

A Path Forward for Transit Rider Experience and Safety: Lessons from the LA Metro Ambassador Pilot Program

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16. Abstract A growing number of U.S. transit agencies are adding transit ambassadors to their systems to improve the customer service and safety experience for passengers. These personnel can play a variety of different roles, including providing wayfinding, system navigation, fare payment support, and other passenger support roles that enhance the customer experience. This research examines the Los Angeles Metro's transit ambassador program, which began as a pilot in 2022 and is moving in-house in 2025 as a permanent program. Ambassadors provide key customer service functions that are not filled elsewhere. Ambassadors spend most of their time with vital, basic tasks of orienting and aiding riders; they also assist with the first level of homelessness response, with crisis de-escalation, and by administering Narcan to prevent overdoses. Broadly, they provide more eyes on the system and offer a highly visible presence to riders. Training during the pilot period was customer-service oriented but lacked thorough instruction in conflict resolution techniques. The contractor model, while quick to implement and iterate, created some employment drawbacks during the pilot phase, such as paying below living wages, lack of on-the-job resources, and reports of strenuous working conditions. System satisfaction, ratings, and safety perceptions increased over the period ambassadors were deployed, but we lack data to draw firm causal conclusions. The program to date demonstrates progress towards meeting the intention to advance a community safety approach to meeting riders' needs and appears to be making a positive contribution to the system.			
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The UCLA Institute of Transportation Studies acknowledges the Gabrielino/Tongva peoples as the traditional land caretakers of Tovaangar (the Los Angeles basin and So. Channel Islands). As a land grant institution, we pay our respects to the Honuukvetam (Ancestors), ‘Ahihirom (Elders) and ‘Eyoohiinkem (our relatives/relations) past, present and emerging.

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Table

of

Contents

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
I. Introduction	5
Overview	5
II. Program Operations	7
Program Structure.....	7
Training.....	19
III. Ambassadors' Day-to-day Job	26
Methods.....	26
Ambassador Demographics and Prior Experience.....	26
Job Functions Overview.....	27
Customer Service	28
Public Safety	30
Communication with Management.....	32
IV. Ambassadors' Job Quality, Working Conditions, and Pay	35
Ambassadors' Job Quality and Working Conditions	35
Ambassador Pay and Benefits.....	38
V. Ambassadors' Effect on the System	42
Monthly Activity Reports	42
LA Metro's Passenger Survey.....	45
Transit App.....	47
VI. Conclusions and Recommendations for Transit Ambassador Programs	54
Meeting Initial PSAC Goals and LA Metro Approved Priorities.....	54
Ambassadors' Role	56

Promoting Safety.....	57
Connecting Vulnerable Riders to Resources.....	58
Ambassadors’ Job Quality	59
A Moment for Change.....	60
References	62
Appendix A: PSAC Recommendations.....	71
Transit Ambassadors Play a Rider-facing and Welcoming Role	71
Transit Ambassadors’ Presence Promotes Safety for All Riders and Operators	71
Transit Ambassadors Can Connect Vulnerable Riders to Resources and/or Assistance	72
Transit Ambassadors Provide Communities with Access to Good Jobs.....	72
Appendix B. K Line Street Teams	73
Appendix C. Select Questions from LA Metro’s Rider Survey on Ambassadors	74
Appendix D: Comparing Demographic Profiles: Transit App Users and LA Metro On-board Surveys.....	76

List of Tables

Table 1. Comparison of Inflation-adjusted Median Wages in Other Occupations to Ambassador Wages..... 39

Table 2. Frequency of *Transit* App Responses by Question and Period.....49

Table 3. Ordinal Regression Model Results from Rate-My-Ride Data. 53

Table 4. Program Evaluation, Compared to Initial PSAC Recommendations and LA Metro Scope of Work. 55

Table D-1. Data from *Transit* App Users and LA Metro On-board Surveys..... 76

List of Figures

Figure 1. LA Metro’s Public Safety Ecosystem. 8

Figure 2. LA Metro Ambassador Contractor Service Areas. 12

Figure 3. Strive Ambassador Station Deployments. 13

Figure 4. Strive Ambassador Riding Deployments. 14

Figure 5. Ambassador Zones, August 2024. 15

Figure 6. Signage Explaining Different LA Metro Staff and Programs on the System. 18

Figure 7. Slide from Ambassador Trainings. 24

Figure 8. Ambassador Engagements. 43

Figure 9. Reports from Ambassadors by Category. 44

Figure 10. Ambassador Narcan Incidents. 45

Figure 11. “Rate-My-Ride” Prompt in the *Transit* App. 47

Figure 12. *Transit* App Ride Ratings over Time. 50

Figure 13. Share of Five-star *Transit* App Ride Ratings over Time, by Line, Mode, and Contractor. 51

Figure 14. Change in Five-star Ratings over Time, by Line, Mode, and Contractor. 52

Executive Summary

A Path Forward for Transit Rider Experience and Safety: Lessons from the LA Metro Ambassador Pilot Program

Executive Summary

A growing number of transit agencies in the United States are adding a new type of personnel to their systems. Transit ambassadors, as they are frequently called, play a variety of roles at different agencies but typically share a common goal of improving the customer experience and safety perceptions of riders on the system. In June 2020, in response to community demands to shift how the agency delivers public safety, the board of the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (LA Metro) directed the agency to establish a Public Safety Advisory Committee (PSAC). This committee would work with LA Metro departments to develop new approaches to public safety, including the possibility of a transit ambassador program.

This committee, composed of fifteen community members with three non-voting LA Metro employees, met twice a month over a six-month period in 2021. In December 2021, the committee submitted a set of final recommendations about a transit ambassador program to the agency. These recommendations outlined a vision and goals for the program, much of which served as the basis for the agency to release a request for proposals for a pilot program. By October 2022, LA Metro launched the initial pilot program with a small number of ambassadors, which was expanded to a full program with 300 ambassadors spread across the system by March 2023.

Given the growing interest in ambassador programs and the scale of LA Metro's efforts, this report provides an understanding of the program in Los Angeles. The research focuses on three questions:

1. What functions do the ambassadors play, and what does their day-to-day work look like on the transit system?
2. What are their working conditions, including the job quality, pay, and benefits?
3. What effects are they having on the system?

We answer these questions by reviewing meeting minutes and public documents, interviewing a small number of ambassadors and management from the contracted companies, collecting participant observations across a day on the rail system and observing end-of- and beginning-of-shift briefings, reviewing data reported by ambassadors and collected by LA Metro, and finally, analyzing data from customers submitted through the *Transit* app. We focus our analysis on the program's first two years from October 2022 through November 2024. We analyze these data and assess how the program aligned with the original vision and goals outlined by the Public Safety Advisory Committee as a basis for providing recommendations for an ambassador program. We note that starting in July 2025, LA Metro began to convert the contracted ambassadors to in-house employees and through that transition process, many of the critiques offered in this report are likely to be addressed.

Overall, we find that LA Metro's transit ambassador program follows the guidance of the agency's Public Safety Advisory Committee in having the ambassadors play a key customer service role, promoting safety for riders,

and providing job opportunities for people likely reflective of the diversity of riders themselves. The program structure also generally contributes to PSAC's other goals regarding supporting riders and operator safety and connecting vulnerable riders to resources; however, it is less clear how ambassadors can make referrals to other teams such as those that are directly supporting riders experiencing homelessness. First, we find that the program leans heavily into customer service, not crisis management, at the training stage. As a result, ambassadors serve a customer service role a majority of the time, but crisis management, ranging in severity, is still an element of the job on the ground. Ambassadors spend most of their time with vital, basic tasks of orienting and aiding riders: greeting patrons, providing directions, helping with fares, etc. They also assist with the first level of homelessness response, with crisis de-escalation, and by administering Narcan to prevent overdoses. Broadly, they provide more eyes on the system and offer a highly visible presence to riders.

In the experiences reported by our interviewees, while the customer service training is thorough, conflict resolution and safety training fall short when ambassadors face dangerous or stressful situations on the job. For better or worse, ambassadors are subject to similar conditions as riders themselves: if the system lacks enough resources to fully address a particular issue (e.g., violence, mental, cleanliness, accessibility), ambassadors are limited in how they can offer support.

The ambassador program has increased LA Metro job access for various Los Angeles communities and promoted diversity in the agency workforce, but the job quality of the ambassador role is lacking in some ways. In our interviews with ambassadors and field research, we observed that ambassadors' pay and working conditions need improvement. Retention was lower than for in-house LA Metro employees, and ambassadors face both day-to-day stress and occasions of violence and harassment. We also uncovered ways that ambassadors' original hiring as contract employees, rather than direct LA Metro employees, led to issues such as lack of access to break rooms (and breaks themselves), seemingly arbitrary location assignments, and lack of access to communication channels and devices. Interviewees had mixed feelings about their pay, with wages and benefits falling short of a living wage and lower than comparable specialized workers in other sectors and transit ambassadors elsewhere, instead being more in line with customer service roles. Ambassadors did not have much opportunity for job advancement. As LA Metro employees, ambassadors' job quality conditions will likely improve, including access to break rooms, wages, and opportunities to further their careers in the agency. In terms of ambassadors' effects on passengers and the system itself, metrics such as the number of substantive interactions and graffiti and cleanliness reports have risen over the course of the program to date. While these numbers tell a story, ambassadors have also saved hundreds of lives on the system through Narcan use, CPR, and first aid.

Over the period the ambassadors have been deployed, public perceptions of system satisfaction and safety improved—but we lack the data to make a firm causal case for ambassadors' role in this. LA Metro survey results demonstrate that passengers agree that ambassadors make them feel safer, but only a small percent of respondents attribute their improved experience to ambassadors directly when asked about their perceptions in an open-ended question. *Transit* app "Rate-My-Ride" data show a higher share of trips getting five-star ratings after the ambassador program launched.

Overall, ambassadors contribute to improved passenger experiences and play a needed role not well-served by other existing staff or system design features. The ambassador program has met some but not all of the goals set forth in the original PSAC vision for the program, but the transition to an in-house, permanent program provides the opportunity to improve how LA Metro's various personnel work together within their public safety ecosystem. As other transit agencies consider adding ambassadors to their systems, this report offers an in-depth look into the different components of the LA Metro approach and what changes or improvements transit agencies, including LA Metro, may want to consider when beginning or refining their programs.

Contents

I. Introduction

Overview

Transit agencies are increasingly turning to transit ambassador programs to address and improve passenger safety and user experience. These programs are currently found in Los Angeles, New York City, Chicago, Washington D.C., Boston, Philadelphia, the San Francisco Bay Area, Atlanta, Miami, Cleveland, and Seattle, among other locations (Smith, 2023). While these programs all have similar general aims, their size, function, and specific goals vary widely. An increased understanding of the day-to-day operations of these programs and their effectiveness is useful as more agencies consider adding ambassadors to their system.

This report examines the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority's (LA Metro) transit ambassador program's origins, structure, day-to-day operations, and outcomes. LA Metro deploys one of the largest number of ambassadors of any existing program. Our analysis demonstrates the working conditions and transit system effects of a robustly developed ambassador program. Other transit systems considering or aiming to start or expand an ambassador program can take lessons from LA Metro's program—both its benefits and its areas for improvement.

The research focuses on three questions:

1. What functions do the ambassadors play, and what does their day-to-day work look like on the transit system?
2. What are their working conditions, including the job quality, pay, and benefits?
3. What effects are they having on the system?

We conducted our research using a variety of methods to provide a well-rounded understanding of LA Metro's program design and implementation. Our approach included:

- Reviewing meeting minutes and other materials from LA Metro's Public Safety Advisory Committee (PSAC), which established the original goals and vision for the program
- Reviewing contracts with and other materials from the two contracted ambassador providers
- Interviewing the management at these organizations
- Reviewing ambassador training materials
- Conducting interviews with five ambassadors
- Attending end-of-shift debriefs and beginning-of-shift briefs for both contractors
- Collecting participant observations about ambassadors across a day on the LA Metro system

- Reviewing safety reports and other documents presented at LA Metro Board meetings, including results from LA Metro’s ambassador passenger survey
- Analyzing data on customer ride ratings collected through the *Transit* app (a mobile application that provides real-time transit arrival data and trip planning tools for transit systems worldwide) before and during the ambassador program

These different data sources provide an understanding how the LA Metro program is structured, how its ambassadors are hired and trained, and their opportunities for good jobs, as well as the overall effect of the program on passenger experience. We also document how the program has aligned with the vision outlined by PSAC. Our intent is not to give LA’s program a particular “good” or “bad” rating. Instead, this report aims to help transit agencies in their efforts to make their systems safer and more welcoming to passengers by creating ambassador programs and making other safety improvements that build on the lessons learned from this research. And while LA Metro’s program is rapidly evolving as of this writing, we still find value in reviewing its now-completed pilot phase for lessons learned for the future.

We begin by reviewing the operations of the program. First, we describe the program’s origins and structure: what were its goals, when and where do ambassadors deploy, under which contractors, etc. We next review in detail the range of training ambassadors receive. Second, we characterize ambassadors’ day-to-day work, including their customer service and public safety roles. Third, we assess ambassadors’ job quality, working conditions, pay, and benefits. Finally, we document the ambassadors’ effect on the LA Metro system and its riders. We conclude with reflections on the program and avenues for improvement.

Overall, ambassadors contribute to improved passenger experiences and play a needed role not well-served by other existing staff or system design features. The ambassador program has met some but not all of the goals set forth in the original PSAC vision for the program, but the transition to an in-house, permanent program now being implemented provides the opportunity to improve how the agency’s various personnel work together within their public safety ecosystem. As other transit agencies consider adding ambassadors to their systems, this report offers an in-depth look into the different components of the LA Metro approach and what changes or improvements transit agencies, including LA Metro, may want to incorporate into their systems.

II. Program Operations

Program Structure

Program Origins and PSAC Recommendations

The Los Angeles urbanized area has the second-highest transit ridership in the United States in the most recent year of full data. Its largest transit agency, LA Metro, carries the third-most boardings in the country (Federal Transit Administration, 2024). The challenges of limited funding, a massive service area (Chaparro, 2025), and stigma toward transit use (Cain et al., 2009; Hensher and Mulley, 2015; Hess, 2012; Hutchinson, 2000; Schweitzer, 2014; and Wasserman, 2015) have long made the unpredictable experience of riding transit in the county a site of transit justice activism, from the Bus Riders Union organizing against fare hikes in the 1990s to the formation of the Alliance for Community Transit-Los Angeles (ACT-LA) in 2011 (Grengs, 2002 and ACT-LA, 2025). In addition to highlighting riders' mobility needs, advocates have called attention to the need for more supportive programming to improve the experience of using buses, trains, and stations.

Like many transit agencies, LA Metro contracts with local law enforcement agencies to patrol the system and employs security officers to enforce their rider code of conduct. In Fiscal Year 2023-2024, LA Metro allocated over \$300 million of their \$9 billion annual budget towards public safety, the lion's share of these resources devoted to law enforcement and security personnel (LA Metro, 2023a). However, the agency's own research on the experiences of women riders in the system documented concerns that police were poorly equipped to address, especially when it comes to sexual harassment and personal safety on the system (LA Metro, 2025a and Galicia et al., 2019). In June 2020, the LA Metro Board passed a motion directing the agency to "work in partnership with community leaders to re-envision transit safety and community-based approaches to policing leading up to and as part of the 2022 renewal of the multiagency police contract" (Bonin et al., 2020, p. 1). The motion directed the agency to establish a public safety and advisory committee (later known as PSAC) and to implement this new approach to public safety on the system, including establishing a transit ambassador program (Bonin et al., 2020), an idea pitched by both various community groups and internal agency employees for a number of years prior (Quinn et al., n.d.). PSAC consists of community members who apply to serve two-year terms (Abrahamian, 2025). Informed in part by PSAC's recommendations, the agency launched a "transit ambassador" program in 2022 (LA Metro, 2025b).¹

During the planning of the ambassador program, LA Metro staff and leadership solicited PSAC's feedback. In turn, over the course of 2021, PSAC's Non-law Enforcement Alternatives Ad-hoc Committee drafted recommendations, sought LA Metro staff input, and brought the document to the full committee for approval in November 2021 (LA Metro, 2025b). The 13 recommendations (PSAC Non-law Enforcement Alternatives Ad-

¹. While contractor data indicates that ambassadors began to be paid as early as August 2022, the program had a public launch in October 2022 (LA Metro, 2025b and Sotero, 2023).

hoc Committee, 2021) suggest that transit ambassadors “play a rider-facing and welcoming role” (p. 1), that their “presence [promote] safety for all riders and operators” (p. 2), that they “connect vulnerable riders to resources and/or assistance” (p. 2), and that the program “provide[s] communities with access to good jobs” (p. 3). LA Metro staff concurred with most of the recommendations but at the time disagreed with PSAC’s recommendation to hire ambassadors as employees directly, instead preferring a pilot program contracted out to external firms. Meanwhile, LA Metro staff noted that “ambassadors will be a layer within LA Metro’s overall public safety ecosystem in connection with LA Metro’s system security, law enforcement, crisis response teams, and homeless outreach” (Jones, 2022, pp. 1, 4). While the PSAC recommendations suggest that the transit ambassador role synthesizes a number of safety functions, LA Metro framed their role into the larger context of a public safety ecosystem (See **Figure 1**) (Jones, 2022).

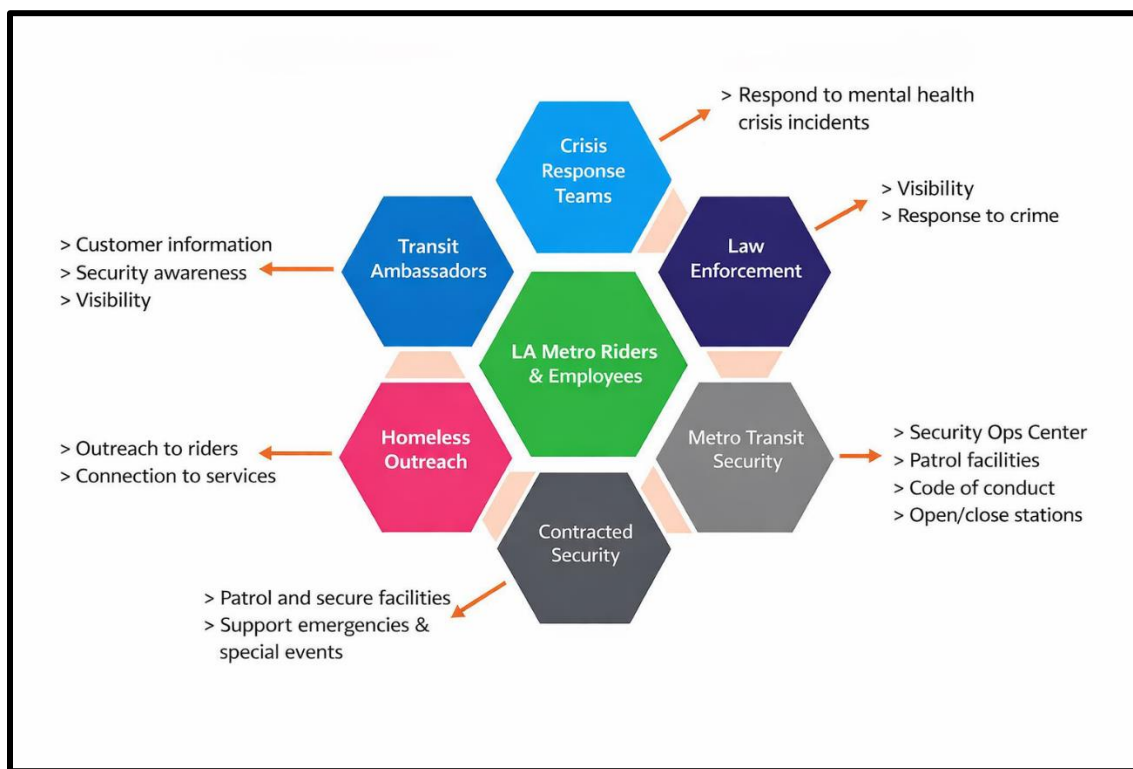


Figure 1. LA Metro’s Public Safety Ecosystem.

Source: Jones, 2022, p. 5

Overall, LA Metro’s statement of work for the ambassador program reflects much but not all of PSAC’s guidance, as shown in the comparison below. The PSAC recommendations are summarized in each category, and the full list of recommendations is provided in Appendix A. In this report, we discuss the PSAC recommendations (alongside the guidance and structure approved by the LA Metro) not to imply that PSAC’s goals were (or should have been) formal benchmarks for the ambassador program to meet, given PSAC’s advisory status, but rather to compare a community-driven vision for an ambassador program to the results in practice on the ground.

“Rider-facing and welcoming role” (PSAC Non-law Enforcement Alternatives Ad-hoc Committee, 2021, p. 1): Both LA Metro and PSAC stated that ambassadors should be easily identifiable representatives that are knowledgeable about the LA Metro system and are welcoming and respectful (PSAC Non-law Enforcement Alternatives Ad-hoc Committee, 2021 and LA Metro, n.d.-a):

- *PSAC recommendation:* Ambassadors will be an “identifiable presence on [LA] Metro vehicles,...stations, and stops” and “...have frequent contact with riders.” They “will deliver a high level of customer service” and be “knowledgeable about the [LA] Metro system,...assisting with wayfinding and answering riders’ questions” (PSAC Non-law Enforcement Alternatives Ad-hoc Committee, 2021, p. 1).
- *LA Metro language:* “Ambassadors are welcoming greeters for customers and employees” (LA Metro, n.d.-a, p. 4). Transit ambassadors “play a rider-facing and welcoming role” (LA Metro, n.d.-a, p. 1).

“Safety for all riders and operators” (PSAC Non-law Enforcement Alternatives Ad-hoc Committee, 2021, p. 2): Both LA Metro and PSAC stated that ambassadors should increase safety for riders by providing non-law enforcement interventions. They also stressed the importance of de-escalation training and being able to connect to the larger safety ecosystem (See **Figure 1**). PSAC’s recommendations had a bigger emphasis on the safety of LA Metro staff (operators and janitorial staff), but LA Metro’s language also mentions staff, albeit more broadly (PSAC Non-law Enforcement Alternatives Ad-hoc Committee, 2021 and LA Metro, n.d.-a):

- *PSAC recommendations:* Ambassadors’ “role is to identify potentially unsafe situations and determine whether...to intervene and address the situation. They will be trained...[in] de-escalation techniques” and “...will be able to call upon...service providers” (homeless and mental health services), “...system maintenance [and] janitorial staff,...emergency medical professionals,” security professionals, and “...law enforcement” (PSAC Non-law Enforcement Alternatives Ad-hoc Committee, 2021, p. 2). These other supports will constitute “a larger ecosystem” of safety partners, and “...armed law enforcement will only be involved when absolutely needed” (PSAC Non-law Enforcement Alternatives Ad-hoc Committee, 2021, p. 2).
- *LA Metro language:* “Ambassadors will promote safety for all riders and [LA] Metro employees” (LA Metro, n.d.-a, p. 5).

“Connect vulnerable riders to resources” (PSAC Non-law Enforcement Alternatives Ad-hoc Committee, 2021, p. 2): Both LA Metro and PSAC outlined the role of ambassadors as a connection to resources for vulnerable riders. LA Metro explicitly mentioned unhoused riders, and PSAC also emphasized unhoused riders as a priority (PSAC Non-law Enforcement Alternatives Ad-hoc Committee, 2021 and LA Metro, n.d.-a):

- *PSAC recommendations:* “Ambassadors will be culturally competent [and] reflect the diversity of Los Angeles County,” including “...where appropriate, possessing multilingual skills.” They will be “...responsive to the diverse needs of...riders” and be “...trained to...respond to situations with empathy and compassion.... Ambassadors will be equipped...to connect vulnerable riders to resources” (PSAC Non-law Enforcement Alternatives Ad-hoc Committee, 2021, p. 2).

- *LA Metro language*: “Ambassadors connect unhoused riders to resources and/or assistance” (LA Metro, n.d.-a, p. 5).

“Provide communities with access to good jobs” (PSAC Non-law Enforcement Alternatives Ad-hoc Committee, 2021, p. 2): The biggest differences between the recommendations made by PSAC and LA Metro’s approach is in the employment model proposed. PSAC suggested using in-house employees, while LA Metro ended up proceeding with a contractor model for the initial years of the pilot program. Per LA Metro staff, the contracting model allowed the agency to stand up the program more quickly than integrating a new type of personnel into the agency. Further, the pilot model with contracted employees provided the agency with flexibility to test, refine, and demonstrate the value of the program before committing to a permanent investment. Both discussed job benefits and diverse hiring and outreach (PSAC Non-law Enforcement Alternatives Ad-hoc Committee, 2021; LA Metro, n.d.-a; and communications with program staff):

- *PSAC recommendations*: Ambassadors will be LA Metro employees with “defined career path[s]...to grow within the program...and...the agency.” Ambassadors will be provided with “...a family-supporting wage, union jobs, professional development opportunities,...bilingual pay differentials, and access to healthcare” (PSAC Non-law Enforcement Alternatives Ad-hoc Committee, 2021, p. 3). “[LA] Metro will reduce barriers to hiring” among disempowered communities. In this effort, “[LA] Metro will partner with community-based organizations to build a pipeline of qualified workers that reflect the diversity of [LA] Metro’s ridership” (PSAC Non-law Enforcement Alternatives Ad-hoc Committee, 2021, p. 3).
- *LA Metro language*: “The plan will ensure recruitment outreach is expansive and focused to ensure that the Ambassadors, field supervisors, and managers can reflect the diversity of [LA] Metro riders in terms of race, gender, disability, language, and other characteristics” (LA Metro, n.d.-a, p. 12).

Contractors and Deployments

After the contract solicitation process was concluded, LA Metro selected two different companies to staff and manage ambassadors on different parts of the system: RMI International and Strive Well-being. RMI International is a large firm and certified minority business enterprise that generally employs and provides security guards and security services. They were selected to deploy ambassadors on LA Metro’s light-rail lines (A, C, E, K²) beyond downtown Los Angeles, bus rapid transit (G and J), and select bus routes. Strive Well-being is an employee health and wellness firm and was selected to deploy ambassadors on LA Metro’s heavy-rail lines (B and D) and on the Regional Connector segment of the A and E light-rail lines downtown. Among LA Metro’s reasons for splitting the program across two contracts was that Strive’s status as a certified small business enterprise aligned with LA Metro’s small business contracting goals (LA Metro, 2025b and Sotero, 2023).

². Just before the COVID-19 pandemic, LA Metro renamed its heavy-rail, light-rail, and bus-rapid-transit routes from their former color designations to letter designations. LA Metro’s current A Line runs on what used to be the Blue Line and northern portion of the Gold Line. LA Metro’s current C Line used to be the Green Line. LA Metro’s E Line runs on what used to be the Expo Line and eastern portion of the Expo Line. LA Metro’s K Line was called the Crenshaw Line during its planning and construction (LA Metro, 2024e; Cuevas, 2021; NBC 4 Los Angeles, 2020; Fonseca, 2020; and Chiland, 2018, 2019).

However, all contracted ambassadors wore the same uniforms and received similar direction from LA Metro, as discussed further below, providing the appearance of a single program to the riding public.

Before accepting the LA Metro ambassador contract, Strive's focus was on community health programming. Based in San Diego, Strive manages employer-provided wellness programs for their employees, including those at LA Metro, and conducts public health outreach programs for vulnerable populations, such as people experiencing homelessness. At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Strive had 15 employees, so the ambassador program represented a significant expansion for their firm. Strive trained ambassadors in classes of 30 at a time as they grew. According to their interview and proposal response, Strive partnered with Union Station Homeless Services, Homeboy Industries, and CALIF—nonprofit organizations that hire and/or work with unhoused people, formerly incarcerated people and those in gangs, and disabled people, respectively—to hire ambassadors from those groups. However, we could not confirm whether any ambassadors were successfully recruited from these organizations. Meanwhile, RMI worked with WorkSource Regional Business Services and the Southeast Los Angeles County Workforce Development Board, two public entities which assisted them with ambassador recruitment from underrepresented populations. LA Metro, Strive, and RMI leadership meet twice per week to coordinate their efforts.

Figure 2 maps the division between the two contractors. RMI deployed ambassadors from three sites: one near Expo/Crenshaw Station at the intersection of the E and K lines, one near Willowbrook/Rosa Parks Station at the intersection of the A and C lines, and one at Union Station. Strive deployed all its ambassadors from Union Station. All ambassadors met for briefings before and after their shifts at one of these deployment sites, collected materials for the day like iPads for reporting, and then headed to their shift assignments. This approach led some ambassadors to have to double-back on their commutes, to first get to the deployment site and then to their shift assignment location.

LA Metro's vast bus network, which carried 76 percent of system boardings in Fiscal Year 2023 (Federal Transit Administration, 2024), receives much less ambassador coverage. In initial contracting documents, LA Metro slated RMI ambassadors for deployment on nine bus routes in different areas of the city—Lines 4, 40, 45, 51, 105, 180, 207, 233, and 720—as well as the system's two bus rapid transit lines, the G and J Lines. But in progress reports since the program launch, staff routinely identified only four bus routes—Line 4, Line 720 Rapid and its local counterpart Line 20, and Line 210 (not on the initial list)—and the J bus rapid transit line as receiving regular ambassador coverage. The G Line bus rapid transit later started hosting ambassadors in December 2023. Reports also noted special ambassador deployments for major events, including concerts, sports games, festivals, conferences, open streets events, and parades, as well as planned and unplanned service detours. Staff singled out Lines 106 and 605 and the Marengo/State bus stop near the Los Angeles General Medical Center county hospital as having hosted ambassadors for special deployments (LA Metro, 2025b). Overall, though, the ambassador program primarily serves the system's rail network, as only ten percent of ambassadors are deployed on bus-riding teams. However, LA Metro is expanding the proportion of bus-riding ambassadors during the in-house transition, and this proportion will increase to 20 percent (Parks et al., 2025).



Figure 2. LA Metro Ambassador Contractor Service Areas.

Base map: LA Metro, 2024e

On a typical day in 2024, Strive deployed 92 ambassadors across the system in two shifts of 46 ambassadors each, one in the morning from 5:30 A.M. to 2:00 P.M. and one in the afternoon from 1:30 P.M. to 10:00 P.M.³

³. RMI did not provide detailed ambassador deployments (communications with program staff).

As with RMI, ambassadors have one 30-minute lunch break and two other ten-minute breaks, and they always work in teams of two. Each shift, 36 of Strive’s ambassadors worked “fixed” assignments on station platforms and mezzanines, and two (usually senior) ambassadors worked “roving” assignments, filling in at stations where extra help was needed. **Figure 3** maps the specific locations. Meanwhile, an additional eight “riding” ambassadors worked on the trains themselves (communications with program staff), traveling back and forth along routes mapped in **Figure 4**.⁴



Figure 3. Strive Ambassador Station Deployments.

Base map: LA Metro, 2024e

⁴. The deployments described and mapped here differ slightly from those given by LA Metro staff in a November 2024 report to the Board of Directors (Smith, Parks, and Coppola, 2024), likely due to small changes in deployment between when the data for that report and this one were prepared.



Figure 4. Strive Ambassador Riding Deployments.

Base map: LA Metro, 2024e

According to an August 2024 report to the City of Los Angeles Board of Police Commissioners (Choi, 2024), LA Metro’s criteria for specific ambassador deployment locations include (quoted in Choi, 2024, p. 9):

- *High visibility*—Establishing a regular ambassador presence on high ridership lines and routes
- *Opportunities for customer experience improvements*—Addressing locations with high incidents of customer complaints/concerns, and Americans with Disabilities Act accessibility concerns (including rail or bus stations with elevators/escalators)
- *Public Safety “hot spots”*—Reviewing crime data to include bus operator assault data by bus route



Figure 5. Ambassador Zones, August 2024.

Data source: Choi, 2024; base map: LA Metro, 2024e

This resulted in six zones across the system, each with different numbers of ambassadors (See **Figure 5**). Across both contractors, the 200 ambassadors deployed in August 2024 were stationed as follows (Choi, 2024):

- 12 ambassadors in Zone 1 (Pasadena and northeast of downtown Los Angeles)
- 28 ambassadors in Zone 2 (the San Fernando Valley and Hollywood)
- 28 ambassadors in Zone 3 (the Westside, Mid-city, and Koreatown)
- 72 ambassadors in Zone 4 (downtown and East Los Angeles)
- 48 ambassadors in Zone 5 (South Bay and Long Beach)
- 12 ambassadors in Zone 6 (South Los Angeles and the Gateway Cities)

This breakdown (Choi, 2024) represents a snapshot of a particular time, as these deployments have and continue to change. According to a June 2025 LA Metro Board report, 10 percent of ambassadors were stationed on the bus system, 10 percent on bus rapid transit lines (G and J), 32 percent on light rail (A, C, E, and K), 29 percent on heavy-rail (B and D), and five percent in downtown Regional Connector stations, with the remaining 14 percent being supervisors who rotate through the system as a whole (Parks et al., 2025).

The total number of ambassadors has varied since the program’s launch. After an initial ramp-up from fall 2022 to March 2023, LA Metro reported the program reached full deployment at “nearly 300” ambassadors (Sotero, 2023); it had 285 ambassadors and 48 supervisors in June 2025 (Parks et al., 2025). With these numbers, LA Metro’s program is likely tied for the largest U.S. transit ambassador program with the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority’s program in Greater Boston⁵ (Smith, 2023 and Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, 2023).

The ambassador program’s launch in October 2022, coincided with the opening of the K Line, a new light rail line connecting South Los Angeles to the E line, which runs from Santa Monica to downtown Los Angeles. Thereafter, LA Metro completed the Regional Connector project which re-routed two trains in downtown Los Angeles, added two new stations, and re-opened one that had been rebuilt underground. LA Metro increased the deployment of ambassadors to assist passengers to navigate the reconfigured train patterns.

LA Metro always intended the pilot phase of the ambassador program, which was to last three years, to function with contractors. In October 2023, a year into the program, LA Metro released an internal evaluation, which included a survey of riders on safety, satisfaction, and ambassadors (discussed further in Chapter V). Staff found the program relatively effective and recommended that it be made permanent, that it be expanded, and that, after the pilot, it be brought in house, with ambassadors directly employed by the agency (Smith, 2023 and LA Metro, 2025b). Reasons cited included job security, benefits, opportunities for career advancement, and union representation (Harjai, 2025 and Smith, 2023). The LA Metro Board approved the plan but struck out an initial recommendation to accelerate the move in house (Smith, 2023 and LA Metro, 2025b). Indeed, that process faced delays. In March 2024 and September 2024, LA Metro increased the funding for Strive’s contract. LA Metro is still setting up its new, broader in-house police and public safety department (See Chapter VI). Additionally, discussions over how ambassadors will fit into LA Metro workers’

⁵. Among comparable U.S. programs identified by LA Metro staff (Smith, 2023)

existing union structure and their pay and benefits under a union delayed the in-house transition for at least a year (LA Metro, 2025a, 2025b).

But in June 2025, LA Metro and the Teamsters union reached a collective bargaining agreement for the ambassadors, which was ratified by union members by a two-to-one vote. Starting July 1, 2025, the ambassadors began the process of becoming direct LA Metro employees. They received a raise (discussed in Chapter IV), and it was announced that all ambassadors in good standing at the time of the transition would be allowed to continue in the role. As a part of this change, LA Metro pledged to add 44 new ambassadors on the rail system and 40 new bus-riding ambassadors, resulting in a total of 322 ambassadors deployed daily (Parks et al., 2025).

Other Programs on the System

In addition to the ambassadors, LA Metro contracts and employs a variety of other field staff on and around train platforms and stations. Along with the green-shirted ambassadors, LA Metro deploys:

- Blue-shirted TAP staff, who specifically help with purchasing and using TAP cards (the region's transit payment smart cards) and promote free- and reduced-fare programs
- Sworn law enforcement officers of the City of Los Angeles Police Department, Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, and City of Long Beach Police Department
- Uniformed transit security officers directly employed by LA Metro, who often work on code of conduct and fare enforcement
- Contracted security staff, who support the other security officers
- Purple-shirted HOME Teams, who conduct outreach specifically to unhoused people on the system, organized by the nonprofit People Assisting the Homeless (PATH) and five other homeless service providers (Loukaitou-Sideris et al., 2021, 2023a, 2023b)
- Pink-vested K Line Street Teams, launched at the same time as the ambassador program: a comparable but distinct program discussed in Appendix B

Janitorial staff, vehicle operators, and more also move around the system in view of riders. This can create confusion in the public, especially given that these employees sometimes perform overlapping duties, but it also provides redundancy and backup when needed. To educate riders, LA Metro has placed informational signage about their different teams and programs in stations (See **Figure 6**; compare to **Figure 1**). We discuss the relationship between ambassadors and these other staff in the sections below.

We're here to help.

Estamos aquí para ayudar.



TAP Blue Shirts
Answer your questions about fare and help you with purchasing and using TAP cards.

Personal de TAP de camisas azules

Responden a sus preguntas sobre las tarifas y ayudan con la compra y el uso de las tarjetas TAP.



Metro Transit Security Officers (TSOs)
Enforce Metro Code of Conduct, including fare compliance.

Agentes de seguridad de tránsito de Metro

Hacer cumplir el Código de conducta de Metro, incluido el cumplimiento de tarifas.



Metro Ambassadors
Support you during your journey, connect you to resources and report any maintenance or safety issues.

Metro Ambassadors

Lo apoyan durante su viaje, lo conectan con recursos e informan sobre cualquier problema de mantenimiento o seguridad.



Law Enforcement
Patrol Metro stations, trains and buses to prevent and address crime.

Cuerpo policial

Patrullan estaciones de Metro, trenes y autobuses para prevenir y combatir el crimen.



HOME Teams
Multidisciplinary Homeless Outreach and Engagement teams link unhoused riders to social services and housing solutions.

Equipos HOME

Los equipos multidisciplinarios de atención a las personas sin hogar ponen en contacto a los pasajeros sin hogar con los servicios sociales y las soluciones de vivienda.



Contracted Security
Safeguard Metro stations and divisions and support other security needs.

Seguridad contratada

Protegen las estaciones y divisiones de Metro y apoyan otras necesidades de seguridad.



Download the *Transit Watch* app today.
Descargue la aplicación *Transit Watch* hoy.



Figure 6. Signage Explaining Different LA Metro Staff and Programs on the System.

Source: LA Metro, 2025c

Training

Overview

Before deployment into the field, transit ambassadors (during the period we studied) received two to three weeks of classroom and field training. Per the training syllabus, training includes 80 hours of instruction, with three days in a classroom and seven days at Union Station. Some of our transit ambassador interviewees estimated around 85 percent of the training occurred in a classroom setting and 15 percent in the field, indicating information learned in the classroom might carry more mental weight than training in the field for some ambassadors. Some ambassadors mentioned an expectation to obtain external first aid/CPR certification before starting the job, but contractors did not reveal this in their interviews.

All materials used to help train ambassadors were developed by LA Metro, with staff from partnering agencies invited as guest speakers/collaborators. The training sessions were the same across both contractors, and the contractors regularly refreshed the materials with LA Metro based on ambassadors' needs. The training format varies but most frequently involves a slideshow presentation from LA Metro. Represented departments include Customer Experience, System Security and Law Enforcement (SSLE), and the Office of Civil Rights, Racial Equity and Inclusion, as well as external groups like the LA County Department of Mental Health (DMH). Some training sessions involve videos and interactive activities, such as scavenger hunts, roleplay sessions, quizzes with prizes, and audience interaction that calls upon trainees to reflect upon their experiences riding transit (LA Metro, 2024d).

Throughout the training sessions, there was a focus on the role of ambassadors within the agency's overall strategies to restore transit ridership. Thus, training lessons include promotional language and feature performance metrics for initiatives unrelated to the ambassadors per se, like LA Metro's annual vehicle-miles of revenue service or information on its transition to zero-emission fleets. The customer-service training, which was the most comprehensive of the training modules, emphasizes ambassadors as a critical element of building LA Metro's brand loyalty and facilitating returning riders (LA Metro, 2024d).

The ambassador training is both detailed and broad in scope, reflecting most activities ambassadors undertake to serve transit patrons. However, our review and interviews with ambassadors highlighted that the training is not exhaustive in preparing ambassadors for stressful encounters on the system. Ambassadors learn the fundamentals of de-escalation and receive guidance on how to remove themselves from dangerous situations, and defer to others, including the LA Metro SSLE officers. Ambassadors described that in tougher situations, it was more difficult to understand how to respond because of the different directions these interactions could take. As two ambassadors described:

"There's a million different ways that these scenarios can go. And it is hard to unveil that in a classroom-type setting. So, in my opinion, training should be extensively on the field, shadowing people while they're actually at work."

“The unpredictability is paramount, because you have a huge kaleidoscope of all other possibilities and things that can happen in one day.”

Aside from pre- and post-shift briefings, ambassadors also complained of a lack of follow-up sessions to build on the initial training they received. There is no regularly scheduled training for ambassadors beyond their initial weeks of training.

The following four sections critically examine different focus areas of ambassador training, with some recommendations for areas of improvement. As LA Metro proceeds through the in-house transition, they are now incorporating feedback from the pilot phase and plan to retrain all ambassadors.

Familiarizing Ambassadors with LA Metro

Training materials about the agency educate ambassadors on becoming proficient system navigators and summarize what ambassadors need to know about the system to support riders. They outline the agency’s bus and rail operations; review the differences between local and rapid bus routes and the various light and heavy rail lines; list rider resources, including bike lockers, information booths, the lost and found center, and LA Metro Micro (the agency’s microtransit service in select areas); and highlight major system changes such as new line openings. The materials teach ambassadors the proper vocabulary needed to describe their location within stations (e.g., at the street, mezzanine, or platform level) and how to plan trips via Google Maps or the *Transit* app. Through the training, ambassadors also familiarize themselves with accessible infrastructure for those with disabilities, such as tactile pathways, braille signage, and wheelchair-accessible fare gates. Understanding fare payments is another significant training area, including how to reload fares, when TAP cards expire, and why LA Metro shifted from all-day and seven-day passes (with which riders may be more familiar) to an automatic fare-capping system (through which rides are free after a traveler reaches a daily or weekly cap) (LA Metro, 2024d).

In some instances, the training materials employ overly technical terms that require clarification, such as “signal priority,” “headways,” etc. (LA Metro, 2024d). On the other hand, they lack information that could inform ambassadors about how riders make trips. For instance, instead of teaching ambassadors how to read the system map like a new rider might, presentations often enumerate routes. Training on trip-planning omits instructions on how to use features of trip-planning applications such as selecting a future departure or arrival time or filtering trips for fewer transfers, less walking, use of ridehail services, etc. The training also lacks instruction about the *Transit* app’s real-time arrival information feature.

This training section also briefs ambassadors about the various other units with which they will work to aid riders. Ambassadors learn about the five LA Metro Customer Centers and their resources, including the agency’s various free and discounted fare programs. Ambassadors learn about the SSLE Department and the departments that oversee transit operations, describing each group’s responsibilities and who manages information about detours/breakdowns, emergency response, and special events (LA Metro, 2024d). Due to the complex nature of the agency’s organization, a more comprehensive organizational chart outlining the

duties and chain of command for affiliated departments might be helpful to orient ambassadors to where they fit within LA Metro.

Customer Experience and the Ambassador's Role

The training sessions primarily emphasize customer service, placing it as the highest priority of an ambassador's role. The Customer Experience team's training consistently describes the job of an ambassador to support, connect, and report and their function as a visible, unarmed, and uniformed presence on the system to attend to riders' needs. They also stress that ambassadors should not look at themselves as the only team on the system looking out for riders. Other teams and departments, including Homeless Outreach or SSLE, should be expected to intervene when situations escalate beyond the customer service function. The customer service training underscores the fundamentals of professionalism and building rapport with LA Metro riders. Sections on emotional intelligence, social awareness, and sensitivity toward the LA Metro ridership's demographic profile help shape how ambassadors approach relationship-building with their patrons (LA Metro, 2024d). Interviewees described the majority of their interactions as customer-service oriented, matching the intent of the customer-service training.

Some basic principles the ambassadors learn are maintaining a clean appearance by showing up to work on time with the proper uniform and keeping a positive, engaged attitude while on duty. The training materials reinforce the idea that an ambassador's role should be active, reminding ambassadors to greet their customers courteously by name and be proactive in asking riders if they need help. When not interacting with customers, ambassadors should report interactions with riders or areas that need cleaning on their reporting devices (phones or iPads) and refrain from using those devices for personal use. Memorable acronyms or other mnemonic devices prime ambassadors to develop a culture of creating trust, empathy, assurance, and accountability to riders, responding to immediate needs and concerns (LA Metro, 2024d).

Emotional intelligence and social awareness exercises remind ambassadors of various tools for being attentive to how riders might be feeling and the implications of how that might affect customer interactions. Ambassadors learn the significance of self-regulation before coming to work to ensure their mental state does not affect their interactions with others. The training lessons also focus on body language, tone, and active listening. Ambassadors learn to keep an open posture, calm and respectful tone, and to pay careful attention what a person says before generating a response, following up to expand upon someone's thoughts and reflecting on their feelings. The presentations also include segments that evaluate ambassadors for whether they can identify emotional cues, with one section consisting of a quiz on how a rider might be feeling based on their facial expressions (LA Metro, 2024d).

To ground these skills, the sessions highlight the variety of riders LA Metro serves. Ambassadors are reminded that people choose LA Metro for many reasons: avoiding traffic, promoting the environment, transit-dependence, etc. Trainees learn about riders' income, language, tech-savviness, racial/ethnic background, and disabilities of different types (e.g., physical, cognitive, emotional, temporary, chronic). The training informs ambassadors about accessibility accommodations for riders, learning best practices for interacting with service

animals and assisting riders with disabilities. Training materials recommend ambassadors keep an appropriate distance and communicate clearly with riders about whether they need assistance before assuming so or jumping in to support them. Trainees learn how to conduct sighted guide assistance for low-vision riders and to respect riders who do not accept help, while thoroughly addressing the needs of riders with extensive wayfinding needs (LA Metro, 2024d).

Example videos, roleplay exercises, quizzes, interactive discussions, and reflections upon ambassadors' experience with customer service and riding transit provide opportunities for ambassadors to practice activities promoted in the training materials (LA Metro, 2024d). However, in some cases, an applied example might be more helpful if embedded in the field training. For instance, instead of showing a video about sighted guide assistance, the training could include inviting a member of the LA Metro Accessibility Advisory Committee to model the behavior and share their lived experience.

Additionally, some customer service roleplay activities and statistics about rider demographics contain advanced knowledge that may be more appropriate for preparing a more senior ambassador than an entry-level trainee (LA Metro, 2024d). Training that more extensively addresses regulations such as Section 504 and ADA accommodations or the function of customer service to meet high-level targets for ridership recovery could be reserved for ambassadors engaged in troubleshooting the program.

Incident Reporting and Transit Safety

The training materials compel ambassadors to log their rider interactions—especially ones requiring special attention from LA Metro security and law enforcement—and information to help the agency keep the system well-maintained and accessible. Ambassadors have strict reporting protocols to call 911 for emergencies. All other non-emergency incidents should be referred to the appropriate department: for example, Security Operations Control manages disorderly conduct, loitering, and disruptive behaviors on the system; Rail Operations Control addresses spills, area closures, and damaged assets (such as train and station doors, lighting, and elevators). They also walk through reporting via the LA Metro Transit Watch app—a publicly accessible application, described further in Chapter III, that ambassadors also use to input reports. Trainees learn how to describe and identify incident types, locations, and affected parties, and how to annotate reports properly using the LA Metro ambassador identifier tag. Ambassador reports may include facility requests to address exposed wires, broken glass, trip hazards, missing fire extinguishers, loose handrails, liquid spills, and broken elevators (See **Figure 9**). Or, they may involve people problems, including violence and harassment, illegal vending, homeless encampments, and right-of-way obstructions affecting trains or pedestrians (LA Metro, 2024d).

Incident reporting training contains helpful tips for locating equipment ID numbers, taking photos of incidents only when safe, responding to follow-up text messages requesting more information about the incident, logging all reports on a work device under an LA Metro ambassador profile, and calling for assistance for priority incidents. However, aside from reporting, there is limited information on what ambassadors can do to create a “warm” hand-off to other personnel or how else an ambassador can support riders during these events.

For instance, emergency response training solely consists of teaching ambassadors to call 911 and how to locate emergency exit hatches on rail cars. Ambassadors do not have explicit training on how to interact with concerned patrons proximate to dangerous encounters. Training on how to remove riders from risky situations (while they contact another department to address the issue) and provide follow-up support might prepare ambassadors to manage crises involving bystanders. Finally, equipping ambassadors with temporary signage to direct riders away from identified environmental hazards could be a meaningful, immediate response by ambassadors before other teams resolve issues (LA Metro, 2024d).

Mental health referrals are another public engagement tool the training materials share with ambassadors. The Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health provides ambassadors with various support pathways to connect people to mental health help. The ACCESS help line, 911, psychiatric urgent care, or a county outreach worker are available to LA Metro riders depending on the severity of a rider's needs. The department's staff detail the protocol for requesting a crisis response, including asking the ambassador to remain on site with the affected individual until a DMH Field Intervention Team member arrives. The training also provides information about conducting a general mental health referral, including asking questions about a person's behavior, lack of shelter, and personal history, if the ambassador can successfully connect with the rider (LA Metro, 2024d). Unfortunately, the amount of time and resources required to complete one of these referrals might be beyond the capacity of an entry-level ambassador who is also balancing the customer service needs of other riders around them.

How to Support Riders Experiencing Crisis

Crisis management training exposes ambassadors to response strategies of the SSLE Department and provides more information about mental health concerns affecting people on the system, including substance use. Some of SSLE's training focuses on preparing ambassadors for potential threats, including armed riders. Vigilance is a substantial component of this part of the training; ambassadors learn situational awareness, the difference between cover and concealment, which parts of the body to scan to assess for weapons and how to avoid physical altercations. Specific tools include maintaining distance, identifying signs of aggression, locating exit points, and engaging in other forms of self-defense. Other SSLE training focuses on using verbal de-escalation to diffuse conflict with patrons. These instead promote a more empathetic approach toward disturbed riders, echoing the talking points from the customer service training. SSLE training reiterates an emphasis on reserving judgment and controlling for implicit biases to avoid provoking other parties. If all else fails and a situation gets out of hand, the SSLE training suggests ambassadors exit the scene and call another appropriate department for support (See **Figure 7**) (LA Metro, 2024d).

A more proactive approach to supporting riders in crisis is presented in training videos borrowed from Denver's Regional Transportation District and developed by the LA County Department of Mental Health. Using real-life transit scenarios, the videos outline the symptoms of various affective, thought, developmental, and cognitive disorders, highlighting the prevalence of each disorder and giving advice on interacting with affected individuals who might feel defensive and reticent toward receiving support. Even if an individual ultimately refuses aid, the training counsels ambassadors to approach riders exhibiting distressing behaviors as a method

of addressing social disruption and promoting an environment where people can return for support in the future. The department training further humanizes mental health issues by explaining the causes of mental illness and the influence of risk or protective factors on the onset of mental illness (LA Metro, 2024d).

Answer

Metro Ambassadors need to “STAY IN THEIR LANE” and call for help!

- You are not a security staff person.
- If you ever feel threatened – get to a safe place and call 911.
- You are customer service FIRST.
- Metro Transit Security is there to help assist you in any tense or dangerous situation.
- You will have the tools available to call directly for help.
- Remember - Metro Ambassadors are not enforcers but rather connectors

PUBLIC SAFETY

7. Metro Ambassadors are security and should step in if a fight occurs on the system.

TRUE or FALSE?

True.

False.

Figure 7. Slide from Ambassador Trainings.

Source: LA Metro, 2024d

The videos also encourage ambassadors to be prepared to give information on basic needs resources, such as emergency first aid, housing, and transportation, to people experiencing mental illness after building rapport. They provide appropriate language to support emotional validation and to probe about the goals of the person in crisis. They caution against assuming control over others and propose gentle cues to suggest riders join an ambassador in relocating to a more private area where the ambassador can focus on listening and determining how to help. A one-page handout by Right To Be—a nonprofit organization with a mission to build inclusive, harassment-free, and discrimination-free public spaces—also provides tips on how to wait to approach a troubled individual if they need time to compose themselves or to create a distraction if they need to be separated from others (LA Metro, 2024d).

A little short of one year into the program, beginning in April 2023, ambassadors began administering Narcan to passengers who were experiencing signs of an opioid overdose. Narcan, a form of naloxone, is a drug that works almost immediately and can save the life of someone suffering an opioid overdose. After witnessing

multiple overdoses on the system, an ambassador who saved someone's life using Narcan they carried personally began lobbying for ambassadors to receive training and be supplied with the drug.⁶ As a result, LA Metro started having all ambassadors carry Narcan (See Chapter V for usage statistics). Now, ambassadors receive naloxone administration training from a slideshow presentation and video adopted from a California State University, Sacramento project and additional resources supplied by the California Department of Public Health. The training materials are exceptionally detailed. A licensed psychologist discusses opioid use, signs of overdose, and how to administer naloxone. California Department of Public Health resources explain the storage conditions necessary for naloxone and differentiate between Narcan and other methods of administering naloxone. Along with a step-by-step tutorial on how to administer Narcan, ambassadors learn how to conduct a wellness check (i.e., check individuals for responsiveness), how to perform CPR and rescue breathing, when to administer a second dose of naloxone, how to help someone into the recovery position, and what to look out for when providing aftercare for someone who has received naloxone. The training materials also detail procedures for tracking naloxone distribution and use by an ambassador (LA Metro, 2024d).

As a part of the retraining for the permanent ambassador program, LA Metro is incorporating lessons learned to better prepare ambassadors for the job, including any daily on-the-job challenges. The intent is to further enhance the existing training and add new modules on topics such as human trafficking, transit terrorism, earthquake preparedness, sexual harassment, and more.

⁶. One of the contractors interviewed explained that this was done at an ambassador's suggestion. Interviewee Fabian Bolanos (who gave permission to be named) shared that he was the ambassador who made this suggestion to his company.

III. Ambassadors' Day-to-day Job

Methods

To explore what an ambassador's work is like on a day-to-day basis, we conducted interviews with five ambassadors, and research team members conducted participant observations across the system to gain a better understanding of the job functions and daily experiences of ambassadors. We connected with the ambassadors by working with community partners who had been in contact with ambassador staff and through snowball sampling. The interview questions included the hiring experience and process, training experience, and how they felt the training prepared them for their daily interactions with passengers. We also asked interviewees to describe the volume and types of daily interactions they had and the extent to which their experiences differed based on where in the system they were working. Finally, we asked whether interviewees had heard about the then-pending change from a contractor to an in-house model and whether they saw themselves continuing in this role going forward. Given the small number of interviews, we do not intend for these findings to be representative of all ambassadors but rather to provide insight into the program from the frontline staff experience.

For the participant observations, the research team members each rode the rail system and took notes on the presence and activities of ambassadors and other LA Metro personnel at each station and on the vehicles. Our team converged on Union Station to observe ambassador briefings/debriefings during a shift change. The onboard observations took place during the day during off-peak hours. Again, these are not intended to be representative of the entire day-to-day ambassador experience but instead provide preliminary observations about their presence on the system and their daily work conditions.

Ambassador Demographics and Prior Experience

Based on our observations of the end and beginning of shift meetings, the research team found that transit ambassadors appear to be roughly representative of LA Metro's racially diverse transit ridership. Interviewees reported a variety of professional backgrounds and lived experiences. Representatives of the two contractors described an openness toward hiring people who have served in the military, hospitality, or healthcare, and people who were formerly incarcerated or affected by past trauma. Our interviewees' past occupations included concert production, security, bartending, food service, construction, and other customer service roles.

Interviewed ambassadors described being attracted to the role because they wanted to help others and directly interact with the public. One ambassador expressed, "I'm all about customer service and meeting people and helping [the] unhoused." Another described, "It takes a lot of street smarts. It could be a lot of fun; it could be very rewarding....I love it—I really do." Some ambassadors mentioned finding out about the role through friends who were already ambassadors. Others applied for the job after seeing ambassadors on the system themselves.

Many interviewed ambassadors and their peers were regular LA Metro users before starting the job, but not all. As customer service-oriented people, some ambassadors have gone out of their way to develop resources to share with riders that have helped them become familiar with the system. LA Metro adopted one employee's personal booklet as an official resource for the ambassadors. The "pocket guide" contains the rail system map, contact information for customer service and transit security, information about the *Transit* app, and various other resources that originally helped the ambassador who created the booklet during their first weeks on the job.

Another stated priority for hiring new ambassadors by the two contractors was to recruit people with lived or professional experience interacting with unhoused populations or people experiencing substance abuse (potentially enabled by the contractors' outreach subcontracts with community-based groups, described in Chapter II). Specifically, they sought people with peer-counseling experience and conducted outreach with career centers, facilitating second-chance employment programs for people who have faced homelessness or substance use disorders. Some interviewees spoke to us about these experiences. One interviewee had previous volunteer experience with unhoused Angelenos; another mentioned his brother had experienced homelessness for a period. The same interviewee also observed that some of his fellow ambassadors came from "similar backgrounds" as the unhoused patrons of the LA Metro system and that the job provided them "pride and dignity."

The strength of hiring diverse candidates for the ambassador program is to have a team that can better empathize and respond to the range of concerns of transit users. Contractors emphasized a need for ambassadors to be personable and relatable to build customer satisfaction and relationships between LA Metro and riders, often referring to them as friendly or helpful peers to other riders in the transit network. Notably, many ambassadors mentioned observing theirs and the program's impact while on the job. One initially entry-level ambassador who began in the program during fall 2022 looking for part-time work eventually became a program manager and recognized leader for the ambassador program.

Job Functions Overview

Managed under the LA Metro Customer Experience Department, transit ambassadors primarily serve a customer support role. They promote a comfortable environment for transit riders by providing a visible presence. Ambassadors interact with and help LA Metro patrons, report on stations/stops and vehicle conditions, and connect riders to service information or public safety resources. As frontline workers, transit ambassadors support LA Metro in making a good first impression on all their riders, including first-time riders, those from low-income, disabled, or non-English monolingual backgrounds and people experiencing homelessness, mental health disorders, or barriers to riding transit. Understanding the diverse needs and resources available for transit users is part of fulfilling an ambassador's responsibilities. Sometimes, the intensity of those needs or a lack of resources dedicated to addressing those needs—regardless of whether LA Metro is traditionally responsible for meeting those types of needs—can create conflicts on the system that may lead to verbal or physical agitation. Though the transit ambassador program emerged from the LA Metro

PSAC's recommendations, ambassadors are not designated any formal public safety functions outside of verbal de-escalation, incident reporting, and connecting people to LA Metro transit security, external crisis response teams, or law enforcement. While the ambassador program was operated as a pilot under Strive and RMI, managers for each contractor supervised ambassadors to ensure they fulfilled LA Metro's goals for the ambassador program and evaluated team members to provide feedback on program performance to the agency and PSAC.

Customer Service

Customer service is a huge component of an ambassador's day-to-day job. LA Metro expects ambassadors to go above and beyond for riders, with the ambassador playing an integral role in building rider relationships and encouraging people to be returning riders. During their interviews, ambassadors described customer service interactions as the main function of their daily shift. Ambassadors' presence as a friendly, unarmed, and uniformed presence on the system is pronounced by their uniform of lime green polos and black pants,⁷ central location on the platform, and overall engagement with passersby. By default, ambassadors greet most customers they encounter. When conducting observational work, we heard ambassadors say:

"Happy Monday!"

"Azusa train here!"

"Thank you for riding!"

Some more subtle, nonverbal greetings included a wave hello or a slight nod of the head. Some ambassadors were also multilingual, greeting customers in Spanish. These actions aligned with the language in the ambassador training materials.

Regular shift deployment meetings reinforce many of the customer service points taught in the initial ambassador training. During a shift deployment meeting, the contractor's leadership encouraged their ambassadors to approach patrons with questions and a "listening posture" to hear how they could provide information and support a customer's trip.

Interviewees also described much of their work as helping riders with wayfinding and using TAP cards. They provide pocket maps, digital directions, and other resources directly to customers. Sometimes, this can entail collaborating with customers to develop custom routes based on their preferences or level of comfort with specific transit modes (for example, someone who only wants to use the bus to reach their destination). Ambassadors regularly direct riders to the appropriate train or bus stop that will take them to their destination and sometimes accompany those patrons. Additional assignments include explaining detours at various transit

⁷. One contractor also emphasized black shoes as part of the uniform to ensure riders perceive ambassadors as clean and professional.

stations/bus stops. Often, ambassadors assist people who are new to or confused by the LA Metro system or speak limited English.

In our interviews, ambassadors shared that customer service and support, especially system navigation, made up the vast majority of their daily interactions. One ambassador broke down his work as follows: 30-40 percent, helping with tickets and TAP fare cards; 20-30 percent, giving directions and other “situational help”; and 20-30 percent, addressing medical and criminal incidents, which we elaborate upon later in this section.

Beyond the basics of helping riders travel on LA Metro itself, we witnessed other activities ambassadors undertook, such as accompanying people purchasing tickets at non-LA Metro ticket machines for services like Amtrak and Metrolink at Union Station and helping individuals or groups take photos of themselves.

Ambassadors take pride in this work. One remembered walking with a lost and scared Spanish-speaking family from the station to a store’s lobby where they were heading. The ambassador continued:

“There’s a lot of really, really sweet moments that are like that. And there’s also some heartbreaking ones. When you have somebody that is been thrown out of their house, and they’re in a crisis, and they just began their journey being homeless, and they’re terrified, and they’re just basically stranded, trying to...seek refuge and shelter inside a station because that’s the place they feel the safest, if you were to compare it to being on the street under a bridge.”

Another moment shared during a shift-deployment meeting was an ambassador helping reunite a young rider who was separated from her parents. Ambassadors coordinated with agents across various stations via the security intercom to locate the child on the rail system and direct her back to her group. Another ambassador shared this story: a customer, initially fearful of riding transit after someone had mugged them, felt more comfortable riding again after engaging with ambassadors and said they would look out for ambassadors in the future.

Ambassadors also regularly aid unhoused people seeking shelter or transport on the LA Metro system, and the ambassador program plays an important role in the agency’s homelessness response. As one ambassador asserted of unhoused riders, “It’s important that they feel like people as well, as hard as that can be for certain people, but [that] they get the same greeting on the [LA] Metro that I would give a businessperson in a suit.” One interviewed ambassador called hotels on behalf of an unhoused rider who had a housing voucher and was looking for lodging. The same ambassador had also engaged in several wellness checks that involved administering Narcan and noted how his actions “give people a second chance.” Other ambassadors noted the challenges of this work, including witnessing drug use or seeing violence. However, ambassadors did share that their experiences differed based on where they were stationed. Regional Connector stations were relatively calm, the interviewees suggested, while B and D lines were more difficult.

One of the interviewees mentioned a desire for continuous training to ensure ambassadors can respond to emergencies and provide first aid, at least for less severe injuries, using bandages or gauze. Other ambassadors noticed customers often felt stuffy at the below-grade platforms, asking whether they could pass out water to

affected passengers. A few ambassadors described wanting better coordination, trust, and service provision from LA Metro's security units. Since ambassadors are limited in what they can do to de-escalate situations involving challenging patrons, some believe LA Metro security personnel should be more engaged to support the customer experience and improve the work environment for ambassadors.

Public Safety

Transit ambassadors play a unique role in LA Metro's spectrum of safety as *informal* enforcers of the agency's code of conduct. Ambassadors are the closest to riders, serving as the first point of contact for any emergency requiring intervention. Their training obliges them to connect people in crisis on the system with resources instead of providing direct support, which can be a point of relief or tension depending on the ambassador's outlook toward their duties or the situations they encounter. An interviewee detailed, "In our training, we're [told] that we're not enforcers, or we're not allowed to tell somebody what they can or can't do."

In the words of one of the contractor's representatives, the ambassadors are there to share their lived experiences, not get folks in trouble. Thus, ambassadors can avoid uncomfortable confrontations related to fare compliance or enforcing other agency policies and only gently remind people what the rules are, at most. On the other hand, some ambassadors feel underprepared to respond to patrons in distress. Though ambassadors receive some initial mental health, verbal de-escalation, and bystander intervention training (described in Chapter II), our informants mentioned an interest in receiving more ongoing support on these topics after ambassadors encountered real scenarios on the job.

Ultimately, an ambassador's primary public safety role is to connect to other LA Metro units that can respond to crises and to document incidents in formal reports (See **Figure 9**). When situations escalate at a stop or station or on a vehicle, interviewed ambassadors mentioned standing by and calling for help (which is supposed to arrive at the next station for moving vehicles). In the training materials and shift deployment meetings, upper management consistently reminds ambassadors of the hierarchy of reporting incidents. Ambassadors should call 911 for immediate emergencies and direct non-emergency priority incidents to the designated unit.

In a recent Board report, LA Metro staff made clear: "[LA] Metro Transit Ambassadors are not security officers and do not replace existing security personnel or law enforcement" (Parks et al., 2025). Yet interviewed ambassadors saw their work not just supplementing LA Metro's existing security system but also acting in instances where law enforcement is not necessarily needed. One ambassador, who characterized their role as a "buffer" between law enforcement and riders, described an instance when they resolved a code of conduct violation (smoking in a station) without involving police. Another interviewee demonstrated that ambassadors recognize their job as part of a broader effort: "We should be prioritized over police, which is the original reason why this program was brought forth to LA Metro, from what I understand." However, an interviewee complained that, lacking formal enforcement powers themselves, their reports of conduct violations such as public urination rarely lead to security or police arriving in time to confront the rider.

Ambassadors report all incidents on the LA Metro Transit Watch app and often respond to additional reporting duties delegated by their supervisor. For example, one of the contractors mentioned requiring their ambassadors to file reports in the contractor's specific app and/or to their supervisor with a signed report of at least three sentences. The LA Metro Transit Watch app is a publicly available mobile application that allows all LA Metro riders to text, call, or submit non-emergency reports to LA Metro transit security 24/7. The app operates in multiple languages and has features, including location sharing and push notifications that allow app users to connect with LA Metro transit security in real-time. Ambassadors file all LA Metro Transit Watch app incident reports under an ambassador profile, tagging reports with "METROAMB." Ambassadors will also often inform other ambassadors after that. Despite having direct contact lines for various LA Metro units, interviewees complained of slow response times from law enforcement.

Indeed, ambassadors' days are punctuated by addressing serious and sometimes extremely distressing incidents. Interviewees recalled trying to prevent people from attempting suicide on the tracks or witnessing it, needing to intervene in large fights that broke out, responding to people being intoxicated or having psychiatric episodes, diffusing domestic violence, witnessing gang activity, and encountering people with large knives and guns. These incidents are mentally taxing and physically dangerous for ambassadors (described further in Chapter IV); they also require more work time afterward to document what happened for official records, which can be challenging to balance on top of their everyday customer service duties.

Ambassadors often must make judgment calls about whether to intervene in conflict. Some interviewees said that knowing how to react can be challenging, given the number of directions interactions can go, even after asking questions to gather more information. For less complicated scenarios, ambassadors can fall back on their day-to-day protocols. Otherwise, most public safety enforcement is left to law enforcement or security except for administering Narcan in the case of a drug overdose.

Again, our contractors mentioned that one of the ambassadors helped bring Narcan administration to the agency after saving a life during their shift.⁸ The ambassador regularly carried it with them, outside of their ambassador duties, since they had individuals in their personal life who used drugs. Now, many more people possess it, including rail operators and some law enforcement personnel that work closely with LA Metro.

Ambassadors witnessed frequent fentanyl use and described harrowing experiences responding to people overdosing on the system:

"At Civic Center station, a guy stumbles over. He's purple. He's not breathing. [His] pupils are...the size of a little pin. He's almost going. I give him Narcan, start giving him CPR and compressions, and brought him back. By the time the paramedics got there, he was okay."

⁸. The contractor did not name the individual ambassador in their interview. One of our ambassador interviewees, Fabian Bolanos (who provided permission to be named in this report) said that it was his effort to use Narcan which led to all ambassadors being trained to carry and deploy Narcan.

Along with administering Narcan and performing CPR, ambassadors first call 911 for paramedics and then inform their supervisor. Sometimes, paramedics arrive and take over. If they come to the scene quickly enough (or the situation is not so severe), the ambassador does not need to administer aid themselves. Other times, as reported by one interviewee who had helped a person who declined further medical assistance, the individual may leave before paramedics arrive.

Though some ambassadors have had prior experience administering Narcan, those who were unfamiliar with its use were sometimes overwhelmed by those duties. As one interviewee characterized their peers:

“After they’ve done a Narcan, [I’ve noted] how stressed out and how panicked they are. Because they’re really scared. If you’ve never done it, it could be very shocking. You just have to act fast.”

Through all of these public safety duties, ambassadors encounter tension between serving as liaisons and responding to crises (other than administering Narcan). This tension may be exacerbated by the fact that some patrons confuse ambassadors for LA Metro security personnel. Especially during certain times or days of the week—like during our observation period—security and law enforcement officers might have higher visibility on the platform than ambassadors but might not be facilitating ambassadors’ duties. During our observation period, we witnessed a few law enforcement officers walk past customers who seemed to be causing disruptions on the rail platforms. Customers who might not be able to differentiate between ambassadors and other LA Metro programs (See Chapter II) and might express their frustrations toward ambassadors who do not have the same training or authority to respond to emergencies as their counterparts in other LA Metro units.

Communication with Management

During the pilot phase of the ambassador program, ambassadors did not generally interact with LA Metro managerial staff directly and instead received information and resources through their contractor firms. Both RMI and Strive trained their ambassadors together. While their management did not overlap, they assisted one another in keeping their ambassadors accountable to protocol when out in the field.

Contractors distributed the supplies the ambassadors carry on the job. RMI provided their ambassadors with red work phones, while Strive provided tablets (Other than their deployment locations (See **Figure 2**), this was the most visible way one can tell at a glance for which firm an ambassador worked.). At shift deployment and reflection meetings, ambassadors returned their equipment kits to their respective teams. Sometimes, contractors provided water bottles or snacks.

Ambassadors walk thousands of steps during shifts, circling platforms and traversing mezzanines, often with long periods between sitting down. RMI ambassadors we encountered on the E Line informed us that they would decide when to move to each station within their five-station block if they were on a riding/roving assignment.

While in the field, ambassadors use the Zello app on their cellular devices to communicate with management and each other. The Zello app uses cellular data, but some stations (including on the Regional Connector) lack consistent cell service. Ambassadors' communication there is therefore hampered, and interviewees reported having to leave underground stations in order to send a message over the app. This is also an issue when an ambassador needs to look up directions for someone online, causing rider frustration. Communications over the Zello app are also often hard to hear over the noise and other announcements of the station or vehicle, especially since ambassadors do not have earpieces and instead just listen from their iPads or phones at their waists. One ambassador recounted an incident when a peer needed to rush up out of an underground station to report a medical emergency, lacking cellular service down on the platform. Unlike other LA Metro staff in stations, ambassadors do not have radios that work below ground.

At the beginning and end of their shifts, ambassadors attended pre-shift and post-shift meetings with their respective contractors (leaving an afternoon gap in system coverage, as most ambassadors are either being briefed or debriefed around 2:00 P.M.). At Union Station (Strive's only deployment site and one of RMI's (See **Figure 2**)), ambassadors met in circles in a back hallway. In these meetings, shift leaders and program managers reviewed protocol for processing reports, took inventory of customer interactions and Narcan administration, and encouraged ambassadors to be on their best behavior and share stories that the contractors could in turn relay to LA Metro.

The contractors each expressed employee responsibility and wellness differently, reflecting the nature of their parent organization. In our observations, RMI was more regimented in listing responsibilities for employees to remember, emphasizing protocols for distributing information about discounted fare programs and checking in with "sleepers" throughout the system. Meanwhile, Strive's conversations were somewhat more open-ended. The discussion was structured as a call-and-response, where people raised their hands to share customer interactions and observations about transit activity during their shift. In a brief conversation with program managers for Strive, we also noticed an emphasis on taking care of their team's mental health. The manager we talked with mentioned "hugs" and emotional labor are required to keep their ambassadors looking up. At least one interviewed Strive ambassador noticed these differences playing out on the system:

"I can always tell, like, who's Strive [and] who's RMI, you know? No shade to RMI, but sometimes they're a little standoffish, and that might be because of how they're trained. I mean, I think Strive people are more friendly, and you're gonna get a warm welcome."

Fundamentally, both contractor employers worked together to coordinate updates and feedback on the ambassador program to LA Metro staff and the LA Metro Board. They conducted meetings with PSAC and spoke at media events, often reminding their teams that LA Metro is looking to their success to inform transitioning the ambassador program in house. Since ambassadors did not receive much communication directly from LA Metro, they relied on information relayed through their employers. Sometimes, this relationship worked well, as the contractors and ambassadors could band together to request improvements

from the agency, such as access to break rooms⁹ (See Chapter IV). Other times, this structure presented issues when delays, disruptions, and redeployment orders were not communicated to ambassadors in a timely manner, working their way too slowly through multiple chains of command.

⁹. One of our interviewees shared that they believe the lack of access to break rooms violated California labor law. Because ambassadors were not able to take breaks in a private setting, this individual had filed grievances with the California Department of Industrial Relations. As the program transitions to an in-house model, the issue about access to employee break rooms should be resolved.

IV. Ambassadors' Job Quality, Working Conditions, and Pay

Ambassadors' Job Quality and Working Conditions

Being a transit ambassador is a taxing role. Below, we describe and synthesize observations of ambassador job quality, working conditions, and retention. This is especially relevant as LA Metro works to bring the ambassadors in house from their former place as employees of contractor firms.

Hiring and Training

The experience of the ambassador's job may vary based on how much a given ambassador works. Some ambassadors work full-time: one 8.5-hour shift each day for five workdays. Other ambassadors have a more flexible schedule, including working only on weekends. "I really appreciate the flexibility of that program," noted one interviewee, "where certain things [are] more rigid, and other jobs are available." The speed of ambassador hiring seems to vary. An interviewee reported that his peers started within a week or two after applying, but his own hiring took over two months. One interviewee, who at the time had another job and was seeking part-time employment, was unable to take time off to attend the full two weeks of training; he instead was scheduled for a three-day condensed version.

Indeed, ambassadors expressed some dissatisfaction with the training (See Chapter II) and found that they did not fully prepare ambassadors for the job on the ground. As one ambassador described, "This contractor just basically hired us, gave us that tutorial basically, and they threw 250 ambassadors onto a system—a very dangerous system....They just grabbed a bunch of young people [and] threw them out." Another called the trainings "shoddy," though yet another offered a more mixed assessment: "I feel like it could have been a little more extensive personally, but I do feel like I was prepped, just because I've already had customer service experience." One ambassador, who rarely rode LA Metro before starting the job, told us that he ended up learning more on the job than in the training sessions about the layout of the system and how to give others directions. As previously mentioned, LA Metro will be retraining all ambassadors as they become employees and improving training based on lessons learned during the pilot program.

Importantly, there was no ongoing training after the initial sessions. One interviewee characterized this as a "big mistake." Joanna Juarez, who suffered an assault on the system, agreed, as quoted in a news article (Carter et al., 2024). Even during the initial training, interviewed ambassadors complained broadly that the training did not cover the specifics of interpersonal interactions on a transit system and specifically that more training was needed on self-defense and de-escalation techniques for diffusing confrontations. One interviewed ambassador resorted to techniques not covered in training, such as first offering a cigarette to a disorderly

traveler to help them calm down, then stating that they would need to leave the system to smoke it, and walking out with them.

Ambassadors' Safety on the System

Out on the system, the public-facing nature of the job, as well as stressful incidents such as overdose response, altercation interventions, and responding to intoxicated riders or those experiencing mental health crises, have caused stress and burnout. Interviewed ambassadors varied in their long-term plans: some loved the job and intended to remain in the role for a while; others suggested they will leave when the program moves in house at LA Metro. “This isn’t my dream job,” said one ambassador; “I’m gonna continue, and I love it—I really do,” said another. In their internal evaluation of the ambassador program in 2023 (See Chapter II and V), LA Metro staff noted that the program had a 73 percent retention rate (without specifying over what time period), compared to 86 percent retention among LA Metro’s own employees (Smith, 2023).

One reason ambassadors leave is both the real and perceived danger of the role. “A lot of ambassadors have gotten assaulted,” one interviewee told us. “I’ve had a gun pulled on me. I’ve been spat at. I’ve had other female ambassadors that have gotten sexually assaulted.” Another ambassador reported peers being kicked in the ribs and slapped in the face. Juarez, the ambassador profiled by USC journalists, was punched by an “erratic” man in a station; she had not, as of the article’s publication, returned to work (Carter et al., 2024). Worryingly, one ambassador with a past case of sexual assault slipped past a background check and attempted to later assault a rider he met while on duty (Harjai, 2025).

Multiple interviewees wanted to carry pepper spray for self-defense but are not allowed to; one admitted to doing so anyway. Another noted with some resignation that even improved or expanded security staff would not be able to protect ambassadors during every potentially dangerous interaction they experienced over the course of their work.

Overall, ambassadors lack decompression and mental health support after such intense incidents. Multiple interviewees, including Juarez, wished their employers offered counseling to help them process these episodes, as well as times when they witnessed suicides or faced violence. For a while, Strive did offer its employees the rest of the day off after using Narcan, but that practice ceased. Strive management, for its part, claimed that its contract with LA Metro precluded hiring counselors themselves (Carter et al., 2024).

Deployment Issues and Labor Relations

Aside from dramatic instances of violence and harassment, ambassadors face more mundane issues in their deployments. For one, ambassadors complained about lack of consistent 30-minute lunch breaks and access to break rooms in stations. The latter issue arose frequently in our interviews. Especially because ambassadors wear a highly visible uniform, they need a space out of the public eye to be able to take uninterrupted breaks. While program administrators said that ambassadors should have had this access, the ambassadors’ experience suggests that LA Metro employees or other system contractors did not have clear guidance on who could access restricted areas at stations. Interviewees observed a “pecking order” of who could use the break rooms,

with direct LA Metro employees such as custodians at the top, then contract security, and only then ambassadors, who are often denied access altogether. This presents health and safety hazards for ambassadors, though break rooms are legally mandated in the state (California Department of Industrial Relations, 2021). An ambassador also noted that break violations entitle workers to an extra hour of pay (Lee, 2025), which they allege has not been provided. In response to the increased number of frontline workers in the stations, LA Metro increased the number of station restrooms in 2023 and will continue to increase restroom access in 2025. Additionally, we expect that the in-house transition is likely to help assuage this previous tension around break room and bathroom access. During the pilot program, LA Metro staff also identified underutilized security kiosks across the system to provide more break spaces for ambassadors.

Without a formal rotation or seniority system, interviewees described the way that the contractors assigned ambassadors to postings for the day as “random” or arbitrary but also reported some favoritism in assignments. One ambassador also recalled colleagues being reassigned to a station where they had previously suffered an incident and had requested not to return to for a while. Another relayed that assignments are given to ambassadors on the day-of. Still another noted that they had no choice in who they were paired with, sometimes leading to tension. Experiences vary widely by station, with some of the B and D Line subway stations characterized as the hardest assignments, but change in who is deployed to what station is apparently slow. The short notice on assignments also made it hard to plan for bringing lunch into work, since some stations have refrigerators for staff but others do not.

Meanwhile, ambassadors face difficulties in setting up boundaries between time on duty, time being briefed, and time off from work. The pre- and post-shift briefings at Union Station, for instance, are conducted in a publicly accessible hallway—apparently a consequence of the contractors either not being given or seeking dedicated briefing space in the station. During our observations, multiple travelers with suitcases walked right through the middle of the briefings. Before and after work, interviewed ambassadors who themselves commute by transit reported being approached by patrons who assumed they were on duty. Some resort to covering their bright uniforms with a sweatshirt to avoid this. Additionally, a common rider complaint reported by contractor management, by interviewed ambassadors, and in LA Metro’s ambassador evaluation survey (Smith, 2023) was that ambassadors often appear to be “on their phones” and not paying attention, when they are actually logging their interactions and making their required reports.

In all, interviewed ambassadors varied widely on how they viewed their contractor employer’s management. Of their relationship, one ambassador quipped, “It’s like any marriage: it has its highs, its lows.” An interviewee recalled almost getting into trouble for missing some days of work due to mental health strain but then having a “heart-to-heart” conversation with supervisors who proved “lenient.” Another praised them for accommodating his desire for more flexible shifts. While opportunities for promotion directly within the ambassador program are few, given its relatively horizontal structure, we met with Jennifer Sory, who began at the program’s launch as a part-time ambassador but was subsequently promoted to supervisor, lead supervisor, and then program manager.

In mid-2023, a group of ambassadors organized a unionization vote at Strive, attempting to be represented by Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 1756. ATU is the largest transit worker union in the U.S., and Local 1756 represents operators and mechanics at Foothill Transit, another transit system in the region. However, the vote failed by a wide margin: 67 employees against, 30 for. Strive management claimed that shop stewards (members of the union selected as internal representatives) would interfere with the relationship between ambassadors and management. An interviewee reported mandatory “captive audience” meetings in which management made the case against unionizing. After the vote, organizers filed multiple complaints with the National Labor Relations Board, alleging illegal unfair labor practices such as threats and retaliation for protected organizing activities; those complaints are still being adjudicated as of writing (Scauzillo, 2023; *KNX News*, 2023; Yee, 2017; ATU, 2023b, 2023a; and National Labor Relations Board, 2025).

At RMI, organizers with the Teamsters were, at least at some point, taking authorization “cards” (forms indicating that workers are joining a union and giving it permission to collectively bargain for them). With long roots in transportation, the Teamsters are the largest U.S. union of any kind, and Local 911 represents a variety of municipal and transportation workers in Southern California, including LA Metro security officers and Los Angeles International (LAX) airport ambassadors (Teamsters, 2019; Teamsters Local 911, 2023; and Leiva, 2024). Meanwhile, Local 911 filed a protest with LA Metro for hiring ambassadors through external contractors at all, claiming it violates their unionized security guards’ bargaining rights (City News Service, 2023).

In May 2025, LA Metro and the Teamsters agreed that the Teamsters would represent the ambassadors when the program moves in-house (with supervisors to be represented by American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), pending completion of negotiations) (Parks et al., 2025).

Ambassador Pay and Benefits

Along with working conditions, ambassadors’ pay and benefits of course determine the quality of the job. The two contractors paid their ambassadors slightly different base wages in 2024—\$19.96 per hour for Strive and \$21.75 for RMI. On top of that, under LA Metro’s living wage policy that governs employee pay for LA Metro contractors, both contractors pay their workers an additional hourly sum in lieu of health benefits. Within each contractor, the ambassadors all appear to have earned the same wage (Abrahamian, 2024; Parks, Smith, and Coppolo, 2025; and communications with program staff).

Table 1 compares hourly ambassador wages for each contractor and the new wages of in-house LA Metro ambassadors with inflation-adjusted median hourly wages for comparable occupations in California. As ambassadors’ work sits at the intersection of many types of work, **Table 1** includes occupations in customer service, security, social work, and transportation. Employees within each of these other occupations may or may not have health benefits provided through their workplace; hence **Table 1** lists ambassador wages both with and without the health benefits stipend (Parks et al., 2025; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023, 2024; and communications with program staff). The table also includes the “living wage”—what researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) calculate is needed to “cover the cost of [a person’s] minimum

basic needs where they live while still being self-sufficient” (Living Wage Institute, Glasmeier, and MIT, 2025). This differs from LA Metro’s Living Wage Policy and the City of Los Angeles’ Living Wage Ordinance (with which LA Metro’s transit ambassador program complies) which establish a wage floor above the minimum wage for contractors with LA Metro and the City of Los Angeles, respectively (Abrahamian, 2024 and City of Los Angeles Bureau of Contract Administration, 2025). But they do not necessarily reflect the actual costs of living in the area, as calculated by the MIT index (Living Wage Institute, Glasmeier, and MIT, 2025).

Table 1. Comparison of Inflation-adjusted Median Wages in Other Occupations to Ambassador Wages.

Occupation/Wage	Location	Median Hourly Wage (December 2024 \$)
Security Guards [†]	California	\$19.75
Strive ambassadors, base wage*	Los Angeles metropolitan area	\$19.96
Reservation and Transportation Ticket Agents and Travel Clerks [†]	California	\$20.60
RMI ambassadors, base wage*	Los Angeles metropolitan area	\$21.75
Counselors, All Other [†]	California	\$22.15
In-house LA Metro ambassadors, starting wage*	Los Angeles metropolitan area	\$22.32
Customer Service Representatives [†]	California	\$22.99
RMI ambassadors, wage plus health benefits stipend*	Los Angeles metropolitan area	\$25.83
Strive ambassadors, wage plus health benefits stipend*	Los Angeles metropolitan area	\$25.91
In-house LA Metro ambassadors, most senior wage*	Los Angeles metropolitan area	\$26.00
Living wage, one adult with no children [‡]	Los Angeles metropolitan area	\$28.57
Substance Abuse, Behavioral Disorder, and Mental Health Counselors [†]	California	\$28.97
BART ambassadors, starting wage**	San Francisco metropolitan area	\$30.21
Living wage, one adult with no children [‡]	San Francisco metropolitan area	\$30.57
Social Workers, All Other [†]	California	\$31.77
Bus Drivers, Transit and Intercity [†]	California	\$32.92
Living wage, one of two working adults with two children [‡]	Los Angeles metropolitan area	\$33.19
Mental Health and Substance Abuse Social Workers [†]	California	\$35.65
Subway and Streetcar Operators [†]	California	\$36.72
BART ambassadors, most senior wage**	San Francisco metropolitan area	\$37.10
Living wage, one of two working adults with two children [‡]	San Francisco metropolitan area	\$42.37
Healthcare Social Workers [†]	California	\$44.80
Police and Sheriff’s Patrol Officers [†]	California	\$56.61

Data sources: * Parks et al., 2025 and communications with program staff; ** BART and BART Police Officers’ Association, n.d.; [†] Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023, 2024; [‡] Living Wage Institute, Glasmeier, and MIT, 2025; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024

Without considering the health benefits stipend, the contractor ambassadors' hourly wage lies at the low end of the scale, below that of customer service agents. With the stipend included, their wages become more comparable to other relevant occupations, though still lower than many. This is especially true given Los Angeles' cost of living, with ambassador wages, even with the health benefits stipend, below the metropolitan area's living wage for a single adult. And wages are well below the area's living wage for a family wage-earner (exemplified in **Table 1** by the living wage of one member of a household with two working parents and two children) (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023, 2024; Living Wage Institute, Glasmeier, and MIT, 2025; and communications with program staff), contrary to PSAC's recommendation that ambassadors receive a "family-supporting wage" (PSAC Non-law Enforcement Alternatives Ad-hoc Committee, 2021, p. 3).

To be sure, the higher-paid occupations are largely "skilled" labor—a technical term not casting judgment on the difficulty of the work but rather denoting that the work requires extensive training or education and often licensure (such as bus operators' commercial driver's licenses or clinical social workers' and therapists' licenses). Ambassadors, as a formally "unskilled" profession, do not command the wages of their "skilled" peers (Social Security Administration, n.d. and Hayes, 2022).

LA Metro contractor-employed ambassadors also earned less than their peers to the north. Ambassadors on Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) in the San Francisco Bay Area earn between \$30.21 and \$37.10 per hour, over five steps detailed in their collective bargaining agreement (See **Table 1**). BART's ambassadors, while unarmed civilians, are part of BART's police department and are represented by the same union as other police department employees. Nonetheless, they perform largely similar duties to LA Metro ambassadors (BART, 2020, 2025; BART and BART Police Officers' Association, n.d.; and BART Police Department, n.d.). This regional wage difference is not unique to ambassadors—local government employees overall earn 16 percent more, on average, in the San Francisco metropolitan area than the Los Angeles metropolitan area (Federal Reserve Bank of Saint Louis, 2025), and the overall living wage is higher there as well (Living Wage Institute, Glasmeier, and MIT, 2025). But with even a little seniority, the wage difference between BART and LA Metro ambassadors quickly becomes greater than that (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023, 2024; BART and BART Police Officers' Association, n.d.; and communications with program staff).

Interviewed ambassadors had mixed feelings about their wages. One ambassador described seeing the wage on an online job posting: "That's pretty good pay for a good hourly wage, at least from what I've been used to in my life, for a job that doesn't seem constricting, like a desk/office job or even a lot of food service." But others mentioned particularly looking forward to the ambassador program moving in house at LA Metro because of the likely increase in pay that would come with the change. Indeed, improved pay and benefits were among the key demands of backers of the 2023 unionization drive (KNX News, 2023 and ABC7 Los Angeles, 2023).

The recently adopted collective bargaining agreement for the ambassadors' move in-house at LA Metro did indeed offer some improvement to pay but did not change the relative position of LA Metro ambassadors' pay relative to comparable occupations (See **Table 1**). Adopting a step-based pay model like BART's, in-house LA Metro ambassadors will earn \$22.32 per hour at the lowest level of seniority and \$26.00 per hour at the highest level. Almost every current ambassador making the transition in-house will be classified in the top two

levels of seniority. This represents a raise from the base wages at the contractors, but LA Metro ambassadors' pay still sits below that of specialized comparable roles and the area's living wage. Ambassadors will receive annual cost-of-living increases that average out to 3.2 percent over the following three fiscal years.

Perhaps a more significant change than the pay increase is new health and retirement benefits. Ambassadors did not receive health insurance through their contractors. They instead received the extra \$5.95 per hour (Strive) or \$4.23 per hour (RMI), under LA Metro's living wage policy, but did not have to use those funds on health insurance. At LA Metro, however, ambassadors will instead receive a comprehensive package of health, vision, and dental insurance. They will also enter the state's pension system, with contributions co-funded by LA Metro and the employee, and receive more holidays off (Abrahamian, 2024 and Parks et al., 2025).

From the contractor health benefits stipend, a Strive ambassador working nationally standard full-time hours (2,080 hours) would receive \$12,376 per year. This is more than the national average premium for employer-sponsored healthcare in the transportation, communication, and utilities sector (\$8,603 per year) and the average premium for employer-sponsored healthcare for all workers in the West region (\$8,859)—for a single individual. However, a full-time ambassador at the contractor earned less from this stipend than comparable average family premiums (\$26,601 nationally in the transportation, communication, and utilities sector; \$24,574 for all workers in the West region). Meanwhile, the new in-house health benefits package is valued at \$26,502, representing a substantial step up for the ambassadors (KNX News, 2023; Abrahamian, 2024; Taxpayer Advocate Service, n.d.; KFF, 2024; Parks et al., 2025; and communications with program staff).

V. Ambassadors' Effect on the System

To understand how ambassadors' presence on the LA Metro system affected riders, especially their perceptions of safety, one of the program's stated objectives, we used the following three data sources:

1. Monthly activity reports from the ambassador program, presented to the LA Metro Board
2. LA Metro's passenger survey, deployed one year into the pilot program
3. Ride rating data collected from the *Transit* app from before the ambassador deployment through year two of the pilot program

Across these three data sources, we find the ambassadors are making a slight but notable improvement in passenger experience. As seen in the monthly reports, they have interacted with an increasing number of passengers and assisted in filing a growing number of reports about system issues. Due to the distribution of Narcan, the ambassadors have had a lifesaving impact on hundreds of people. From the LA Metro surveys from the first year, passengers who had seen ambassadors found them helpful and agreed that their presence made them feel safer. Further, people who had seen the ambassadors expressed that their experience with the system had improved from the previous year. However, only five percent of those respondents directly attribute these improvements to the ambassadors' presence. Finally, the *Transit* app data analysis highlights a similar trend—a small but significant increase in passenger ratings on the rail system during the period when the ambassadors have had an increasing presence. We caution that the *Transit* app findings are not intended to indicate a causal relationship. Still, we do find a small, yet significantly positive, association between customer trip rating and routes with ambassadors over time, especially in the second year of the program. The following sections detail these data and our findings.

Monthly Activity Reports

We generated the data in this section by compiling the monthly updates on public safety presented at the LA Metro committee and board meetings. Each update included the number of customer interactions. The number and type of interactions are a useful metric for what the ambassadors are doing and how often they interact with riders. However, these activity reports are better considered an input about their performance, rather than a way to understand the outcomes on the system.

The number of engagements—meaning the number of times ambassadors interacted with riders (defined by program staff as a conversation more than just a greeting)—increased markedly in the program's first year (See **Figure 8**). The growth in monthly engagements continued during the second year of the program, but at a slower pace than the first, with an estimate of approximately 65,000 monthly engagements as of November 2024. We compared the number of engagements with the number of deployment hours for Strive and found an

association between the ramp-up in Strive deployment and engagements for the first year. However, the trends between deployment and engagements were not as closely related in the second half of 2023.

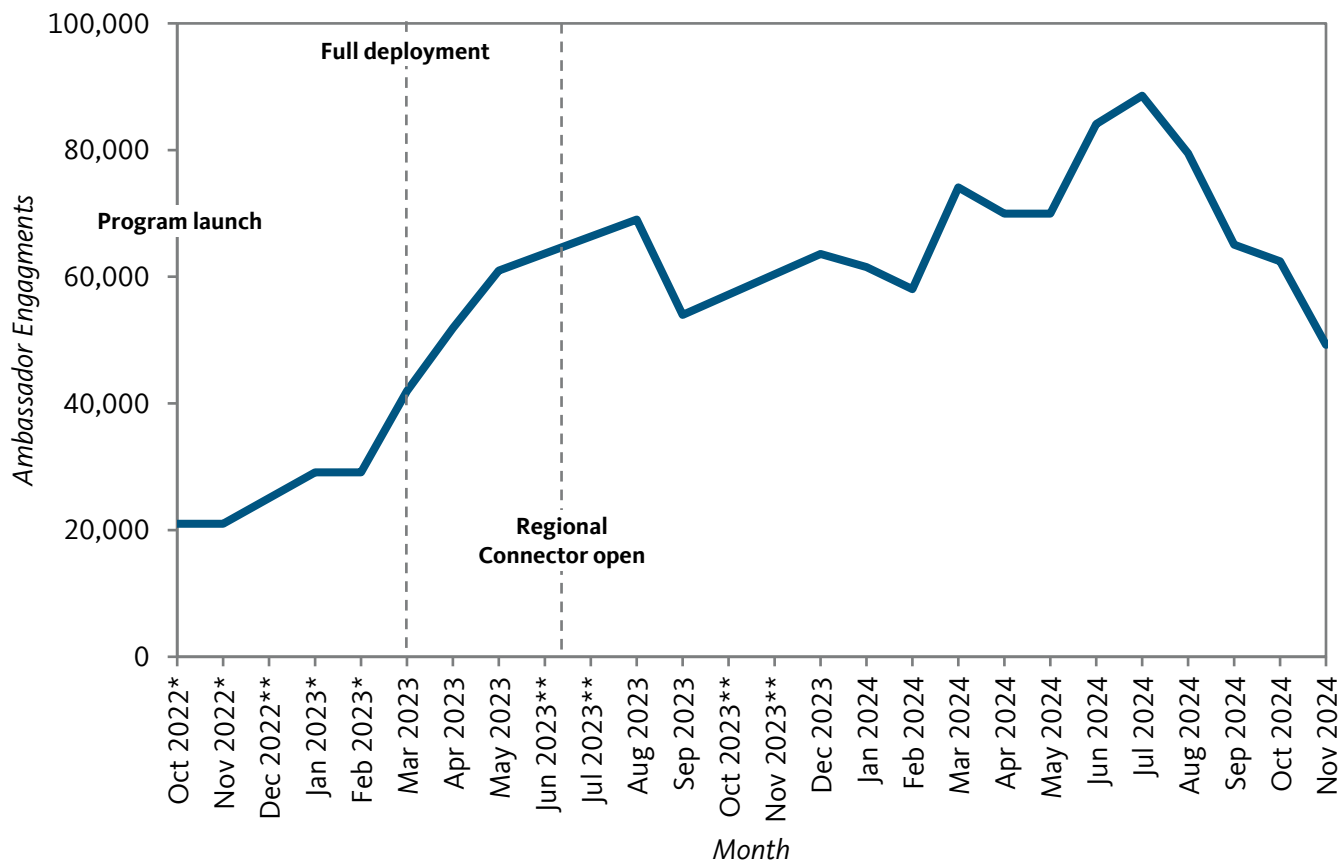


Figure 8. Ambassador Engagements.

* Engagement data were reported over a two-month period these months; half of those totals are shown each month.

** No engagement data available

Data source: LA Metro, 2025b

We also compared the number of monthly engagements with rail system ridership estimates for November 2024. In that month, we estimate that an ambassador may engage with roughly one out of every 90 passengers (LA Metro, 2025b, 2025e).

The monthly reports also included the number of incidents reported by the ambassadors categorized by type, including cleanliness, elevator and escalator problems, graffiti incidents, and safety issues. As seen in **Figure 9**, ambassadors most commonly report issues with cleanliness and graffiti. Throughout the two-year period, the number of monthly reports about cleanliness and graffiti increased, while safety and elevator or escalator reports remained largely unchanged. However, we do not know if reporting protocol or emphasis changed over the study period, which may contribute to these changes.

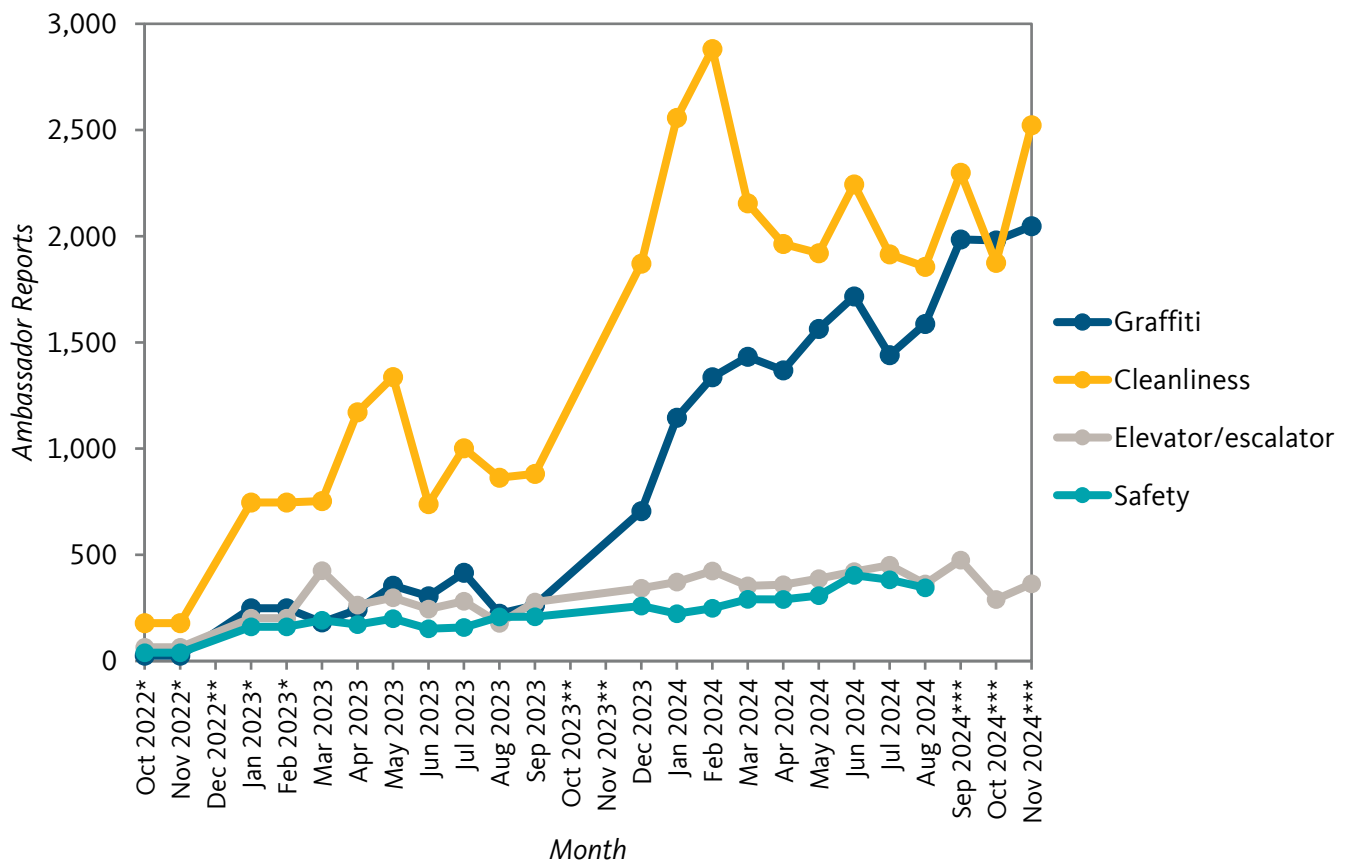


Figure 9. Reports from Ambassadors by Category.

* Data were reported over a two-month period these months; half of those totals are shown each month.

** No data available

*** No data available on safety reports

Data source: LA Metro, 2025b

Finally, we present data relating to ambassadors' use of Narcan (See Chapter III). By the numbers at least Narcan incidents are a relatively minor component of an ambassador's experience, especially compared to the large volume of monthly engagements (See **Figure 8**). Ambassadors have administered Narcan 182 times over less than two years (See **Figure 10**). We do not assume that every Narcan use successfully reversed an overdose. Regardless, we are confident that these activity reports are indicative of the ambassador's lifesaving impact on passengers. Indeed, after the time period for which we acquired data, an LA Metro blog post in early 2025 reported ambassadors administered nearly 300 doses of Narcan (LA Metro, 2025d).

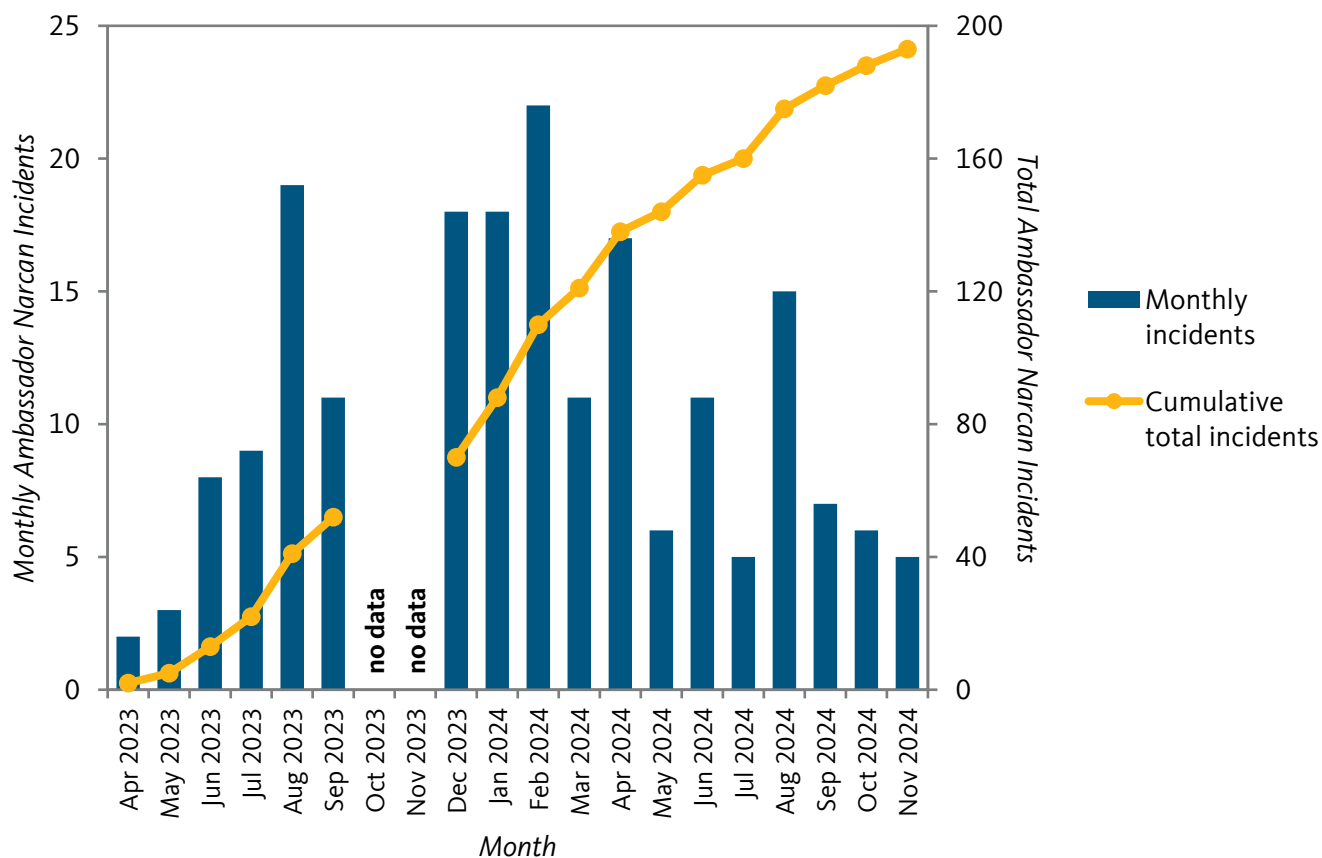


Figure 10. Ambassador Narcan Incidents.

Data source: LA Metro, 2025b

These reports also included the general location of Narcan deployment. The majority of Narcan activity (60%) took place at heavy rail line stations other than Union Station and Regional Connector stations. Union Station itself accounted for 12 percent of incidents, Regional Connector stations made up 9 percent, and the remaining Narcan deployments occurred at other light rail stations (16%) or on buses (3%).

LA Metro's Passenger Survey

LA Metro conducted a survey in early August 2023 of passenger experiences with the ambassador program, five months after the start of the program. In contrast to activity reports, surveys like this represent a performance measure that reflects the views of passengers themselves. Survey respondents were recruited through a push notification on the *Transit* app, a pop-up notification in the trip planning sections of LA Metro's website, and an e-mail to riders with TAP cards who had signed up to receive e-mail messages. LA Metro received 11,337 completed surveys (Appendix C provides a selection of questions from the survey instrument); the respondent pool generally matched the demographics and riding frequency from LA Metro's general onboard survey administered in 2022 and the proportion of bus and rail riders in recent boarding data.

LA Metro staff presented the survey responses to the LA Metro Board in four thematic categories: overall interactions, perceptions of safety, customer experience, and areas for improvement. Approximately half of the respondents had seen the ambassadors, and slightly more than half (59%) of those respondents had been greeted by an ambassador. Most respondents who had seen ambassadors found the ambassadors to be easy to see, friendly, approachable, and informative. Less than half of the respondents (40%) had directly asked ambassadors for help, and an overwhelming majority of riders who did find the ambassadors to be very helpful (Smith, 2023). Because the ambassadors are mainly stationed on the rail system, and most respondents use the bus system, this may explain why 48 percent of respondents had not seen the ambassadors.

The survey found that people who had seen ambassadors agreed that their presence made them feel safer (63% agreed strongly or somewhat). These feelings of safety were greater among Asian/Pacific Islander, Latino/a, female, and low-income respondents (those with a yearly household income under \$25,000). About half of the respondents believed their overall LA Metro riding experience improved over the prior year. The percentage who thought so increased as respondents interacted more with the ambassadors. People who had asked an ambassador for help were more likely to rate their riding experience as having improved from the year before (61%) than those who had less substantial or no interactions with ambassadors. But while perceived system improvement and ambassador interaction were related, only a small share of respondents attributed those improvements directly to the ambassadors. Rather, better transit service was the most common reason given for perceived improvement (38%) (Smith, 2023). However, this difference may arise because respondents were asked an open-ended question why their experience had improved (communications with program staff). Therefore, we cannot conclusively say that people did not feel that ambassadors did not have an impact. Rather, for those who responded, it was more common for service improvements to be cited as the causal factor.

The survey results suggest some areas for improvement in the program. Despite some interviewees' reports of confusion among riders (See Chapters II and VI), respondents generally could tell the ambassadors from other LA Metro employees, security personnel, and law enforcement. However, survey respondents expressed concerns that they did not know what ambassadors do (39%) or how ambassadors can help them (31%). Finally, in an open-ended question on how to make the program better, six sets of ideas emerged: expanding to other areas; adding hours at night; clarifying what ambassadors do; reducing (perceived) ambassador idleness, personal conversations, and phone use while on duty; augmenting ambassadors' knowledge of routes and arrivals; and helping with additional duties that are currently out of ambassadors' scope, such as removing disruptive passengers from the system or cleaning vehicles (Smith, 2023).

Overall, the LA Metro survey shows that passengers have a broadly favorable view of the ambassador program and that the ambassadors likely contribute to making some people feel safer and improving their experience on the system. Women were particularly likely to say that ambassadors made them feel safer—which is promising given the safety concerns women especially face while using transit (Galicia et al., 2019 and Loukaitou-Sideris and Ceccato, 2022). While Asian/Pacific Islander and Latino/a respondents were also more likely to agree that ambassadors made them feel safer, agreement was lower among white (59%) and Black respondents (56%) (Smith, 2023 and communications with program staff), suggesting that different groups of people may

perceive the safety improvements to slightly differing degrees. The LA Metro evaluation survey results indicate a positive, but slightly uneven improvement (based on the perceptions of different racial/ethnic groups) on the system from the ambassador program.

Transit App

Data Framework

Finally, we drew on data from the *Transit* app to review changes in rider perceptions before and after the deployment of ambassadors. App users can receive step-by-step instructions about their route through the app's "GO" mode, and at the end of the ride, they are asked to rate their experience out of five stars (See **Figure 11**).

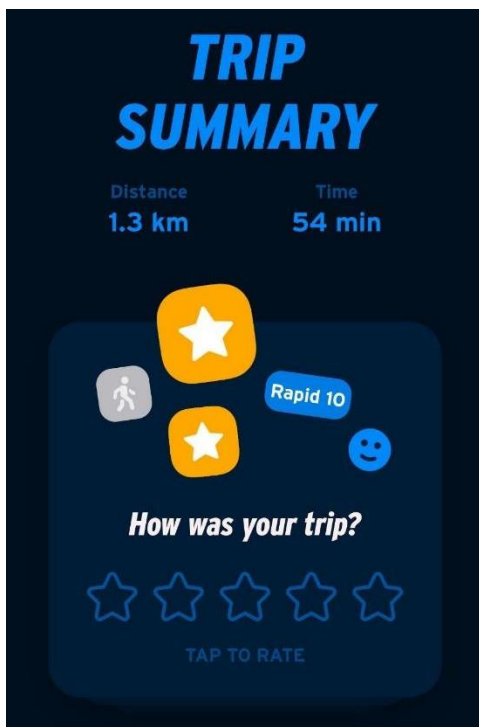


Figure 11. “Rate-My-Ride” Prompt in the *Transit* App

Source: authors’ screenshot of Transit app

Known as the “Rate-My-Ride” survey, app users who are actively using “GO” mode (step-by-step navigation) are then also asked to rate specific aspects of their ride, such as whether they felt safe on board the vehicle and the quality of the stop amenities. Additionally, when a respondent indicates that the stop amenities were bad or unsafe, they are prompted to answer additional questions about what in particular made a stop feel bad or unsafe.

For this analysis, *Transit* app provided a dataset of 300,753 anonymous responses taken from LA Metro rail and bus rapid transit riders.¹⁰ The app records the user’s stop and line on the system along with their survey answers. Because, when using “GO” mode, the app also records the rider’s intended route on which they are traveling, the app and dataset can also differentiate between lines that share the same track (such as the B and D Lines downtown). Given where ambassadors are deployed (See Chapter II), our dataset includes responses from rail lines (A, B, C, D, E, and K) and the bus rapid transit G Line in the San Fernando Valley and J Line from El Monte to Long Beach but otherwise no on-street bus routes. The data includes responses over a 28-month period from May 2022 to September 2024. The dataset represents rider experiences before and after the program was implemented, with partial data from a year before and two years after launch. We were unable to analyze a full year of data before the ambassador program began, as the “Rate-My-Ride” survey was first launched in May 2022. Additionally, the app only asked the general five-star rating question, not the further specific questions above, in the pre-ambassador period.

We have segmented the data into three periods:

- Pre-ambassador (May 2022-September 2022)
- Year 1 ambassador (October 2022-September 2023)
- Year 2 ambassador (October 2023-September 2024)

Table 2 provides an overview of the data collected by question and period. The reason that the total number of responses rose over time is that the “Rate-My-Ride” feature was rolled out slowly, first to less than half of app users by September 2022 and to all users by January 2023. The subsequent growth in the number ratings is a result of the *Transit* app’s expanding user base and the increase in users taking trips in “GO” mode.

We intended to analyze the specific questions about stop quality and onboard safety. However, due to the lack of pre-ambassador period data and the limited number of responses in the Year 1 period, we could only analyze the main “How was your trip?” question.

To determine how representative *Transit* app users are of LA Metro ridership, we compared demographic responses from another *Transit* app dataset, its quarterly Rider Happiness Survey of LA Metro riders, to LA Metro’s general on-board rider survey, in fall 2022 and fall 2023 (Chaparro, 2024). The demographic profile is slightly different but not drastically so. The respondents are similar in their levels of vehicle ownership and access. *Transit* app users include a much higher percentage of frequent riders (80-83% of *Transit* app users using transit five days or more per week, compared to 56-60% of riders LA Metro itself surveyed). The two sets of surveys have a similar proportion of Latino/a respondents, though the *Transit* app has slightly fewer Black respondents and a slightly higher percentage of white respondents than the LA Metro on-board survey. Surprisingly, the *Transit* app profile skews *older* than the LA Metro profile. Finally, LA Metro’s surveyed ridership profile includes slightly more people with very low household incomes, under \$20,000 (51%,

¹⁰. We identified 230 duplicate responses and removed them from the dataset, leaving 300,523 responses.

compared to 38% for the *Transit* app) but is fairly similar in its share of households making between \$20,000 and \$50,000 annually (Chaparro, 2024; LA Metro, 2022; and Pabba, 2024). The *Transit* app included a “prefer not to say” option for income, which may contribute to slight differences in responses. A complete comparison of demographic profiles is provided in Appendix D.

Table 2. Frequency of *Transit* App Responses by Question and Period.

Question	Pre-ambassador	Year 1 Ambassador	Year 2 Ambassador
How was your trip?	8,481	51,432	99,015
Do you feel safe onboard this [vehicle type]?	0	704	109,604
How’s this [vehicle type] stop?	0	332	26,597
What’s not great about it [the stop/station]?	0	70	3,355
What’s making you feel unsafe [at the stop/station]?	0	21	912

Data sources: *Transit app*, 2024a, 2024b

Rider Satisfaction: Change over Time

We first present descriptive results by period and by line, followed by chi-square tests for significant differences, and finally, an ordinal regression to determine the strength, direction, and magnitude of the association between the periods, ratings, and lines. Taken together, we find statistically significant evidence that ride ratings on the rail system, where the ambassadors are primarily located, increased over the study period. We caution that this analysis only associates the increased presence of ambassadors with rating improvements. We make no causal claims about the relationship; many other factors changed over these years as well.

Most riders rate their trips with five stars across all three time periods.¹¹ A slightly higher percentage of users ranked their trips with five stars by the second year of the ambassador program. Ratings of one, two, and three stars remained stable, and the increase in five-star ratings appears to be due to a decline in four-star ratings (See **Figure 12**).

¹¹. This might be influenced by a general societal trend of “reputation inflation,” wherein ratings on scales like five-star ratings grow over time (Filippas, Horton, and Golden, 2022), and by rating systems in other transportation apps like Uber and Lyft, on which five-star ratings have become to some degree an expectation for at least adequate service (especially given that low ratings can lead to various penalties for drivers) (Wolff-Mann, 2017; Rana, 2023; Kane, 2015; and Spires, n.d.). Uber, for instance, explicitly defines five-stars as merely being a ride with no issues (Wolff-Mann, 2017), and one study found that around 90 percent of trips analyzed received five stars (Athey, Camilo Castillo, and Chandar, 2024).

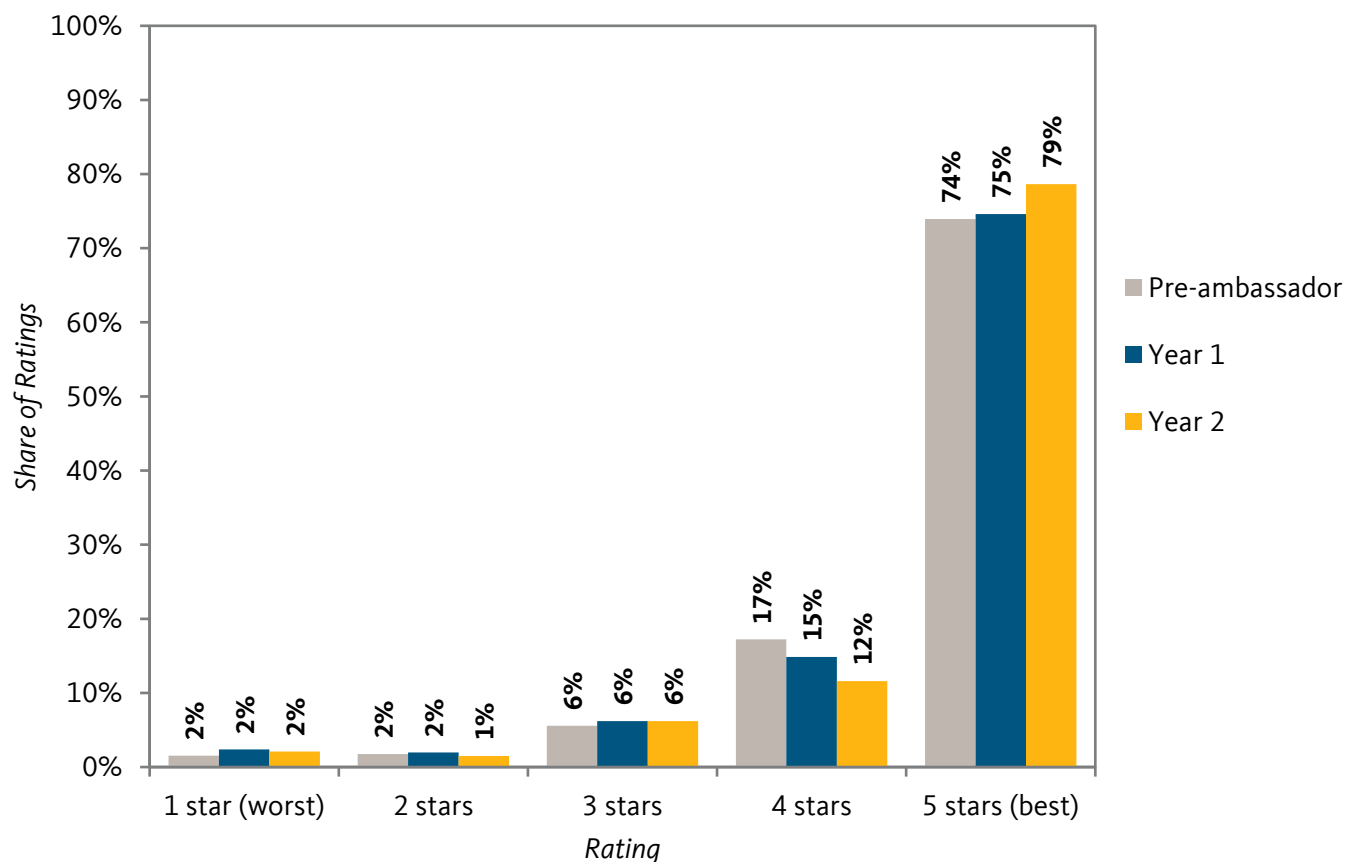


Figure 12. Transit App Ride Ratings over Time.

Data source: Transit app, 2024a

We analyzed the proportion of five-star ratings by line and the percentage change in these ratings by line over time (See **Figure 13** and **Figure 14**). The systemwide trends from the pre-ambassador period to the Year 2 period were generally positive. However, these trends vary by line (See **Figure 13**). The percentage of riders providing five-star ratings on the A line declined slightly, from 79 percent to 77 percent, between the pre-ambassador period and Year 2. Every other line had slight to moderate increases in the percentage of five-star ratings. As seen in **Figure 14**, the percentage change in five-star ratings had a more consistent increase between Year 1 and Year 2. This increase is particularly noticeable on the C and D lines, which saw a roughly 10 percentage-point increase in five-star ratings between Year 1 and Year 2 of the ambassador program. The trends also show that changes in ratings in the program's first year were relatively minor, and the magnitude of the positive trends was greater, although still somewhat minor, between the first and second years of the program. We again caution that this change cannot be directly attributed to the presence of ambassadors

based on this descriptive analysis alone. However, it suggests an association between improved feelings about the system and the presence of ambassadors over this time period.¹²

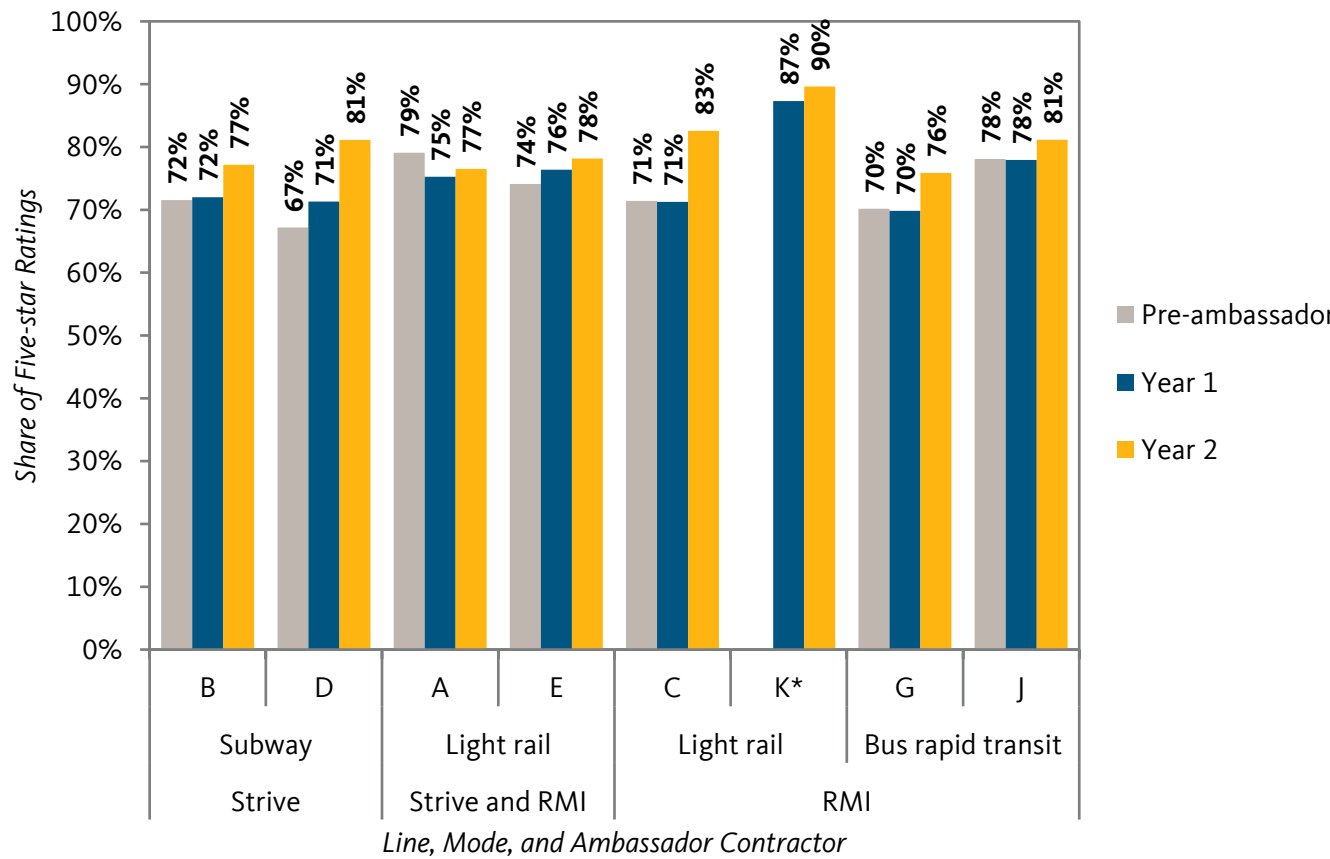


Figure 13. Share of Five-star *Transit App* Ride Ratings over Time, by Line, Mode, and Contractor.

* K Line not yet open in the pre-ambassador period

Data source: *Transit app*, 2024a

¹² We did not compare whether the “Rate-My-Ride” ratings changed on the bus system during this time. This deeper “difference-in-difference” approach may have provided more insights into whether the changes in the rail system with ambassadors changed at a different rate than the system as a whole. This would be useful in future research on this topic.

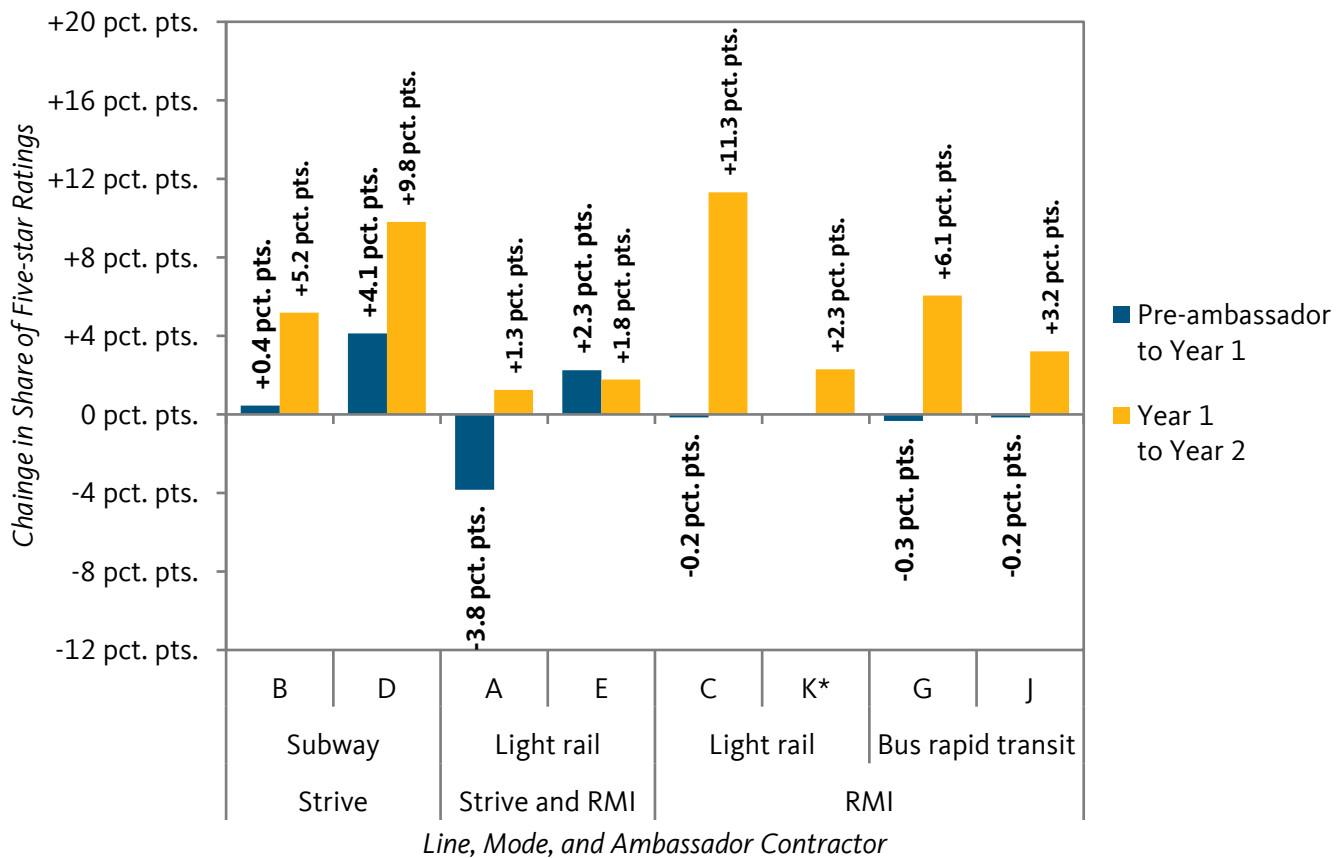


Figure 14. Change in Five-star Ratings over Time, by Line, Mode, and Contractor.

* K Line not yet open in the pre-ambassador period

Data source: Transit app, 2024a

Rider Satisfaction: Testing and Modeling

We further conducted a Pearson’s chi-square test to determine whether there was a significant difference in ratings between the time periods. This test confirms a statistically significant association, with a p-value of less than 0.0001, between the ratings and periods, but it does not determine the direction of that change. Given the descriptive analysis showing a rise in five-star ratings over time (See **Figure 12**), though, we can conclude that the significant change is in the positive direction.

We then created an ordinal logistic regression model to predict the likelihood of a particular rating, relative to all other rankings, comparing the end of Year 1 and the end of Year 2 both to the pre-ambassador period. In this model, the rating is the dependent variable and the period is the independent variable. The first time frame in **Table 3** comprises the change from the pre-ambassador period to the end of Year 1, and the second the change from the pre-ambassador period to Year 2. Ordinal logistic models help answer the question of whether people are more likely to give higher or lower ratings in one period compared to another. The model looks at the odds of giving a ride a one-star rating versus a two-, three-, four-, or five-star rating at one point in time

compared to another, and it recognizes that these ratings are ordered (i.e., that five stars are better than four) but that the differences in ratings may not be equal between each category. For example, a person’s rating of one versus two stars may be different in magnitude than rating four versus five stars.

Table 3. Ordinal Regression Model Results from Rate-My-Ride Data.

Time Frame	Odds Ratio Coefficient	Standard Error	T-value
Pre-ambassador to Year 1	0.0054	0.0263	0.2048
Pre-ambassador to Year 2	0.2174	0.0255	8.5164*

** Significant at the $p < 0.01$ level*

Data source: Transit app, 2024a

As seen in **Table 3**, the coefficient for the odds for the first time frame are nearly zero, which likely means that the time variable here (Year 1 compared to the pre-ambassador time) has no effect on changing the ratings between these times. The standard error represents the uncertainty in the estimate of the coefficient, meaning that the odds ratio for this time period may be 0.02 higher or lower, but this still puts the odds ratio at near zero. Finally, the low t-value, also close to zero, demonstrates that this change over this period is *not* statistically significant.

The results from the pre-ambassador period to Year 2, in contrast, demonstrate there is a significant change in ratings between these years. From the previous descriptive results, we can see that this significant change is in the positive direction (See **Figure 12**). This change is moderate, given that the coefficient is less than one, but the coefficient is greater than the standard error, and a high t-value (a value greater than two, for reference) suggests that the change in the positive direction is statistically significant. In simple terms, for a response that was received in Year 2, the odds of having a higher rating is 1.24 times higher than a review received in the pre-ambassador time period.¹³ The odds are not much higher than one, because, as seen in **Figure 12**, change is mostly due to an increase in five-star ratings and a decrease in four-star ratings, with more consistent ratings over time for one, two, and three stars.

¹³. This 1.24 value comes from taking $e^{0.2174}$ (the mathematical constant e to the power of the odds ratio coefficient in **Table 3**), which is how the odds ratio coefficient is interpreted.

VI. Conclusions and Recommendations for Transit Ambassador Programs

Meeting Initial PSAC Goals and LA Metro Approved Priorities

Table 4 summarizes and evaluates progress made towards the initial PSAC recommendations for the program before it began and the LA Metro scope of work as it began (See Chapter II and Appendix A). The rest of this concluding chapter reflects on each of these four goal areas: ambassadors' role, system safety, connecting vulnerable riders to resources, and ambassadors' job quality.

Table 4. Program Evaluation, Compared to Initial PSAC Recommendations and LA Metro Scope of Work.

LA Metro Board-approved Priority	PSAC Recommendation	UCLA Program Evaluation Assessment
“Ambassadors are welcoming greeters for customers and employees.”	“Transit ambassadors play a rider-facing and welcoming role.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is a primary function of the job, and training emphasizes their customer service role. • An ambassador created a “pocket guide” of rider resources that was later adopted by the program—indicative of worker innovation. • Reporting requirements sometimes create the appearance of ambassadors “being on their phones” instead of outward-facing work.
“Ambassadors will promote safety for all riders and [LA] Metro employees.”	“Transit ambassadors’ presence promotes safety for all riders and operators.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data from a rider survey and collected in the <i>Transit</i> app suggest a positive improvement on rider experience and safety, but these are difficult to attribute directly to ambassadors versus other system improvements. • Narcan deployments, begun after the program started, have saved hundreds of lives. • Ambassadors primarily work in trains and stations, whereas operator safety issues tend to occur on buses. Ambassadors meet with contractor management but do not regularly interface with LA Metro staff.
“Ambassadors connect unhoused riders to resources and/or assistance.”	“Transit ambassadors can connect vulnerable riders to resources and/or assistance.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ambassadors reported that some of their work involves connecting unhoused riders or riders in crisis to other LA Metro teams focused on those issues, but there is an overall lack of clarity on the nature of the public safety ecosystem and how ambassadors fit in. LA Metro is investing in those other, specialized teams concurrently with expanding the ambassador program. • Reporting does not work reliably in stations with limited cellular service.
“The plan will ensure recruitment outreach is expansive and focused to ensure that the Ambassadors, field supervisors, and managers can reflect the diversity of [LA] Metro riders in terms of race, gender, disability, language, and other characteristics.”	“Transit ambassadors provide communities with access to good jobs.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observations and interviews suggest the ambassador workforce is representative of LA Metro’s ridership. • This is an emotionally and physically difficult frontline role, and current wage levels may not take this into account • Training is primarily classroom-based and does not fully prepare ambassadors for difficult situations that are a regular part of the role. • Pay and benefits are less than living wages and less than other transit ambassadors in California. Pay is in line with customer service jobs but not specialized outreach roles in other sectors.

Sources: quoted from PSAC Non-law Enforcement Alternatives Ad-hoc Committee, 2021, pp. 1–3 and LA Metro, n.d.-a, pp. 4–5, 12

Ambassadors' Role

Ambassadors play a key role in providing basic customer service which supports a range of needs, from wayfinding to purchasing fares (TAP cards). Especially during schedule changes, for vulnerable riders who speak English as their second language, for riders who have extra needs due to a disability, and other such cases, ambassadors' readiness and reachability to patrons is a source of relief for those who need help on their transit trip. As an extra set of eyes and ears on the system, ambassadors contribute to LA Metro's knowledge inventory to create a comfortable environment for riders and add an unarmed staffed presence on the system.

While other employees and services of LA Metro can be helpful to riders, this customer service function is not otherwise specifically provided by LA Metro. Most rail stations, for instance, lack station agents and have hardly any physical spaces for customer service personnel. There are almost no visible ticket booths, security offices, or kiosks. In the absence of ambassadors or other station personnel, there is no one to turn to for help when people need assistance. In contrast, the ambassadors typically stand in the middle of the station platforms in their bright green uniforms, providing a reliable source of information and customer support. In their assigned duties, in the outward-facing way they carry them out, and even in their physically bright uniform, ambassadors are much more visible than every other member of LA Metro's safety and security and customer experience teams (See **Figure 6**).

Physical and operational improvements for riders will also make ambassadors' jobs easier. A common question from riders an interviewee reported is the location of a bathroom. However, very few of the rail stations have public restrooms, and ambassadors have to tell riders that there are none available or direct them to private restrooms outside the station. Likewise, more frequent service will enable ambassadors to reduce periods of overcrowding that require high vigilance from ambassadors and make night and weekends less stressful for waiting passengers who may in turn require less ambassador aid.

Behind the scenes, ambassadors' incident reporting has increased dramatically since the program's inception, especially for cleanliness and graffiti cases whose resolution leads to a more welcoming system. Going forward, LA Metro may want to consider how ambassadors can better use that system to make reports or take feedback about service and reliability concerns. Even when not directly talking with riders, their presence can often dispel any anxiety people have along their journey, knowing that there is likely someone on a platform that could help if and when an issue arises.

Despite this customer-service focus, according to the responses to LA Metro's survey, there remains some confusion about what ambassadors do and if and how they can help in any given situation (Smith, 2023). The goals of the program are murky, from riders' perspective, and there needs to be more clarity on how ambassadors' customer service role relates to their place in LA Metro's safety ecosystem. The fact that LA Metro's survey demonstrated that many customers do not know the role of ambassadors is indicative of the program's lack of focus.¹⁴ The training ambassadors receive clearly directs them to "STAY IN THEIR LANE"—

¹⁴. For comparison, the (much smaller) program at the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority hires both ambassadors and crisis

“You are not a security staff person....You are customer service FIRST....Remember—[LA] Metro ambassadors are not enforcers but rather connectors” (See **Figure 7**) (LA Metro, 2024d). But LA Metro’s public language describing the program on its main webpages is more ambiguous. The agency variously describes its ambassadors as “one part of our multilayer plan to improve public safety” (Cuevas, 2024), “serving as additional support for riders...[and] assist[ing] passengers with various needs and report[ing] any issues they observe, contributing to a safer and more pleasant transit experience” (LA Metro, 2024a), and “a customer-focused” program that is part of “continually improving safety and cleanliness”(LA Metro, 2024b). In discussions with the research team, agency leadership stressed that ambassadors are only *one layer* of the LA Metro public safety ecosystem. Thus, during the permanent program roll-out, LA Metro may want to consider (further) using billboards or signage in the rail stations to create or improve messaging about how ambassadors help passengers. For example, signage could explain that ambassadors are there to help guide passengers through the system by connecting to other lines or other agencies.

As the ambassadors move in house at LA Metro, issues and tensions such as these will remain. Bringing the ambassadors into direct LA Metro employment promises a number of improvements but could also threaten to undermine the ambassadors’ potential to provide responses independent of police, especially given the program’s coming placement under the new internal police and safety department.

Promoting Safety

We find that the ambassador program creates a largely positive impact on the system, in terms of riders’ satisfaction and their sense of safety, belonging, and orientation on the system, even as their role is primarily customer service oriented. While LA Metro’s own rider survey demonstrates that ambassadors were not the *definitive* element in patrons’ overall judgment of the system improving over time (Smith, 2023), the other evidence we analyzed shows the value of ambassadors in ways tangible and intangible. Our findings paint a picture of a program slowly but surely improving conditions across areas of the system where ambassadors have been deployed. While passenger safety ratings reported through LA Metro’s survey and the Rate-My-Ride ratings through the *Transit* app demonstrate noticeable improvements since the ambassador program launched, we cannot attribute these improvements to the presence of ambassadors directly.

Whether through their daily customer-service work or through their direct administration of Narcan and de-escalation of altercations, ambassadors promote a safer system. Given their core customer-service role and our discussion above, we do not believe LA Metro’s ambassador program or others similar to it should be evaluated by or geared towards improving traditional safety statistics such as crime rates. Nonetheless, safety is an important aspect of the program that can be measured through well-designed rider surveys and data on lives saved and incidents reported.

intervention specialists (licensed social workers), at a 4:1 ratio, with more clearly delineated roles between each and between them and police. Unlike LA Metro’s ambassador pilot program, their training includes ongoing refreshers (Abu-Khaled, 2024).

Ambassadors' data collection is not only of use to researchers like ourselves evaluating the program but also to management on a day-to-day basis. However, the need to log every interaction more than a greeting and to report maintenance and safety issues as well does appear to be creating a public perception of ambassadors "being on their phones" (Gummer, 2024), and it may indeed be distracting ambassadors at least sometimes from other work. Going forward, LA Metro should find a way to balance the amount of reporting completed by each ambassador with the value that data provides. Additionally, the release of these data on a public dashboard (versus static documents currently presented in Board reports) would be of great public benefit, promoting transparency in the program and even advertising the program itself.

Given the scale of the ambassador program relative to the LA Metro system as a whole, it would be difficult for around 300 ambassadors to truly ensure safety for all daily riders. But one particular concern is the relatively small proportion of ambassadors on the bus system, which carries the vast majority of daily riders (Federal Transit Administration, 2024) and which has experienced concerns about operator safety (Choi, 2024).¹⁵ LA Metro is adding 40 bus-riding ambassadors during the in-house transition, which will double the proportion of bus-riding ambassadors (Parks et al., 2025). With the caveat that ambassadors are not meant to deter crime *per se*, crime rates are higher on the train system than the bus (Brozen, 2023), demonstrating that ambassadors may be a more useful safety presence on trains and at stations.

To take a step back, the reasons and procedures by which LA Metro and the contractors choose where to send ambassadors should be made more transparent. While LA Metro has described their criteria in broad terms to the City of Los Angeles Board of Police Commissioners (See Chapter II), the specifics of the decision-making process remain opaque, and only recently did LA Metro release a public breakdown of how many ambassadors were deployed by line. For instance, both ridership and bus operator assaults were given as deployment criteria (Choi, 2024). Yet as for the former, a number of bus routes with ridership higher than some rail lines, such as the 204 on Vermont Avenue (LA Metro, 2025e), lack ambassador coverage; as to the latter, assaults on LA Metro bus operators were over 40 times more common than assaults on rail operators, from Fiscal Years 2017 to 2023, but again ambassador deployments do not reflect that (Choi, 2024). The in-house transition provides the opportunity to improve on the public transparency about the criteria for ambassador deployment across the system and how deployments may change depending on ridership surges (e.g., major concerts, sporting events).

Connecting Vulnerable Riders to Resources

While the ambassadors report a large amount of information about their daily interactions (See Chapter V), none of it includes the number of passengers referred to other teams, such as HOME Teams or mental health

¹⁵. In this aspect, ambassadors' current deployment presents an equity issue. While LA Metro's overall ridership has a greater share of low-income travelers and travelers of color than the population, this is even more true on the bus. Almost half (48%) of LA Metro bus riders in the most recent ridership survey earned less than the federal poverty line for a single person (\$15,060 per year) (compared to 36% on rail); 47 percent were women (compared to 41% on rail); 91 percent were people of color (compared to 87% on rail); and 36 percent chose to take the survey in Spanish (compared to 26% on rail) (Federal Transit Administration, 2024 and Chaparro, 2024).

services (See Chapter II). Therefore, we did not have sufficient evidence to make a full assessment of the progress towards this goal. Nor, indeed, should ambassadors be expected to make dents in issues like homelessness on the system themselves, given their primary customer service role. Other entities are better-equipped to deal with these issues (but whose operations are beyond the scope of this report). Even so, the training materials that ambassadors received did not contain substantive guidance on when or how they could refer vulnerable riders to these other teams. One future improvement would be to strengthen the connection between ambassadors and homeless outreach teams, rather than having ambassadors *de facto* independently take on this role. Loukaitou-Sideris et al. (2021, 2023b) find that civilian homeless outreach teams on LA Metro have greater success at connecting unhoused people to shelter and services, cost less per staff person, and cost less per successful interaction than specialized police homeless teams. Going forward, the ambassadors can also connect riders with other needs to resources. For example, ambassadors could carry “know-your-rights” cards to distribute to immigrant riders in an effort to spread awareness of what to do if approached by federal immigration officers. As the ambassador program grows, clarifying roles among different groups in the public safety ecosystem will be increasingly important. LA Metro should ensure there is a way for ambassadors to provide feedback when they see the need to support other vulnerable groups or when they think greater clarification of roles among staff is necessary. Broadly, creating a feedback loop between ambassadors, their management, and ridership will help identify newly vulnerable groups on the system, new needs of existing riders, and ways ambassadors can help within the confines of their particular role.

Ambassadors’ Job Quality

As the wage and other data we analyzed demonstrate, ambassadors earn less than a living wage,¹⁶ have physically and emotionally demanding roles, and face higher attrition rates than other LA Metro employees. Pay, job conditions, and recruitment are akin to service workers, which is somewhat reasonable given that most of their job is customer-service-based. However, they also play minor but important roles more akin to social workers or system security. Yet again, this points to the ambiguity of the job, with its multi-tiered responsibilities and varied day-to-day experiences. Regardless of whether and how the role is refined, we see a need for higher pay and benefits to increase retention and compensate fairly for what the job entails. Pay under the contractors and even at LA Metro in-house initially does not fulfill PSAC’s recommendations that ambassadors receive wages that can support a family and have real access to healthcare (See Chapter IV) (PSAC Non-law Enforcement Alternatives Ad-hoc Committee, 2021). However, the transition in-house has increased the wages and benefits ambassadors receive, and time will tell whether this helps to overcome previous wage-related concerns.

¹⁶ As discussed in Chapter IV, LA Metro ambassador pay satisfies agency and municipal Living Wage rules (Abrahamian, 2024; City of Los Angeles Bureau of Contract Administration, 2025; and communications with program staff), but merely meeting a statutorily defined wage threshold does not mean that the job actually pays a wage that provides earners with basic needs and self-sufficiency, especially in a high-cost-of-living metropolitan area (Living Wage Institute, Glasmeier, and MIT, 2025).

Additionally, the in-house transition will hopefully assuage concerns that contracted ambassadors expressed about feeling apart from LA Metro's workforce. This feeling was most acute in their lack of access to spaces such as break rooms and briefing rooms but also to timely information on system disruptions and other agency communications. The in-house transition also provides a better opportunity to ensure that ambassadors have equipment and spaces, receive information, and have the opportunity to grow their careers within the agency. For one, agency staff have promised ambassadors lockers, break rooms, and more meeting spaces. LA Metro can also use models from other positions at the agency to think about how to recruit ambassadors, such as holding monthly hiring fairs modeled after bus-operator-related efforts. At these fairs, potential employees can be screened and interviewed and even leave with a temporary job offer (Wasserman, Padgett, and Do, 2024). The agency can also partner with local worker centers like the Los Angeles Black Worker Center or Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance to create a pipeline of workers into these fairs and ultimately to employment at the agency.

Ambassadors themselves have significant knowledge of what would make the program work more effectively. Carrying system "pocket guides" and carrying Narcan on the job were both innovations started by ambassadors themselves. LA Metro participates in California Transit Works!, a consortium of High Road Training Partnerships (HRTPs), through partnership with ATU 1277 (California Transit Works!, 2025). HRTPs include worker voice as an essential component of their mission (Dalberg Consulting, 2025), and it is promising that LA Metro sees the value of this model. What might an H RTP focused on transit safety look like, where the ambassador role and others in LA Metro's public safety ecosystem were structured to prioritize job quality and rider care?

Other nuts-and-bolts improvements to help ambassadors continue to excel at their jobs could include regular refresher sessions and moving more of their initial instruction into the field, assigning and rotating deployment locations more transparently and fairly, supplying first aid kits, giving radios and relying less on the Zello app that requires cellular service, and designing phone and tablet cases that communicate that ambassadors are using them for their work duties, not for personal activities. Public service campaigns could also better communicate to riders the ambassadors' role and how they can help. LA Metro's own evaluation identified a number of these issues and concerns (Smith, 2023), showing a recognition of paths to improving the job on the ground. Indeed, agency staff have begun implementing a variety of responses to almost all these issues or will soon do so. As of writing, this includes issuing a standard operating procedure manual that clearly defines policies and actions for all ambassadors.

A Moment for Change

There are three major transitions underway that create an opportunity for improving the ambassador program. One is the program moving from a contract to an in-house structure, and another is LA Metro hiring leadership and creating organizational structures from scratch for its in-house public safety department, starting with a chief, Bill Scott, hired in May 2025 (LA Metro, 2025f). The in-house transition will add more ambassadors to the system and increase their wages and benefits (Parks et al., 2025 and Harjai, 2025).

This is, therefore, an ideal time for LA Metro to ensure the program's orientation can most effectively meet its aims. The new chief and other elected and appointed leadership have an opportunity to advance the agency's public safety ecosystem model, including the expansion of other elements like HOME Teams for homelessness outreach, and reevaluate ambassadors' place in it. The model that local advocates have articulated and attempted to advance through PSAC remains a work in progress, and the ambassador program will likely continue to improve through an increased investment in time and resources.

Ambassadors raised a third major transition, that the program will be essential during the 2026 World Cup, 2028 Olympics and Paralympics, and other mega-events coming soon to Los Angeles, during which many new riders will be on the system and will need help. The increase in visitors and activity from these coming events presents another opportunity for the program. Both customer service and security will become even more crucial needs. As the region prepares for the games—temporarily more-than-doubling the bus fleet, creating a network of venue-connecting bus lanes and routes, and completing transit capital projects—ambassadors promise to be a key part of welcoming and orienting visitors (LA Metro, 2023b, 2024c, n.d.-b; Uranga, 2024; Cubic, 2025; and Chaparro, 2025). Indeed, LA Metro lists an expanded, more multilingual ambassador program as part of its strategies for transportation during the 2028 Olympics and Paralympics (LA Metro, 2023b). However, addressing this need will require significant investment in the program and rather quick expansion in the immediate future. Ensuring that LA Metro can quickly hire ambassadors through approaches like the monthly job fairs will likely be necessary to be able to quickly staff up.

Overall, our findings suggest LA Metro was wise to consider, pilot, and now make permanent their ambassador program. This approach demonstrates progress towards the intention from June 2020 to advance a community safety approach towards meeting riders' needs and one that appears to be making a positive contribution to the system. Other transportation agencies now have the opportunity to learn from LA Metro's efforts and take similar steps to invest in alternatives to law enforcement responses that can provide a staff presence for riders. While improvements are still likely needed and in progress at LA Metro and at other agencies, ambassador programs demonstrate real promise as a new approach to re-envisioning transit safety.

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Appendix A: PSAC Recommendations

Transit Ambassadors Play a Rider-facing and Welcoming Role

Recommendation #1: Transit ambassadors will be a significant and identifiable presence on [LA] Metro vehicles, as well as at transit stations and stops. Alongside [LA] Metro operators, ambassadors are likely to have frequent contact with the riders and the general public.

Recommendation #2: Transit ambassadors will deliver a high level of customer service and are expected to treat all riders with dignity and interact in a manner that is welcoming, respectful, and kind.

Recommendation #3: Transit ambassadors will be knowledgeable about the [LA] Metro system and act as an official “face” of the agency, guiding folks to resources, assisting with wayfinding, and answering riders’ questions.

Transit Ambassadors’ Presence Promotes Safety for All Riders and Operators

Recommendation #4: Transit ambassadors will be a significant non-law enforcement presence on the [LA] Metro system. Their role is to identify potentially unsafe situations and determine whether they are able to intervene and address the situation. They will be trained to respond judiciously to difficult situations and armed with de-escalation techniques to diffuse tense encounters. At the same time, ambassadors will be able to call upon a broad array of service providers, security professionals, and/or law enforcement if the situation merits (*Note: intervention and de-escalation will not be the responsibility of all transit ambassadors and will vary based on position level and description and level of employee training.*).

Recommendation #5: If an ambassador determines that they are not able to intervene, then they will have access to a larger ecosystem of service providers, community-based interventionists, and/or law enforcement. Each of these support services will have the capacity to respond quickly when the situation merits.

Recommendation #6: The ecosystem of service providers that support transit ambassadors will include the following entities: 1) unhoused service providers, 2) mental health service providers, 3) system maintenance/janitorial staff, 4) vehicle operators, 5) supervisory staff, 6) emergency medical professionals, 7) care-centered public spaces, 8) public education, and 9) law enforcement. Note that armed law enforcement will only be involved when absolutely needed.

Transit Ambassadors Can Connect Vulnerable Riders to Resources and/or Assistance

Recommendation #7: Transit ambassadors will be culturally competent professionals that reflect the diversity of Los Angeles County. This includes having familiarity with the geographies they serve and (where appropriate) possessing multilingual skills.

Recommendation #8: Transit ambassadors will be sensitive and responsive to the diverse needs of [LA] Metro riders. They are trained to respect riders' privacy, check assumptions or pre-judgments, and respond to situations with empathy and compassion.

Recommendation #9: Transit Ambassadors will be equipped with the information, tools, and contacts to connect vulnerable riders to resources. They have specific training to identify situations where a mental health service provider, homeless service provider, community-based organization or other [LA] Metro services may be the best entity to respond to a rider's expressed need.

Transit Ambassadors Provide Communities with Access to Good Jobs

Recommendation #10: As [LA] Metro employees, transit ambassadors will have a defined career path that includes an opportunity to grow within the program (e.g., from entry-level ambassador to mid-level ambassadors with increased training to management positions) and/or shift to other careers within the agency.

Recommendation #11: To ensure that ambassadors reflect the communities they serve, [LA] Metro will reduce barriers to hiring. This includes recruiting that focuses on communities impacted by harmful policing, low-income communities of color, individuals with disabilities, and those facing barriers to employment.

Recommendation #12: [LA] Metro will partner with community-based organizations to build a pipeline of qualified workers that reflect the diversity of [LA] Metro's ridership. These organizations can work with [LA] Metro to identify candidates with non-traditional skill sets, those with relevant language proficiencies, and/or specialized training.

Recommendation #13: Benefits and opportunities for advancement will be key features for transit ambassador positions, and ambassadors will be [LA] Metro employees. [LA] Metro will ensure that ambassadors have the following: 1) a family-supporting wage, 2) union jobs, 3) professional development opportunities, 4) diverse leadership (including women and people of color), 5) bilingual pay differentials, and 6) access to healthcare.

Source: quoted from (PSAC Non-law Enforcement Alternatives Ad-hoc Committee, 2021, pp. 1–3)

Appendix B. K Line Street Teams

In addition to the ambassador program contracted to Strive and RMI, LA Metro has contracted with the Lee Andrews Group to deploy “Street Teams” of community intervention specialists on the K Line. The Lee Andrews Group is a community engagement and public relations firm, and they have supplied community intervention specialists since the K Line’s opening in October 2022. Despite their name, Street Teams generally operate within the LA Metro system. They work from 8:30 A.M. to 8:30 P.M., in two shifts (Honor et al., 2022; Parks, Smith, and Coppolo, 2025; and Lee Andrews Group, 2025, n.d.). To distinguish them from ambassadors, Street Teams wear pink safety vests, the color of the K Line on maps. K Line Street Teams do not train together with the ambassadors.

Ambassadors and Street Teams share many job duties and day-to-day operations on the LA Metro system; for instance, LA Metro used Street Teams to supplement the then-new ambassador program as the contractors worked to hire and train workers in late 2022. But the Street Teams are specifically employed to de-escalate situations and respond to gang activity, and their specialists are hired from the communities in which they work (The Lee Andrews Group subcontracts with three local community-based organizations to recruit specialists.) (Honor et al., 2022 and Parks, Smith, and Coppolo, 2025). As an LA Metro Board report described:

“Transit Ambassadors are focused on the broader security support, customer experience and reporting, while Street Teams provide a welcoming presence at stations and distribute materials. Community Intervention Specialists are more focused on preventing and de-escalating incidents in a community-based, safety-centered role” (Parks, Smith, and Coppolo, 2025, p. 2).

Nonetheless, we observed Street Team specialists performing very similar duties to ambassadors, including handing out maps, notifying riders about LA Metro’s low-income fare discount program, and informing riders about a broken escalator. LA Metro plans to expand Street Teams beyond the K Line in the years to come; they reselected the Lee Andrews Group in early 2025, over RMI and Strive, who also bid the contract (Parks, Smith, and Coppolo, 2025).

Appendix C. Select Questions from LA Metro's Rider Survey on Ambassadors

The survey began with broad questions about the LA Metro riding experience, including:

- Thinking about your experiences during your entire journey door-to-door and all your interactions with [LA] Metro bus or train, how satisfied are you with Metro bus/rail?
 - Not at all satisfied – 1, 2, 3 (Neutral), 4, 5 – Very satisfied
- Please rate your satisfaction with the following aspects of [LA] Metro: Safety from crime
 - Not at all satisfied – 1, 2, 3 (Neutral), 4, 5 – Very satisfied
- Is your overall [LA] Metro riding experience, including both bus and rail, better than, worse than, or the same as it was a year ago?
 - A lot worse
 - Somewhat worse
 - The same
 - Somewhat better
 - A lot better
- *For people who said their experience has improved: What has made your [LA] Metro riding experience better? [OPEN-ENDED]*

After the broad LA Metro experience questions, respondents were asked about ambassadors directly, including:

- Before today, have you heard that [LA] Metro is adding [LA] Metro ambassadors to select buses, trains, and in stations?
- Have you seen [LA] Metro's ambassadors on the [LA] Metro system, including on trains, buses, or in stations or at bus stops? *[IMAGE OF AMBASSADORS SHOWN]*

For respondents who had seen ambassadors:

- Have you been greeted by a [LA] Metro ambassador?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Not sure
- Have you asked a [LA] Metro ambassador a question or for help?

- *Among those who had asked for help:* When you asked an ambassador for help, how helpful were they?
 - Not at all helpful
 - Somewhat helpful
 - Very helpful
- How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements on a scale of 1-5, where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree?:
 - Strongly disagree – 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 – Strongly agree
 - Seeing ambassadors on [LA] Metro makes me feel safer.
 - It is easy to tell ambassadors apart from other [LA] Metro employees, security, and law enforcement.
 - I don't know what ambassadors do.
 - I don't know how ambassadors can help me.
 - Ambassadors don't do everything I want them to do.
 - I would like to see more ambassadors on the system.
 - [LA] Metro ambassadors make me want to ride more.
- How would you describe ambassadors? Ambassadors are:
 - Not at all
 - Somewhat
 - Very
 - Easy to see
 - Friendly
 - Approachable
 - Speak my language
 - Informative
 - Eager to help
- How could we make the ambassador program better? *[OPEN-ENDED]*

The survey also collected demographic information about race/ethnicity, Spanish-speaking at home and English-speaking proficiency, household income, age, gender, fare payment type, ridership frequency, and car and smartphone access.

Appendix D: Comparing Demographic Profiles: Transit App Users and LA Metro On-board Surveys

Table D-1. Data from *Transit App* Users and LA Metro On-board Surveys.

Question	Response	2022		2023	
		<i>Transit App</i>	LA Metro	<i>Transit App</i>	LA Metro
Vehicle available	Yes	14%	14%	17%	18%
	No/ no but I have a vehicle available when I need to drive	86%	86%	83%	83%
Ridership frequency per week	0-2 days	5%	22%	6%	18%
	3-4 days	12%	22%	14%	22%
	5 or more days	83%	56%	80%	60%
Race/ethnicity*	Hispanic/Latino/a	61%	62%	60%	66
	Black/ African American	11%	17%	11%	16%
	Asian/ Asian American	8%	6%	8%	7%
	White	17%	11%	17%	9%
	Other**	7%	5%	6%	3%
	Prefer not to say	7%	N/A	6%	N/A
Gender identity	Male	49%	50%	50%	51%
	Female	45%	47%	44%	46%
	Non-binary	2%	2%	4%	2%
	Prefer to self-describe or prefer not to say	3%	1%	3%	1%

Question	Response	2022		2023	
		Transit App	LA Metro	Transit App	LA Metro
Age	Under 18	4%	6%	5%	9%
	18-24	8%	19%	13%	18%
	25-34	17%	24%	16%	25%
	35-49	60%	25%	55%	23%
	50-64		19%		18%
	65 or more	11%	7%	12%	8%
Household Income***	Under \$10,000	24%	32%	24%	35%
	\$10,000-\$19,999	16%	20%	14%	16%
	\$20,000-\$49,999	30%	36%	29%	31%
	\$50,000-\$100,000	11%	10%	11%	12%
	\$100,000-\$149,999	2%	2%	3%	3%
	\$150,000 or more	2%	2%	3%	3%
	Prefer not to say	15%	N/A	16%	N/A

* Respondents on the Transit app survey can provide multiple race/ethnicity responses; therefore, percentages sum to more than 100%.

** “Other” on LA Metro includes a combination of Pacific Islander, Native American, and “other” respondents.

Transit app provides a wider range of responses, so “other” is a combination of Native American, Native Hawai’ian, Middle Eastern or North African, and “some other race.”

*** The two surveys have slightly different income categories; we therefore aligned these categories into larger and slightly uneven income bins.

Data sources: Transit app, 2024a, 2024b and Chaparro, 2024

