

SF area transit agency to discuss wireless policy

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A San Francisco Police officer pushes protesters onto a sidewalk from Market Street in San Francisco, Monday, Aug. 22, 2011. About 100 demonstrators on Monday were protesting the Bay Area Rapid Transit agency's decision to cut wireless service in its San Francisco stations earlier this month. (AP Photo/Jeff Chiu)

(AP) -- The transit agency in the San Francisco Bay area hopes to ease tensions with a public meeting over whether there should be a policy on cutting wireless access to its stations during protests.

The Bay Area Rapid Transit agency board of directors meets Wednesday morning in Oakland to discuss whether it wants to continue using the tactic, which drew unfavorable comparisons to Hosni Mubarak's attempts to cut Internet access to most of Egypt to quell demonstrations protesting his regime.

"We've had a number of protests over this that have been disruptive to our passengers," board president Bob Franklin said. "We want to provide an appropriate forum to hear from those protesters with this meeting."

Franklin said the board isn't expected to take any action during the meeting. Instead, he said the session is being held to gather ideas and hear from all sides about what [wireless access](#) policy BART should adopt.

BART became the first reported U.S. governmental agency to shut wireless access as a security measure when it turned off power to [cell towers](#) in four San Francisco stations on Aug. 11, when a protest over BART police shooting and killing a transient was planned.

The action was taken after leaders of the protest told demonstrators to look for last-minute instructions on how to disrupt the evening commute on social networks and text messages. The protest failed to materialize after BART cut wireless access.

The tactic, though, has prompted two rowdy demonstrations on each of the past two Monday nights. The first demonstration prompted BART to briefly close four stations, but no arrests were made even though protesters unfurled banners and loudly chanted slogans on the platform in violation of BART safety rules.

The protest Monday night forced closure of two stations and resulted in close to four dozen arrests in the subway and in city streets above after

demonstrators refused police demands to disburse. Four demonstrators were arrested after refusing BART police demands to refrain from protesting on the Civic Center station platform.

Franklin believes there was a conscious decision Monday to not tolerate protests on the platform. "It's dangerous," he said.

Franklin said BART police have been better handling each successive demonstration. The first protest, held July 11 over the police shooting, caused massive delays throughout the BART system. There were no delays reported Monday night, Franklin said.

"This has been an ongoing process," BART Deputy Chief Daniel O. Hartwig said.

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