

Murillo's lawyer, James Blatt, said that his client was on paternity leave when the incident took place and did not receive an e-mail indicating that access to the traffic signal control center would be blocked during the strike.

He said Murillo didn't mean to do anything wrong.

"The issue in the case is Mr. Murillo's intent when he logged into the system," Blatt said. "Mr. Murillo has been an engineer there [at the Department of Transportation] for 17 years. He's highly regarded and respected by management and employees. It was not his intent to jeopardize the system or the citizens of Los Angeles."

Alan Eisner, who is representing Patel, said his client "unequivocally denies the charges against him and specifically denies illegally accessing or disrupting the [computerized traffic light] system. Mr. Patel has been an employee of the Department of Transportation for more than 12 years and has an outstanding work history. He and his family are traumatized by the allegations, and he looks forward to responding to the allegations in court."

After the arraignment Monday, city employees filled the hallway outside the courtroom, creating an impromptu receiving line as they filed past the defendants and their families. Officials from their union were not in court and did not return calls seeking comment.

In deciding how to handle security in the future, the city faces a difficult choice: set up systems that could impede the smooth functioning of its crucial traffic control efforts, or do nothing and risk another hacking incident.

Clifford Neuman, a computer security expert and the director of the USC Center for Computer Systems Security, said there are two primary ways to design computers to guard against malicious activity by insiders, but each can interfere with employees' ability to do their tasks and would probably be prohibitively expensive for the city.

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