting of three Taft High School students has recommended a broad series of steps to improve the safety of LAUSD students.

The three students were wounded in a shooting near a bus stop outside the Woodland Hills school, one critically. Three suspects have been arrested and remain in custody.

Task force members, including MTA, the Los Angeles Unified School District, the district's police department and the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department will carry out the 12-step action plan.

MTA staff must submit a report to the Board in 120 days and must report on the task force's progress in implementing the recommendations in six months.

"I want to commend the MTA and the other participating agencies for addressing this very serious issue with the urgency it deserves," said MTA Board Chairman Zev Yaroslavsky, who requested that MTA convene the independent panel. "These recommendations should go a long way toward helping to ensure that we can avoid any repeat of this tragic incident in the future."

The Sept. 9 shooting, believed to be gang-related, occurred a few minutes after the operator of a Metro Rapid Line 750 bus chose not to pick up students at a bus stop at Ventura Boulevard and Winnetka Avenue. The operator believed some of the students waiting at the stop were unruly and posed a safety risk.

"The actions the task force members have chosen to pursue go well beyond the panel's initial focus," said Deputy CEO John Catoe. "While not every incident can be anticipated or prevented, this tragedy has spawned changes that will create a safer climate at bus stops located near LAUSD schools served by the Metro Bus system."

The plan includes these key actions:

- MTA will modify its current policy that requires bus operators to notify the Bus Operations Control Center (BOCC) of a pass-up *only* if it involves a wheelchair-bound or otherwise disabled customer. The new policy will require operators to immediately notify BOCC when they pass up a bus stop, regardless of the situation.
- Depending on the nature of the pass-up, MTA will contact the Sheriff's Department's Transit Services Bureau. If the pass-up involves students under the age of 18 or unruly students, the Transit Services Bureau will contact the LAUSD police department for follow up and/or intervention.
- MTA will create a bus safety-training program for schools similar to its rail safety-training program and will initially test it in schools in the San Fernando Valley. The program will be expanded later throughout MTA's service area. In addition, MTA and LAUSD will determine whether LAUSD training programs

related to situations involving adolescent behavior might be incorporated into MTA training programs.

- Whenever an MTA bus operator has requested an unruly passenger under the age of 18 to vacate a bus, the operator must request a supervisor or police officer to respond. The LAUSD police department will be notified when a student is put off the bus during school pick-up or drop-off hours.
- MTA's Chief of Police, Capt. Dan Finkelstein, and LAUSD Police Department Cmdr. Steven LaRoche will develop procedures for contact and coordination between the two agencies.

Other steps identified by the task force include:

- Notification to MTA of new school openings and coordination of bus stop locations and changes to service new schools,
- Notification to MTA of school schedule changes,
- Inspections of bus stops at or near schools to determine whether the stops should be relocated to provide maximum space,
- Familiarize LAUSD personnel with the Bus Operations Control Center, MTA's incident reporting system and new technology.

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