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MetroLink stations to use metal detectors in 4-week pilot program

Fare collection gates, fencing, more coming to help with security

BY MARK SCHLINKMANN
St. Louis Post-Dispatch

ST. LOUIS — Just days after a fatal shooting Saturday morning on a MetroLink train in Maplewood, transit officials plan to begin deploying two mobile metal detectors to help keep guns off the light rail line.

The detectors will be rotated among MetroLink stations in a four-week pilot program, said

Kevin Scott, general manager of security for the Bi-State Development Agency. Scott said he hopes the effort can start in a few weeks.

People will have to walk through a detector to get on the platform at the selected station. If officials decide that the pilot program is effective, he said, more detectors could be added.

Scott said he and others at Bi-State, the parent agency of Metro Transit, had been discussing the metal detector option for months and had been planning to move

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ahead with it soon.

"This isn't just a specific reaction to this incident on Saturday," he said. "You are seeing a proliferation of firearm activity in our region, all over. This is a trend, and I cannot stress this enough, it's not a Metro Transit phenomenon" alone.

Scott said using metal detectors at locations not announced in advance won't in itself solve the problem but can supplement other ongoing steps, such as improving and expanding security cameras and adding police patrols.

Bi-State/Metro also plans to spend \$52 million to install fare collection gates and related fencing at every station, beginning with four in St. Clair County next year.

"All of these are just layers of mitigation to build as much of a security bubble as we can," Scott said.

He also said the detectors also can help build public confidence in the system. "I need people to feel safe on this system as well," he said.

While MetroLink rules bar passengers from carrying firearms,

Scott said the number of guns seized by police and security personnel doubled last year — to about 50 — from the 2021 total.

Scott, however, emphasized that Bi-State/Metro has no plans to install metal detectors at each of its 38 stations across St. Louis, St. Louis County and St. Clair County.

He said it's impractical to require every person go through a detector because of the potential delays involved.

"A TSA-type checking protocol would not work," Scott said. "It's just not going to work with the type of product we have. It would greatly impact our scheduling."

In the Maplewood incident, Terry Alexander, 69, of St. Louis, was charged with second-degree murder in the death of Malachi Brown, 21, also of St. Louis. Police said Alexander displayed a firearm and shot Brown, who returned fire with his own gun.

The shooting was the second gun incident involving MetroLink in recent weeks.

On April 13, two passengers got into a fight that led to gunfire on a train crowded with Cardinals fans headed to the Metro East after that

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night's game at Busch Stadium. No one was hit.

Scott said Bi-State would be paying about \$10,000 for the two detector systems and that police would be on hand whenever they're deployed.

If the detector sets off an alarm, he said, "you'll be able to comply and show us what is setting off the detector or you could leave." He said the goal is not to seize weapons but to keep them off platforms and trains.

A few MetroLink passengers interviewed Thursday afternoon had mixed reactions to the metal detector plan.

Kevin Brock, 54, wondered about the small number of detectors in the pilot plan.

"I don't know if two are going to do anything," said Brock, a government employee from south St. Louis who was waiting for a train at the Civic Center station downtown.

A few blocks east at the station next to Busch Stadium, Bill Aubuchon, 63, a retiree from south St. Louis County, said he thought the detectors might help.

"Who knows?" said Aubu-

chon, who had left the Cardinals' Thursday afternoon game early. "It doesn't hurt to try."

Sharonett Griffin, 55, a project manager from Lake Saint Louis, said the metal detector program "makes me a little more comfortable."

Ryan Castile, 32, of Maryland Heights, said he didn't think the metal detectors are worth it unless they're used at every station.

"They're just going to text each other and (say) don't go here, go there," he said of people with guns.

More police OT pay

Bi-State this week also announced it will spend up to an additional \$750,000 in police overtime pay to increase the number of patrols on trains and platforms this summer.

Taulby Roach, Bi-State CEO, said the goal is to increase visibility of law enforcement during a period in which more riders are expected to head to sports events, concerts and festivals, especially downtown.

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