


[Home](#)
[CEO Hotline](#)
[Viewpoint](#)
[Classified Ads](#)
[Archives](#)
[Metro.net](#) (web)

Resources

[Safety](#)
[Pressroom](#) (web)

[CEO Hotline](#)
[Metro Projects](#)
[Facts at a Glance](#)
(web)

[Archives](#)
[Events Calendar](#)
[Research Center/
Library](#)
[Metro Cafe](#) (pdf)

[Metro Classifieds](#)
[Retirement
Round-up](#)

Metro Info

[Strategic Plan](#) (pdf)

[Org Chart](#) (pdf)

[Policies](#)
[Training](#)
[Help Desk](#)
[Intranet Policy](#)

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Calming a 'Storm' of Concern About Robberies Near Blue Line

By RICH MORALLO

(March 16, 2004) Slightly wet from the evening's rain late last month, Sheriff's Lt. Rick Martindale and one of his team members, Sgt. Carlos Jaen, strode from the parking lot into the Bethel Baptist Church in Watts.



LASD Lt. Rick Martindale

They had come to answer residents' biggest question: How can they help stop the robberies and muggings at the 103rd Street Metro Blue Line station?

In the past few months, passengers using that Metro Rail station had been victimized by thieves, robbers and gang members. They wanted action from the Sheriff's Transit Services Bureau.

"About 60 percent of our community use public transit, including the Metro Blue Line, and we have to feel safe when we are on public transportation," Jacquelyn Simms, of the Watts Neighborhood Council's transportation committee, told the law enforcement officers.

Arrest for robbery

Martindale, who's in charge of security for Metro Blue and Green Line trains, stations and other facilities, told the assembled residents that the deputies, in a joint operation with LAPD, had recently arrested a man for robbery on the train.

"The same suspect was wanted by LAPD for four other robberies," said the lieutenant. "Much of the crime in that area is actually away from Metro property so we often coordinate our law enforcement activities with LAPD."

He described the 'modus operandi' of some gang members traveling on the train: they would spot a possible victim and get off the train with the passenger, follow the victim a few blocks, and then rob him.

When the residents started asking questions about the security cameras at the 103rd Station, Martindale told them he was coordinating a request that would move a Sheriff's Law Enforcement Technician (LET) into the closed-circuit TV room of the nearby Rail Operations Center.

Identify suspicious activity

"An LET technician screening the monitors would be able to identify suspicious activity faster," he said.

Martindale also informed the group that funding may soon be available to upgrade the cameras, and that funding has been requested for additional deputies to support night shift patrols along the rail line.

"Your help is important in keeping us informed," said Martindale, adding that he welcomes all phone calls, even anonymous tips. The residents agreed to pass the word to neighbors.

Later, after Martindale had answered the last question and passed out his business cards, he headed back to his car.

He had just confirmed with the residents that the neighborhood around the Metro Blue Line's 103 Street station is a priority for him. And although the rain was still falling, the lieutenant, a 23-year veteran with the department, felt the storm had passed.

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