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First Observer Plus teaches transit professionals how to keep the U.S. safer

San Diego, Calif. – The San Diego Metropolitan Transit System has two world-class events to oversee in July – the MLB All-Star Game and Comic-Con International. Both events will attract hundreds of thousands of people. MTS employees are not only preparing for higher ridership, but also for potential terrorist activity.

“Our operations and security teams will have all hands on deck the entire month. And each employee is responsible for being the eyes, ears and voice of MTS,” said MTS Chief Executive Officer Paul Jablonski. “The First Observer Plus program has taught hundreds of our employees how to be safe and more aware of surroundings – regardless if they are on duty or off duty.”

More than 250 MTS employees took part in First Observer Plus last week, a terrorism awareness training course. It’s a Department of Homeland Security program, administered by the Transportation Security Administration to promote surface transportation security within the United States by training transportation professionals to Observe, Assess, and Report potential terrorist activity.

“The San Diego Metropolitan Transit System has been at the forefront of implementing highly effective security measures,” said Sonya Proctor, Surface Division Director, Office of Security Policy and Industry Engagement at the Transportation Security Administration. “The training exercise MTS conducted for all of its security officers and many of its rank-and-file employees is another important step to help stop an act of terrorism before it happens. The First Observer Plus program is something all transit agencies should consider providing for their employees.”

The airport bombings in Istanbul last week were yet another grim reminder that terrorist attacks can happen anywhere and anytime. With more than 10.8 billion trips on public transportation in 2014, train and bus stations can be targets. But transit professionals can serve as engaged civilians, helping to keep the United States safer from terrorism. First Observer Plus is an important program to engage transit employees with the responsibility of observing, assessing and reporting suspicious activity.

Any activity deemed to be out of the ordinary and suspicious should be reported immediately to 911. Additionally, like many transit agencies across the country, MTS also has the See Something, Say Something security hotline for employees and the public to report suspicious activity:

- Text: 619-318-1338

- Phone: 619-595-4960

MTS has been working with the Department of Homeland Security for a number of years to increase security capabilities. San Diego's proximity to the border with Mexico and its large military installations put the region at a higher risk than others. Other recent security upgrades completed by MTS include:

- More than 10,000 video cameras Trolleys, buses and most transit stations
- A canine unit to patrol trains and respond to reports of suspicious packages and bomb threats
- Body cameras for code enforcement officers
- Multi-Agency Law Enforcement Task Force for enhanced patrols on transit property
- "Eagle Team" – a special unit to patrol late night trains on the Orange Line and UC San Diego Blue Lines
- Joint security training exercises with partner transit and law enforcement agencies

MTS operates 95 bus routes and three Trolley lines on 53 miles of double-tracked railway. Every weekday more than 300,000 passenger trips are taken on MTS bus and Trolley services. MTS set a new record in FY 2015 with 96.7 million riders. For more information on how you can use public transportation and save money, go to www.sdmts.com.

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