


CITY OF LOS ANGELES
INTER-DEPARTMENTAL MEMORANDUM

Date: September 26, 2024

To: Honorable City Council
c/o City Clerk, Room 395
Attention: Honorable Heather Hutt, Chair, Transportation Committee

From: Laura Rubio-Cornejo, General Manager 
Department of Transportation

Subject: **REPORT ON BUS DRIVER SAFETY**

SUMMARY

In response to Council File (CF) [24-0562](#), this report provides an assessment of bus driver safety concerns, safeguards implemented, and recommendations to protect the City's contract bus drivers and the transit riding public from harm, including estimated costs and implementation timelines. A summary of steps that are being implemented by the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) to protect their bus drivers is included as Attachment A.

RECOMMENDATION

1. Pursuant to in accordance with Section 371(e)(5) of the Los Angeles City Charter, FIND that executing contracts to install protective driver barriers on LADOT DASH buses to be of urgent necessity to preserve the lives and safety of bus drivers due to the recent increases in assault on DASH buses;
2. AUTHORIZE the General Manager of the Department of Transportation approval authority to enter into sole-source contracts to install protective barriers on active DASH buses subject to City Attorney review of legality and final approval of the Mayor;
3. AUTHORIZE LADOT to transfer \$2,250,442 from 94AA40 'Transit Facility State of Good Repair' and \$1,418,558 from 94A431 'Transit Operations' to a new appropriation account 'Bus Driver Safety Risk Mitigation' within Prop A Fund No. 385, Department 94, for the purposes of funding the safety initiatives LADOT identified in response to the City Council Motion CF 24-0562
4. DIRECT the Police Department to report back on a plan of security services that they are able to implement to support safe operation of LADOT DASH services and layovers.

BACKGROUND

As transit agencies across the country experienced declining ridership during the COVID-19 pandemic, these same transit systems saw the quantity, type, and severity of violent assaults on transit operators escalate over the last few years. This concerning trend has continued, despite increasing ridership continuing to put drivers and the riding public at risk. This national trend is apparent on both LADOT and Metro services. LADOT is working with the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), its contractor MV Transportation, and the Teamsters Local 572 to address these driver safety issues. Teamster Local 572

represents the collective bargaining unit for bus drivers that operate the Downtown and Mid-Cities service regions.

On June 12, 2024, LADOT and its transit operations contractor, MV Transportation, Inc. (MV) met with MV bus operators, a Teamsters Local 572 business representative, and LAPD Transit Service Division (TSD) and Transit Service Bureau (TSB) to identify the top safety concerns from bus operators.

On June 20, 2024, LADOT convened a Transit Safety Committee to receive additional feedback directly from bus drivers, identify potential solutions, and assign leads to carry them out. LADOT and MV shared a list of specific problematic layover locations with LAPD after the meeting.

In July 2024, Council directed LADOT with the assistance of the Los Angeles Police Department and City Attorney to report with an assessment of bus driver safety concerns, safeguards implemented, and recommendations to protect the City's contract bus drivers and the transit riding public safe from harm. Council further directed that the report include estimated costs and implementation timelines, as well as a summary of steps that are being implemented by the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority to protect their bus drivers.

DISCUSSION

According to data transit agencies report to the Federal Transit Agency (FTA) as part of the National Transit Database (NTD), "major" assaults on bus drivers more than doubled between 2008 and 2022, from 136 to 318 annual events nationwide.¹ The FTA until recently only required transit agencies to report assaults on transit workers that resulted in fatalities or medical attention,² but the trends of overall harassment and assaults to transit workers that fall below FTA's reporting threshold of "Major" assaults may be rising even faster.

Earlier this year, the FTA published research and issued direct guidance to recipient agencies in an increasing effort to respond to the needs to increase safety on the transit system. In partnership with the U.S. Department of Transportation Volpe Center (Volpe), FTA commissioned research to gain a deeper understanding of assaults on the riding public through interviews with representatives of nine transit agencies that serve large metropolitan areas.³ This Volpe Report provided findings related to assault type and frequency, data collection methods, and factors that may contribute to customer assaults, and identified potential mitigations agencies could pursue. Agency interviewees linked the root cause of many assaults to housing insecurity, substance misuse, and mental health crises.

¹ Rennert, L. (2023, November 28). Assaults on Transit Workers Have Tripled in the Past 15 Years. Income Inequality and Societal Tensions Have Contributed. Retrieved July 6, 2024, from <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/assaults-transit-workers-have-tripled-past-15-years-income-inequality-and-societal>.

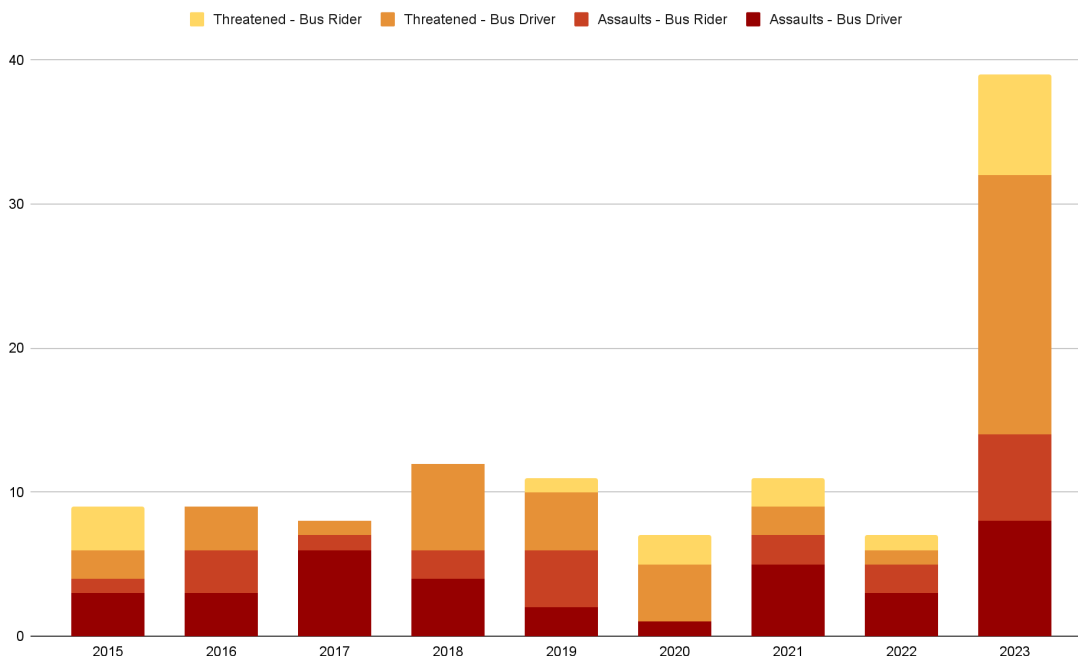
² Mader, S. (2023, April 25). Special Directives: Required Actions Regarding Transit Worker Assault. Analysis of Transit Agency Responses. U.S. Department of Transportation. Federal Transit Administration, Office of Transit Safety and Oversight. Retrieved July 6, 2024, from <https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/2023-04/APTA-Mobility-Conference-Special-Directives-Required-Actions-Regarding-Transit-Worker-Assault-04-25-23.pdf>.

³ France, M., Shabbir, Z., & Katt, S. (2024, January 26). *Transit Agency Perspectives on Customer Assault: Summary Report*. Federal Transit Administration. Retrieved July 6, 2024, from <https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/2024-02/Transit-Agency-Perspectives-on-Customer-Assault-Summary-Report-1-26-24.pdf>

The report also linked some assaults to fare evasion. LADOT suspended fare collection on DASH buses at the start of the pandemic, and will resume fare collection in January 2025 as directed in the City's Adopted Budget. It is possible that fare reinstatement will introduce more conflicts if bus drivers feel they are responsible for enforcing fare policy. The safety mitigations related to bus operations that agency representatives most discussed in the Volpe Report include collaboration with social service providers when responding to distressed riders, continued reliance on uniformed law enforcement presence, and deployment of surveillance cameras.

Assaults on transit in Los Angeles mirror national trends. On LADOT Transit, reported physical assaults on buses nearly tripled from 2022 to 2023, while reported threats of violence increased five-fold since 2015 and the bus driver was on the receiving end of most of the incidents involving assaults or threats of assaults. In the recent surge in 2023, over half of assaults and over two-thirds of threats involved the bus driver. See **Figure 1**. Assaults continue to persist at increasing frequency, with 30 assaults on bus drivers reported thus far in 2024, 10 of which were reported in June 2024.

Figure 1. Assault and Threats on LADOT Transit Bus Drivers and Bus Riders from 2015 to 2023.



Federal lawmakers have shown concern over the rising trends in driver assaults. As part of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), the FTA requires recipient agencies to convene a Safety Committee composed of equal parts management and front line transit workers (i.e. bus drivers) who are responsible for identifying safety risks and solutions to mitigating them. In their Proposed General Directive No. 24-1⁴, the FTA is seeking to further improve safety for transit workers by requiring recipient agencies to complete and submit to the FTA a safety risk assessment related to assaults on transit workers. LADOT meets the FTA's requirements, convenes quarterly Safety Committee meetings, which

⁴ Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Proposed General Directive No. 24-1. Published December 20, 2023 <https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/2023-12/Proposed-General-Directive-24-1-Required-Actions-Regarding-Assaults-on-Transit-Workers.pdf>

includes an ongoing agenda item for MV bus drivers and safety managers to help define the risks they and the riding public are continually exposed to and solutions needed to mitigate those risks.

During recent convenings, attended by LADOT, MV, Teamsters Local 572, and LAPD, bus drivers identified the following concerns that expose them to unacceptable safety risks:

- Some of the communications radios in the DASH buses do not function;
- Bus operators are dependent on personal cellular telephones to contact police in an emergency;
- The DASH does not have security personnel readily available to respond to requests for service in the field;
- The DASH drivers were concerned about extended hours on several routes, which have increased interaction with non-destination travelers, late at night;
- Many drivers are not certain what to do when passengers become aggressive toward each other or the driver;
- Bus layover locations are high risk areas where there exists increased opportunity for drivers to experience conflict with unstable passengers or members of the public. Bus drivers seek clear protocol on how to approach sleeping passengers that refuse to disembark at the end of the route and change in driver shift; and,
- Many drivers are uncertain about what constitutes a crime, the investigative and reporting process, what to expect when LAPD officers respond to a call for service, and the span and limitations of police action.

Safeguards implemented by LADOT

Based on concerns shared in the Transit Safety Committee, LADOT is currently pursuing the following measures. LADOT can front fund associated costs in a new appropriation account 'Bus Driver Safety Risk Mitigation' funded by Proposition A Fund 385. LADOT will seek reimbursement from existing FTA grants and Prop C formula funds, both of which have set asides for transit security:

1. Additional Roadway Supervisors - Soon after the City Council Transportation Committee meeting on June 4th, MV deployed additional road supervisors on an overtime basis on DASH routes and times with a high pattern of incidence in the Mid-Cities Service Region to provide assistance to drivers in de-escalating tensions with agitated passengers and increase presence and visibility for the riding public. The annual cost is expected to be \$295,000. Deploying additional road supervisors on an overtime basis for the Downtown Service Region would cost an additional \$178,390.
2. Emergency Button - LADOT directed its transit technology contractor, GMV Syncromatics, to connect the emergency alert button to the Mobile Data Terminal (MDT) Emergency alarm system on our entire DASH bus fleet. When a driver triggers an emergency alarm on the MDT (which is the on-board tablet), the dispatch is immediately notified. It also changes the bus's destination displays to alert the public to call 911. This upgrade will allow the driver to activate this function more discreetly using the panic button in addition to activating it via the on-board tablet. This upgrade is currently in progress, and is expected to be complete by mid-October. The cost to upgrade 305 DASH buses is \$45,240.
3. Live-Stream Video Surveillance - GMV Syncromatics also recommended enabling a live stream feature from on-board security cameras available on newer buses to allow dispatchers to gain operational awareness and retain video for law enforcement investigators. With this upgrade, dispatch will be able to see what is happening on/around the bus in real time. Upgrade of video

surveillance systems on 148 buses (2021 and newer) is expected to take 3 - 5 weeks and will cost \$60,000. Upgrade of video surveillance systems on 80 older DASH buses is expected to be completed by the end of 2025 and will cost \$990,200.

4. Replacement Radios - LADOT will purchase 170 handheld replacement radios that will be programmed to an open dedicated frequency that can communicate directly with the LAPD dispatch system and or/ area units able to respond to local calls. Reliance on these radios will create a faster response time allowing MV Transportation personnel to communicate directly to LAPD patrol units. Estimated costs for 269 units is \$375,000.
5. Lone Worker Personal Safety Devices - LADOT is exploring the purchase of lone worker personal safety devices for bus drivers. These devices transmit alarms with GPS coordinates over the cellular network system. MV is leading field tests of samples to verify features and capabilities and will provide field test results and cost estimates for potential system-wide deployment to LADOT. Each device costs \$115 and requires ongoing network service costs of \$102 per year per device. LADOT would spend \$37,000 for 170 devices for DASH drivers in the first year, and pay \$17,340 in ongoing costs each year. LADOT and MV will be testing 20 devices prior to committing to a purchase.
6. Protective Barrier - LADOT is requesting authorization to procure and install fully-enclosed driver barriers for all DASH buses to physically protect drivers from potential assaults. LADOT installed partial driver barriers on most DASH buses during the height of the COVID pandemic to minimize exposure to the virus, though their effect is more limited in protecting drivers from assaults. LADOT previously investigated different options from different manufacturers on levels of protection, costs, durability, visibility, and glare issues. The recommended fully-enclosed driver barriers are similar to the barriers Metro is procuring. Estimated costs for installing full fully-enclosed driver barriers on 300 of DASH buses is up to \$2,162,000. LADOT recommends that City Council invoke emergency procurement procedures to authorize LADOT to purchase and install new laminated, tempered glass, protective barriers.
7. Rider Code of Conduct - LADOT will review the current Rider Code of Conduct policy with LAPD, MV Transportation, and the Teamsters Union and propose changes to clarify rider expectations. To effectuate, LADOT will convene marketing consultants Illium to develop new signage on buses outlining the expected behavior and Code of Conduct of passengers. The marketing scope will respond to feedback LADOT has received from the bus drivers to update signage that address concerns around cell phone use and unsanitary behavior that pose additional risks to the driver and rider public. On lines with high levels of incidence, LADOT will use the destination display to remind passengers to respect the bus driver..
8. Safety Marketing - LADOT will develop new programming to display on existing on-board monitors that reinforces positive rider behavior. The programming will include marketing that builds empathy with bus drivers and demonstrates rider behavior that is supportive of drivers and other passengers.
9. Frontline Worker Engagement - LADOT will continue to engage front line workers, including bus drivers and dispatchers through the Transit Safety Committee. While the FTA requires the Transit Safety Committee to meet quarterly, LADOT will meet with front line workers at least monthly until significant progress is achieved in reducing assaults on bus drivers.

10. Unarmed Crisis Response - LADOT is reaching out to the Unarmed Model of Crisis Response (UMCR) pilot program response providers and the Crisis and Incident Response through Community Lead Engagement (CIRCLE) services to train MV personnel on when it's appropriate to request crisis-intervention services to assist non-violent riders that demonstrate the need for support.
11. Rider Safety Survey - LADOT will survey riders on their perceptions of safety of the bus system, their impact from harassment on buses or at bus stops, and their perceptions of LADOT's policies and practices as compared to other transit agencies. Senate Bill (SB) 434 requires Caltrans to collect survey data on rider safety from the ten largest transit agencies in the state and submit the results to the National Transit Database (NTD) by the end of 2024. As one of the ten largest transit agencies in California, LADOT has executed an Agreement with Caltrans that provides \$250,000 to LADOT to conduct the surveys and requires LADOT to submit completed surveys to Caltrans by the end of the calendar year.
12. Modified Operating Hours - LADOT will review the operating hours as part of the revised Transit Safety Analysis to assess passenger demand for extended service hours on routes that have a high level of incidence and low-ridership.
13. LAPD Security Services Contract - LADOT is coordinating with the LAPD Security Services to determine the feasibility of piggybacking off the existing LAPD security contract for on-route security services to deploy at problematic lay-over locations and ride along DASH buses.

Safeguards implemented by LAPD

LADOT previously entered into a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with LAPD to provide uniformed officers on board LADOT buses, which expired in 2020. Absent a formal MOA with LADOT, LAPD offered the following measures to support in a joint effort to provide a safer operating environment for bus drivers.

1. LAPD is providing direct contacts to area precincts to build relationships with MV safety managers and bus drivers. This will help local commands gain awareness of common incidence on DASH.
2. LAPD will assign all calls for support from LADOT DASH services the same code-level priority as LAPD assigns to calls on Metro services.
3. LAPD will increase coordination in responding to risks at layovers. In response to hearing of bus driver's most challenging experiences at layover locations, on July 2nd, LADOT TSB distributed the layover locations with higher safety incidence to each of their Area Captains and Senior Lead Officers to raise awareness of the needs and a request to coordinate strategies to increase safety at these locations.
4. LAPD will support updating training and operating procedures for bus drivers. Given their experience in managing security for Metro, LAPD have offered, on their own initiative, to review the MV Transportation's Standard Operating Procedures that are expected when a driver encounters safety risks imposed by riders experiencing forms of distress, and to recommend revised protocols and updated safety training including de-escalation techniques.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There is no impact to the General Fund. LADOT will front fund the estimated \$3,669,000 costs for capital, equipment, and IT by Proposition A Fund 385 in a new appropriation account 'Bus Driver Safety Risk Mitigation'. LADOT will front fund any costs for contract security services by Proposition A Fund 385, appropriation account 'Transit Bus Security Services'. LADOT will seek reimbursement for the capital, equipment, and IT services from existing grants in FTA Section 5307 funds that are set-aside for transit safety and security. LADOT will seek reimbursement for the contract security services by use of Metro's 5% of Proposition C formula funds that are set aside for transit security.

LRC:JK:ds

[Attachment A](#) - Summary of Measures Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) is Implementing to Protect Bus Drivers

Attachment A

Summary of Measures Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) is Implementing to Protect Bus Drivers

In the past few years, most discussion around Metro's response to growing public alarm around transit safety has focused on their deployment of ambassadors and security presence on rail and at stations.¹ Given that not all strategies Metro employs at rail stations translate to buses, Metro deploys a subset of safety strategies for operators and riders on buses that include²:

- On-board cameras and digital video recorder (DVR)
- Partial operator barriers on all Metro buses
- Emergency buttons on buses
- Clear signage is posted about punishment for assaults on operators ("Let's Respect Operators...injuring an operator is punishable by up to 3 years in prison or up to 10,000 fine, or both."....Penal Code 243.3")
- De-escalation training for operators
- "See something, say something" Campaign, and
- Dedicated bus riding teams on select bus lines

In spite of these efforts, Metro bus drivers continue to be subject to violent assault by assailants who exploit a gap in existing protective barriers. A high profile incident of this includes a bus hijacking on March 20th, 2024, where the operator was held at gunpoint, and on April 13th, 2024, when an operator was stabbed in the chest despite the barrier being closed. Given the urgency of the need, at their April 24th, 2024 meeting, the Metro Board invoked emergency procurement procedures to accelerate installation of the fully protective enclosures to restrict physical access to the bus driver from the riding public, thereby protecting the driver from future harassment. Metro had previously left a cut-out opening in the protective barriers to provide a better line of sight, though assailants are able to exploit this opening. Metro staff concluded that it would take up to three years to install the fully protective enclosures on their entire bus fleet if they were to follow the normal procurement process, and worked with Custom Glass Industries (CGI) to iterate on a design that addressed concerns from operators related to reflections and glare found in earlier prototypes. By invoking the emergency provision, Metro is now authorized to scale up production of 1,200 fully protective enclosure sets (2 pieces per bus) to install the barriers on half of their bus fleet on a timeline that responds to driver needs for personal and functional safety.

¹Metro. Board Report 2022-0869: Infrastructure Protection Services - North and South Regions. June 15. 2023. Metro describes their multi-layered public safety framework.

²Metro. Board Report 2024-0274: Bus Operator Retrofit Barriers. April 25, 2024