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Jack Eckles, who heads Metro's Systems Safety & Security Department, plans for security officers to focus more on threat prevention in the Metro System.

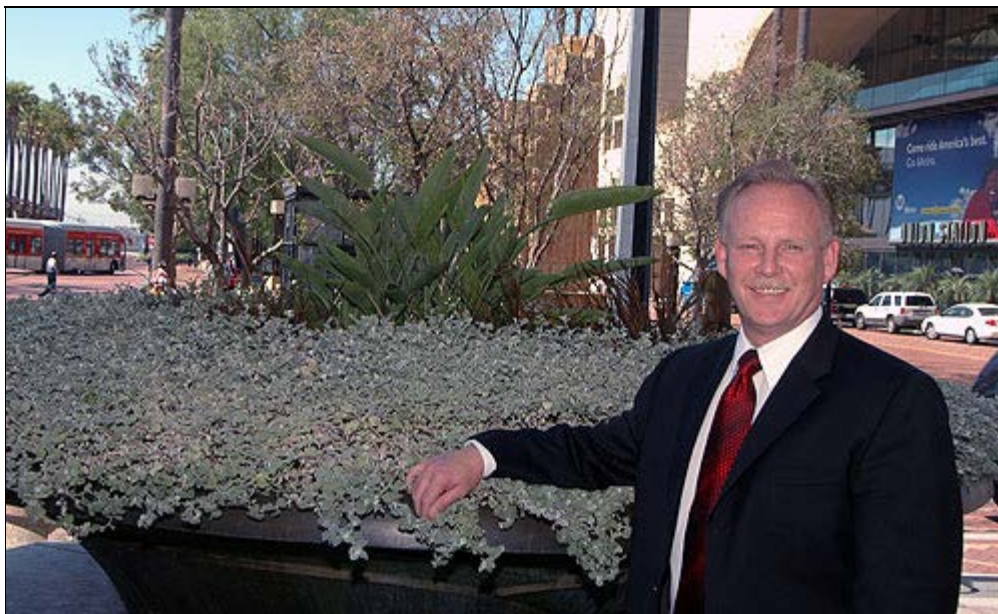


Photo by Ned Racine

Jack Eckles' Challenge – Balancing Metro's Open System with Need for Security

- DEO for System Safety & Security wants Metro Security to present a higher profile to bus and rail riders

By NED RACINE

(Aug. 8, 2007) Jack Eckles, the new deputy executive officer for System Safety & Security, faces a critical challenge at Metro: balancing the agency's desire to operate an easy, open system with what he perceives are threats to the nation's second largest transit system.

"First and foremost the challenge of an open system is what the agency expects the system to be...", he said. "So I have to weigh that against my tendency to be a chain-link fence and barbed wire kind of guy."

At Metro, Eckles oversees the \$62.5 million contract for law enforcement services provided by the Sheriff's Transit Services Bureau, and is responsible for the Security Department and its security officers, as well as for the activities of the Corporate Safety Department.

The West Anaheim resident's top goal for Metro's Security Program begins with creating a more organized and focused security force with proactive officers who concentrate on prevention.

Eckles sees the experience of his officers as a big asset for Metro Security

and a sign of their dedication. "It's extremely impressive from an industry standpoint." He noted that the officers average 12 to 27 years of experience, unusual because of the 20 to 40 percent turnover in the security industry.

Because the Metro System spans a number of law enforcement jurisdictions, Eckles says it's an advantage for the agency to have its own security force. An incident on a bus or train may not be at the top of another police organization's priorities.

'Law enforcement presence'

"Most of the transit agencies across the country have their own law enforcement," Eckles said. "[They] want a highly responsive law enforcement presence, and you can't get that if you're expecting someone else's...law enforcement agency to do that simply because you pass through their neighborhood."

The Artesia native would like for Metro Security to present a higher profile to bus and rail riders, but he finds himself constrained by the number of officers at his disposal.

"Eventually, deterrence and presence on the rail lines and the buses are a numbers game," Eckles said. As an illustration, he said Metro Security "is actually numerically structured to be a five-day-a-week, eight-hour-a-day department [while actually] operating seven days a week, 24 hours a day."

He estimates Metro Security, which has 93 officers, is short approximately 40 officers. "They've been tasked to keep up with the growth of Metro but they haven't been [staffed] to keep up with the growth."

Eckles, 47, believes his eight years with the Los Angeles County Office of Education—schools also being open systems—prepared him for Metro's challenges. Previously, he held management positions in several local security firms for seven years during the 1990s.

Former Sheriff's deputy

A Sheriff's deputy in Los Angeles County for six years in the 1980s, Eckles joined Metro in March. He began working in security as a security supervisor for the Cal State LA bookstore when he was an undergraduate in 1981. He later earned a doctorate in law from Pacific West College of Law in Orange.

A two-year-stint in the United States Army Reserve from 1990 to 1992 included classes at the Military Intelligence School and Special Forces School. From April 2005 to July 2006, he served as commander of a civil affairs unit in Baghdad, leading more than 100 officers, soldiers, contractors and engineers building \$400 million in projects.

If he looked in his crystal ball, Eckles would say the big question within the next 10 years would be whether the Metro Board wants to reconstitute its own security force. He makes no bones about his answer to that question. "Contracting the resources for law enforcement is just too expensive."

He sees his biggest challenge as reorganizing the security side of Metro Safety & Security. "Developing a new contract with the Sheriff's Department [will] be an outcropping of whatever happens with that reorganization."

"I think from the public side, the reality is they always want to be able to reach out and talk to somebody [in security]," Eckles said. "They always

want that psychological comfort level.”

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