

Detroit's 5 most violent bus routes - Assaults have drivers and riders demanding police on board

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DETROIT -- Death threats, beatings and even stabbings are not uncommon on at least five of the city's **bus routes** , fueling a mix of fear and anger among drivers and riders who are clamoring for a police presence.

Since the start of 2006, the first full year after Detroit cops stopped policing the **buses** , **more** than 50 people have been assaulted -- five of them stabbed, according to drivers' reports obtained by The Detroit News. One driver was dragged off the **bus** , pummeled and stabbed with an ink pen. Another miscarried after an armed man hijacked her **bus** . A four-person brawl sent two passengers to the hospital with stab wounds.

"It's to the point where you're afraid to ride at night," said Shirley Newman, 57, a frequent passenger on the Detroit Department of Transportation coaches.

The violence -- **most** prevalent on busy **routes** such as Grand River, Greenfield and Woodward - - comes as the City Council and Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick's administration battle over **bus** security.

Kilpatrick wants to use a three-year, \$11.7 million federal grant to put Wayne County sheriff's deputies on the **buses** , which Sheriff Warren Evans says he can do immediately. After months of delays, the nine-member council is expected to vote on the hotly contested plan today.

Council members, who have the final say because they control the city's checkbook, have expressed concerns about Kilpatrick's proposal, including liability and fear of losing the **bus** service to regional powers. Several say the city, not the sheriff, should benefit from the grant and the jobs it will create.

"Handing this money over to Wayne County is preposterous," said Councilwoman JoAnn Watson.

'Anything-goes' atmosphere

The council is exploring options such as a city-run transit police force, although details are scarce and the plan would take months to implement. They've also urged Police Chief Ella Bully-Cummings -- a Kilpatrick appointee -- to keep the grant money and re-staff the **buses** , but she has refused, saying her priority is patrolling the streets.

The standoff frustrates leaders from the **bus** department and the 1,000-member drivers' union. They both favor the plan to have 48 sheriff's officers ride the **buses** , patrol the **routes** and work undercover. DDOT operates 450 **buses** on 55 **routes** , carrying some 42 million passengers a year.

"Maybe it should be mandatory for council members to ride the **bus**," said union chief Henry Gaffney. "Then their attitude will change. Then they'll do something."

Greg Hull, security chief for the American Public Transportation Association, a Washington, D.C.-based lobbying and educational organization, said he didn't know of another major city without its own dedicated transit police force or a contract with another police agency or private company.

The transit systems in Los Angeles and Seattle both contract with their respective county sheriff's agencies, he said. Miami and Milwaukee, on the other hand, contract with Florida-based Wackenhut Corp., which provides sworn peace officers who carry guns.

Gaffney and Norman White, director of the Detroit transportation department, said the violence has worsened since Detroit police eliminated its transit force in late 2005, creating an anything-goes atmosphere. The move was made to beef up street patrols, officials said.

White said the need for security was heightened March 19 when police said they believe a serial rapist is targeting **bus** stops on the city's northeast side. Five women have been assaulted since December.

"Every day we sit and talk about this, somebody needs our help," White said. "I don't think anybody can be **more** frustrated than me."

According to the drivers' reports, acquired through the Freedom of Information Act, at least 25 drivers have been assaulted since Jan. 1, 2006, with eight needing medical attention. One had a cup of hot liquid thrown on him; another was hit in the face with an ice ball.

All told, there were 75 altercations -- mostly assaults -- in the past 14 months, although drivers say **many more** go unreported. Besides assaults, altercations include robberies, threats and verbal attacks. Guns were drawn three times, although there were no reports of shots fired.

Students part of the problem

Margaret Brown, a 23-year driver, was slugged in the face three times by a passenger who tried to give her an expired ticket. The man ran off the **bus** on the Chene **route** and was never caught, Brown said of the Jan. 3 attack. That **route** has seen three assaults in the past year.

"That line has been very hostile lately," said Brown, whose retina was damaged. "I accept the fact that there's a certain amount of danger involved, but I'm glad I'm only a few years away from retirement, because I'm ready to go."

Students are heavy users of the system -- and often part of the problem, officials say. About 10,000 high school students from Detroit Public Schools receive free or discounted passes to ride the **bus** to and from school.

Drivers have been assaulted by students four times and threatened three times, the report found.

Two weeks ago, Newman said she watched a student hurl a brick at a man's head aboard the **bus**.

"He bled like I don't know what," she said.

The area's suburban **bus** system, which also has no police force, occasionally gets unruly passengers, but there have been no reports of assaults in at least a year, said Dale Cathey, a superintendent for the Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation.

SMART has 26 **routes** through downtown Detroit, but its **buses** make comparatively few stops in the city, which generally has a higher crime rate than the suburbs.

Kelvin Hall, a veteran Detroit **bus** driver on the Grand River **route** , said he gets regular problems from students, homeless people and suspected drug dealers.

"It's terrible," he said. "Day-to-day, we don't know what we're going to get."

Bus violence

The five **most** dangerous **bus routes** in the city are: Grand River, Greenfield, Dexter, Woodward and Seven Mile. Here's a breakdown of the incidents on those **routes** from Jan. 1, 2006, to March 1, 2007.

¥ Grand River: Four assaults, three threats against the driver, argument and theft.

¥ Greenfield: Five assaults, including two stabbings, theft and two fights.

¥ Dexter: Two threats, two thefts, driver assaulted twice and a fight.

¥ Seven Mile: Three threats against driver, two assaults and one fight.

¥ Woodward: Two fights, two assaults, theft and a passenger refused to take baby from stroller.

Caption: Since the start of 2006, the first full year after cops stopped policing Detroit **buses** , **more** than 50 people have been assaulted. "It's terrible. Day-to-day, we don't know what we're going to get," says Kelvin Hall, a veteran **bus** driver on the Grand River **route** .

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