



Kansas RTAP Fact Sheet

A Service of The University of Kansas Transportation Center for Rural Transit Providers



Aware of Your Surroundings?

by Justin Dorsey

“Hmmm...that’s a strange thing for someone to do. Well, it’s probably nothing.” Has this thought ever crossed your mind while riding public transportation? If so, pat yourself on the back for being aware of your surroundings. However, question whether ignoring the unusual behavior was the correct response.

Public transportation systems are vulnerable to attack. How can we better protect them? One way is for employees and riders to become more responsive to their surroundings. That means identifying, reporting, and responding to suspicious behavior.

What is suspicious?

The easiest way to define suspicious behavior is “out of the ordinary.” This assessment relies heavily on personal judgment and gut instinct. However, guidelines exist. According to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), suspicious people can be identified by where they are, when they are there, and what they are doing. For example, a suspicious person may:

- Be in a restricted area without good reason
- Be in an area at a strange time
- Appear lost

- Lack proper identification
- Sweat excessively, or
- Dress inappropriately for the weather.

However, sometimes the person might not appear suspicious, but their activities do—such as:

- Briskly walking away after abandoning a package
- Taking photographs of facilities
- Watching the routines of employees and customers
- Propping-open a door that should be closed
- Parking a vehicle (especially a rental vehicle) in a strange location
- Unlocking a door that should be locked
- Taking a uniform (especially one worn by utility crews or delivery personnel)
- Taking an identification card, or

Finally, 58 percent of attacks on public transportation since 1920 have been from improvised explosive devices. Thus, knowing how to spot a suspicious package is important. A suspicious package is likely to be placed in an “out of the way” location or may have a message attached to it like, “To Mommy...”

Vehicle tampering

As a security precaution, buses should be frequently searched for foreign objects, both inside and outside. Exterior searches should pay special attention to:

- Wheel wells
- External lifts
- Exhaust system components and
- The underbody

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- Asking an unusual amount of questions about a transportation agency’s operations.

Notice that the FTA focuses on *behavior* in attributing suspicion, rather than race or any other personal characteristic that may not have any significance in making a person suspicious.

Interior searches should pay careful attention to:

- Areas below seats
- Storage compartments
- Steps, and
- Internal lifts

Be on the lookout for scratches which appear to be made by prying tools. Keep your bus and work area

clean and organized. This makes it easier to identify out-of-the-ordinary objects.

I see something, now what?

You see a suspicious person...now what do you do? First, you decide if the suspicious person is approachable.

Avoid approaching individuals that have been confrontational or threatening. If you decide the person is approachable, approach in a calm manner and ask:

- Can I help you?
- Who are you here to see?
- Could I see your ID?

If the individual cannot produce an ID or explain what he/she is doing there, offer to escort the individual off the premises. Meanwhile, paint a physical picture of the individual in your mind, remembering characteristics like eye color, hair color, height, etc. After your conversation, inform a supervisor of the situation.

If you decide against approaching the person, attempt to keep the person in sight and contact a supervisor.

If you see a suspicious package, do not touch it. If the package is harmful, touching it may trigger its on-switch or destroy evidence like fingerprints. Next, the area must be evacuated. As a transit employee, passengers will look to you

for evacuation guidance. Therefore, calmly give the passengers evacuation instructions, reminding them to exit quickly, but calmly. Finally, contact the local police or sheriff, remembering not to use a cell phone or radio within 50 feet of the package.

For more information, visit
<http://transit-safety.volpe.dot.gov/Security/TransitWatch/tool kit.asp>

Transit Watch

If your community wants to increase awareness of transit safety issues, the FTA's *Transit Watch* Program can help. Transit Watch is designed to educate transit passengers, employees, and the general public about transit safety.

Getting the program under way is easy. Implementation begins by downloading the Transit Watch tool kit. The tool kit includes: a brochure, fact sheet, logos, posters, and press releases. It can be downloaded from: <http://transit-safety.volpe.dot.gov/Security/TransitWatch/tool kit.asp>.

Our safety

Individuals who wish to harm our public transportation system do not advertise their intentions. Therefore, we must remain awake at the awareness wheel. That means identifying,

reporting, and responding to suspicious behavior. After all, you may be the only person who sees a suspicious act.

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Sources :

Pennsylvania Homeland Security information on spotting and reporting suspicious behavior. <http://www.homelandsecurity.state.pa.us/homelandsecurity/cwp/view.asp?A=519&Q=166134>

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Federal Transit Administration information on the Transit Watch Program. <http://transit-safety.volpe.dot.gov/security/TransitWatch/Default.asp>

How the Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada implemented the Transit Watch Program. <http://www.rtcsonthernnevada.com/tw/>

DVD discussing how to identify, report, and respond to suspicious behavior and objects. *System Security Awareness for Transit Employees*, National Transit Institute, 2002.

DVD describing what transit employees can do to protect transit systems. *System Security Awareness for Transit Employees: Warning Signs*, National Transit Institute, 2003.