

## Police unit for CTA nearly ready to ride

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*Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)*; Dec 4, 1986; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune  
pg. A4

# Police unit for CTA nearly ready to ride

By Gary Washburn

Transportation writer

A new Chicago police unit formed to fight crime on Chicago Transit Authority buses could be on duty beginning next month, CTA officials said Wednesday.

An agreement between the police department and the transit authority that would create the special force is expected to be ready for approval by the CTA board at its Dec. 15 meeting, officials reported.

Deployment of the long-awaited, often-delayed unit would come a few weeks later than the most recent goal, a year-end start-up, that had been set by CTA Chairman Walter Clark.

Creation of the force has been stalled for months by uncertainty over long-term funding and difficulty between the CTA and police department in reaching an accord on the unit's operation.

All major issues now have been settled and only a few technical matters remain to be resolved, said Robert Paaswell, CTA executive director.

Paaswell said that the presence of the police unit could lead to increased ridership, not only by cutting crime, but by reducing the perception of danger on the CTA's buses.

Clark said he plans to use the moonlighting Chicago officers 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The unit is expected to have 92 to 96 members, he said.

Robert O'Connor, the CTA's manager of police liaison, said that creation of a similar security unit in Detroit about eight years ago slashed incidents on buses by 50 percent almost immediately, while special forces in Los Angeles and Seattle also reduced crime "considerably" in those cities.

The CTA's unit will be deployed throughout the city, but will concentrate on high-crime routes, O'Connor said. Most officers will work from a fleet of 32 unmarked squad cars purchased by the CTA, though some will ride buses undercover. Officers in some cases will board buses to make quick spot-checks for problems and to enhance their visibility, O'Connor said.

One of two CTA radio frequencies will be reserved for emergency and police use, and officers will be dispatched to trouble spots directly from the CTA's control center after the center receives distress signals from drivers.

Currently, the control center must forward information to the police department, which in turn dispatches officers.

Creation of the special unit was recommended last year in a consultant's report commissioned by the Regional Transportation Authority after several highly publicized assaults aboard CTA buses.

Also on Wednesday, Michael Cardilli, who was CTA chairman until being replaced by Clark last September, visited the authority's offices in his new capacity as vice president and general manager of Management Transportation Associates, Inc., a civil engineering firm based in Springfield.

Cardilli, a stalwart of the Regular Democratic organization, sat in the audience at a CTA board briefing and later told reporters that his firm is seeking to win a

contract with the authority. He declined to say what work the company hopes to do pending consideration of its proposal by the CTA staff.

Clark, a supporter of Mayor Harold Washington, said he was unaware of any contract bids by Cardilli's firm.

On another matter, CTA officials said that "dozens" of new signs have been installed in concourses at O'Hare International Airport to help guide travelers to the airport rapid transit station, and they reported that the city is considering a CTA proposal to install still more signs and advertisements heralding the O'Hare line.

Since the line was extended to the airport three years ago, critics have complained that difficulty in finding the station, located under O'Hare's parking garage, has hurt ridership growth.

The city's Aviation Department has shown a new spirit of cooperation in recent months to promote the line, CTA officials said.