



On The Move

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Enough is enough, but what can we do?

Input from frontline workers can help address security concerns

While the leadership of Local 234 has been working hard to improve the safety and security of our members it is essential that frontline employees communicate their ideas on how best to address the problem. The Safety Specialist program and the location safety committees can help. Under the safety specialist program, the Union has assigned six safety specialists to tackle safety and security issues around the property. There is also a safety committee at each location. Operators and other frontline employees who are most affected are well positioned to come up with common sense solutions.

If you have suggestions that would ease your security concerns, step up, talk to the safety rep assigned to your location, below, or raise the issue at the LSC.

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Bulletproof partitions are in the works

The process is underway to produce and install Transparent Armor Safety Barriers (bullet proof partitions that can withstand a 44-caliber bullet, plus some) to protect operators on all surface transportation vehicles, starting with the bus fleet. *Custom Glass* designs and produces Transparent Armor that meets all DOT requirements for optical distortion and clarity. We are working with *Custom Glass* to figure out a design for a fully enclosed cabin, that can dramatically improve the security of our operators. Two shields have been tested, one failed, the other was able to protect a 15-caliber bullet.

SEPTA will be providing *Custom Glass* with a bus to develop a prototype. If the partitions can be designed to be compatible with the operating requirements of the vehicle, especially in regards to weight, the bullet proof partitions can be produced by *Custom Glass* and installed on the entire fleet, with the newest vehicles first. The partitions will be installed by bargaining unit employees.

Operators out of the fare collection business

Assaults against TWU members are monitored, tracked and analyzed. Preventative measures are taken whenever feasible.

A review of assaults committed against our operators shows that one of the most frequent causes of conflict between operators and riders in the fare collection process. Last June, the Union convinced the Authority to get operators out of the fare collection business. Since then, enunciators have taken over the task of asking passengers to pay the fare. With the automated fare

announcements in place, you only have to “check and request” if the fare announcement is not working on your vehicle. As a result, we have seen a decline in the number of operator assaults.

Bulletproof vests

As an option to feel safe, we are also discussing the introduction of bulletproof vests, that can be worn under your SEPTA uniform. If you have a bullet proof vest, you can wear it, but we want SEPTA to provide the vests to all who need it. Our members will have to be fitted and we’ll be talking about moving forward with bulletproof vests.

Real time video

Approximately 800 hundred SEPTA buses are currently capable of transmitting real time video to SEPTA’s transit police at the Authority’s Control Center. If you are facing a dangerous situation on your bus, pressing the panic button will transmit audio from the scene and if you’re operating a bus with real time video, the transit police will see what’s going on and can assist.

Deploying the National Guard to deter crime and other social ills

Three suspects have been arrested in connection with the Northeast High School shooting last week. In the days since, just about every public official in the city has been promising to address the problems of gun violence and transit crime. From the vantage point of our members, however, this attention to transit crime is well intentioned, but too little, too late, and misguided.

The politicians are talking about arresting, prosecuting, and punishing the perpetrators of transit crime, which, of course, is necessary, but the focus should be a kind of “preventive maintenance,” *designed to deter* gun violence and other crimes. In other words, the strategy should be to get ahead of events, rather than act only after a tragedy has occurred.

Local 234, two years ago, called for the state to assist the thinly staffed and often overwhelmed transit police with a show of force by sending in the National Guard to help patrol SEPTA’s buses, trains, and trolleys. SEPTA and state leaders listened to what we had to say but looked at us like we needed our heads examined.

But here’s our point. The *temporary* deployment of the National Guard, or the State Police, can be a powerful deterrent to transit crime, as well as the problems of fare evasion, mental illness, homelessness, and drug addiction *in the transit system*. Studies have shown that as ridership goes up, transit crime and other social ills go down and vice versa. We saw this with the pandemic. As ridership declined during the pandemic, crime and other societal problems in the subway went up. Deploying the National Guard can bring riders back and make the system safer for everyone.

The Governor of New York recently decided to deploy the National Guard to patrol the NYC subway system. It’s time for SEPTA, along with our political and law enforcement leadership, to bring together state and local resources to provide a heightened law enforcement presence throughout the SEPTA system. Otherwise, public transit, vital to our local and state economies, is at risk of suffering a slow but inevitable death.