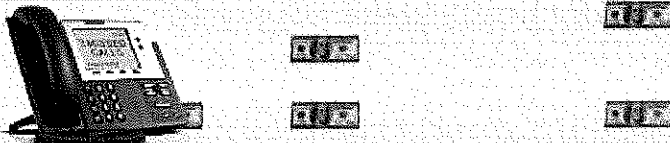


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Transit Systems Reinforce Security Measures

By JENNIFER LEVITZ

The bombing in Moscow's heavily traveled and often densely packed metro Monday offers a tragic reminder that subways, buses, and trains are particularly vulnerable to terrorists, with millions of people pouring in and out of them every day.

Commuters and travelers use mass transit systems daily without going through metal detectors, baggage inspections, or any of the security measures commonplace at airports.

Since the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and subway and rail bombings in London and Madrid, transit agencies have increased surveillance, adding cameras, more police and bomb-sniffing dogs. On Monday, many U.S. transit systems beefed up their security as a precautionary measure in the wake of the Moscow attacks.

The New York City Police Department increased patrols in the city's subway system in time for Monday's morning rush, as did officials in Los Angeles and Atlanta. Bomb-detection teams at the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority in the capital conducted random station and rail-yard sweeps, officials said.

In Moscow, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev ordered new steps to tighten security on the metro and other public transport.

Transportation agency officials say they are limited by the open nature of mass transit, in which hordes of people rush on and off trains, with no centralized location for arrivals and departures.

"They are doing what they can, but just simply the nature of the system makes the same kind of airport security impossible to replicate," said Robert Puentes, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution's Metropolitan Policy Program.

In addition to that lack of screening, subways may be particularly attractive targets to terrorists, because their goal is to attack where there are a lot of people in a confined place, and to carry out the attacks inconspicuously, some experts say.

Intelligence officials in the U.S., Germany and the U.K. said that despite the precautions taken Monday after the Moscow attack, there was no indication of an increased threat to subway and rail systems elsewhere in the world.

Some noted that similar attacks carried out by individuals or groups from the Caucasus have focused primarily on targets in Russia.

"While we're unaware of any specific threat to American subways that may be connected to what happened in Moscow, it nevertheless makes sense to take the appropriate precautions," a U.S. counterterrorism official said.

A senior German intelligence official said his service didn't have a bomb threat in Moscow on its radar screen prior to the Monday attack. Intelligence officials from two European countries said that for the moment, they don't expect similar attacks in their capitals.

But that conclusion is tempered by caution: Behind the scenes, intelligence officials have intensified their scrutiny of Arab and Islamist Web sites, looking for signs that other groups might stage a similar attack. "Nobody has a patent on suicide attacks," the German intelligence official said.

After coordinated suicide bombings on London's vast underground network and a double-decker bus in July 2005 killed 52 people and the four bombers, police and transport officials took a variety of steps to increase security.

They doubled the number of "transport police" patrolling cars and stations on the Underground—also known as the Tube—at any given time to 700. The number of security cameras in the network was nearly doubled, to 13,000. And a new communication system, known as Airwave, was put into place, allowing underground communications between emergency services and London Underground staff.

A spokesman for Transport for London, which runs the London Underground, said the network hadn't taken additional security measures Monday.

"We are running as normal today," the spokesman said. Generally, he said, transport officials have tried to strike a balance between security and putting in place measures "that would impede people."

A report by the House of Commons Home Affairs select committee issued last year said the London transport network remains "extremely vulnerable" to terrorist attack.

But, the report added, "We would, nevertheless, seek to reassure the Commons and the public that a great deal of work has been done, both overtly and behind the scenes, to protect the millions of passengers who use the Transport for London network every day."

Cathy Asato, a spokeswoman for the Washington transit authority, said the agency has a mobile security team that can randomly check passengers and their bags.

Airport-style security with metal detectors would be impossible, Ms. Asato said: "Sending people through that sort of screening that they would do in airports would change the whole nature of the service that we provide and it wouldn't be mass transit anymore."

The Washington agency is taking a security step to allow calls for help while on the trains: By 2012, passengers in the entire system will be able to use their cellphones underground. "It's another tool that can be used for reporting things to police," Ms. Asato said.

Paul Browne, the NYPD's deputy commissioner of public information, said cellphones work only sporadically in the New York subway system, mostly on some platforms and in trains while they are in a station.

He said the NYPD would prefer that cellphones work throughout the system, and that the department is hopeful that new technologies can be used in the subways.

"Our stated preference, since we don't own those systems, is that cellphones be able to work and be kept on," Mr. Browne said.

"As a general premise, we think it's more advantageous for the public to be able to communicate with us."

New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg said that in addition to the stepped-up patrols, "we will continue to do everything possible to protect our transit system."

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