



KING COUNTY SOUTH
LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS, KING COUNTY SOUTH

Violence in Public Transportation

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Violence in Public Transportation in South King County Final Report

Acknowledgements

The League of Women Voters, King County South Violence Committee would like to acknowledge help provided that made this study possible.

Jim Jacobson, Deputy General Manager, Metro Transit Division was kind enough to provide data and his time to talk to our team about violence on public transportation in south King County. He also answered numerous phone inquiries. Without his help we would not have much the facts and data provided in this report.

Lindsey Tiroux, Crime Analyst & Prevention Specialist, Federal Way Police Department met with our team and gave us valuable background and education in types of crimes and how data is gathered. She also provided data and resources that made this study possible.

The Muckleshoot Tribe has provided on-going financial support to the League of Women Voters, King County South over many years making it possible for us to continue to look at issues such as violence on transportation.

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Summary:

The League of Women Voters, King County South looked at violence in public transportation. The information gathered was used as the basis for a conversation about safety on buses and light rail in south King County. There was not a high ridership represented in the people that participated in the discussions; however most participants had used the buses or light rail infrequently in recent years. Our overall finding was people are concerned about their safety when using public transportation at night. Other concerns or suggestions discussed centered on bus stop safety the need for more frequent buses after events, and better lighting.

Study Scope:

Develop a framework of facts and data to be use in a public conversation about violence on public transportation in south King County. Find out how people feel about violence on public transportation and if there is something that can be done to increase their use of public transportation.

Background:

Specific concerns about violence incidents at Metro and Sound Transit facilities in Seattle and Federal Way were the reason the scope of this study was narrowed, with LWVKCS Board approval, from violence in general to violence on public transportation in south King County. South King County is defined as south of Highway 405/518. Based on data availability, the study was further refined to cover only Metro.

The study committee (Ann McNeely, Cindy Piennett, and Mary Ehlers) worked to gather data to determine the frequency and severity of violent incidents and the criminal justice system's response.

Information was found online and using the Request for Public Records process. Committee members met with Lindsey Tiroux, Public Education Office of the Federal Way Police Department, and Jim Jacobson, Deputy General Manager of King County Metro Transit Division. Both were very cooperative and helpful.

Metro Security:

Prior to 2003, security was provided by off-duty police officers. Since 2006 Metro security has evolved to now having a detail of 70 full-time county sheriff officers. Cameras were put on buses starting about five years ago and are presently on 25% of buses. In additional, all Metro drivers have instant communication technology available in case of an emergency. Non-emergency problems, such as fare evasion, are tracked by means of the driver filing a Security Incident Report at the end of their shift. They are paid for this work; approximately 5000 reports are generated yearly. For a population of 2,000,000 riders per week, approximately two arrests are made per week.

Metro Felony Index Crimes for South King County*

Aggravated Assault		Robbery		Rape	
2009	2010	2009	2010	2009	2010
9	5	14	6	1	0

*Data provided by Metro and King County Metro Transit Police

It should be noted that there were no reported incidents of homicide for 2009 and/or 2010 that occurred at any King County Metro Transit facility or on any Transit vehicle.

Crime Statistics:

All law enforcement jurisdictions are mandated by the state to collect and report data on the following Index Crimes: **homicide, rape, robbery, aggravated assault**, burglary, larceny, vehicle theft, and arson. For this study's purpose, only data from the first four categories were gathered (bolded).

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Some jurisdictions, notably King County Sheriff's office, post reports online. In addition, to unincorporated King County, the Sheriff's office currently provides public safety service by contract with the south King County cities of Maple Valley, Covington, SeaTac, and Burien. Data for these cities can be found through the Sheriff's website. Data from other cities must be requested individually; the Request Form is downloadable from many cities' websites. Response time varies depending on staff availability, but generally within a few days. There is significant variation in how the data is recorded depending on the individual entities structure of operations. Data older than seven years is likely unavailable. We requested data from the years 2003, 2006, and 2009 with the thought of seeing a trend. It became apparent that changes in jurisdictional boundaries and report forms, made this unrealistic.

Other Public Security Transportation facts:

- Metro is funded by 0.09% of King County sales tax; budget priorities (more buses, security, driver pay, etc) within Metro dictate spending.
- Metro and Sound Transit are two separate entities.
- There is no official coordination of jurisdictions involved with public transportation. An incident occurring near a bus stop would perhaps be reported to and handled by the police in that area. When a victim leaves the site of a Metro crime (goes home or to the hospital) and then reports, the incident is normally tied to the reporting location, not the occurrence location. Metro encourages, but does not require other agencies to share reports.
- Problems on a bus may not be reported to the driver (so no incident report filed) or reported to locale police later.
- The 2-10pm shift has the highest rate of problems.

Other thoughts:

- There are differing opinions about the effectiveness of onboard cameras as a deterrent to violence, plus the expense of buying, maintaining, and operating the system are considerations.
- There is a likely, though unproven, link between youth violence, mental illness laws and treatment and crime on Metro. The Metro system is the de facto senior high school transportation system for many districts.
- The recent release of people arrested for gang-related crimes coincides with increase in incidents of violence.

Websites:

WASPC.org (Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs)

KingCounty.gov/safety/sheriff/crimestats.aspx

Metro.kingcounty.gov/am/reports/reports.html

<http://metro.kingcounty.gov/am/reports/2009/2009YE-RTC.pdf>

Soundtransit.org

FBI.org

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Unit Meeting Discussion Questions:

1. What are your concerns regarding your safety on public transportation?
2. How does concern for your personal safety influence your use of public transportation?
3. What would make you feel safer on public transportation?
4. What has not been discussed regarding safety on public transportation?

Discussion Findings:

Three unit meetings were held to explore the discussion questions during the month of April 2011. The general public was invited to these meetings via newspaper notices and flyers on community bulletin boards. A Conversation Café discussion approach was used at all the meetings. This approach promotes civil discussion by providing a framework for the discussion questions, requires speakers to be recognized before speaking, and imposes time limits. Conversation Cafes are designed to encourage learning, listening and the sharing of views.

The participants all had used public transportation, but most were not frequent users. Some had used buses to commute into Seattle when working, but no longer did. The discussions at each of the unit meetings found a common concern about using public transportation at night. It was generally agreed that better lighting and more frequent service especially after events downtown would reduce concerns.

Several participants had been made to feel uncomfortable by other riders. However no one had personally experienced violence while on public transportation. Incidences were related that they had heard about.

Multiple participants expressed concern about safety while waiting for the bus at downtown locations like First Avenue and Third Street. This was especially true at night. One solution discussed was having more visible security at those locations.

There was general agreement that better reporting and tracking of violence incidents associated with transit travel should be looked at. The goal should be to establish a collective database for the region with all law enforcement elements contributing.

Specific comments to each of the discussion questions can be found in the Unit Meeting Results at the end of this report.

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Metro Transit Police

2009 Annual Report

ACTIVITY SUMMARY

	2008	2009	Percent Change
Dispatched Calls For Service	2,913	2,764	-5.1%
On-views	18,465	31,691	71.6%
Adult Charges	1,543	1,552	0.6%
Juvenile Charges	161	140	-13.0%
Infractions	1,333	1,069	-19.8%
Total Activity	24,415	37,216	52.4%

ACTIVITY COUNTS

DISPATCHED CALLS	2009
Unlawful Bus Conduct	392
Area Check Transit Property	286
Bus Escort	16
Bus Ride	6
Fare Evasion	25
Liquor Violation	91
Metro Base Contact	4
Parking Violation/Bus Zone	121
Sleeper Removal	462
Vandalism	45
Vucsa	24
Robberies	27
Fights	21
Thefts	28
Vehicle Thefts or Attempts	1
Warrant Arrests	29
All Other	1,186
Total	2,764

ON-VIEWS	2009
Unlawful Bus Conduct	949
Area Check Transit Property	13,149
Bus Escort	2,747
Bus Ride	555
Fare Evasion	74
Liquor Violation	872
Metro Base Contact	114
Parking Violation/Bus Zone	74
Sleeper Removal	413
Vandalism	78
Vucsa	272
Robberies	25
Fights	14
Thefts	43
Vehicle Thefts or Attempts	12
Warrant Arrests	217
All Other	12,083
Total	31,691

ADULT AND JUVENILE CHARGES, ARRESTS, AND CITATIONS ISSUED

	Adult Arrests	Juvenile Arrests	Citations Issued (Adult & Juvenile)	Total Arrests & Citations
Unlawful Bus Conduct	277	20	36	333
Fare Evasion	40	1	0	41
Liquor Violation	106	9	502	617
Parking Violation/Bus Zone	0	0	71	71
Sleeper Removal	3	0	52	55
Vucsa	195	19	0	214
Robberies	2	9	0	11
Fights	0	0	0	0
Thefts	16	1	0	17
Vehicle Thefts or Attempts	0	5	1	6
Warrant Arrests	113	7	0	120
All Other	800	69	407	1,276
TOTAL	1,552	140	1,069	2,761

NOTE:

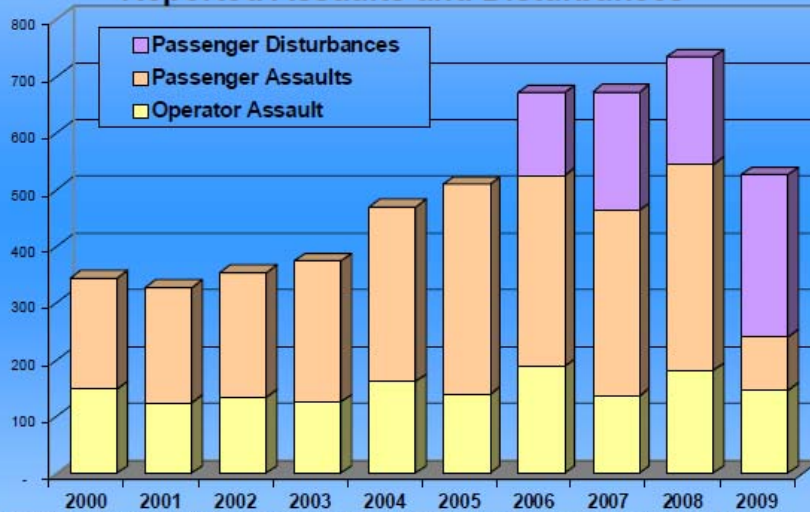
This information is based on calls dispatched and on-viewed by Metro Transit Police. It does not include metro related calls handled by other police jurisdictions.

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Assaults

This is an important measure of security for transit operators, as well as for customers.

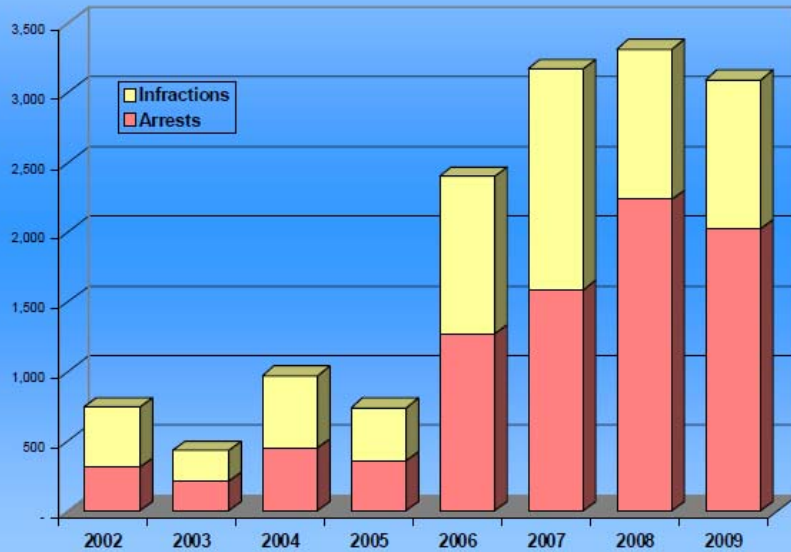
Reported Assaults and Disturbances



Passenger vs. Passenger Assaults reflect a change in the counting beginning in 2006. Any assault which is defined as a fight between passengers (no clear victim) will be counted as a Passenger Physical Disturbance rather than a Passenger Assault.

Arrests and Infractions on Transit Coaches and Property

- Arrests and infractions decreased 6.7% in 2009.



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Unit Meeting Results

- Federal Way Unit 3/16/11 - 7 participants
- Enumclaw Unit 3/8/11 - 3 participants
- Burien Unit 3/14/11 – 7 participants

Discussion Questions

1. What are your concerns regarding your safety on public transportation?

Federal Way:

- Night bus stops in downtown – too risky, so takes the train (Link)
- Waiting for the bus, getting to/from the car and out of the parking lot – not while on the bus
- Vandalism of cars at the Park-n-ride
- During the daytime is threatening, when crowded, not sharing seats, etc. Seen lots of police action, just depends on luck, violence is random
- No concerns
- Last bus is scheduled too early; can't take, since don't want to get trapped in downtown with no way to get home after Theater / event.
- Drinking alcohol / drugs on the bus, get off the bus with her and walk with her to her destination

Enumclaw:

- Depends on Route. Frequent user dislikes Kent route- more "Weird" people. Feels the attitude / demeanor of the driver can make a difference in level of feeling safe
- Bus stops can be problem area- no specific examples given

Burien:

- Little or no safety concerns while on the busses or light rail.
- Concern about safety while waiting for the bus, especially in the downtown areas.
- Concern about safety at night, both while waiting for transportation and while walking to and from the bus stops.

2. How does concern for your personal safety influence your use of public transportation?

Federal Way:

- Not an influence: 4 respondents
- Saw violence, still ride the bus
- Buses do not go late enough to be out late for a show, can use Link
- As an infrequent user, when some stops have changed, returning home is worrisome.
- Inconvenience of schedule
- Comfort (e.g., rain, freezing temperatures) versus safety
- Difficult to get down stairs at Tukwila
- Wheelchair concerns re: night attacks

Enumclaw:

- Unanimous "No"

Burien:

- Do not use the bus at night.
- Do not use the bus to get to events at the Seattle Center due to the transfers needed to get there and home and the limited scheduled transportation.

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3. What would make you feel safer on public transportation?

Federal Way:

- Uniformed police officers at hot spot transit locations
- Adjust bus schedule, so that there are no long waits to transfer
- Make more comfortable to wait, but not too comfortable (night lighting, solar panels for lighting, cover against rain)
- Cameras do not get more safety, they just record violence
- Feeder bus, community buses – increase frequency and for longer hours, e.g., #183 bus

Enumclaw:

- Uniformed security officer on the bus
- Less overcrowding

Burien:

- Better lighting at stops.
- More frequent buses home from events in town to limit wait time.
- More security at transfer points in Seattle such as at First Ave and Third Ave, where groups gather to catch the bus.

4. What has not been discussed regarding safety on public transportation?

Federal Way:

- Until you feel that you cannot afford to drive privately (cost or time), you won't take the bus, e.g., you don't have a car, can't use HOV lanes during rush hour
- Park-n-rides in the city
- Access bus we are not eligible for?
- DART – expensive to operate, need to set up in advance – not used enough?
- Offensive behavior – do not want to confront it
- Service interruptions – need way to communicate / notify
- Reader board, like BART in San Francisco, “bus# __ coming in 3 minutes and 21 minutes”
- Appreciate assertive bus drivers who passengers when older people need seat
- Medical assistance – bus driver calls
- Share rides, Smart Car, Zip Car
- Walkability Score

Enumclaw:

- Systems like San Francisco's whereby user can call up information on cellphone to find out exactly when the bus will arrive at the stop, thereby able to plan the amount of time needed to reach the bus stop and avoid lengthy waits.
- More cameras on the bus
- More public education on how to deal with agitated or aggressive people

Burien:

- The brochure on personal safety on public transportation is quite good.
- Scheduled transportation home from downtown events to the south end is lacking.
- Returning home is the most worrisome, especially when events have caused the bus stops to be temporarily changed.
- Wish there was better evening transportation home from events at Benaroya Hall.