

## LAPD Detectives Arrest Suspect in Profitable Sales of Stolen Transfers

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(Feb. 7) For three days last week, detectives from the LAPD's Transit Group tracked a pair of men as they allegedly broke into Metro Buses to steal transfers they then sold for as much as \$1,200 to \$1,500 a week. The primary suspect is thought to have been operating for almost two years.

On Wednesday, officers swooped in and arrested the suspect's alleged partner outside a garment district sales point. The primary suspect was still at large on Monday. Detective Tim Gipson, supervisor of the Revenue Protection Team, said his arrest is just a matter of time, since police have impounded the suspect's vehicle and know where he lives.

### Six felony counts

A warrant with six felony counts has been issued for the man. Five of the counts are for burglary. One is for counterfeiting – in this case, altering transfers by punching them with transfer times.



Cracking the stolen transfer case was the second major illegal fare bust for the LAPD this year. On Jan. 3, the LAPD announced the arrest of a man and two women they alleged were operating a counterfeit transit pass ring that may have cost the MTA more than \$2 million annually in lost revenues.

According to a police report on the transfer thefts, the primary suspect's partner, Arturo Flores, 21, of Panorama City, has admitted to committing at least 50 prior burglaries during the past six months. During one of those, Flores told police he had taken an operator's transfer punch and had been using it to time-punch his customers' transfers.

### Method of operation

From the detectives' surveillance of the pair as they hit a number of Metro Bus layover zones and then sold the stolen transfer tickets, the Revenue Protection Team was able to piece together their method of operation.

The primary suspect and his partner, Flores, allegedly spent mornings making the rounds of Metro Bus layover zones throughout the city. They would wait for an operator to leave a bus. Police never observed a confrontation with an operator.

Then with burglary tools or a homemade key, they would jimmy the bus door and grab the operator's supply of transfer tickets.

### Eight or more books

On heavily traveled lines, Gipson said, this could amount to eight or more books of 50 tickets each, per bus. The pair would hit from two to four buses, depending upon the number of transfer tickets they could collect from each bus.

After completing their rounds of the layover zones, the suspects then would drive to the garment district where they divided up the books of transfers.

On one occasion, a surveillance team "was able to follow (the primary suspect) into several buildings and watch him make contact with eager customers who seemed to know he would be around during the lunch hour," according to a police report.

### **Earned \$250 a day**

"The stolen transfers were being offered at 50 cents each," the report continues. "It is highly probable that (the suspect) earned at least \$250 per day on days when he worked alone and considerably more when he teamed up with an additional suspect or suspects."

Gipson said the LAPD's Revenue Protection Team is working to determine the magnitude of the transfer theft problem. The team is focused on catching transfer thieves and stopping illegal sales at the distribution points.

"We'll continue to go through the areas of distribution and ensure that copycats aren't continuing the illegal sales of transfers," he said. "We'll go after additional suspects in the same way, locate points of distribution and eliminate those also."

Gipson asked Metro Bus operators to report suspicious vehicles parked in or near layover zones, or suspicious persons loitering nearby.

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