



7 arrested in protests as MBTA board privatizes 'money room'

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From left at bar: Patrick Hogan, Michael Keller, Joseph Cerbone, Allen Lee, Lawrence C. Kelly, Jr., John D. Hunt, and president James M. O'Brien.

By Matt Rocheleau and Laura Crimaldi

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The MBTA's fiscal board voted Thursday to privatize the transit agency's troubled cash collection department, over protests from unionized workers.

The board approved a five-year, \$18.7 million contract to Brink's, a national cash collection and security company headquartered in Virginia. MBTA officials say the deal would replace the union employees currently assigned to the department, saving the agency as much as \$8.6 million in the first year of the contract.

“Change is never easy,” said Brian Shortsleeve, the MBTA’s acting general manager. “But, frankly, the status quo isn’t working.”

The department, which handles nearly \$200 million a year, has been considered poorly run for years, and a 2012 state audit showed that computer problems caused the MBTA to record receipts for more money than was actually deposited.

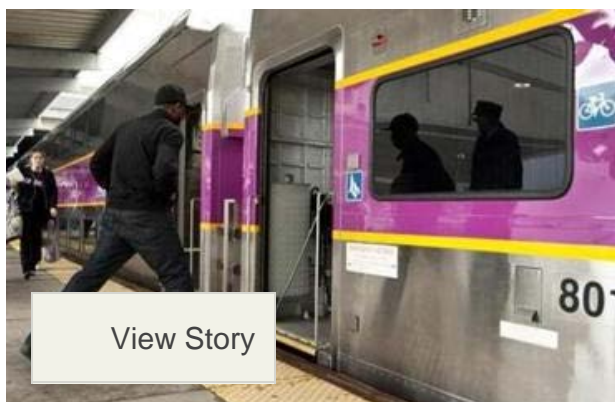


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The Brink’s contract is the first major battle over privatization between the MBTA and its unions. As part of the Baker administration’s push to cut costs, the MBTA is also seeking to outsource its warehousing department and looking into privatizing bus maintenance and driver jobs.



Union promises fight as MBTA moves to privatize cash-counting jobs

“We’re confident we’ll not only save money, but have a better level of service,” acting GM Brian Shortsleeve said Wednesday.

Shortsleeve said he expects resistance going forward, and union officials said they plan to oppose further privatization attempts.

“Even though this contract is moving forward, we’re not going to back down from this fight to stop privatization,” said James O’Brien, president of the Boston Carmen’s Union, which represents many of the workers in the collection department.

Before the vote, O’Brien and six other union officials were arrested by Transit Police at a picket line formed outside the MBTA’s cash collection facility in Charlestown to protest the outsourcing.

Around 5:30 a.m., transit officers found the gate to the facility had been chained and padlocked, and protesters were preventing vehicles from passing, officials said.

“We asked them to move across the street where they would be allowed to exercise their First Amendment rights,” Transit Police Superintendent Richard Sullivan said. “We gave them ample opportunity to do so. They declined that.”

The picket lines were set up before dawn to block collection trucks from leaving. O’Brien said as many as 150 members participated.

“We are standing up for our members today, and we are standing up for our riders,” O’Brien said in an interview. “Privatization does not work.”

The union officials were charged with unlawful assembly. They were released on their own



recognizance and ordered to stay away from the location of their arrest.

Speaking with reporters Thursday, Governor Charlie Baker said union members have the right to protest as long as they do not interfere with MBTA operations.

“The T has to be able to perform. It has to be able to operate,” Baker said. “You can’t lock the gates or get in the way of the trucks. At some point, we have to be able to serve the public.”

Shortsleeve and Baker said department employees will be offered other positions with the MBTA, including as bus drivers. Many workers in the department are former bus drivers.

O’Brien said Thursday he believes 42 jobs will be affected.

Shortsleeve said the outsourcing will help the transit system close an operating deficit of more than \$100 million.

“The problems at the money room are legendary. It’s been a problem for the MBTA for a long time,” he said.

Brink’s and GardaWorld were the only two companies to bid on the contract. GardaWorld’s five-year offer would have cost the MBTA about \$23.5 million.

“Cash collection is not a core competency of the MBTA,” Shortsleeve said. “Even Bank of America, the largest bank in this country, doesn’t run their money rooms. They outsource to specialist companies like Garda and Brink’s.”

Laura Crimaldi can be reached at laura.crimaldi@globe.com. Follow her on Twitter [@lauracrimaldi](https://twitter.com/lauracrimaldi). Matt Rocheleau can be reached at matthew.rocheleau@globe.com. Follow him on Twitter [@mrochele](https://twitter.com/mrochele).

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