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T website out after cyber attack on vendor

By Matt Rocheleau | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT JUNE 21, 2013

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The MBTA's website became inaccessible late Wednesday night and into Thursday when an outside company that runs domain name services for many websites, including mbta.com, experienced technical issues related to a cyberattack, officials said.

"It's a complicated problem and something that's well outside of our control," Gary Foster, chief technology officer for the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, said by phone Thursday.

In a statement Thursday, the outside company, Network Solutions, said: "In the process of resolving a distributed denial of service (DDoS) incident on Wednesday night, the websites of a small number of Network Solutions customers were inadvertently affected for up to several hours. We are proactively working with these customers and have resolved most issues.

“No confidential data was compromised, including passwords, credit card information, or cookies,” the statement said.

Cyberattacks over distributed denials of service can overwhelm a server with traffic. Such attacks have been used to disrupt websites and Internet services for a number of reasons, including to make political statements or simply for the amusement of the hacker.

“Network Solutions is committed to protecting customers from these types of online threats, which are unfortunately becoming more common with all Internet providers,” the company said. “We are continually working to create a more secure and reliable Internet environment.”

Foster said that Network Solutions made an initial fix early Thursday morning, but that the repair has to be replicated and rolled out further before services are fully restored.

At about noon Thursday, he said that the company was continuing to roll out the repairs and that most Internet users should be able to get access to mbta.com, but a complete fix might not come until later for some users.

“They weren’t telling us much at all,” Foster said of Network Solutions. “They were trying to get it fixed.”

Network Solutions manages more than 7 million domains, 1.5 million e-mail boxes, and 350,000 websites, according to its website.

Foster said the company’s technical issue affected domain name services for mbta.com and other websites.

He said the issue affected some websites differently from others. For mbta.com, the domain became inaccessible at about 11 p.m. Wednesday, a problem that also affected some mbta.com e-mail accounts.

Meanwhile, the state Transportation Department website, massdot.state.ma.us, which Network Solutions also runs domain name services for, was not affected.

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