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Press Release

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IMMEDIATE

MTA Police Department Opens Premier Canine Training Center

Only Mass Transit Oriented Police Canine Training Facility in the United States

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) today opened the MTA Police Department's innovative Canine Training Facility in Stormville, New York, with a ribbon cutting ceremony attended by MTA and MTA Police officials.

The 72-acre campus houses nine indoor-scenario training areas and multiple outdoor training fields and obstacle courses and areas with cars, buses, platforms and even a decommissioned train, classrooms, twenty-four kennels, a veterinary room with medical kennels, and administrative offices. The outdoor and indoor training grounds provide the MTA Police with an unlimited number of scenarios to teach, drill and test the dogs.

"Our top priority at the MTA is ensuring public safety," said MTA Chairman and CEO Thomas F. Prendergast. "In our post 9/11 world, the MTAPD's specialized Canine Unit is a crucial component of the MTA's overall security strategy. The Canine training center will help the MTA honor its commitment to maintain the highest levels of safety and protection for customers, employees and system infrastructure."

"Everything about this sophisticated, 17,000 square foot facility was designed to train dogs to meet the unique demands of patrolling the MTA's railroads, stations, subways, platforms and buses, making it the only state-of-the art 'mass transit' specific canine training center in the nation," said MTAPD Chief of Police, Michael Coan.

The MTA Police Department's Canine Unit was established in 2002 to protect customers from terrorism and other criminal acts and to help reduce railroad service disruptions by expediting inspections of unattended packages. The dogs support the MTA's security strategy in ways other tools could never do. The structure of a dog's nose gives it a sense of smell that is 3,000 to 5,000 times stronger than the human nose, allowing them to detect explosives and follow a scent trail untraceable to humans, even breaking down specific scents. Canines can do in minutes what can take hours for humans to do when searching for explosives or other evidence in crimes.

"As North America's largest transportation agency, the MTA has a responsibility to remain at the forefront of security initiatives," said MTA Board Member representing Dutchess County, James Sedore. "The new training facility is a powerfully important investment in public safety."

The MTA purchased the training center property, a former farm, in 2010 and started building the facility in 2012. Prior to 2012, the MTAPD relied on borrowing space and equipment from the New York State Police, the Port Authority Police Department and the Orange County Sheriff's Department. "Our Canine Unit team is incredibly dedicated," said MTAPD Lt. John Kerwick. "Officers and dogs worked in the facility throughout the construction process, using improvised classroom space."

The MTAPD has the largest mass-transit canine explosives detection force in the country, with approximately 50 dogs in service at any time. Last year, the canine teams responded to over 26,000 requests for assistance, and inspected and cleared 2,748 unattended packages.

"We have a highly elite Canine Unit," said Lt. John Kerwick. "Dogs are put through a rigorous testing and training program, and only about one in thirty are deemed skilled enough to join the MTAPD."

The MTA Police Department patrols the trains, stations, tracks and yards of the Long Island Rail Road, Metro-North Railroad and Staten Island Railway.