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Transportation Security Administration officers search the baggage of Lisa Duong of Los Angeles and Elizabeth Shin of North Hills at a pedestrian checkpoint outside Union Station.



Photos by Ned Racine

Milestone Anti-Terrorist Exercise 'Locks Out' Union Station Complex

- Bomb dogs, cops and security officers worked 'on the same frequency' to stymie mock multi-target terrorist attack

By NED RACINE

(May 2, 2007) Under a flawless blue sky, local, regional, and national law enforcement and transit authorities ran a real-time test of security measures at the Union Station Gateway (USG) complex last Saturday, employing a less-than-sunny scenario.

Saturday's event, the first anti-terrorist exercise sponsored since 2002 by the Security Task Force, a group of agencies and businesses concerned with USG security, attempted to "lock out" Los Angeles' downtown transportation center.

"The coordination, deployment, and communications went very well so that all the players were on the



same frequency—literally,” said Jack Eckles, DEO for System Safety & Security. “They were all [integrated] into the overall plan and purpose of what they were doing, so when they deployed, they all understood their role.” He noted that this level of integration during a multi-agency exercise is difficult.

Sheriff's Deputy Kyle Hayden leads Xxzylo, a two-year-old Vizsla, through a luggage inspection. One piece of luggage carried a mock explosive. Xxzylo was named after a victim of the September 11, 2001 attacks.

According to the exercise's grim scenario, the Department of Homeland Security had raised its threat level to “red,” following a coordinated terrorist attack on a commuter rail system somewhere in the United States. “Terrorist” teams tried, unsuccessfully, to penetrate USG's security forces to place mock explosive devices in five critical areas inside USG. The majority of terrorist teams were “captured” on Metrolink trains.

Public participation in the exercise was voluntary, although Dan Cowden, Metro transit security manager, estimated that 50 percent of passengers, pedestrians and drivers chose to take part in the exercise.

Transit industry's largest drill

According to Cowden, the exercise was the transit industry's largest multi-agency drill since the September 11, 2001 attacks. He estimated approximately 250 officers took part in the exercise, which lasted from 7 a.m. to noon.



Sheriff's Deputies Sheriff Morsi and Randy Williams check the luggage of Janet Delgado of Los Angeles at a pedestrian checkpoint at the east entrance of the Union Station Gateway complex.

“I was very pleased with the results,” said Sheriff's Lt. Leo Norton, co-planner of the exercise with Sheriff's Lt. John Herrera. “We learned an awful lot in terms of logistics; how long it took to set up.” In reviewing the exercise, Norton discovered that it delayed the Metrolink trains only 15 minutes.

Deputies from the Transit Services Bureau and Metro Security officers screened bus and rail passengers and pedestrians—and their luggage—as well as vehicles entering the USG complex. No passenger cars were allowed into the transit plaza.

K-9 units also were a key part of the exercise. The dogs examined luggage that participating passengers placed in the aisle of rail cars. Dogs from the TSB and Los Angeles Police Department discovered a mock explosive device transported via vehicle to the Alameda Street entrance to Union Station.

Officer Juan Alba, of the Los Angeles Airport Police, searched Metro Gold Line trains at the Chinatown Station with Eno, a German shepherd. “People are more leery of the dogs, but they don't mind being searched.”

Other checkpoints

Other checkpoints near USG included the Civic Center station, the Vignes



Officer Juan Alba, Los Angeles Airport Police, pauses between searches of Metro Gold Line trains at the Chinatown Station. Eno, a German shepherd, rests his nose.

Street pedestrian and vehicle entrances to USG and multiple Metrolink stations.

Participating agencies included the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), Los Angeles Fire Department, Los Angeles Airport Police, Metrolink Sheriff's unit and Amtrak Police Department.

Observers included the Federal Bureau of Investigation, California Office of Homeland Security, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Orange County Sheriff's Department, California Public Utilities Commission, Federal Air Marshall Program and the

head of security for New York's Metropolitan Transportation Authority.

"We learned a lot from the TSA," Norton said. "They were extremely professional."

"They really cared about the scenario," Norton said of the public who chose to participate. "They really took it seriously. That's really great when you can create a scenario that everyone treats as real and wants to play."