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LA County, Metro officials eye Philly transit agency for homeless solutions

Supervisor Hahn says Union Station is better for a homeless service center than near A Line in Long Beach



Left to right: Long Beach Mayor Rex Richardson and LA County Supervisor and LA Metro board member Janice Hahn get a tour of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority's Hub of Hope facility for homeless individuals who are removed from trains. The two, and others, made the trip to Philadelphia on Aug. 5 and Aug. 6. (photo courtesy of Hahn and county of Los Angeles).

By **STEVE SCAUZILLO** | sscauzillo@scng.com | Daily News

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Can LA Metro do a better job addressing homelessness on its trains, depots and buses?

Los Angeles County Fourth District Supervisor and Metro board member Janice Hahn thinks so.

Hahn and a delegation that included officials from Metro, the county of Los Angeles and also the mayor of Long Beach, visited a Philadelphia transit agency last week that posted a 35% reduction in unhoused individuals on their system.

“I feel like we can do better,” Hahn said during an interview on Friday, Aug. 11, after touring the homeless treatment facilities of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) in Philadelphia on Aug. 10 and Aug. 11.



LA County Supervisor and Metro board member Janice Hahn and Long Beach Mayor Rex Richardson learn about a Philadelphia transit agency's approach to unhoused riders during a trip to the City of Brotherly Love on Aug. 10 and Aug. 11, 2023. (Photo courtesy of Hahn's office).

The key to SEPTA's success is a multi-faceted Hub of Hope, an 11,000 square foot center built in a former subway concourse that was last used 25 years ago by the police department. Each day, it takes in 70 or more homeless riders removed from trains by the agency's outreach team, Hahn said.

The permanent center includes food services, showers, laundry facilities, a public health clinic staffed with doctors and mental health counselors, plus a team connecting the unhoused to temporary and permanent housing, Hahn said. It is not an overnight shelter, she stressed.

"There were also rooms for people who had kids, with games to play," she added. "It is like a drop-in center."

The Hub of Hope began in a 150 square foot storefront in a suburban train station in 2012 but expanded in 2018 to its current facility, which Hahn thinks could be a model for LA Metro.

"In the Hub of Hope, they (homeless) are taken care of in a way that I think we have difficulties in just knowing what to do with our unhoused riders," Hahn said. Metro CEO Stephanie Wiggins has called the homeless who ride trains and buses for mobile shelter a humanitarian crisis that decreases ridership and affects frontline employees.

Hahn noted that SEPTA outreach teams in Pennsylvania move through trains and platforms continuously on mornings and afternoons, telling the unhoused they can't stay there and directing them to the Hub of Hope.

"I don't think I've seen anything like it," she said. "It is a better way to address this crisis."

Hahn criticized the [actions by LA Metro, which tells the homeless riders to get off the train at the end of the line, usually around midnight or 1 a.m., so the train can be cleaned](#). "That is counter-productive to a good outcome," Hahn said.

The [disembarking of homeless riders](#) in Long Beach, Azusa and Santa Monica at the terminus of the A and E lines have precipitated complaints from these cities. [Two members of the Torrance City Council have objected to extending the C \(Green\) Line into Torrance](#) because they're concerned about homeless riders left to roam the city every night, committing crimes.

Hahn noted SEPTA's more purposeful approach to a problem that many say is keeping regular riders off Metro's trains: "Their outreach workers say 'You can't stay here.' They tell people you can't stay on the train or in the station." And having the Hub of Hope is a humane way of removing the homeless from the transit system, she said.

Hahn was joined by Jackie Dupont-Walker, a Metro board member appointed by Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass; L.A. County Homeless Initiative CEO Ashlee Oh; LA Metro Homeless Initiative Director Craig Joyce; L.A. City Deputy Mayor Randall Winston and [Long Beach Mayor Rex Richardson](#).

LA Metro is studying whether to place a homeless caretaking facility on a Metro parking lot near the end of the A Line in Long Beach. Hahn said she wants Metro to think bigger.

“I thought it would be something I would propose for one of the stations in Long Beach. But we are talking about a parking lot. So no, this is not for a station in Long Beach. This is a bigger opportunity. Somewhere like Union Station would be a better choice,” Hahn said.

Both Hahn and Richardson noted that the Philadelphia transit agency doesn’t go it alone. The Hub of Hope is run by Project Home, a nonprofit, and includes cooperation from the city of Philadelphia and SEPTA and costs about \$2.5 million a year to operate.

“This visit was an eye-opening experience for me,” said Richardson in a prepared statement. “I was impressed by how SEPTA works with their partners, like Project Home and the ‘Hub for Hope’ to provide holistic services for homeless riders.”

Hahn agreed, saying Metro should seek more help from nonprofits who have street teams that address the needs of homeless individuals. She said that often nonprofits are not allowed on Metro’s train platforms.

“We need to have a better partnership with people whose job it is to do that work,” Hahn said. “That was my biggest takeaway. Sometimes, we try to reinvent the wheel at Metro. I am hopeful we can use some of what we learned from SEPTA on our own Metro system.”