

Analyzing Transit Assaults in Oklahoma Since 2020

This white paper examines the statistics and trends regarding transit assaults in Oklahoma since 2020. As urban, rural, and tribal areas increasingly rely on public transportation post Covid, concerns related to safety have risen.

While the rise in violent and verbal incidents on rolling stock (public transit vehicles) has risen in the past few years, statue 21 OK Stat § 21-1903 needs the language clarified to mitigate this public safety risk and allow for enforcement on all transit vehicles.

This document compiles data from law enforcement agencies, transit authorities, and relevant studies to provide a comprehensive overview of the landscape of transit violence in Oklahoma.

Introduction

Public transportation is essential for many residents in Oklahoma, enabling mobility and access to jobs, education, and medical services. However, incidents of violence and assaults, can create a climate of fear and discourage transit use.

Overview of Transit Assaults

Nationally, transit assaults rose during the COVID-19 pandemic as ridership patterns changed and tensions escalated in many urban centers. According to the Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS), reported incidents of violence on public transit systems increased by 25% from 2019 to 2021 across major U.S. cities. This trend raised alarms among safety advocates and transit authorities.

Additionally, on September 25, 2024, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) issued General Directive 24-1 mandating that transit agencies assess the risks posed by assaults on their workforce and report the results back to FTA. They also require reporting to track transit assaults in the NTD data submitted to ODOT and FTA.

Oklahoma Specific Data (2020-2023)

Statistics on transit assaults within Oklahoma reveal notable trends:

2020: The onset of the pandemic saw a decrease in overall transit ridership due to lockdown measures, albeit with some fluctuations. Initial reports suggested a significant drop in transit-related assaults, attributed to fewer passengers.

2021: As ridership began to rebound, there was a concerning uptick in assaults. Data from the Oklahoma City Police Department indicated that reported transit-related incidents increased by approximately 15% compared to pre-pandemic levels. Factors included heightened tensions, social unrest, and resource constraints on local law enforcement.

2022: The trend continued with a further increase of 10% in reported assaults on transit systems. Many incidents involved verbal altercations escalating to physical violence, often fueled by factors such as substance abuse and mental health issues.

2023: Preliminary data suggested a stabilization of incidents, but assaults remain above pre-pandemic levels. Transit authorities and law enforcement agencies have implemented new measures to enhance safety, including increased surveillance and patrols.

2024: Transit assaults in Oklahoma reflected a concerning upward trend, continuing patterns observed in previous years. However, we also see a 15% increase in transit assaults compared to 2023 of both physical altercations and verbal confrontations on public transportation.

Statistical Overview

Oklahoma City reported approximately 65 assaults, while Tulsa documented around 35 incidents. Both had cases where workers had to be transported to the hospital and in Tulsa, passengers had to intervene after the bus hit a tree, that posed a major public safety risk given the size of the vehicle that was not being controlled. This is not just an urban problem, rural and tribal transits also reported verbal and physical assaults in the last year.

The increase in assaults has been linked to various factors, including rising economic pressures, increased rates of substance abuse, and the impact of mental health issues exacerbated by societal stressors.

A national survey of transit users indicated that **65%** felt unsafe while using public transportation, highlighting significant concerns regarding personal safety.

Overall, the data from 2024 underscores the importance of ongoing assessment and intervention to address the rising tide of transit assaults in Oklahoma, emphasizing the need for collaborative efforts in enhancing safety for all riders.

We have bus security video available, if requested, for private viewing by legislators of these assaults.

Future Forecasting

As of 2025, transit assault data indicates a continued trend of concern in many urban areas across the United States, including Oklahoma. Here are the key findings from the data collected:

In Oklahoma, transit authorities expect a **10% increase** in assaults compared to 2024 numbers. This marks a continuation of the upward trend observed since the pandemic.

A significant proportion of incidents have involved physical altercations that involve a transit worker. Verbal assaults also remain high, contributing to a feeling of insecurity among riders, even when physical harm is not inflicted.

In summary, while efforts to improve safety have been initiated on a case-by-case basis, the increase in transit assaults in 2025 highlights ongoing challenges that require continued attention from transit agencies, law enforcement, and communities.

References

- FTA Reporting Data
- Oklahoma City Police Department Annual Reports.
- Tulsa Transit Safety and Security Statistics.
- ODOT NTD Data (2023/2024)

This white paper serves as a foundation for understanding and addressing the issue of transit assaults in Oklahoma by the Oklahoma Transit Association. Learn more at OKTransit.org

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