

Hackers protest BART decision to block cellphones

August 15 2011, By PAUL ELIAS and JOHN S. MARSHALL ,
Associated Press



This screen shot taken from myBART.org shows a page from the website after it was hacked by the hacker's group Anonymous on Sunday, Aug. 14, 2011. Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) district officials said they were attempting Sunday to shut down the hacker's group website that lists the names of thousands of San Francisco Bay area residents who are email subscribers of a legitimate BART website. (AP Photo/myBART.org)

(AP) -- Hackers broke into a website for San Francisco's mass transit system Sunday and posted contact information for more than 2,000 customers, the latest showdown between anarchists angry at perceived attempts to limit free speech and officials trying to control protests that grow out of social networking and have the potential to become violent.

The [hacker group](#) known as Anonymous posted people's names, phone numbers, and street and email addresses on its own website, while also calling for a disruption of the Bay Area Rapid Transit's evening

commute Monday. The transit agency disabled the effected website, myBART.org, Sunday night after it also had been altered by apparent hackers who posted images of the so-called Guy Fawkes masks that anarchists have previously worn when showing up to physical protests.

The [cyber attack](#) came in response to the BART's decision to block wireless service in several of its San Francisco stations Thursday night as the agency aimed to thwart a planned protest over a transit police shooting. Officials said the protest had been designed to disrupt the evening commute.

"We are Anonymous, we are your citizens, we are the people, we do not tolerate oppression from any government agency," the hackers wrote on their own website. "BART has proved multiple times that they have no problem exploiting and abusing the people."

BART spokesman Jim Allison described myBART.org as a "satellite site" used for marketing purposes. It's operated by an outside company and sends BART alerts and other information to customers, Allison said.

The names and contact info published by Sunday came from a database of 55,000 subscribers, he said. He did not know if the group had obtained information from all the subscribers, he said, adding that no bank account or [credit card information](#) was listed.

The BART computer problem was the latest hack the loosely organized group claimed credit for this year. Anonymous has worldwide adherents to calls from the group to deface and disrupt websites.

Last month, the FBI and British and Dutch officials made 21 arrests, many of them related to the group's attacks on Internet payment provider PayPal Inc., which has been targeted over its refusal to process donations to WikiLeaks. The group also claims credit for disrupting the websites

of Visa and MasterCard in December when the credit card companies stopped processing donations to WikiLeaks and its founder, Julian Assange.

The group also claims to have stolen emails from the servers of News Corp., which is the accused of hacking into voicemails of prominent news makers.

Anonymous also threatened on Friday to attack the website of the Fullerton Police Department, which is under fire after a mentally ill homeless man died following a violent confrontation with officers.

Fullerton Police Sgt. Mary Murphy said the department experienced no problems with its website, email system and computer systems after taking "appropriate steps" after Anonymous made its threat.

Allison said that BART's main website was protected from attacks as well.

BART's decision to shut down wireless access was criticized by many as heavy handed, and some raised questions about whether the move violated [free speech](#).

The contretemps began Thursday night when BART officials blocked wireless access to disrupt organization of a demonstration protesting the July 3 shooting death by BART police who said the 45-year-old victim was wielding a knife.

Activists also remain upset by the 2009 death of Oscar Grant, an unarmed black passenger who was shot by a white officer on an Oakland train platform. The officer quit the force and was convicted of involuntary manslaughter after the shooting.

Facing backlash from civil rights advocates and one of its own board members, BART has defended the decision to block cell phone use, with Allison saying the cell phone disruptions were legal because the agency owns the property and infrastructure.

"I'm just shocked that they didn't think about the implications of this. We really don't have the right to be this type of censor," Lynette Sweet, who serves on BART's board of directors, said previously. "In my opinion, we've let the actions of a few people affect everybody. And that's not fair."

BART officials on Sunday were also working a strategy to try to block plans by protesters to try to disrupt service Monday.

"We have been planning for the protests that are said to be shaping up for tomorrow," Allison said. He did not provide specifics, but said BART police will be staffing stations and trains and that the agency had already contacted San Francisco police.

Laura Eichman was among those whose email and home phone number were published by the hackers Sunday.

"I think what they (the hackers) did was illegal and wrong. I work in IT myself, and I think that this was not ethical hacking. I think this was completely unjustified," Eichman said.

She said she doesn't blame BART and feels its action earlier in the week of blocking cell phone service was reasonable.

"It doesn't necessarily keep me from taking BART in the future but I will certainly have to review where I set up accounts and what kind of data I'm going to keep online," Eichman said.

Michael Beekman of San Francisco told the AP that he didn't approve of BART's move to cut cell phone service or the Anonymous posting.

"I'm not paranoid but i feel like it was an invasion of privacy," he said. "I thought I would never personally be involved in any of their (Anonymous') shenanigans."

The group Anonymous, according to its website, does "not tolerate oppression from any [government agency](#)," and it said it was releasing the User Info Database of MyBart.gov as one of many actions to come.

"We apologize to any citizen that has his information published, but you should go to BART and ask them why your information wasn't secure with them. Also do not worry probably the only information that will be abused from this database is that of BART employees," the statement said.

©2011 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

Citation: Hackers protest BART decision to block cellphones (2011, August 15) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-08-hackers-protest-bart-decision-block.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--