



Memorandum

To: Erin Aleman
From: CMAP staff
Date: July 7, 2023
Subject: Transit safety and security

Executive summary

The pandemic has impacted the transit rider experience in many ways, but safety and security have emerged as primary areas of rider concern. Stakeholders have highlighted the impacts of both perceived and actual increases in crime on the system and its impact on travelers' willingness to use transit. However, these concerns are not confined to the regional transit system, nor are they unique to northeastern Illinois. As each of the regional transit providers continue to respond to these challenges, there are opportunities to learn from strategies and best practices implemented both here in the region and elsewhere.

To address both actual and perceived safety on the region's transit network, the state and regional transit operators could:

- **Increase staff presence on the system.** The state should fund the launch and (if successful) the full-scale deployment of a "transit ambassadors" program. Other complementary changes could include changes to the responsibilities of existing staff, such as customer attendants.
- **Improve two-way rider communication.** The state should require the deployment of mobile applications that allow riders to share information on safety concerns and other incidents. This could leverage existing applications, such as Metra's safety incident reporting application.
- **Invest in physical infrastructure that improves real and perceived safety outcomes.** The state should fund the wider installation of lighting and other targeted investments (e.g., cameras) that have a positive effect on rider perceptions and behaviors.



- **Committing to ongoing reporting and improvement.** Building on recently passed state legislation, regional transit operators should provide regular updates to riders on the progress and effectiveness of system safety initiatives. Transit operators and regional policymakers should also continue to monitor ongoing efforts in peer regions to identify additional best practices.

In addition to these recommendations, the PART report will include strategies to address the related topics of cleanliness and nuisance behaviors (e.g., smoking) on the regional transit system. Those topics are addressed in a companion memo, with specific areas of overlap highlighted throughout this memo.

The problem: The perception and incidence of crime has increased on regional transit.

One of the most acute challenges on the regional transit system in the wake of COVID-19 has been the safety and security of system users. As discussed below, rider surveys and news media have highlighted system safety as a pressing concern. Available data also show an increase in incidents of violent crime on transit, with the greatest increase found on the CTA rail system. Overall violent crime levels remain below prior peaks, but lower ridership may mean that remaining riders are more likely to observe or experience this increase. And while this development is not as severe on Metra, Pace, or CTA bus services, increases in violent activities on one mode can impact perceptions of safety for both riders and system staff system-wide, with consequences for ridership, hiring, and retention.

A 2022 RTA survey¹ found that riders are significantly less satisfied with their safety and security today vs. prior to the pandemic. As shown in Figure 1 below, this included experiences both on board the system and while waiting at stations or bus stops.

Local media have also regularly covered rider concerns. For example, a recent WBEZ investigation noted that, “[a] wave of violent incidents on the [CTA] Red Line in 2022 rattled riders, and some said they no longer felt safe taking public transportation outside of the more populated commute times in the mornings and evenings.”² Other media outlets, such as the Chicago Sun-Times³ and CBS News Chicago,⁴ have highlighted similar concerns.

The perception and reality of increased safety concerns on transit has ripple effects throughout the region. Current riders might reduce their use or stop altogether – associating these challenges with “transit” generally, and not just specific agencies or modes. Former or potential future riders might

¹ “RTA 2022 Customer Satisfaction Survey Report” (Regional Transportation Authority, November 2022), <https://www.rtachicago.org/uploads/files/general/Region/RTA-CSS-2022-Final-Report.pdf>.

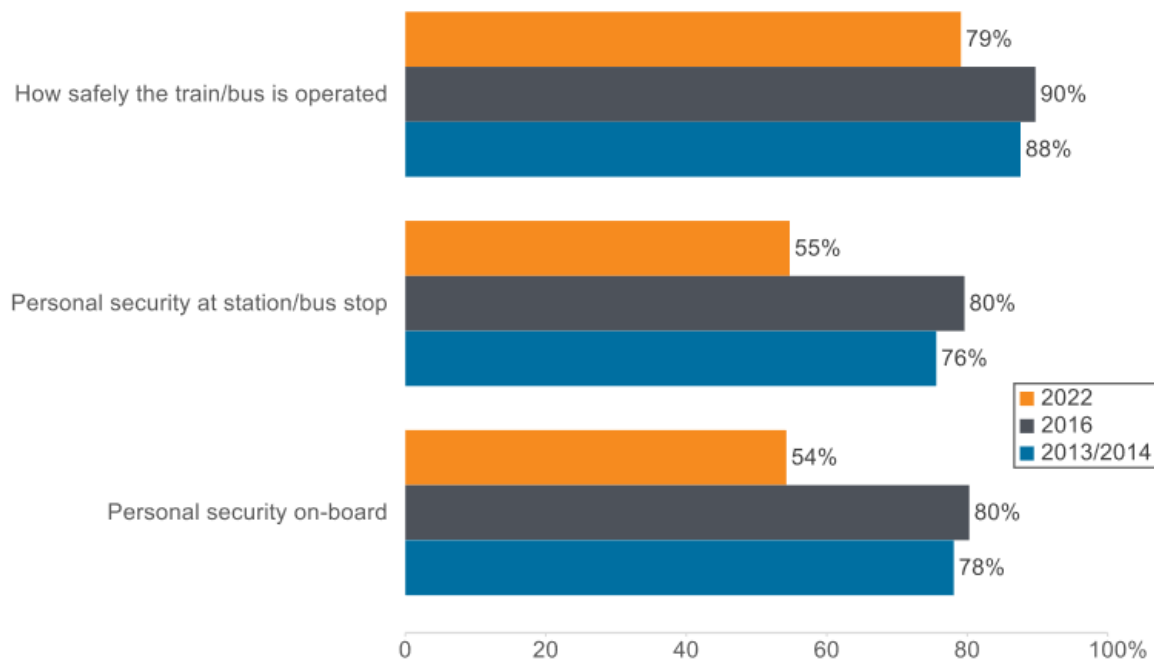
² Rebecca Holland, “Everybody’s Late, and Everything Smells like Weed: What Nearly 2,000 CTA Riders Told Us,” *WBEZ Chicago*, January 17, 2023, <https://www.wbez.org/stories/chicago-cta-riders-on-delays-safety-filth-smoking/00289237-4e60-4d9a-b355-8923fe433449>.

³ Tom Schuba, Manny Ramos, and Jesse Howe, “More CTA Riders Getting Attacked, Violence at a Level Not Seen in over a Decade,” August 5, 2022, <https://chicago.suntimes.com/2022/8/5/23289322/cta-crime-dan-beam-subway-violent-crimes>.

⁴ Elliott Ramos, Sharda Gray, and Michele Youngerman, “Violent Crime Is Spiking along the CTA Train System: A Look at the Numbers,” *CBS News Chicago*, October 15, 2022, <https://www.cbsnews.com/chicago/news/heres-whats-going-on-with-crime-on-the-cta/>.

decide to stay away from the system. And as transit operators continue to confront staffing shortages, safety incidents have been highlighted as a barrier to both hiring and retaining bus and train operators.⁵

Figure 1. Perceptions of personal security on transit fell significantly from 2016 to 2022.



Source: RTA 2022 Customer Satisfaction Survey Report.

These challenges extend beyond the transit system – they are regional and societal in scope, and transit is only one part of that broader regional ecosystem. Many of the safety and security concerns do need to be addressed operationally by the service boards. However, these concerns also stem from issues that are not specific to the transportation system, and will require solutions that go outside the scope of this memo. These include broader societal trends in crime, the number of regional residents experiencing homelessness, and the treatment options available for residents with mental illness. But while not specific to transit, these trends nonetheless have an impact that is felt on the region’s transportation system, and especially on transit. Addressing these concerns will be critical to maintaining and growing ridership, as well as to build support for the additional investments needed to support transit as the system confronts the post-COVID fiscal cliff.

Regional context

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the safety and security of transit system users and staff was a priority for each of the region’s transit service providers. The sections below provide an overview of the

⁵ Tara Molina, “Union: Violence on CTA Buses Contributing to Driver Shortage,” *CBS News Chicago*, April 12, 2023, <https://www.cbsnews.com/chicago/news/union-violence-cta-buses-driver-shortage/>.

concerns facing each system specifically, as well as their responses before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

CTA

Among regional transit operators, the CTA has seen the largest decline in rider perceptions of personal security. A recent survey found that rider satisfaction with safety fell by more than 20 percentage points across several categories from 2016 to 2022.⁶

While comprehensive and granular regional data are not available for criminal incidents on the transit system, the City of Chicago releases data on reported criminal activity on the CTA system within Chicago. Those figures show that crime on transit declined alongside ridership at the beginning of the pandemic, with levels falling from 2019 to 2020.⁷

However, on CTA rail, violent crime rates did not fall as much as ridership during the pandemic, meaning that riders who continued to use the system were more likely to be victims of violent crime.⁸ As shown in Figure 2 above, in 2022, levels of violent crime on CTA trains were the highest in at least twenty years, with over 700 reported violent crimes. This represented an increase of more than a quarter from 2019 levels. Violent crime on CTA trains has also steadily increased since 2015, suggesting that the current pattern is a continuation of pre-pandemic trends.⁹ It is also important to note that while violent crime levels have increased on CTA rail, the incidence of violent crime remains extremely low across the regional transit system. For context, CTA rail provided over 103.5 million rides in 2022.¹⁰

There is no definitive explanation for why this increase has been concentrated on the CTA rail system. However, there are operating characteristics that could play a role. For example, CTA trains have a smaller staff footprint than other transit modes, with one operator responsible for up to eight train cars. CTA and Pace bus drivers are responsible for a much smaller footprint (a single bus), and Metra typically operates with several conductors who collect tickets by hand throughout the train. However, other factors can still affect rider perceptions of safety. For example, with less frequent bus arrivals, riders may feel less seen and served by the system and possibly less safe during their waits.

⁶ "CTA 2022 Customer Satisfaction Survey" (Regional Transportation Authority, November 2022), <https://www.rtachicago.org/uploads/files/general/Region/CTA-CSS-2022-Final-Report.pdf>.

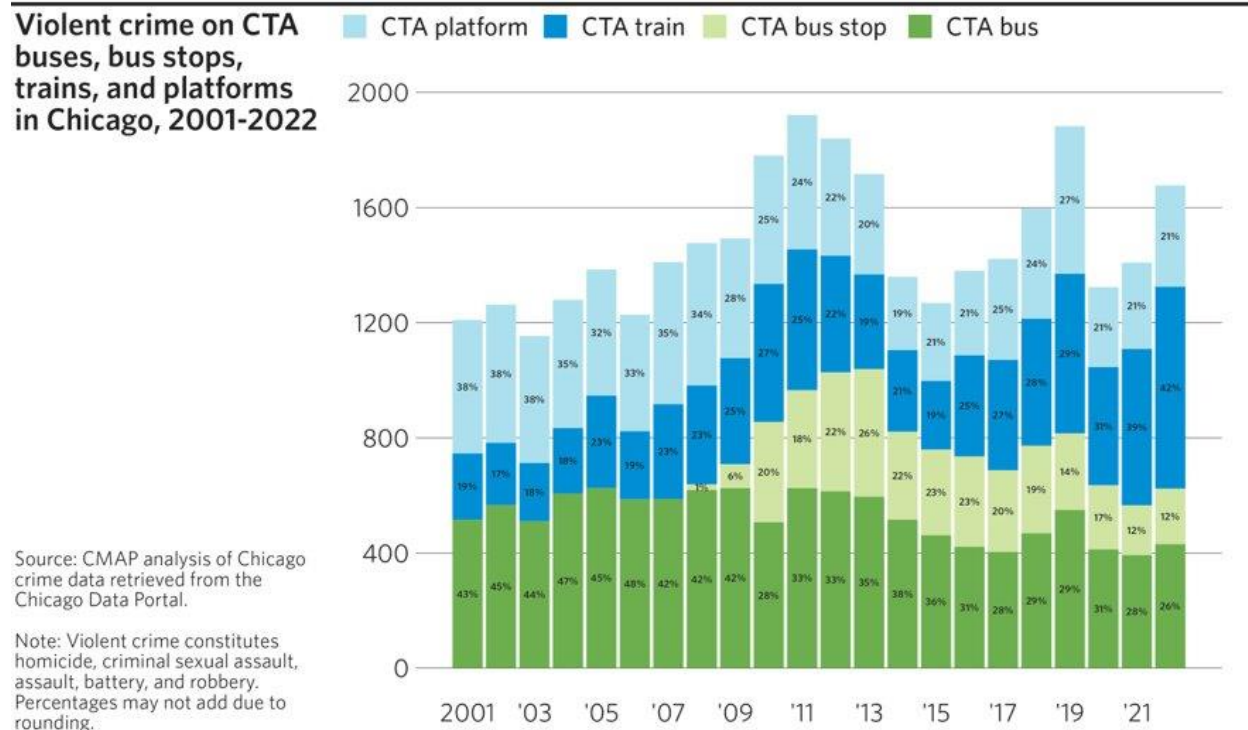
⁷ CMAP analysis of the City of Chicago Data portal as of April 27, 2023. <https://data.cityofchicago.org/Public-Safety/Crimes-2001-to-Present/ijzp-q8t2/data>.

⁸ Kelli Smith and Joe Mahr, "Violent Crime Rate Doubles on CTA Rail System, Even with Stepped-up Police Efforts and Far Fewer Riders: 'The People That Are Driving the Crime Never Left the System,'" *Chicago Tribune*, December 14, 2020, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/investigations/ct-chicago-crime-cta-train-stations-20201214-el4tvqdanzb5jbgwlkecyx27kq-htmlstory.html>.

⁹ CMAP analysis of the City of Chicago Data portal as of April 27, 2023.

¹⁰ "Daily Ridership Count by Mode," Regional Transportation Authority Mapping and Statistics, accessed April 25, 2023, <https://rtams.org/dataset/covid-19-transit-dashboard/resource/60f46ba9-a0ed-454e-83b7-982388536f18#{}>.

Figure 2. Reported incidents of violent crime on CTA rail have increased since 2019.



The CTA has previously made substantial investments to address these challenges. For example, in 2013, the CTA, equipped more than 840 rail cars with high-definition cameras. The agency also worked with the Chicago Police Department (CPD) towards plans to operate a real-time surveillance feed onboard train.¹¹ Funding for this initiative largely came from the Transit Security Grant Program offered by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), which covered the cost of implementation but not real-time surveillance.

The CTA is mostly policed by CPD, save for areas in which the transit system leaves the city’s jurisdiction (Oak Park, Evanston, etc.). In these areas, it often falls upon the respective jurisdiction to police their stations and stops (often with the collaboration of CPD, depending on the proximity to the city’s boundaries),¹² with their own municipal police force and/or private security teams.

CPD has an intergovernmental agreement with CTA¹³ where officers are allowed to volunteer for off-duty patrols on CTA properties through CPD’s Voluntary Special Employment Program (VSEP). This agreement is in place until 2025, three years after it was most recently renewed. In April of 2022, the

¹¹ Jon Hilkevitch and Chicago Tribune reporter, “CTA Adding Cameras to Older Rail Cars,” *Chicago Tribune*, February 9, 2013, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-2013-02-09-ct-met-cta-train-cameras-0210-20130210-story.html>.

¹² Julian Gerez, “Chicago, Evanston Police Collaborating to Combat Violence near Chicago-Evanston Border,” *The Daily Northwestern*, April 25, 2014, sec. City, <https://dailynorthwestern.com/2014/04/25/city/chicago-evanston-police-collaborating-to-combat-violence-near-chicago-evanston-border/>.

¹³ “CTA Renews Agreement with CPD for Additional Police Resources,” CTA, accessed June 22, 2023, <https://www.transitchicago.com/cta-renews-agreement-with-cpd-for-additional-police-resources/>.

CTA entered a three-year contract worth \$71M with Monterrey Security Consultants¹⁴ and Inter-Con Security Services. The CTA then hired a security detail in August for an additional \$30.9M with Action K-9 Security for 100 additional unarmed guards and 50 canines. This detail, with a focus on fare evasion and train disturbances, can alert conductors, CTA rail staff, and police to criminal activity. These guards, like most enforcement entities under current legislation, have limited, and in some cases a complete lack of authority, to remove individuals from transit cars and stations or write tickets. However, their presence alone is intended to be a deterrent to violent crime given their training and equipment to quickly reach law enforcement and CTA staff.

Finally, issues of safety and security also extend beyond the rider experience, with impacts on system operations. For example, CTA operators have raised concerns about their own safety and security on the system.¹⁵ As regional transit operators continue to face significant staffing shortages, such concerns could make it harder to attract and retain critical transit staff.

The broader societal relevance of these trends also makes it clear that success will require partnerships with stakeholders and agencies across sectors, from social service agencies to healthcare institutions and more. One example of successfully creating programmatic responses to these issues is the pandemic-era partnership between the City of Chicago, CTA, and the Night Ministries to provide services to people experiencing homelessness on the Blue Line and Red Line.¹⁶

Pace

Pace customers have also reported declining levels of satisfaction with personal safety and security, but overall perceptions remain higher than regional averages.

In a Pace Customer Satisfaction Survey conducted in 2022,¹⁷ riders reported that:

- Almost 80 percent are satisfied with respect to onboard security (a 12-percentage point decrease from 2016).
- 75 percent are satisfied with their personal security at bus stops (down 13 percentage points from 2016).
- 80 percent are satisfied with their personal security on the way to the bus stop.

Pace does not publicly report detailed data on criminal activity on its system. Like CTA, Pace relies on local law enforcement for assistance in safety and security incidents, with the added complexity of the

¹⁴ Tara Molina, "Contract Sheds Light about What One Company's Unarmed Security Guards Are Tasked with Doing to Keep CTA Safe," *CBS News Chicago*, May 24, 2022, <https://www.cbsnews.com/chicago/news/cta-crime-monterrey-security-guard-contract/>.

¹⁵ Evelyn Holmes, "CTA Bus Drivers, Train Operators Demand More Protection amid Increase in Violent Attacks," *ABC7 Chicago*, December 11, 2021, <https://abc7chicago.com/cta-protest-bus-drivers-train-operators-workers/11327167/>.

¹⁶ Neil Steinberg, "Homeless L Riders Get Night Ministry Care," *Chicago Sun-Times*, February 28, 2021, sec. Columnists, <https://chicago.suntimes.com/columnists/2021/2/28/22305839/homeless-l-riders-cta-night-ministry-care-blue-line-forest-park-steinberg>.

¹⁷ "Pace 2022 Customer Satisfaction Survey" (Regional Transportation Authority, November 2022), <https://www.pacebus.com/sites/default/files/2023-02/Pace%202022%20CSS%20Final%20Report.pdf>.

number of jurisdictions in which Pace operates. However, press reports have not highlighted safety concerns on Pace to the same extent as they have on CTA.

Pace has continued to adopt security strategies to address both rider perceptions and actual safety. These include:

- Cameras on board each bus
- Video screens that display footage from those cameras as a deterrent¹⁸
- A hotline for riders to report suspicious incidents¹⁹

Metra

Among Metra riders, perceptions of safety and security have also slightly worsened since the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the decline has not been as significant as system-wide or CTA totals. For example, a recent survey²⁰ found that:

- Personal security on the train saw a 6-percentage point drop between 2016 and 2022.
- Personal security at boarding stations saw a 11-percentage point drop during the same period.

Similar to Pace, there are not comprehensive and detailed data available on criminal incidents on the Metra system.

Uniquely among regional transit operators, Metra operates its own professional police force.²¹ Metra has also leveraged cameras to “augment onboard security,” including a 2019 announcement that the system would invest more than \$15 million to install cameras in at least 400 railcars.²² Metra also has a mobile application that allows riders to report crimes and suspicious behavior to Metra Police from a train or station. The application allows riders to anonymously send photos and video along with a description of the event they are reporting.

Peer agencies have deployed solutions, although definitive outcomes remain unclear.

Peer metropolitan regions, such as Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Cleveland, are facing a similar situation within their own transit systems. As discussed below, these systems and others have also implemented various strategies to improve system safety and security. Many of these programs are too new to have generated rigorous evidence regarding their success (or failure), but their early implementation does provide ideas that regional transit providers could leverage and build upon in developing their own solutions.

¹⁸ “Transit Asset Management Plan 2022” (Pace, September 23, 2022), <https://www.pacebus.com/sites/default/files/2022-12/Transit%20Asset%20Management%20Plan%202022.pdf>.

¹⁹ “Transit Watch,” Pace, accessed June 22, 2023, <https://www.pacebus.com/transitwatch>.

²⁰ “Metra 2022 Customer Satisfaction Survey” (Regional Transportation Authority, November 2022), https://rtams.org/sites/default/files/digital_documents/2022_Metra_Customer_Satisfaction_Study.pdf.

²¹ “Metra Police Department,” Metra, accessed June 1, 2023, <https://metra.com/metra-police-department>.

²² “Metra Approves \$15.5M Contract to Install Cameras inside Passenger Cars,” *ABC7 Chicago*, November 8, 2019, <https://abc7chicago.com/metra-railcars-railcar-cameras-train/5684009/>.

Staff presence: Transit Ambassadors

In recent years, several transit systems have created new staff positions for a role commonly referred to as “transit ambassadors.” These staff travel between stations, buses, and train cars on coordinated patrols. They spend most of their time answering questions, addressing concerns, and greeting system riders. Ambassadors also serve as the front-line point of contact for instances that put riders in danger by directly contacting the necessary authorities and taking ownership of the situation. What makes transit ambassadors different from existing transit staff, like station attendants, is that they travel the system using public transit, and are often trained with conflict de-escalation, first aid, and other useful skills during instances of crisis on board the system.

To date, there are transit ambassador programs in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and Cleveland. Although NYC’s MTA does not have a transit ambassador program of note, they have recently asked more than 2,000 transit station attendants to exit their ticket booths and to patrol the stations and assist riders with ticketing and wayfinding.²³ All transit ambassador programs began within the last three years and have yet to generate significant data on their potential effectiveness. Each pilot has resulted in a general expansion of the program and riders have attested to a greater feeling of safety and security since their implementation.

San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART)

BART launched its transit ambassadors program as a six-month pilot in February of 2020, aiming to address customers’ concerns about safety and security. This program grew out of BART police department, with non-sworn transit ambassadorship having a career pipeline to law enforcement or direct recruitment from the BART Police Department.

In 2009, 22-year-old BART passenger Oscar Grant was killed by a BART officer at Oakland’s Fruitvale Station. A six-year investigation of the BART Police Department conducted by the Center for Policing Equity shows clear bias against Black BART passengers. This incident and the ensuing outcry have led to the creation of the Progressive Policing and Community Engagement Bureau, with a mandate to hire 40 dedicated officers, including community outreach specialists, crisis intervention specialists with a “social work background”, and transit ambassadors with “community service experience.”

San Francisco’s BART saw spikes in crime, harassment, and indecency during the second quarter of 2020. The ambassador program aims to keep harassment at bay and to resolve conflict without involving police. This program was the compromise between having police on every car (something that some communities expressed a visceral discomfort with, given the department’s history) and having no staff presence at all.

There are few metrics of success since the beginning of this pilot. However, during the pilot period, ambassadors called police to resolve less than 1 percent of the over 14,000 interactions they had with riders.²⁴ During the initial six-month pilot, ambassadors needed to change tactics to mitigation as the

²³ Sarah Holder, “NYC’s Subway Booths Take New Roles as Station Agents Step Out,” *Bloomberg*, March 30, 2023, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-03-30/in-nyc-s-subway-it-s-the-twilight-of-the-ticket-booth>.

²⁴ H. Jiahong Pan, “Transit Agencies Try Decarceral Approaches to Improve Rider Safety,” *Next City*, July 19, 2022, <https://nextcity.org/urbanist-news/transit-agencies-try-decarceral-approaches-to-improve-rider-safety>.

COVID-19 pandemic began, to enforce mask mandates, identify and assist unresponsive or overdosed individuals, and assist in the arrest of a suspect of a violent crime.

Los Angeles Metro

The LA Metro Board approved a pilot transit ambassador program in 2021. This initial pilot launched with 60 ambassadors, and as of March 2023 the program has officially launched with 300 trained ambassadors.²⁵ These ambassadors come from the communities the Metro serves and possess a diverse background allowing them to better relate with the broad demographic of Metro riders.

The pilot was inspired by BART and Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA)'s ambassador programs.

Training for the LA Metro's ambassador program involves a classroom and field training program designed by the transit agency. This training is based on the collective experience of Bus and Rail Operations, Office of Civil Rights and Inclusion, Customer Experience and System Security and Law Enforcement, as well as other transit adjacent departments. This course provides training on skills such as conflict de-escalation, disability awareness, trauma-informed care, cultural and situational awareness, Metro operations, and other personal and public safety issues.

Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority (GCRTA)

The GCRTA launched their Transit Ambassador Program in September 2022.²⁶ Greater Cleveland's Transit Ambassador team works under the transit authority and in collaboration with the GCRTA's Transit Police. The GCRTA outlines the Transit Ambassador's responsibilities as:

- Providing general information and assistance to riders and the public.
- Assisting riders needing help with navigating GCRTA's transit system.
- Assisting riders in understanding and complying with fare policies.
- Requesting Transit Police assistance as needed.
- Helping maintain a safe and clean environment.

The Ambassador program includes a team of Crisis Intervention Specialists. They are licensed social workers who are responsible for:

- Performing mental health, crisis, and substance abuse outreach.
- Defusing immediate crises and serving as a gateway to available resources.
- Establishing relationships with social service agencies.

Both general Transit Ambassadors and Crisis Intervention Specialists receive 40 hours of Crisis Intervention Team training along with training on de-escalation, defensive tactics, First Aid/CPR/Narcan, human trafficking awareness, and customer service.

²⁵ Dave Sotero, "L.A. Metro Celebrates Official Launch of New Ambassador Pilot Program," LA Metro, March 6, 2023, <https://www.metro.net/about/l-a-metro-celebrates-official-launch-of-new-ambassador-pilot-program/>.

²⁶ "GCRTA Launches Their Transit Ambassador Program," Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority, September 6, 2022, <https://www.riderta.com/news/GCRTATransitAmbassadorsProgram#:~:text=GCRTA%20launches%20their%20new%20Transit,to%20handle%20non%2Dcriminal%20issues.>

Incident-based reporting application

Like Metra, several peer transit agencies offer incident reporting applications to their riders. These include LA Metro and San Francisco’s BART.

Los Angeles Metro

Offered by the LA Metro Transit agency, the Transit Watch Mobile App allows riders to contact Metro security by text message or phone call 24/7 in both Spanish and English, submit a report and/or upload a photo, get push notifications with critical alerts from the agency. This application is available on both the Apple Store as well as the Google Play Store. One of the most frequent critiques from riders who have used the application is an absence in follow through by law enforcement,²⁷ demonstrating the importance of pairing this approach with additional safety and security strategies.

San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART)

SF BART offers the BART Watch Mobile App that allows riders to report illegal activities or unattended bags. The app also allows for users without an internet connection to create reports that will send when their phone is then connected to signal. These reports are anonymous, and can be sent in Spanish, Mandarin, and English.

As with the LA Metro example, the most frequent critique from users of the BART Watch application is a lack of observable follow-up in response to incident report submittals.

²⁷ “Transit Watch,” Google Play Store, accessed June 22, 2023, <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=net.metro.lametrowatch.production>.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. Increase staff presence through a pilot “transit ambassadors” program.

Summary

The state should require the creation of a transit ambassadors program, building on the model deployed in regions like San Francisco, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and others. The cost of this program should be accounted for in the larger funding structure for regional transit operations.

Regional transit operators should monitor the effectiveness of the program as a potential candidate for wider deployment, informed by the program’s effects on both system incidents and customer perceptions (e.g., using customer survey data). Regional transit operators should also consider additional strategies to leverage existing staff to address these incidents, such as system station attendants.

Primary rationale

- A transit ambassadors program would increase staff presence on the system, with the potential to reduce the likelihood of both criminal incidents and other nuisance behaviors (see companion memo on system cleanliness). This added staff presence could also help to address rider feelings of helplessness in emergency situations.
- Transit ambassadors could also provide additional services or functions, including addressing questions of new or inexperienced system users, first aid, de-escalation, and more.
- This recommendation would also complement related strategies outlined in the companion memo on system cleanliness and user experience, such as additional partnerships with human services and social services agencies.²⁸

Implementation steps

The state has the authority to both mandate the planning and creation of a transit ambassador program as well as distribute the funding needed to begin the program. While this program could be deployed system-wide, it could also reflect the variation in existing challenges, with the greatest resources concentrated on the CTA’s rail system.

The service boards would need to monitor and regularly report on the effectiveness of this program. This could be accomplished through pre-and post- rider and non-rider surveys, focus groups, and partnerships with relevant nonprofit and social service organizations. This could include ongoing engagement with an oversight committee, such as the Public Safety Advisory Committee created by LA Metro in advance of their transit ambassadors pilot program.²⁹

²⁸ This companion memo is still in development and will be posted to the PART webpage later in summer 2023.

²⁹ “Public Safety Advisory Committee (PSAC),” LA Metro, accessed July 7, 2023, <https://www.metro.net/riding/public-safety-advisory-committee/>.

To ensure that this program does not negatively impact transit service operations, the state should provide funding to cover both a pilot and (if successful) a more comprehensive program. That cost could vary significantly depending on scale. For example, BART’s program began with 10 ambassadors for six months at a cost of \$690,000. BART adopted the program as a standing initiative in October 2020, with a total annual cost of \$1.3 million for ten ambassadors, paired with an additional \$1.8 million for staffing and training of ten crisis intervention specialists.^{30,31} LA Metro is using a \$122.8 million pilot vendor contract for up to five years to operate the ambassador program, which has trained nearly 300 “Metro Ambassadors” who will travel on rail and bus lines throughout the system.³²

Considerations


Any transit ambassador program, or other initiatives to increase staff presence on the system, would need to reflect existing complementary efforts and staff, including not only transit operators but also customer service attendants, agency or contracted security staff, outside law enforcement, and (in the case of Metra) transit police officers.

The RTA region has hundreds of train stations and bus routes, meaning that it will likely not be practical or affordable for any ambassador program to provide uniformly high levels of coverage. With that in mind, an initial pilot could focus on routes, stations, or stops that have seen higher incidences of violent crime, as well as those that connect to important regional destinations (e.g., airports).

Any investments in increased staff presence should also be made in parallel with broader approaches to public safety and social services. For example, the state could instruct social service agencies to place a specific focus on incidences or needs experienced on transit systems. Strategies to adapt the operations of these agencies are beyond the scope of this memo and are briefly discussed in the companion memo on the cleanliness of the regional transit system.

Evaluation





Policy

Category	Rating	Rationale
 Mobility	High	If successful, an ambassador program could increase rider willingness to use transit, both due to the perceived and potential real safety benefits of such a program. Any impacts should be closely monitored to understand the effectiveness of the program and suitability for long-term adoption.





³⁰ Carly Graf, “Unarmed BART Ambassadors Program Formalized with a Focus on Community Service,” *San Francisco Examiner*, October 24, 2020, https://www.sfoxaminer.com/archives/unarmed-bart-ambassadors-program-formalized-with-a-focus-on-community-service/article_f74c861e-326f-585d-9014-44665369b258.html.

³¹ Jerold Chinn, “Directors Approve Permanent BART Ambassador Program in 7-2 Vote,” SFBay, October 24, 2020, <https://sfbayca.com/2020/10/24/directors-approve-permanent-bart-ambassador-program-in-7-2-vote/>.

³² Sotero, “L.A. Metro Celebrates Official Launch of New Ambassador Pilot Program.”

 Equity	High	A successful transit ambassador program would provide a non-law enforcement option to improve safety and security on the regional transit system, which could help to address the concerns of system users while balancing the need for a safe and secure transit system.
 Environment	Medium	Beyond potentially increasing transit ridership, this program would have no incremental impact on emissions or other sustainability metrics.
 Economy	Medium	Beyond potentially increasing transit ridership, this program would have no incremental impact on job access metrics.
 Regional benefit	Regional	By addressing safety and security concerns on the areas where they are most pressing, transit operators can improve the perceptions of transit to riders and potential riders throughout the region.



Process

Category	Rating	Rationale
 Administrative feasibility	Medium	While this would involve a new program, it would build on existing staffing efforts, including the CTA’s customer station attendants and the customer-facing roles of CTA, Pace, and Metra vehicle operators. However, the service boards have faced challenges with hiring and retention in a tight labor market, which could limit the initial scale of any ambassador program.
 Political feasibility	Medium	The cost of the program could be a potential impediment. However, system safety and security are a priority topic and stakeholders have expressed interest in implementing a variety of strategies in response.
 Timing	Near	A pilot initiative could be launched relatively quickly, assuming that appropriate staff could be hired. Full-scale deployment would take additional time, especially if it involved extensive training.
 State span of control	High	While the state would not directly operate any ambassador program, it has the authority to both fund and require the adoption of either a transit ambassadors pilot or program.

Net Cost / Investment

The cost of a pilot project could scale depending on the number of staff involved. From the San Francisco/BART example, a \$5 million pilot could support a program of up to 40 ambassadors. This increased size vs. the BART pilot could be appropriate given the significantly larger scale of the CTA system and the other RTA service boards.

As with the pilot, a full program could also scale significantly depending on cost. LA Metro’s ambassador program has an annual cost of \$25 million.

Category	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
 Operations & maintenance	\$25+ million	\$25+ million	\$25+ million	\$25+ million	\$25+ million	\$25+ million
 Capital	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA

Recommendation 2. Improve two-way rider communication through existing and new mobile applications.

Summary

The state should support the creation and more widespread implementation of mobile applications and/or other communications tools that allow riders to report incidents, including those related to safety and security concerns. The state could require the service boards to make such tools available to the public and establish a timeline by which they would need to certify compliance. To support these efforts, the state could make funding available for the creation and integration of these platforms into a regional approach.

The state could also require ongoing monitoring and reporting on the number and resolution of incidents reported to the service boards (see related recommendation below).

Any new customer communication approach would also need to integrate with existing efforts. For example, Metra currently has a mobile application that allows riders to report crimes and suspicious behavior to Metra Police from a train or station. The application allows riders to anonymously send photos and video along with a description of the event they are reporting.

The app was developed after the agency’s Board of Directors approved a five-year contract for \$274,000 with the same agency that operates the BART Watch App.³³ The contract was funded by the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s Transit Security Grant Program.

Primary rationale

- Improved two-way communication strategies like mobile applications can provide riders with an opportunity to share concerns or feedback quickly and easily. These strategies can also provide transit operators with information on incidents more quickly, potentially enabling a faster and improved resolution.
- If paired with increased responsiveness and follow-up, these strategies can also demonstrate action and an ongoing commitment to addressing safety and security challenges.
- This strategy would also complement strategies outlined in the upcoming companion memo on system cleanliness and user experience.


Considerations

While Metra has an existing safety and security incident-reporting app, that model might not be exactly replicable for the CTA and Pace. Metra’s app shares information with the agency’s dedicated police force, whereas Pace and CTA both rely on local/municipal law enforcement agencies. However, the model from Los Angeles demonstrates that such applications are possible even for agencies without dedicated transit police staff. There may also be opportunities to leverage other customer-facing mobile applications, such as the Ventra application, to consolidate customer information sharing and receiving.





As noted in the evaluation below, there are also significant considerations related to equity and rider interactions with the criminal justice system. Any mobile application and reporting system would need to be monitored for its effects on riders from all backgrounds.

Evaluation




Policy

Category	Rating	Rationale
 Mobility	Medium	In isolation, a mobile application or other two-way communications strategy would be unlikely to generate significant incremental transit ridership. If paired with other strategies, however, it could improve rider perceptions of safety and help to rebuild confidence in the system.


³³ Mischa Wanek-Libman, “Metra Customers Will Soon Be Able to Use App to Report Safety, Security Concerns,” *Mass Transit*, December 13, 2018, <https://www.masstransitmag.com/safety-security/article/21036769/metra-customers-will-soon-be-able-to-use-app-to-report-safety-security-concerns>.

 Equity	<p>Medium (note risks)</p>	<p>This recommendation could advance equity outcomes by improving the experience for existing transit riders, who are disproportionately from lower-income communities and communities of color. However, any implementation would need to account for the potential risks of discriminatory reporting and the varying experiences of regional residents when interacting with law enforcement. Some risks could be mitigated by pairing this strategy with a more robust non-law enforcement transit ambassadors program as outlined above.</p>
 Environment	<p>Medium</p>	<p>Beyond potentially increasing transit ridership, this program would have no incremental impact on emissions or other sustainability metrics.</p>
 Economy	<p>Medium</p>	<p>Beyond potentially increasing transit ridership, this program would have no incremental impact on job access metrics.</p>
 Regional benefit	<p>Regional</p>	<p>Applies to all regional transit operators.</p>

Process



Category	Rating	Rationale
 Administrative feasibility	<p>Medium</p>	<p>A model exists in the region (Metra). However, a regional approach would require a new or substantially modified mobile application or other communications strategy.</p>
 Political feasibility	<p>High</p>	<p>Would address commonly shared concerns of regional stakeholders.</p>
 Timing	<p>Near</p>	<p>For example, Metra launched its mobile application within 6 months of initially approving the contract.³⁴</p>

³⁴ Sun-Times Wire, “Metra Launches ‘COPS’ Crime-Reporting App,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, April 15, 2019, <https://chicago.suntimes.com/2019/4/15/18410106/metra-launches-cops-crime-reporting-app>.

 <p>State span of control</p>	Medium	While the state can direct transit agencies to observe and replicate this strategy, success will require significant service board participation, as well as potentially the participation of local law enforcement.
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Net Cost / Investment

Similar applications in the region and elsewhere have cost <\$1M annually.^{35, 36} This would not include any additional staff costs for incident response.

Category	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
 <p>Operations & maintenance</p>	<\$1 million	<\$1 million	<\$1 million	<\$1 million	<\$1 million	<\$1 million
 <p>Capital</p>	<\$1 million	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA

Recommendation 3. Invest in physical infrastructure that improves safety and security outcomes and perceptions on transit.

Summary

The state should dedicate funding for investments that can improve perceived and actual safety and security outcomes. Funding could support investments in improved lighting at and/or around rail stations and bus stops, additional bus shelters, targeted investments in cameras and camera feed displays, PA systems and callboxes that allow for riders to communicate and hear from transit system staff, and more.

- **Legislative actions**
 - Identify desired funding level for new capital investments in safety and security-related infrastructure.
 - Appropriate funds to service boards, with specific allocations to be coordinated between RTA and transit service boards
- **Local/regional agency actions necessary to support**
 - RTA, CMAP, and other regional stakeholders to identify appropriate allocation of funds

³⁵ Examiner Staff, “Mobile App Will Allow BART Riders to Report Crimes,” *San Francisco Examiner*, March 14, 2014, https://www.sfoxaminer.com/news/mobile-app-will-allow-bart-riders-to-report-crimes/article_627fef67-3bcb-5824-9da9-c5e084215991.html.

³⁶ Sun-Times Wire, “Metra Launches ‘COPS’ Crime-Reporting App.”






- Transit service boards to identify projects that could be accelerated or implemented using these funds, both in existing capital programs and new projects.

Primary rationale





- Each of the region’s transit service providers has already made significant investments in these kinds of safety and security infrastructure projects. However, given existing capital funding backlogs, additional dedicated funds could accelerate the deployment of these strategies.
- Physical investments in safety and security are also highly visible to system users, and could help to demonstrate that the region’s transit service providers are taking action in response to rider concerns.
- This strategy would also complement strategies outlined in the upcoming companion memo on system cleanliness and user experience.

Evaluation

Policy



Category	Rating	Rationale
 Mobility	Medium	The primary goal of this recommendation is to improve the transit user experience for existing riders. However, by expanding infrastructure that improves riders’ safety and security, the system may also attract additional trips from both current riders and former or new riders.
 Equity	High	Investments in lighting and station facilities would most significantly benefit existing transit riders, who are disproportionately from communities of color and from households with low incomes.
 Environment	Medium	Beyond potentially increasing transit ridership, this program would have no incremental impact on emissions or other sustainability metrics.
 Economy	Medium	Beyond potentially increasing transit ridership, this program would have no incremental impact on job access metrics.
 Regional benefit	Regional	Applicable to transit services throughout the region.

Process

Category	Rating	Rationale
 <p>Administrative feasibility</p>	High	All service boards have experience with outfitting transit stops with amenities such as lighting and shelters. The largest barrier to this recommendation is funding for future development, and legislation towards mandating future development and maintenance.
 <p>Political feasibility</p>	High	Legislation tied to this recommendation would be in line with previous mandates and funding for transit amenities infrastructure.
 <p>Timing</p>	Near/ Medium	While some progress could be made in the near term, investments at scale would likely require planning and procurement timelines that extend into 2027.
 <p>State span of control</p>	Medium	The state can provide funds, as well as mandate investments. However, success will require strong partnership and collaboration with existing transit service providers and (depending on the specific project) other agencies such as municipalities and counties.

Net Cost / Investment

The costs associated with this recommendation are heavily varied and dependent upon the extent of funding and the infrastructure chosen for development.

Category	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
 <p>Operations & maintenance</p>	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
 <p>Capital</p>	Varies: \$1M - \$40M					

Recommendation 4. Improve monitoring and reporting of transit system safety outcomes and best practices.

Summary

To ensure that agency responses remain informed by the latest data and best practices, the state should require regional transit providers to regularly report on safety and security incidents on the regional transit system. The state should also require the creation of an ongoing structure to monitor, identify, and implement additional strategies to improve safety and security.

Current progress and future implementation steps

This strategy would build on recently passed legislation, H.B. 1342.³⁷ If enacted, this legislation would require the transit service boards to report on safety incidents on the system for Fiscal Years 2024 and 2025. The bill would also require the RTA and the transit service boards to gather input on these metrics from the public and relevant stakeholders. By adopting this recommendation, the state could codify these requirements as ongoing responsibilities of the transit service boards.

This recommendation would also build on the RTA's recent proposal for a regional "safety and security summit," with a goal of facilitating information sharing and exploring solutions to transit challenges.³⁸ If successful, this summit could become a model for future and ongoing collaboration on these topics within the region.

The state could require the formalization of this approach, potentially guided by a steering committee with input from both regional transit operators and the public. For example, LA Metro's transit ambassadors program emerged from their "Public Safety Advisory Committee," a group of transit staff and community members who regularly convene to discuss topics related to safety and security on the regional transit system.

Primary rationale

- While some data exist, there are not comprehensive and detailed data available on safety and security incidents on the transit system.
- The data that are available demonstrate the safety and security challenges that have faced regional transit operators, and echo the challenges faced by other systems in peer metropolitan regions throughout the U.S.
- Better and more comprehensive data would enable a more nuanced understanding of the challenges facing the system and allow regional transit operators and other stakeholders (e.g., nonprofits and social service agencies) to calibrate their responses.

³⁷ Kam Buckner, "An Act Concerning Local Government," Pub. L. No. HB1342 (2023), <https://ilga.gov/legislation/billstatus.asp?DocNum=1342&GAID=17&GA=103&DocTypeID=HB&LegID=143493&SessionID=112>.

³⁸ "Transit Is the Answer" (Regional Transportation Authority, February 16, 2023), <https://www.rtachicago.org/uploads/files/general/Region/Strategic-Plan/Final/TransitIsTheAnswer.pdf>.






- Because these are shared challenges, more routinized monitoring of emerging best practices in other regions could also help to accelerate the deployment of successful strategies, with a goal of improving safety perceptions and outcomes.

Considerations





As with investments in increased staff presence, ongoing monitoring, reporting, and learning should be coordinated with other relevant social services and public safety stakeholders. The upcoming companion memo on system cleanliness will include additional discussion on the role of partnerships with social services agencies in the transit system’s response to these and other related challenges.

Evaluation

Policy



Category	Rating	Rationale
 <p>Mobility</p>	Medium	Ongoing reporting and monitoring may have modest effects on public perceptions of safety and security on the transit system. However, larger impacts will depend on the strategies implemented in response.
 <p>Equity</p>	High	Because transit riders are disproportionately from lower-income communities and communities of color, ongoing improvements in safety and security on the transit system could have a positive effect on regional equity outcomes.
 <p>Environment</p>	Medium	Beyond potentially increasing transit ridership, this program would have no incremental impact on emissions or other sustainability metrics.
 <p>Economy</p>	Medium	Beyond potentially increasing transit ridership, this program would have no incremental impact on job access metrics.
 <p>Regional benefit</p>	Regional	Applicable to transit service providers throughout the region.

Process

Category	Rating	Rationale
 Administrative feasibility	High	Builds on existing efforts and agency staff.
 Political feasibility	High	This proposal is modeled on recently passed state legislation and the public commitments made by the region's transit service operators.
 Timing	Near	Aligns with established state legislative requirements and near-term plans of regional transit agencies.
 State span of control	High	Mirrors recently passed legislative requirements.

Net Cost / Investment

Ongoing reporting and monitoring would require staff time but limited to no additional expenses. Some data may not be available with existing systems, which could require either changes to reported metrics or investments that enable additional reporting.

Category	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
 Operations & maintenance	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
 Capital	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA