

City/suburbs

Martin may back CTA police force

By Gary Washburn
Transportation writer

Chicago Police Supt. LeRoy Martin said Tuesday that he would have "no problem" with creation of a Chicago Transit Authority security force, a move that would "put 240 police officers back in my stations."

It was Martin's first public comment indicating that, under certain circumstances, he would agree to a shift in responsibility for patrolling CTA buses and trains.

The Mass Transit Unit, with about 240 full-time Chicago police officers, patrols the transit authority's rapid-transit system, and a contingent of 100 moonlighting off-duty officers oversees CTA bus routes in high-crime areas.

CTA executives believe an in-house unit controlled and deployed directly by CTA officials would be more effective in fighting crime on the system. Members of the unit would be professionally trained and vested with the power to arrest.

Martin said in an interview that freeing up officers now assigned full time to the CTA would result in as many as three new beat officers being added to each of the city's 25 police districts.

"It's not that I'm hurting," Martin said. "It's just like anything else. I want all the policemen [I can get]" to patrol the city's neighborhoods.

CTA officials complain privately that Mass Transit Unit officers occasionally are deployed to patrol such special events as Taste of Chicago, leaving trains unpatrolled. Earlier this month, vandals damaged scores of rail cars, causing thousands of dollars in damage, during the food and music festival.

Transit authority officials also con-



Tribune photo by Val Mazzagna

Officers Guy McQuery (left) and James Rowan of the Chicago Police Department's Mass Transit Unit patrol a CTA rapid-transit platform at Randolph and Washington Streets Tuesday.

tend that the bus force is ineffective largely because moonlighting officers do not have the incentive of full-time workers.

Moreover, though the CTA can suggest where Chicago officers should be deployed on the bus and rail systems, the agency cannot order them to what transit officials believe are problem areas.

As an interim measure, staff officials are expected to recommend creation of an in-house security force to patrol the rail system, using full-time Chicago police to patrol the

bus system. Eventually, under the proposal, the CTA would take over bus routes.

But Martin said he opposes any approach that would split responsibilities.

"What I don't want is a piecemeal operation, one system and two police departments," he said.

Martin's proposal "is a bit of a new wrinkle, but I understand his position," said John Haley, CTA manager of field operations. "We feel that with the help of the Police Department we'll be able to put to-

gether a proposal that is beneficial to our customers and to the city as well."

Staff recommendations notwithstanding, it remains to be seen whether the CTA board will approve any proposal to create a in-house security force.

"I can see all the politicians coming forward with their patronage lists almost immediately," said John Hoellen, chairman of the CTA board's Committee on Operations. "I don't want to see [political hacks] working as Keystone Kops."