

Eyes on Chula Vista trolley stops

By Tanya Mannes, Staff Writer

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CHULA VISTA – Hoping to make riders feel safer, the Metropolitan Transit System and the city of Chula Vista have teamed up to install high-resolution digital cameras at the city's three trolley stations.

The cameras have been up and running about two weeks.

City Councilman Jerry Rindone, who has served 16 years representing the city on the MTS board, spearheaded the effort to step up security in parking lots and ticket-buying areas at Chula Vista's stations.

MTS will hold a news conference Monday to inform the public about the new security measures.

“This isn't something we want to keep secret,” Rindone said. “We want residents to know there's full-time security. I'm excited about it.”

Police Department analysts found in a 2003 study that the trolley parking lots were among the city's hot spots for car theft. The trolley stations also have had some violent crimes, including two fatal shootings at or near the city's trolley stations in the second half of 2004.

On July 9, 2004, an attempted robbery at the H Street station ended with the would-be robbers shooting at two witnesses sitting in a car parked nearby. One died. On Nov. 6, 2004, a 17-year-old boy was shot and killed at the E Street station.

MTS security officers are monitoring the new closed-circuit cameras around the clock. They are recording the trolley loading platforms, ticket vending machines, parking lots and the nearby bus terminals.

The Chula Vista Police Department is in the process of installing new computers in all patrol cars. Once the mobile data systems are in place, officers will be able to tap into the trolley-stop surveillance footage as they respond to calls for service – even replaying images recorded moments before.

The cost of installing 28 cameras at Chula Vista's three stations was \$465,000. The city is paying half, though there will be no cost to the city's general fund since the money is from a Federal Transit Administration grant.

JOHN GASTALDO / Union-Tribune

To enhance safety at the three trolley stations in Chula Vista, digital cameras have been installed. This is Palomar station. Metropolitan Transits System security officers monitor them. Thirteen of 52 trolley stops in the county have cameras.

