

Project Background

TriMet reallocates \$1.8 million in funding from Transit Police and additional sources to community-based services that preserve public safety

[June 17, 2020](#) by [Roberta Altstadt](#)

Hearing community's concerns, TriMet shifts security funding to community-based public safety services to keep riders and employees safe

TriMet shares the outrage, frustration and pain over the recent tragic and senseless deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Atatiana Jefferson and Ahmaud Arbery. Their deaths and those of too many others lost to unconscionable violence, magnify the systemic racism, discrimination and disparate treatment against African Americans and other people of color still rampant in this country. The movement that we see happening across Portland and the country reflects a national awakening of the need for immediate, yet lasting change to stop racial injustice once and for all. Today, TriMet is joining the community in taking action.

"At TriMet, we condemn acts of hate—be they deliberate or veiled, explicit, or indirect," says TriMet General Manager Doug Kelsey. "We hold fast to our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. TriMet's core value is the safety of all our riders and employees. That includes being safe from racial bias."

Transit plays a critical social equity role, providing access to jobs as well as mobility for those who can't afford to own a car and people with disabilities that prevent them from driving. Studies suggest that access to high quality transit is an important factor in addressing generational poverty. Good public transit is arguably the most important tool in our effort to combat climate change, which disproportionately affects people of color and low income communities. However, to be successful in serving those ends, transit must be safe and equitable for all.

To help fulfill that promise, TriMet is undertaking a series of immediate short-term actions and pursuing long-term considerations as part of this year's budget process. Moving forward, TriMet will reduce existing police contracts by six positions and redirect additional funds totaling \$1.8 million to community-based public safety approaches.

Piloting community-based public safety approaches

For the next fiscal year starting July 1, TriMet will initiate three efforts to inform a reimagined public safety approach:

- Conduct community-wide listening sessions to gather feedback from riders, front-line employees and community members on the best approaches to providing security on the transit system that is free from bias.
- Establish a panel of local and national experts to advise TriMet on national best practices for transit security, equity and community engagement in safety and security.

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- Pilot new non-police response resources, such as mobile crisis intervention teams for mental and behavioral health issues.

TriMet knows security matters to our riders. We will retain Transit Police officers on the system as they play a vital role in preventing crimes against riders and employees, while also responding if a serious incident does occur. Having officers dedicated to transit allows them to become familiar with TriMet staff, how the system works and the needs of our riders. Officers are able to provide riders and employees assistance in addition to security. However, TriMet recognizes not all situations that happen on our transit system and in the communities we serve require a police response. That is why we want to pilot alternative approaches to public safety on transit, such as the mobile response crisis programs and other unarmed alternatives.

Reimagining public safety on transit

TriMet wants to ensure people of all races, religions, cultures and gender feel supported on the system. To do so, we want to engage our riders, partners, community-based experts and the public. Within the next 90 days, we plan several community listening sessions, hosted by community-based facilitators. We'll also conduct internal and external surveys with our riders and front-line employees, and engage Transit Police officers and our contract security staff.

"This is an important continuation of TriMet's efforts to ensure the safety and equity of our system," said Kelsey. "As we develop our plans for reinforcing a transit system that is equitable and fair to all, we need input from our riders, our front-line employees, the community, mental health experts and others who work closely with people who are houseless or struggling with addiction. We're asking all of you to help us reimagine public safety on transit."

TriMet appreciates Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler's support for the continuation of the City of Portland's participation in the Transit Police Division through December 31, to allow time for a thorough community conversation and thoughtful transition process. We thank everyone for their patience as this process will take some time to make sure we identify proven and effective strategies that will make the transit system better not just for today but for the future.

Equity steps TriMet has taken

The new actions TriMet is announcing today join the steps and actions we've taken over the past five years, in coordination with our Transit Equity Advisory Committee, to make our transit system fair and equitable:

- Initiated two independent analyses ([in 2016](#) and [in 2018](#)) of our fare citation process that found no systemic racial bias.
- Decriminalized fare enforcement by [soliciting in 2017 a change in state law](#) to allow TriMet to resolve fare evasion citations directly rather than citations automatically going to the court.
- Reduced the punitive impacts of fare evasion penalties in July 2018 with [potential for reduced fines, community service or enrollment in TriMet's Honored Citizen reduced fare program](#).
- [Implemented a low income fare program in 2018](#) that has allowed more than 30,000 people to ride with Honored Citizen reduced fare, a 72% discount over TriMet's base fare.

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- Changed TriMet Code as of December 2018 to [clarify that fare evasion only is not a crime](#) and have discontinued routine fare checks by police.
- Increased unarmed security personnel beginning in 2017 in response to community concerns over militarized security presence.
- Worked with regional district attorneys in December 2016 to dramatically reduce the use of Interfering with Public Transportation (IPT) charges.
- Implemented additional training in spring 2019 for contract security staff and fare inspectors related to community safety practices, de-escalation and non-confrontational interactions.