

New DART program to address homeless, mentally ill looks promising

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By [Dallas Morning News Editorial](#)



The red line Dallas Area Rapid Transit rail stops at the St Paul Station in downtown Dallas on Friday, June 30, 2023. (Juan Figueroa / Staff Photographer)

Whether you ride DART buses and trains every day or just once in a while, you've probably encountered homeless passengers or riders with mental health issues talking to themselves or yelling at other riders. It's upsetting to see fellow residents struggling, especially if you don't know how to help them while making sure you reach your destination safely.

That's why it's encouraging that Dallas Area Rapid Transit plans to beta test a program next month to help their most vulnerable passengers. The new multi-disciplinary response team is similar to the Dallas Police Department's RIGHT Care program and will have DART police

officers, paramedics and mental health clinicians on hand to provide treatment and refer passengers to homeless shelters.

Brad Cummings, vice president for business services at DART, told us that the program will be tested for around 60 days starting in late August with one rail team and one mobile team. The rail team will consist of a DART police officer trained in deescalation techniques, a paramedic and a telemed behavioral health clinician who officers can contact virtually.

In the mobile teams, all three officials will travel to places on the rail system or along DART's bus routes when rail or bus operators call them in. Once the program is fully launched, Cummings said, there will be three rail and three mobile teams available from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Housing nonprofits such as OurCalling and The Bridge, and SOAR, an organization that provides support to those facing mental health and substance abuse issues, are among the groups collaborating on the program. DART police Chief Charles Cato said he wants to educate and encourage people to use these services rather than going straight to enforcement. We applaud this compassionate approach that has proven successful in other contexts.

During beta testing, DART will track around 40 metrics including hospital and jail diversions, the change in the number of homeless people on trains and passengers' perceived safety of routes.

Homelessness, addiction and mental health issues are symptoms of bigger issues in the Dallas area, but it's reassuring that DART is stepping in, addressing passengers' concerns and trying to make the service better for all riders.

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