

Bulletin



PHONY PASSES--LAPD Cmdr. Garrett Zimmon, center, shows counterfeit passes to MTA Revenue Director Agapito Diaz, left, and Paul Lennon, managing director, Safety and Security.

LAPD Detectives Stop Counterfeit Ring; Sold, Distributed Phony Transit Passes

By Bill Heard, Editor

(Jan. 3) LAPD detectives have arrested a man and two women alleged to have operated a counterfeit transit pass ring that may have cost the MTA more than \$2 million annually in lost revenues.



Detectives from the Transit Services Section and officers from the Transit Bus Division's Special Enforcement Section arrested alleged counterfeiters Pedro Sotelo and his girlfriend, Tomiko Cash, Dec. 30. In the raid, police seized more than 500 items of evidence they said link both suspects to the crime. Sotelo also is suspected of counterfeiting U.S. \$100 and \$50 bills.

Arrest alleged distributor

On Dec. 31, detectives arrested the alleged primary distributor, Amira Mogollon Cabeza, also known as Angelica Marie Carasco, and confiscated more than 100 items as evidence. Two others - Bonfilio Zamora and Casimiro Salazar - were arrested on a misdemeanor for possession of counterfeit passes.

Sotelo and Cash were arrested following a search at a residence in the 500 block of Boylston Street. Officers confiscated computer and cutting equipment at the Sotelo apartment. Sotelo and Cash are being held on \$20,000 bail.

Detectives picked up Cabeza following the search of the California Beauty Salon in the 200 block of West 8th Street.

Only ring in operation

"Based on everything we've seen and on the information we've received, we believe this was the only counterfeit ring in operation," said Cmdr. Garrett Zimmon of the LAPD's Transit Group.

Police say street vendors had been selling phony monthly passes for \$15 to \$20 each, less than half the \$42 price of a genuine monthly pass. They conservatively estimate the counterfeiter's profit at about \$5,000 a month. The MTA may lose between \$4 million and \$8 million a year due to fare evasion of all types, according to Agapito Diaz, MTA director of Revenue.

Earlier in December, a woman said to be a street vendor for the transit pass counterfeit ring was convicted of a felony for selling counterfeit MTA transfers. Laura Santos was sentenced to 90 days in County Jail, fined \$200 and given three year's probation.

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