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BART Says They're Withholding Deplorable Teen Crime Videos To Prevent Racial Bias

By **Joe Kukura** • July 10, 2017 · 7:00 AM PDT • 3 min read



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BART riders' [season of teen mob anxiety](#) has many commuters concerned not only about their own immediate safety on the trains, but is also renewing a sense of suspicion that [BART is hiding their crime problem](#). During a period when [dozens of teens performed a violent swarm attack in late April](#), four teens ganged up for a [June 28 assault and cell phone theft](#), and around a dozen youths [beat a man who foiled their strong-arm robbery](#) over the July 4th holiday weekend, BART has transitioned from emailing crime logs to interested riders and reporters to only [posting data on CrimeMapping.com](#), a third-party site that displays crime data visually but with relatively little detail.

Despite a [scathing Chronicle editorial](#) that criticized this practice as “only the barest of bureaucratic posting,” [CBS 5 has obtained a series of internal BART memos](#) indicating that the transit system has no intention of going back to the previous crime log system, nor do they have plans to release surveillance video of the latest robbery incident. “To release these videos would create a high level of racially insensitive commentary,” one internal BART memo says, “and in addition it would create a racial bias in the riders against minorities on the trains.”

That memo comes from BART assistant general manager Kerry Hamill and does not appear to have been intended for public consumption. Hamill defends the use of [CrimeMapping.com](#) to report crime data, saying, “Previously, crime logs (in narrative form) had been manually entered and emailed to a small group of approximately 300 readers and local media. The data now is available to all members of the public, freely, on the internet. Recent reports have criticized this move as a step away from transparency.

All of our crimes are still being reported, simply not in the way reporters previously received them. Many reporters remain unfamiliar with the interface.”

The CrimeMapping.com interface is easy enough to use, but is pretty time-consuming and tedious if you’re trying to track down an individual crime you might have witnessed. As an example, let’s consider a [strong arm robbery outside the Downtown Berkeley BART station](#) that KRON 4 reports occurred Friday night. If we [enter the Berkeley BART station address into CrimeMapping](#), we do see a series of crimes near the station. But you have to employ filters and click on each individual crime icon to see the date and time of the crime, and each crime has only minimal descriptions like “Disturbance” or “Theft/Larceny”.

But Hamill's BART memo indicates that those generic descriptions will be less inflammatory with the general public than BART press releases or crime logs. “Disproportionate elevation of crimes on transit interfaces with local media in such a way to unfairly affect and characterize riders of color, leading to sweeping generalizations in media reports and a high level of racially insensitive commentary directed toward the District through our social media channels, email, and call centers,” Hamill wrote.

In an email response obtained by CBS 5, BART Board of Directors member Debora Allen responds, “I don’t understand what role the color of ones skin plays in this issue. Can you explain?”

Hamill does explain. “The social media reaction to the original Coliseum incident in April was startling in the level of racial profiling that it prompted,” she wrote back. “The General Manager got a call about the incident on her voicemail that used racist and incendiary language that

made my mouth drop. Many posts used patently offensive language that often involved racial slurs (no news articles ever referenced the race of the offenders yet some members of the public leapt to their own conclusions).”

“I have worked in or with media since the 1980’s,” Hamill continued. “My view is that the media’s real interest in the videos of youth phone snatching incidents isn’t the desire for transparency but rather the pursuit of ratings. They know that video of these events will drive clicks to their websites and viewers to their programs because people are motivated by fear.”

I have personally written several articles about BART attacks, and Hamill is correct. Coverage of such incidents does “drive clicks,” and there is significant interest among Bay Area readers and viewers for information on patterns of attacks on public transit systems. But there is a more innocent and logical explanation for this interest that does not involve race-baiting or navel-gazing. [BART robberies are up 45 percent this year](#), and it is not implausible to think that riders are yearning for more information, not less, simply for the purposes of protecting themselves.

We also know that BART has a vested interest in not further [adding to their decline in ridership](#), so there's also that.

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