



Minnesota

# Police Journal

The Official Publication of The Minnesota Police and Peace Officers Association

Volume 86 No. 1  
Winter 2013



**METRO TRANSIT POLICE ON TRACK TO NEXT DESTINATION**

Cover story on pages 8-10

# Metro Transit Police On Track To Next Destination

By Chief John M. Harrington

This fall, Metro Transit Police Department (MTPD) will celebrate the department's 20th anniversary. What began in the 1980s as a part-time force of plainclothes police officers working to provide security aboard buses has morphed into a rapidly expanding modern police agency. MTPD is now responsible for ensuring a safe ride for the 80 million annual Twin Cities travelers and the thousands of transit employees at the United States 15th largest public transit agency. As the demand and complexity of public transportation has increased in the Twin Cities and its many communities, MTPD has also grown and evolved.



Community Service Officer Jewel Morrison, Officer Amy Keyes, Officer Alex Johannes, Officer Waheid Siraach, Sergeant Lori Ammend

In 1993 the Minnesota legislature passed MN statute 473.407 which created the Metro Transit Police Department. This enabling statute established that MTPD realizes its unique niche in the fabric of policing, assigning it tasks that traditional agencies were not staffed or equipped to address. As a result of its origins, when Minneapolis and St. Paul officers rode as a part-time job, MTPD has continued to employ sworn officers from other agencies on a part-time basis. These 46 officers add a wealth of experience and knowledge to the force bringing specialized skills and training to the department. Besides the part-time officers, MTPD employs sixty-eight POST licensed, sworn, full-time officers. The officers have an excellent support staff consisting of eight civilians and six community service officers.

Metro Transit Police cover a jurisdiction that extends over an eight county area - everywhere bus and train routes operate. Aside from three other state policing agencies, MTPD has the largest jurisdiction of any police department in Minnesota. Like other state agencies, MTPD is a specialty department and was created to supplement and not replace the primary police authorities in the local jurisdictions. We operate from a Minneapolis headquarters in the Cedar-Riverside area and also staff a substation adjacent the busy Mall of America Transit Center in Bloomington. An

additional new substation is in the works as we prepare for light rail service in downtown St. Paul and the recently renovated Union Depot in 2014.

MTPD officers have a unique challenge in that we serve a mobile community. The traditional idea of responding to and freezing a static crime scene doesn't apply aboard a train moving at 55 mph that may cross geographic boundaries in minutes. Captain Mike LaVine heads up the patrol division and has the challenge of overseeing the day to day operations of a 24/7 multi-jurisdictional police effort.

In spite of our mobile environment, MTPD officers still do traditional patrols like checking bus routes, shelters and responding to thousands of calls in the standard black and white squads. MTPD officers also are walking the beats in downtown Minneapolis and St. Paul, working to keep the peace and address quality of life issues. These beat cops are out daily on foot and by bicycle in the busiest downtown areas. According to Minneapolis Police Deputy Chief, Ed Frizell, the MTPD beat teams have been a major asset in the First Precinct, which saw robberies drop by over 40 percent last year.

One approach that is truly unique to MTPD is the onboard teams that ride buses and trains. Today, officers spend about 20,000 hours per year on buses—a six-fold increase from just six years ago. These officers are unique in that they patrol as the traditional beat cops; however their beat is a mobile and moving beat. They are checking for trouble and enforcing transit rules, city ordinances and state statutes while moving between neighborhoods, cities, and even counties. Recently MTPD has gone back to using plainclothes officers for on-board patrol - mirroring the work done by the US Air Marshals in the sky. Keeping transit secure requires a combination of visible deterrence and keeping the bad guys guessing.

Specialized bomb detection canine and counter-terrorism units are another unique aspect of policing the transit system. When we look back at the history of terrorism, it is easy to see that public transportation has been repeatedly picked as a target. Suicide bombers in Israel,



Officer Alex Johannes and Bomb Detection K9 Merle

Madrid and of course London have prompted U.S. transit agencies to be especially vigilant about the possibility of terrorism. Counter terrorism is a blend of visible deterrence,



Officer Amy Keyes and Officer Waheid Siraach

intelligence gathering and covert observation. Recognizing aberrant behavior is a skill that pays a premium in a transit environment.

Annually there are about 6.9 incidents that MTPD responds to in the transit system per 100,000 customer trips. The vast majority are quality of life crimes such as public intoxication, fights, drug use, loitering, drinking on transit property, and fare evasion; although we have seen some increases in assaults on operators and thefts and robberies (especially of electronic devices) over the past few years. Lieutenant Chuck Donaldson heads a full-time detective unit with two sergeant detectives and a career-enrichment-officer to work these cases. Over the last year we have seen an above average 65 percent clearance rate on operator felony assaults and over 30 percent clearance on theft of phones and other electronics. With almost 1,000 cases to investigate per year, the unit is one of busiest for its size. Overall, transit crime in the Twin Cities is down about 45 percent over the past six years; due to the outstanding MTPD patrol officers and investigative staff.

Each Metro Transit bus and train also includes access to the public safety 800 MHz radio system and are outfitted with multi-camera video systems. Rail stations, transit centers and dozens of Park & Ride locations throughout the metro area are also viewed remotely by cameras on site or mobile units that can be deployed as needed. These digital recording cameras produce high-quality video and audio that are useful in identifying and prosecuting offenders as well as providing evidence to address injury and accident claims. One element that adds to a successful



Officer Alex Johannes and Officer Waheid Siraach

investigation is that transit facilities and vehicles have high-quality video cameras and it is rare that part of the incident isn't captured to some degree from one or more angles. The many customers aboard buses and trains and transit staff also often provide excellent witness accounts. According to Lt. Donaldson, video evidence, coupled with sound police work, recently led to arrests and charges in 15 of 17 felony-level bus operator assault cases. In 2010, compelling video was instrumental in determining a 27-year sentence for a Minneapolis man who fired a gun on a bus wounding two men he believed to be rival gang members. The effectiveness of technology for prevention, surveillance and investigations cannot be overstated.

### PARTNERSHIPS and PROBLEM SOLVING

Partnerships are essential for all law enforcement agencies, but particularly so for us. Partnerships with local agencies, community and business groups such as Target, the Minneapolis Downtown Improvement District (DID), Securian and the St. Paul Business Owners and Managers Association (BOMA) are integral to MTPD's success.

Metro Transit Police partner with the primary law enforcement agencies of the scores of those municipalities that make up the Twin Cities metro area. One key partnership is the annual Safe Zone initiative in downtown Minneapolis. Our officers join with Minneapolis Police Department officers, Hennepin County Sheriff Office deputies and building security



Sergeant Lori Ammend

officials in a concerted effort to track behavior and increase enforcement activities during the summer when more people tend to congregate. Whether it's through Safe Zone or being on hand at large events like Twins and Vikings games, Metro Transit Police have played a key role in maintaining order in the lively downtown center of one of the largest U.S. cities.

This past summer as gang activity spiked in downtown St. Paul, Metro Transit Beat Officers Pete Peterson and Leo Castro led a problem-solving effort to work with the SPPD Downtown Beat to address youth gang activity. Supplemented with overtime funding, the project resulted in a safer and more crime-free downtown area. This year we are already looking to expand the success we had by adding more beat officers, adding a Sergeant to work on coordination, and partnering with the YWCA and God Squad to prevent crime and redirect youth in St. Paul.

Over the past several years, Metro Transit Police have been awarded several millions of dollars in competitive federal grants to increase security and provide deterrence and

*Continued on page 10*

public awareness. Lieutenant James Franklin, who runs the Counter Terrorism Unit, has been a driving force in working with our federal partners. The Transportation Security Administration and Federal Air Marshals accompany transit officers intermittently on saturation patrols and VIPR details throughout the year. Throughout 2010 and 2011, Metro Transit Police used one such grant to train operational staff on heightened awareness and reporting of suspicious activity. This grant led to nearly 900 bus operators and other front-line staff through basic security awareness and terrorism recognition and reaction programs. The training further strengthened Metro Transit's public safety posture. Another grant paid for train-the-trainer active shooter training. MTPD officers will all be trained in active shooter response in 2013.

Homeland Security partners have also joined with Metro Transit on a 'If You See Something, Say Something' public awareness campaign including large-scale advertisements on buses and trains. These investments and efforts have paid off for the region – in August, Metro Transit Police received an overall score of 100 percent in a comprehensive security assessment conducted by the Transportation Security Administration (TSA). Metro Transit received a 100 percent or "Excellent" rating in each of the 17 functional areas and a composite score of 100 percent.

Cooperation, with non-law enforcement partners, is highlighted through the good work done by the Minneapolis chapter of MAD DADS, a well respected national community outreach organization, to improve the bus-riding experience on high ridership routes. MAD DADS members ride select Metro Transit routes hundreds of times each month to interact with customers and officers, enhance bus-riding etiquette and improve civility. MAD DADS also connect those in need with community services that can enhance their lives, providing thousands of referrals each year. MAD DADS and other community organizations joined with Metro Transit Police in a joint security and community relations program throughout much of 2012 focusing patrols on the busiest routes running through North Minneapolis and also attending events – like National Night Out – to meet neighbors and establish a more visible and Metro Transit presence.

To quote the Reverend Martin Luther King "We are caught in an inescapable web of mutuality, whatever effects one individually affects us all". Working with our police and community partners as well as with bus and rail operations, is essential to our success. Whether it's a Transit Communication Center monitoring a rail platform remotely by camera or an onboard team working with an operator to chase down and catch a robber, we are all in this together.

### **ON TRACK TO GROWTH**

In 2014, the region's second light-rail line, the 11-mile Green Line, will open connecting the downtowns of Minneapolis and St. Paul, as well as the University of Minnesota, along University Ave. This presents a new opportunity and challenge for the department. In order to serve the Green Line, we'll be adding more positions as we assume additional responsibilities. This is really a new chapter for

Metro Transit Police and we're engaging it from top to bottom. We're involving the entire department in reviewing and refining our mission and our everyday work to all have the same focus as we build the Twin Cities' transit system for the 21st century.

As part of that effort, in mid-2012 a departmental review was commissioned by the Metropolitan

Council and the Upper Midwest Community Policing Institute (UMCPI) was selected to provide a thorough review and report. Chief David Indrehus had just retired and a search for a new chief of police had begun. After a nine-month search and selection process, I was honored to be sworn in as Chief. I was very familiar with the department having served Metro Transit Police in various capacities on a part-time basis in the 1980s and 1990s and from partnered efforts with SPPD. I came back to transit from the legislature because I still loved being a cop and because I believed that my commitment to the values of excellence, empathy, ethics and esteem were a good fit for a department that was going to grow. The addition of rail service, growing ridership, serving new communities, advances in technology and the threat of terroristic activity are some of the new challenges and opportunities we face.

MTPD has already begun to address many of the issues raised in the UMCPI assessment. A team of officers was convened to draft a new mission statement and outline what the core values of transit policing should be. A recruiting effort is underway as the department is expected to double the number of part time officers and CSOs in the next year. Fulltime positions are also going to increase as we look to grow to 90 full-time peace officers. Recruiting for diversity is going to be incredibly important as the department grows to meet the ideal that police departments should be reflective of the communities they serve. In 2012, we expect to see MTPD grow both as a COP operation, with twice as many beats and a citizen police academy already in the planning stages, and as POP department mirroring some of the success that Chief Bill Bratton brought to NYPD by doing more with Comstat. We have already begun launching "broken windows" policing efforts to address youth gangs and homelessness concerns.

On board, on foot and on the rails we expect that Metro Transit Police will be growing as a department that is committed to the personal safety of the community, the riders and the operators. MTPD will be a department that is meeting the challenge of urban crime and homeland security by working in partnership to solve problems and reduce violence.



*Officer Waheid Siraach*