

## Multnomah County Sheriff's Office takes command of TriMet's Transit Police Division

*The sheriff's office becomes the lead law enforcement agency for the multi-agency police division helping to reshape public safety on transit*



The Multnomah County Sheriff's Office (MCSO) will assume command of TriMet's Transit Police Division following approval of an intergovernmental agreement by the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners today. The first phase of the multi-year agreement will go into effect on April 1, 2021, and last until June 30, 2025, with MCSO providing law enforcement direction to the Transit Police Division during this time. After that, the agreement will be automatically renewed for three one-year periods through June 30, 2028, unless it's terminated before then.

The agreement is the next of several steps to create public safety measures that emphasize community partnerships and racial equity. Shifting command and administrative support of Transit Police to MCSO will better link people to services offered by Multnomah County. The sheriff's office is a leader in developing new approaches like the [Homeless Outreach and Programs Engagement \(HOPE\) Team](#), an innovative program that connects people to resources that can help them get back on their feet.

“With the Multnomah County Sheriff's Office taking the helm of the Transit Police Division, we're able to continue our efforts to make our system safer and more equitable,” said TriMet Interim General Manager Sam Desue, Jr. “The sheriff's office is a regional leader in community policing and truly takes to heart how TriMet's adjusting our approach to safety on the system to make riding a welcoming experience for all.”

The Transit Police Division is currently made up of officers from six law enforcement agencies in jurisdictions TriMet serves. As the command agency, MCSO will provide a captain to serve as TriMet Transit Chief of Police, as well as lieutenants, sergeants and deputies. Overall, the 7-year agreement will not exceed \$82.5 million, or about \$12 million a year, with TriMet reimbursing MCSO for salaries, overtime and equipment.

“I believe MCSO truly reflects the values of Multnomah County, and our approach to public safety on the transit system is rooted in equity and compassion,” Sheriff Mike Reese said. “Our role is to provide safety across the system, for riders and employees, who rely on public transportation every day to get to work, school, appointments and recreational opportunities. This agreement allows for Transit Police to continue its commitment to a collaborative approach, while leveraging opportunities unique to Multnomah County and the Sheriff’s Office, such as homeless outreach services and behavioral health programs. A safe transit system is central to a healthy and thriving community.”

## Reimagining public safety

The agreement comes after months of candid conversations about how best to reimagine public safety on transit. TriMet began this process on July 1, 2020, when [we set aside \\$1.8 million in police contracts](#). The money will be redirected to community-supported programs and used to expand TriMet’s approach to safety beyond the use of traditional law enforcement. This model allows for policing resources to be directed to where they’re needed most. To this end, the agreement reiterates that TriMet staff, not Transit Police officers, conduct routine fare enforcement activities.

TriMet spent months reaching out to the community, engaging with local leaders and listening to riders, employees and the general public. We collaborated with the Coalition of Communities of Color, Portland United Against Hate and other groups to gather comments from their members about what they saw as roadblocks to safety. Through this initiative, the feedback we received—more than 12,500 responses—showed that the majority of riders and employees feel safer knowing that Transit Police are available to respond to emergencies.

In response to this community feedback, TriMet's Transit Public Safety Advisory Committee recommended adding more training for security personnel and putting more staff on the system. It also called for creating mobile safety teams to assist individuals with behavioral health needs. We are preparing a five-year strategic plan for transit police that will support the broader reimagine public safety initiative, and that plan will develop performance measurements for Transit Police activities.

## Making transit safe and equitable

Transit Police have been investigating crimes and responding to emergencies for more than 40 years, shifting their approach as called on to reflect the evolving needs of riders across TriMet's expanding transit system. Hearing the calls for social justice and racial equity this past summer, we paused to listen to our riders and work with community leaders and organizations to evaluate a shared path forward, one that expands on what we'd done in the past. TriMet has embraced community-based responses and reforms in policing that align with the innovative approach of MCSO.

- In 2016 and 2018 TriMet was at the center of two independent analyses that found no systemic racial bias in our fare enforcement process.
- In 2017, we solicited the Oregon State Legislature to decriminalize fare evasion.
- In 2018, we began offering Honored Citizen fare to riders on a low income, a 72% decrease in fare for those who are eligible.
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TriMet has and will continue to look inward at ways to create a safe and welcoming environment for riders while working with partners to put them into practice. Learn more about our efforts to ensure fair access to our transit system at [trimet.org/equity](https://trimet.org/equity) and follow our process to reimagine public safety at [trimet.org/publicsafety](https://trimet.org/publicsafety).