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PROCEEDINGS —

Fifteenth Annual Meeting

Theme:

“Transportation in Focus”

October 10-11-12, 1974

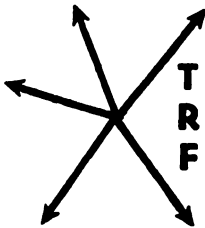
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TRANSPORTATION RESEARCH FORUM

IN 1968-69, a major study of robbery and assault of bus drivers was undertaken by a joint research team from Stanford Research Institute and the School of Criminology of the University of California, Berkeley (Ref. 1.2). A summary of the findings of this work is presented as Appendix A in the form of a reprint of a paper published in *Operations Research*. The reason for bringing up this seemingly ancient history is that, as best as can be determined, little has changed in the interim. The thrust of the present paper is to report on the situation as it exists in 1974.

The earlier study indicated that the problem of robbery had been largely eliminated by the institution of the exact fare requirement together with locked fare boxes. Eliminating the need for drivers to carry change had eliminated the object of most robberies. However, the study also strongly pointed out that the assault problem had not been eliminated and that vandalism caused major economic losses about which virtually nothing was being done.

To assess the current situation, data were obtained in two cities: Oakland and Los Angeles, Ca. In addition, conversations were held with people from various other cities which tend to confirm that the experiences of these two places are typical of the national situation.

OAKLAND

As is typically the case, when discussing these problems with transit officials, the main information obtained is the impression and feel of the situation. AC Transit in Oakland reports that the number of assaults is not reduced, but that the severity of the assaults has decreased. Since assault covers the range of activities from verbal abuse of the driver by a passenger to bodily harm, the implication is that current activities are more at the former end of the scale than at the latter. The following numerical data are reported for the first 4 months of 1974:

Total No. of Incidents:	160
No. of Incidents Involving the Driver:	75
Verbal abuse of driver	18
Passenger altercations	32
Physical assault on driver	25
No. of Pieces of Equipment Damaged by People:	84

Another interesting trend is an increase in altercations between passengers. In fact, 2 killed each other on a bus this year.

Vandalism in Oakland continues at a steady pace. Damage is incurred both to the outside and to the inside of buses. Annual losses to interiors are approximately \$125,000. School buses operated

by AC Transit are particularly troublesome today just as they were then. Here the bus serves as a convenient outlet for the day's pentup aggression of the youngsters and the equipment takes a beating. In an attempt to counter the school bus vandalism problem, the company has hired 2 linebackers from the Oakland Raiders football team to visit the schools on a public relations campaign. The message being delivered is that buses are for kids. AC Transit believes it is having success with this program and plans to repeat it in the 1974-75 school year. However, direct data on program effectiveness are not available.

The assault problem appears to AC Transit officials (as is the case elsewhere) to be a cyclic phenomenon with periods of high and low activity. Since assault seems to be on the upswing at present, a counter-measure program has been established. Their basic idea is to hire their own security force. Because they hope the problem is temporary and because they prefer not to have to establish their own force, an outside protective agency has been hired at a cost of \$48,000/year. This agency provides radio equipped cars that can be notified in case of trouble. Here the link is from the driver via his radio to central dispatch to the security vehicle. In addition, both the outside agency and the city police provide actual physical protection on the buses by providing plainclothes and uniformed riders and vehicles in areas of trouble.

Because of the costs involved, this protective service has concentrated on "hot spots." Again, hard data on effectiveness are not available; however, the impression is that this approach results in a reduction of incidents as word of the protection gets around the neighborhoods. The typical lag between action and information has been observed; that is, reductions in incidents take place some time after the institution of this countermeasure. Furthermore, incidents stay down for some time after the guards are removed but tend to go up again after a while.

One of the findings of our earlier study was that driver training methods could be used to help alleviate the problem. It had been observed that some drivers appear to be involved more often than others in assault situations and that, in part, driver attitudes can set up assault situations. This idea is now being recognized by AC Transit. They have hired an outside firm to undertake a retraining program in human relations for all drivers. This firm had previously undertaken a similar program for the California Highway Patrol.

No attempts are being made to provide

Robbery and Assault of Bus Drivers Revisited

by Paul Gray*

physical protection for the driver such as encapsulating him in a shield. The arguments given are that there are union objections from a safety point of view and that an attempt to do so in Boston had failed.

LOS ANGELES

In October 1973, Los Angeles experienced a series of assaults on drivers and passengers in its South Central section that were sufficiently severe that a labor stoppage was imminent. Through a series of negotiations, Mayor Tom Bradley was able to forestall a strike. As is typically the case, an LEAA grant application was made for additional radio communications and alarms for buses and pushed through the local criminal justice coordinating group. As our previous study indicates, this measure by itself will probably have little effect.

More important, the Los Angeles Police Department assigned its special roving unit, the Metropolitan Division to work on the problem. The Metropolitan Division is a 200 man task force that goes after special problems as they occur. Their task was to provide massive police visibility and support to try to calm things down. The following information is based on conversations with the head of the Metropolitan Division.

The basic idea of the task force is to show police visibility for a period of time until the problem is resolved. Tactics included such actions as following buses, rapid response to calls for help, the use of alarms, and boarding of buses. To achieve more rapid response, the police stationed an officer at the transit district's central dispatch office with the capability for relaying information at once to units in the field.

To provide police visibility, police would meet buses at corners, get on board, chat with the driver, and depart. This program is similar to one tried in Chicago some years ago and later abandoned.

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done. There it was found that the record system used (police obtaining a card from the driver) was being abused by the police because they would obtain several cards from the driver each time they made a contact.

The Metropolitan Division believes its efforts to have been successful and has since moved on to other problems. Certainly the problem is not sufficiently severe at this time to cause labor unrest.

With an intensive program underway, false alarms did not prove to be a serious problem. The system has been used not only to deal with assault but also to deal with drunks and other public nuisances. There has been good cooperation from both the Transit District and the union.

CONCLUSIONS

These brief case studies, together with reports from other jurisdictions, indicate that the problem of assault against bus drivers remains with us. It appears to be a problem that waxes and wanes. As incidents build up, they tend to beget other incidents. Assaulting of drivers becomes fashionable. Countermeasures are taken, typically involving the use of police or private security forces. These countermeasures may or may not have an effect on the number of incidents. However, they are perceived by the drivers and the public to be a response and the assault "problem" is believed solved. After a period of time, it reappears either because of an actual increase or a perceived increase by drivers. Vandalism remains a constant problem. However, it appears to be one that transit properties seem to be willing to live with since few countermeasures are undertaken.

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