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Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority  
One Gateway Plaza  
Los Angeles, California 90012-2952

**Re: Support for Community Safety Approach to System Security and Law Enforcement (File #2020-0429)**

June 22, 2020

Dear Metro Board of Directors,

The signatories of this letter strongly support the motion put forward by Directors Bonin, Garcetti, Hahn, Dupont-Walker, and Solis calling for a Community Safety Approach to System Security and Law Enforcement (File #2020-0429). **We urge the Metro Board of Directors to approve this motion as a first step in eliminating the role of law enforcement on our Metro systems and investing in upstream, community-based approaches to keep the Metro system safe and welcoming for Black, Indigenous, and riders of color.**

The ongoing protests across the US against police brutality and systemic anti-Black racism are demanding a shift in how cities reimagine public safety and a divestment from militarized police departments.

Metro's 5-year, \$797 million multi-agency contract for law enforcement patrol and response on the region's transit system is an almost 60% increase from the agency's previous \$500 million police budget. With the COVID-19 outbreak in LA County, crime in the region has significantly decreased and riders' concerns regarding safety are firmly focused on public health interventions: ability to socially distance, sanitation stations and vehicle cleanliness. This further demonstrates that dollars spent on police could be better spent on improving transit reliability and frequency, scaling up social workers and sanitation on transit and at stations, piloting a transit ambassador program, and making transit fare-free.

Metro has short changed its customers by overspending on police, and underfunding critically needed increases in bus service, maintenance, and infrastructure, resulting in a 25% decline in bus ridership over the last decade. Spending nearly a billion dollars on policing has come at the expense of transit infrastructure and service improvements, but more importantly, youth, Black and Latinx riders who make up Metro's core riders have reported feeling *less safe and secure* due to increased police. Greater police presence on Metro has resulted in racial profiling, harassment, and ticketing of Black riders<sup>1</sup>, criminalization of poverty and often makes transit riders of color feel uneasy.

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<sup>1</sup>

<https://la.streetsblog.org/2017/12/18/strategy-center-files-lawsuit-seeking-arrest-citation-and-deployment-data-from-metro-law-enforcement-agencies/>

As a regional transportation agency with one of the largest police budgets and the first agency to adopt a systemwide Equity Platform, Metro must take action to divest from policing and reimagine safety on public transportation for historically marginalized populations. Armed law enforcement patrol should not be the default approach that Metro implements to respond to people experiencing homelessness or mental health episodes, or to enhance riders' experiences. Police officers are not social workers or mental health professionals, and being first responders to service calls has often led to escalations and violent outcomes. Metro must expand its idea of who can provide safety and security, consider alternative crime prevention measures through design and infrastructure, and actively seek the input of historically marginalized Black, Indigenous, and people of color communities through robust and authentic community engagement.

Alternative public safety interventions including social workers and transit ambassadors provide security without law enforcement and help reduce riders' fears. Transit riders express feeling more safe when non-law enforcement workers are present as evident in Metro-sponsored research including [Appendix E of Understanding How Women Travel Report \(2019\)](#) and [Safety & Security Recommendations of Blue Line First/Last Mile Plan Executive Summary \(2018, page 58\)](#). Activating transit stations with community stewardship programs including street vending markets, like the motion suggests, is a great way to create a safe environment that is welcoming and respects the cultural fabric of many of our communities. Metro's partnership with PATH has been found to be more cost effective and has higher success rates than LAPD HOPE teams in providing meaningful services for people experiencing homelessness.<sup>2</sup> Transit ambassador programs in US cities provide the extra eyes and ears that help prevent crime, reduce operator assaults and prevent youth from entering the criminal justice system.

We urge the Metro Board of Directors to:

1. Adopt the motion which establishes a Transit Public Safety Advisory Committee that incorporates the existing Community Safety and Security Working Group members.
2. Ensure that the Transit Public Safety Advisory Committee serves as a community oversight body over the multi-agency law enforcement contract and renewal process with the powers to investigate and make binding recommendations concerning the role of law enforcement on the Metro system, including requiring Committee approval of any law enforcement contract.
3. Ensure that the scope of the Transit Public Safety Advisory Committee includes reallocating resources from law enforcement to alternative strategies.

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<sup>2</sup> Dembo, Ma'ayan. *Off the Rails: Alternatives to Policing on Transit*. June 2020. Report link: [http://allianceforcommunitytransit.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/AlternativesToPolicing\\_FullReport.pdf](http://allianceforcommunitytransit.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/AlternativesToPolicing_FullReport.pdf)

As the nation grapples with public outrage over systemic anti-Black racism, abuse of power and the failure of police to protect citizens, community safety should be prioritized over policing. Our country has reached a juncture that demands a bold reimagination of safety and rebuilding of cities that eliminates the need for police by redirecting the billions of dollars spent on police departments toward affordable housing, quality education, job opportunities, universal healthcare, mental health services, and fare-free transit. That is what keeps communities safe, and Metro must take leadership to create community safety on public transit.

Signed,

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