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### New officers, new diversity for Metro Transit police

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As new immigrants to the United States, Abdulkhayr Hirse and Salah Ahmed relied heavily on transit to get to work and school.

A few short years later, their experience is coming full circle. The Somali-born men were among 19 new full-time Metro Transit police officers [sworn in on Friday, Aug. 2](#), as the department welcomed one of the most diverse groups of new hires in the history of the 20-year-old organization.

With their hire, the department now includes four Somali officers, including the first Somali sergeant in the country, Waheid Siraach. Mukhtar Abdulkadir, who was also born in Somalia, was among [22 part-time officers](#) who joined Metro Transit Police this spring.

Following Friday's ceremony Hirse and Ahmed said they were excited to begin their new roles, serving as role models for young Somalis as well as ambassadors to the wider transit community. As with all transit police, they will be responsible for patrolling light rail and commuter trains, buses and station areas and will play a key role policing the [METRO Green Line](#) when it opens next year.

“We’re here because we want to change someone’s life, or at least make their day or night a little bit better,” said Hirse, who worked in security after moving from Kenya to the United States in 1998.

Ahmed, who previously worked as a probation officer and park ranger, said he was eager to join the force because it will allow him to have more interactions with community members. “It’s not just about sitting in a squad car but getting out and talking to people, connecting with the public,” he said.

The visibility could encourage other young Somalis to consider law enforcement as a career as well, said Siraach, who joined the department nearly six years ago and was named acting sergeant in July.

“It’ll be a great thing for them to have somebody to look up to,” he said. “This is really exciting for us and it makes us better as an agency.”

For Police Chief John Harrington, the department’s growing diversity represents a “changing of the guards” that will be key to building bridges in the community. This year, the department has made a point of increasing time spent on the streets doing beat work and connecting with community groups at events like Tuesday’s National Night Out (Transit Police plan to attend 50 events in Minneapolis and St. Paul).



With transit customers speaking dozens of different languages, Harrington said it’s

vital for officers to reflect and be able to relate to the people they serve. Officers in the new class speak Arabic, Spanish and Somali.

“People come here from every point on the globe,” he said addressing the officers at Friday’s ceremony. “Today, as you go forth from here, you will bring a new meaning to the phrase, ‘By the people, for the people, of the people.’”

General Manager Brian Lamb echoed the sentiment. Besides introducing more diversity, Lamb said the department’s growth will allow officers to take a more proactive approach to policing and ensure Metro Transit customers feel safe and welcome. There are now 83 full-time Metro Transit police officers and 59 part-time officers.

“It’s easy to be focused on the problems at hand, but that will only get us part of the way there,” he said.

Another 26 part-time officers will be hired this fall. Acting Lt. Jason Lindner, who oversaw the hiring of the new class, said the department received more than 500 applications when it advertised the new jobs earlier this year.

The response was due in part to greater outreach, something Lindner said would continue as the department continues to grow.

“It’s really important for every class to get a good cross-section of people,” he said. “That’s what’s going to allow us to be able to hit more areas than we ever have.”

[> Star Tribune: New officers join Metro Transit police force](#)

> Coverage by *Mogadishu Times*, [Hiiraan Online](#)

[> Metro Transit Police Department](#)

*Top left: Abdulkhayr Hirse poses with St. Paul and Minneapolis police officers prior to the Metro Transit Police Department's swearing in ceremony on Friday. Bottom right: Salah Ahmed poses with an officer from the Dakota County Sheriff Department on Friday.*

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