

## Not You Again! LAPD Catches Transit Pass Counterfeiter

By ERIC RAPP

(June 18, 2002) LAPD Transit Group detectives have arrested a transit pass counterfeiter who was up to his old tricks again. The arrest will save thousands of dollars in lost revenue for the MTA.

Near the end of 2001, the LAPD's Revenue Protection Detail determined that a significant amount of counterfeit fare media was circulating throughout the transit system. Their next challenge was to locate the source of the fakes.

In April of this year, investigations led detectives to repeat offender Pedro Sotelo, recently released from prison after serving 16 months for counterfeiting.

He had been arrested in January 2000 for operating a counterfeit transit pass ring that may at that time have cost the MTA over \$2 million annually in lost revenues.

"[Sotelo] has targeted the MTA for years," says LAPD Detective Steven Reyes.

### Detective work paid off

Detectives had to keep up surveillance on Sotelo for two months before they had the evidence they needed. Finally, the work paid off and officers were able to confirm that Sotelo's actions were consistent with those of a counterfeiter.

Because Sotelo is on parole, detectives were able to enter and search his premises without a warrant. The searches turned up large amounts of counterfeiting material and counterfeit passes.

According to the LAPD, Sotelo has not cooperated with investigations. However, the Revenue Protection Detail estimates that he was making approximately 3,000 semi-monthly passes every month since September 2001.

That amount represents a revenue loss to the MTA of about \$63,000 since Sotelo resumed operation last fall.

Photos by LUIS INZUNZA



^ Officer Jose Martinez studies counterfeiting evidence seized in an LAPD search.



^ Counterfeit transit passes.



^ LAPD Detectives Jeffrey Brugger, left, and Doug Raymond and Officer Jose Martinez of the Revenue Protection Detail examine discarded cuttings from counterfeit passes.

Sotelo is currently in police custody, awaiting trial on a new charge of counterfeiting, as well as violating parole.

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