

M.T.A. Sharpens a Get-Suspicious Campaign

By MICHAEL LUO

The posters have been around for a while now on subway cars, buses and trains, an accepted part of the décor of New York life in this age of orange alerts and terrorism fears.

In big, bold type, they read, "If You See Something, Say Something," meaning anything suspicious that might be an explosive device masquerading as something else.

Now, to make the request a little clearer, transit officials plan to update their advertising campaign starting next week, by offering actual pictures of what they mean by "something."

They are images of seemingly benign objects — a greasy paper bag under a train seat, an elegant black briefcase on a platform, a bulging blue garbage bag stashed under a station bench — except for the fact that they are sitting by themselves. "Be suspicious of anything unattended," the posters say.

The idea, said Katherine N. Lapp, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's executive director, is to encourage customers to help protect the transit system. "We don't want anyone to take anything for granted," she said yesterday.

She said the updating of the campaign, which began in December 2002, drew directly on lessons transportation authority officials gleaned from meetings with officials in Madrid after bombs exploded on four commuter trains there in March, killing 191 people.

According to William A. Morange, the transportation authority's director of security, officials in Madrid said that several passengers interviewed after the bombings remembered seeing the unattended knapsacks that turned out to contain the bombs, but for whatever reason decided not to alert anyone.

That is something that New York officials want to avoid at all costs, Ms. Lapp said, even if it means dealing with a deluge of false alarms.

Indeed, transit officials are already wrestling with the problem of false alarms, especially in the subway system, and struggling to minimize the schedule delays they cause when police officers and bomb-sniffing dogs are called in to investigate.

In March, after the Madrid bombings, calls about suspicious packages



The Metropolitan Transportation Authority's warnings about unattended packages have been an ad campaign for 18 months, but after getting advice following the railroad bombings in Madrid in March, the agency will make clearer, in pictures, what it is talking about. Starting next week, there will be photographs of unattended packages and bags.

in the subway suddenly shot up, becoming the No. 1 cause of delays, transit officials said. (The month before, such calls were not even in the Top 40 causes.) Investigations of suspicious packages accounted for 387 delays in March, compared with just 20 the month before, when fire or smoke and signal trouble topped the list. The delays attributed to calls about suspicious packages contributed heavily to a significant jump in delays over all in the subway system.

More recent statistics were not available yesterday, but at least anecdotally, the problem of false alarms seems to be continuing.

On Tuesday morning, a 911 call about an unattended bag in the waiting room at the Long Island Rail Road's Atlantic Avenue terminal in Brooklyn halted service on the railroad and multiple subway lines into the station for more than an hour. Just a few hours earlier, at 1:30 a.m., the police closed the Flushing/Main Street station on the No. 7 subway line for two hours after a white powder was found on two trains, transit officials said.

Yesterday morning, a suspicious package found on the street above

the 96th Street stop for the 1, 2, 3 and 9 lines forced trains to bypass the station for about an hour, and another package at Grand Army Plaza in Brooklyn caused serious delays there in the afternoon, officials said.

In another measure of heightened security, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's bomb-sniffing K-9 units, which respond to calls of suspicious packages in Metro-North and Long Island Rail Road stations, Grand Central Terminal and Pennsylvania Station, have been increasingly busy. They responded to 71 calls in January, 104 in March and 124 in April, transit officials said.

The transportation authority has beefed up its police force by 39 percent, or 200 people, since 2001, Ms. Lapp said. It has also set up a special counterterrorism task force that consults regularly with law enforcement agencies and reviews threats against the system. Officials are also beginning to plan how to spend \$591 million in security money the authority recently received from the federal and state governments.

Improvements from that money, though, will be more long-term, Ms. Lapp said.