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New BART director strikes blow for transparency, and it's a bit of a bumpy ride



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PUBLISHED: July 14, 2017 at 10:19 AM PDT | UPDATED: July 15, 2017 at 2:48 AM PDT



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Debora Allen doesn't shrink from a challenge. Last year, she ran for the state Assembly as a Republican out of super-blue District 14. She didn't make it through the primary. And she immediately began searching for her next passion.

"When I ran for Assembly, I did a lot of research," said Allen, who employs an awful lot of common sense for an elected official. "As I learned more about transportation, the subject of BART just kept coming up, the complaints. So when I didn't make it through the primary, I thought, what else is there? BART seemed to be a good place for me. I thought this could be a place to make a difference."

She was elected as director of District 1. In theory, that would be a match made in transit heaven. Allen fancies herself a fixer. BART, home of the phony security cameras and six-

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There is a back story here. Since April, there have been three robberies aboard BART trains committed almost exclusively by minors. BART has videos of the crimes but has not released them.



Republican Debora Allen ran for state Assembly in Democratic District 14. (Dan Rosenstrauch/Bay Area News Group) (Dan Rosenstrauch/Bay Area News Group)

On July 9, Allen was interviewed by KPIX (“My first live interview,” she noted). Asked about the videos, Allen was forthright and sincere — a huge violation of BART PR protocol by the way.

“I do believe they should be released,” she told KPIX, “because now we know a 19-year-old was involved.”

About that. One of BART’s reasons for withholding the videos is because the perpetrators were minors. At the same time, BART knew that at least one of them was an adult.

What Allen didn’t know before disclosing that fact to KPIX: BART had not made it public.

Another reason BART gave — on an internal memo authored by Assistant General Manager Kerry Hamill — for sitting on the videos was that in addition to the miscreants being almost exclusively underage, they also were almost exclusively minority. BART

Next thing you know, Allen slipped those nuggets into the public domain. Where they should have been all along.

Not long after the interview, the interviewer reached out to Allen. “She said, ‘I called the PR staff at BART and they say you misunderstood their memo.’ I said, ‘OK, let me show you the memo.’”

You can now [find it online](#), where it is quite useful as a window into BART’s closed culture.

“I honestly sent (the memo) not knowing it would be posted online,” Allen said. “BART representatives have gone on the record to some extent refuting it.”

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Let’s be clear here. BART passengers, especially those who have been beaten and robbed, deserve to have those kinds of crimes investigated. One way to investigate a crime would be to release video of the event, even if it means blurring the faces of suspects who appear to be minors. People who pay taxes to support BART are entitled to know the truth about what happens on BART trains.

What Allen did, however unwittingly, was what responsible officials should do.

“BART needs to release facts and information and not interpretation,” she said. “It’s not their job to interpret the facts and data. It’s up to the riding public to do what they choose to do with the facts and data.”

That said, doing the right thing can give one pause. “The story became hot,” Allen said. “I had this sense of my goodness, what have I done? But in looking back, this is an overreach by a public agency beyond its duty. And so I think it’s OK for the public to know what was being communicated.”