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Bus Operator Charged with Vandalizing Fareboxes

- Damages total \$60,000 for five 'smart card' fareboxes

By PAMELA MURANO

(Sept. 22, 2005) A Metro Bus operator charged with five felony counts of vandalizing fareboxes – with damages totaling \$60,000 – surrendered, Wednesday, to Sheriff's deputies.

Operator Luano James, 45, a 21-year employee assigned to East Valley Division 15, was arrested on a probable cause (Ramey) warrant obtained by the Transit Services Bureau following an investigation by Investigator Cliff Ladage of the Metro Special Investigations Unit.

James was charged under section 594 (A) (1) of the California Penal code. He was booked at Los Angeles County Jail where bail was set at \$20,000.

The operator is accused of vandalizing five of the new "smart card" fareboxes aboard the buses he was assigned to operate by pouring coffee or other liquid in the fareboxes and also by stripping the sensors from the farebox currency receivers.

Cameras and digital video recorders in the buses documented the vandalism, which rendered the fareboxes inoperable. The replacement cost for each farebox is \$12,000.

The warrant was issued Sept. 16, but James was on vacation and failed to attend a Sept. 21 administrative hearing at Division 15. Attempts to serve the warrant at his home were not successful.

Legal counsel for James contacted Sheriff's detectives, Sept. 20, and made arrangements for a voluntary surrender, Sept. 21.