

MTA Operators Encouraged to Aid Homeless, Mentally Ill

(Feb. 14) An LA County team is enlisting the support of Metro Bus and Metro Rail operators to help the homeless and people with mental illnesses who sleep in bus shelters and at subway stations.

The county's Mental Evaluation Team (MET) began operations in December and has since assisted almost 100 homeless persons, according to a report given, Wednesday, to the MTA Board's Operations committee.

County Supervisor and MTA Director Michael Antonovich proposed creation of the MET in 1999 as a means to "provide resources for individuals...(who)...sleep on bus benches and in our subway areas." The Board of Supervisors provided \$200,000 in funding.

"Supervisor Antonovich wanted to do something to see that these individuals were treated and cared for," said Paul Lennon, managing director, MTA Safety and Security.

'Eyes' of the MET program

"Our bus and rail operators can be the 'eyes' of the MET program and notify the control centers when they see a homeless person who may need help," he added. "There is help available and our operators can be a part of providing it."

Sheriff's Deputy Craig McClelland and Linda Boyd of the county Mental Health Department are the team members assigned to the MTA. Beginning last June, the team visited operating divisions and the bus and rail operations centers, and familiarized themselves with bus and rail routes.

The team also trained operations staff and members of the law enforcement units under contract to the MTA. Training included methods for dealing with the homeless and mentally ill and how to contact the MET for assistance.

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