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## Terrorist Threat Focuses Attention on Rail, Bus Security

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By BILL HEARD, Editor

(March 26, 2004) With the terrorist bombings in Madrid, Moscow and the Middle East a vivid memory, the U.S. government and transit agencies nationwide, including MTA, are focusing more attention on rail and bus security.

More law enforcement and security officers, many undercover, are patrolling rail and bus lines. Metro Rail fare inspectors are keeping an eye out for unusual behavior while checking tickets.

Train platforms, buses and rail cars are being searched more frequently for suspicious packages. Bomb-sniffing dogs are deployed on a regular basis.

There's increased cooperation and communication among local law enforcement and emergency agencies and such federal agencies as U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the FBI and Secret Service.

The federal government has been more generous with funding for local security efforts, including a

The Transit Services Bureau has increased the presence of sworn officers in the Metro Rail system. Shown here, from left are Sheriff's deputies Frank Richter, David Sivard and Amore Smith.



### Employee 'Eyes and Ears' Needed

More "eyes and ears" are needed in the campaign to prevent terrorism, says Transit Police Chief Dan Finkelstein. He asks all employees who work in or use the Metro system to help.

Whether riding a Metro Bus or catching Metro Rail, employees can bolster security efforts by reporting suspicious packages and behavior that is not "like a typical Los Angeles commuter."

All Metro Rail platforms have emergency phones that connect to a Rail Operations Center. The push-button phones and speaker boxes may be found near the fire equipment cabinets at the ends or near the middle of the platforms, as well as on the subway mezzanine levels near the ticket vending machines.

Metro Bus operators have direct radio contact with the Bus Operations Center. Bus and rail controllers are in constant communication with the Sheriff's Transit Services Bureau and the Sheriff's dispatcher.

### What Homeland Security is Doing

Over the past two years, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security has focused on improving the flow of security-related information among all levels of government.

The department also has provided more funding, has developed new security measures

\$4.5 million grant to MTA. The money is being spent for a security command vehicle, chemical/biological protective suits for first responders and a high-rail vehicle to transport emergency personnel to an incident site.

Deputy CEO John Catoe, Transit Police Chief Capt. Dan Finkelstein and other MTA security officials have participated recently in several conference calls with Homeland Security.

**Transit security briefing**

Under Secretary Asa Hutchinson and his staff briefed some 100 transit and security officers across the country on the Madrid bombings. The group also discussed how U.S. transit agencies could improve anti-terrorist procedures.

“Since the Madrid bombings, we’ve increased our law enforcement staffing a lot with the goal of having at least some presence on every subway platform,” says Finkelstein, who heads the Sheriff’s Transit Services Bureau, as well as the Metrolink security unit. “We have 24/7 patrols in and around Union Station.”

and has increased training for transit security agencies.

Homeland Security is planning a pilot program to screen luggage and carry-on bags for explosives at rail stations and aboard trains. Amtrak and the Federal Railroad Administration will test the concept, which will not be similar to airport screenings, at one commuter rail station.

The department also is working on a rapid-deployment Mass Transit K-9 program to assist local law enforcement teams. Additional training and assistance also will be provided to local K-9 teams.

The Administration’s FY 2005 budget request includes \$407 million to allow Homeland Security to develop biological countermeasures and \$63 million for chemical and high explosives countermeasures to help detect and counter threats to transit systems.

**Editor’s note:**

The Transit Services Bureau is offering a pamphlet, entitled “What You Can Do to Help,” and a 17-minute video about transit security. The “Warning Signs, System Security Awareness for Transit Employees” video has been distributed to all operating divisions and is available to department managers for employee meetings. For a copy of the video, contact Paul Lennon at 922-4418.

As Los Angeles’ largest transit hub and a converging point for thousands of commuters every weekday, Union Station cannot be overlooked as deserving the highest possible security, Finkelstein believes.

That’s why he helped set up a Union Station security working group that includes the Transit Services Bureau, MTA Security, Amtrak Police, MWD security, the LAPD Central Division and developer Catellus’ private security company.

“Terrorism is all about fear – making you think your government can’t protect you,” says Finkelstein. “With a strong police presence, we do what we can to allay those fears.”

**Beyond Union Station**

The expanded transit security effort reaches well beyond Union Station. The police chief’s goal is to ensure a strong visible presence of deputies and fare inspectors on or around all rail platforms.

During the evening hours, deputies frequently clear an entire train and thoroughly search it for suspicious packages. One side benefit: they’ve reduced the number of transients sleeping on the trains during operating hours from about 200 to about a dozen.

But, transients are a continuing concern. Not only do they annoy passengers, they frequently leave their belongings on the platforms and trains. More than one security alert has resulted from just such instances.

So, whether it's increased police presence or more attention to items left on a bus or train, Finkelstein says these tense times require more vigilance by law enforcement officers, transit employees and the public.

He notes that the bomb-laden backpacks and packages that killed 200 and injured 1,500 had gone unnoticed for 30 or 40 minutes in Madrid's subway system.

"If even one of those could have been defused, or if a train could have been evacuated," he says, "perhaps 60 lives could have been saved."

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