



**King County**

Department of  
Transportation

# ***News Release***

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## **King County Executive orders Metro Transit to review polices that restrict transit security guards from intervening in criminal activity**

**Guards in surveillance video followed current "observe and report" procedures**

King County Executive Dow Constantine has ordered Metro Transit to review policies that restrict unarmed transit security guards from intervening physically in fights or other criminal activity, following a disturbing chain of events involving the assault and robbery of a teenage girl in the Downtown Seattle Transit Tunnel on January 28.

"Public safety is our top priority. I am appalled by the sight of uniformed guards standing by while a person was kicked and beaten," said Executive Constantine. "I have ordered a full review of all operating polices that govern Metro's contract with civilian security guards to determine what changes must be made. People have an expectation of safety when riding public transit, and we must take every measure we can to assure that."

"The events surrounding this incident are troubling, and the video images distressing," said Metro Transit General Manager Kevin Desmond. "The County Executive has ordered us to work with the Sheriff's Office to review the circumstances surrounding this incident and seek advice from other security experts to determine whether we need to change our security protocols," added Desmond.

To augment Metro's transit police force, it contracts with a civilian firm, Olympic Security Services, Inc., to provide transit security throughout its system. According to Metro policies that govern that contract, unarmed security guards are instructed not to intervene when witnessing suspicious behavior or criminal activity, but to "observe and report" and radio the Metro Transit Control Center, which relays requests for assistance to the appropriate law enforcement agencies.

"Safety and security is Metro's top priority, and we rely on a combination of security guard patrols, uniformed police patrols, field supervisors and various surveillance systems to maintain ongoing safety in the tunnel," Desmond said. "The security guards have a range of duties, including providing routine assistance and safety reminders to customers and reporting suspicious objects, disruptive behavior and equipment problems in the tunnel stations. Intervention by civilian security guards when a violent crime is being committed can have serious consequences for

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bystanders and the guards themselves. Therefore, we will rely on the expertise of our Sheriff's department and others as we review the circumstances surrounding this particular incident, and review a range of issues including the appropriate level of response that should be authorized to effectively defuse such situations."

In addition to contracting with a private security firm, Metro contracts with the King County Sheriff's Office for 68 commissioned officers to provide law enforcement as the Metro Transit Police.

According to police, an apparent argument between several teenagers and young adults inside a downtown Seattle department store preceded the assault and robbery of a 15-year-old by another teenager on the bus tunnel platform at Westlake Station on January 28.

While the department store disturbance prompted an initial response by Seattle Police, the dispute flared up again after the teens arrived at the Westlake Station platform. As the teen was repeatedly punched and kicked, the guards immediately used their radio to call the Transit Control Center, but did not directly intervene in the assault.

Seattle Police arrived minutes later but by that time the suspects and the rest of the group had fled. Officers took an initial report and over the next week the Metro Transit Police investigation of the incident resulted in four arrests last Saturday, including the suspect in the assault.

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