

ID scam hits Metro-North

By DAN MANGAN

The MTA yesterday agreed to shell out \$50,000 to cover identity-theft protection for more than 700 Metro-North conductors who may have had their Social Security, birth-date and address data stolen — possibly by an in-house employee.

Up to 60 of the conductors — including their union's chairman — have had their identities swiped since the fall of 2003 by someone who used their personal information to open credit accounts in their names at stores such as Wal-Mart, Best Buy and Sam's Club.

Fraudsters racked up thousands of dollars in charges on those accounts before the scam was detected.

"We've had people that have gotten hit for well over \$10,000," said

Tony Bottalico, the union's general chairman, whose identity was fraudulently used to buy nearly \$2,500 worth of Wal-Mart merchandise.

Although he and the others were not obligated to pay for these purchases, their credit ratings are at risk.

Metro-North — a Metropolitan Transportation Agency subsidiary — will pay up to \$50,000 over up to two years to the Equifax credit agency, which will issue alerts if someone tries to open an account in an employee's name.

A Bronx man, Larry Hampton, and his wife were arrested for the scam in March 2004 and pleaded guilty. Police suspect a third, unknown person obtained the info within the MTA.