

BOLO

Be On the Lookout

The Newsletter for the Los Angeles Airport Peace Officers Association



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LAWA's Denial and Diversion Put Traveling Public at Risk

By Marshall McClain, President

When LAPOA testified before the House Security Subcommittee on Transportation Security on May 29, we used the most recent and reliable statistics about the current number of LAXPD personnel, described the day-to-day reality of officers using outdated equipment, and presented the challenges of coordinating with the TSA onsite. We thought it was all pretty straightforward.

Although we weren't surprised that LAPOA Executive Director Gina Marie Lindsey issued a news release rebutting the facts presented in our testimony, LAPOA's continued refusal to honestly address LAPOA's concerns is troubling. The security and operational issues we have been raising are real, and people's lives depend on all airport stakeholders performing their duties at the highest possible level.

While LAPOA keeps digging in its heels on LAXPD-specific spending and touting impressive-sounding but misleading numbers about its security expenditures, we maintain that many of those claimed "improvements" are simply part of the airport's growth. Items such as alarmed doors and in-line baggage screening systems are not special, extra security measures; they are part and parcel of the addition of 18 new passenger boarding gates to the international terminal. Counting these expenditures as security investments is disingenuous at best.

It's important to point out that LAPOA's security spending figures also include millions of dollars in funds proven to be illegally diverted to LAPD. Throwing out large numbers without context masks the desperate need to expand the dedicated LAX police department to match the pace of the airport's growth.

We testified at the hearing that two officers were assigned to Terminal 3 at the time of the November 1, 2013, shooting, which is typical. With TSA's calls for more armed officers in and around TSA screening checkpoints and a greater overall police presence, LAPOA must quit stalling on recruitment. We dispute LAPOA's claim that the number of LAXPD officers rose 9.5% from 2008 to 2014. As we testified to the subcommittee, the number of LAXPD sworn officers has steadily declined to its lowest level since 2008 (the California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training's numbers, not LAPOA's) — a downward,

not upward, trend. Incredibly, all of this is occurring while the airport continues to expand, and attempts to bring in light-rail service. We also pointed out to the subcommittee that LAX passenger traffic is up 7.3% in the last year and reported crimes are up 10% — again, not LAPOA's numbers but, in fact, LAPOA's own numbers — further underscoring the need to expand the proprietary police force.

LAWA claims it has increased spending on LAXPD staffing and equipment by 25% since 2008, but the decaying patrol cars, outdated police headquarters and substandard operating equipment speak for themselves. Is more proof required beyond the photos we have already published of in-use fleet patrol vehicles with broken seatbelts, exposed wiring, jerry-rigged spotlights and nearly 200,000 miles on their odometers? OSHA complaints have been filed, only for LAPOA's risk management to deny that the vehicles exist. Despite one of our officers recently being hospitalized for carbon monoxide poisoning due to an exhaust leak in a police vehicle, LAPOA placed that vehicle back into the fleet, and it now has more than 198,000 miles and counting. Meanwhile, adding insult to injury, in mid-June several news sources reported that the LAPD is testing a military-grade electric motorcycle to add to its fleet.

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Driven Into the Ground: It's Time to Replace LAXPD's Aging Patrol Fleet

Los Angeles Airport Police are saddled with a high-mileage, often dilapidated fleet far beyond the norms of accepted best practices. LAWA's refusal to invest in security equipment and facilities is an ongoing roadblock to LAXPD's mission of protecting one of the nation's busiest and fastest-growing airports.

Keeping Pace With Change: LAXPD's Diverse History

The rich history of the LAXPD demonstrates its officers' constant commitment to ensuring the safety of the traveling public and the residents of Los Angeles, as well as the crucial importance of having an on-site, specially trained force dedicated to airport law enforcement.

Flashy LAX Upgrades Thinly Veil Outdated Security Equipment and Facilities

LAX's \$4.1 billion modernization project has produced some impressive results, at least on the surface. Pull back the curtain, though, and LAX is not only missing cutting-edge security technology to match its new passenger facilities, but it's also deficient in the most basic police equipment and staffing.



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The Board of Directors meets quarterly on the third Thursday of January, April, July and October at the LAAPOA Headquarters. Additional meetings and/or times are subject to change and will be posted as they occur.

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LAWA'S DENIAL AND DIVERSION

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Finally, a 9-1-1 system that routes calls directly to airport police — rather than via the LAPD — has yet to be implemented, despite this need having been brought forward by LAAPOA four years ago. Even now, six months after the fatal events of November 1, the only progress that has occurred is a promotion of the chief of airport police (a former LAPD deputy chief) to deputy director — despite the continued erosion of public safety and new and inventive ways to pay his department alma mater out of airport coffers, all while allowing the general manager to fail to prioritize security.

Yet again, we call on LAWA to quit stalling, quit denying reality, and make a sincere and prompt effort to address staffing and equipment issues so that its police force can provide the absolute best security possible at LAX and the other airports we serve. Committing to spend upwards of \$7 billion on construction projects while treating public safety as an afterthought should be unfathomable in a post-9/11 world, with aviation still considered a top target. Yet meanwhile, Chief Gannon claims that LAXPD has adequate staffing and continues to hire LAPD personnel on an overtime basis to augment the airport police force.

This ongoing practice of robbing Peter to pay Paul puts the airport and the city of Los Angeles at risk, in terms of both economic and public safety. Taking vital LAPD policing resources away from their regular duties to post at LAX, while also depleting the airport police's budget, is a problem squared. What happens next is that the federal government fines the airport and the city, and ultimately the citizens of Los Angeles pay the price by way of increased taxes or passenger landing fees, as well as higher crime rates due to fewer officers safeguarding their neighborhoods.

It should not take another tragedy or election to heed common sense and implement much-needed changes toward best public safety practices at the LAWA-run LAX, Ontario and Van Nuys airports. If LAWA won't do this on its own, then Mayor Garcetti needs to act upon what everyone already knows: LAWA management is in need of replacement. The next steps are to call on the Department of Transportation, U.S. Attorney General, U.S. Department of Justice, District Attorney's Office and other federal, state and local entities to enforce the law, stop the illegal revenue diversion to LAPD and push the process of implementing true security measures and boosting LAXPD resources. With 165,000 passengers using LAX daily, it's time to stop arguing about numbers and start focusing on the end goal: protecting the traveling public.

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