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Vandals responsible for 277 different tags and damage estimated at more than \$25,000

San Diego, CA –Metropolitan Transit System undercover security operations arrested five juveniles in the past two weeks who are responsible for 277 individual tags covering 3,580 square feet and damage estimated at more than \$25,000.

The vandals were witnessed tagging MTS property and arrested by MTS security. Pictures of their tags were put into the Graffiti Tracker system, which has a data base of tags throughout the region. Graffiti Tracker found 277 matching tags on public and private property attributable to these individuals.

“This bust shows that the regional graffiti program we launched last year is having a tremendous impact,” said County Supervisor Greg Cox. “MTS was one of the first regional agencies to jump on board this program. Our message for graffiti vandals is simple -- there’s nowhere to hide. We’re going to catch you, prosecute you and make you pay for the damages you’ve caused.”

Supervisor Cox was the driving force in the development of the regional graffiti program. All the cities in the County, along with the County of San Diego, MTS, the North County Transit District and the Port of San Diego, participate in the program.

The program uses a database that tracks and links graffiti incidents throughout the region. That information is shared by law enforcement to prosecute vandals for numerous graffiti incidents, resulting in stiffer penalties and large restitutions.

“Graffiti Tracker is a tremendous tool for us in our effort to reduce vandalism in our system,” said Paul Jablonski, Chief Executive Officer of MTS. “Each year we have close to \$1 million in costs to repair vandalism on our bus and trolley vehicles as well as to our property along our rail lines. This system not only allows us to catch and prosecute the vandals, but to recover some of our costs to repair the damage.

“MTS security forces should be congratulated, too. Their efforts to arrest the vandals and their diligence to identify and record tags in Graffiti Tracker is what makes the system work.”

Bill Burke, Chief of Police for MTS, says that these arrests have also given the San Diego Police Department’s Gang Suppression Team leads to the identities of other frequent taggers.

“This is really a cooperative effort between all law enforcement agencies,” Burke said. “Graffiti Tracker gives us the tool to share information effectively.”

MTS has also supplemented in in-station closed circuit television system with on-board cameras for Trolleys and buses. These also serve to deter vandalism and prosecute vandals.”

The San Diego Metropolitan Transit System transports more than 84 million riders a year on over 90 bus routes and 53 miles of rail. For information on fares, routes, and schedules, or to plan a trip, visit www.sdmts.com or call 511.

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