

Speaker; Ms Katie Hodson-Thomas; Mrs Cheryl Edwardes; Mrs Michelle Roberts; Ms Alannah MacTiernan;
Acting Speaker; Mr Mike Board

BUSES, SECURITY PATROLS

Matter of Public Interest

THE SPEAKER (Mr Riebeling): Members, today I received in the prescribed time a letter from the member for Carine in the following terms -

That this House condemns the Government for its failure to recognise the importance of safety on buses for:

- (a) bus drivers;
- (b) passengers; and
- (c) the wider community,

and calls on the Government to immediately reinstate the discontinued security patrols on the bus network and to implement a program of transit guards, similar to that which operates on Perth's rail network, to ensure that the passenger bus system is more accessible, safer and focused on customer service and provides an improved working environment for bus drivers.

If sufficient members agree to this motion, I will allow it.

[At least five members rose in their places.]

MRS HODSON-THOMAS (Carine) [2.42 pm]: I move the motion.

The Opposition condemns the Government for its short-sighted decision to withdraw the funding from bus security services. This decision will have a huge impact on passenger numbers and is clearly a backward step that will be detrimental to the safety of bus passengers and bus drivers. An article referring to bus security patrols being axed appeared in *The Sunday Times* on 2 December 2001 and reads -

Bus passengers will ride unguarded through hot spots as Transperth cuts the number of security officers.

The move has angered the Transperth Workers Union and bus operators who say drivers' lives are at risk.

"We were absolutely staggered," TWU state secretary Jim McGiveron said. "We have been seeking an upgrade of security on the bus network because of the level of violence."

It is understood only \$220,000 has been spent on guards riding buses or following vehicles through trouble spots in the past four months.

Acting Transperth director Mark Burgess defended the decision, saying bus drivers were "very good at handling most problems".

"If there was a real problem, they can call for the police. Police response is greater than private security so why overlay private guards with police?" he said.

... Mr McGiveron said police often did not arrive or arrived too late.

"We are very concerned given the level of violence on buses," he said.

"It is totally out of control. Drivers are bashed, windscreens and headlights are smashed, there is graffiti everywhere. It just goes on and on."

I have often heard in this place the Government's intention to get more motorists out of their cars and onto public transport. We are currently witnessing a huge investment in the southern rail link to encourage more people to use public transport. For the record, I fully support sound investment in public transport initiatives that encourage that use. However, I am concerned about the evident disparity between rail and bus security. I ask the minister assisting the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure why are rail passengers and bus passengers being treated differently? Why is the Government discriminating against bus passengers?

Ms MacTiernan interjected.

Mrs HODSON-THOMAS: Hear me out minister. The Minister for Planning and Infrastructure will have her opportunity to speak. Recently, the Government announced an initiative to improve rail security. Given that rail carries only about 40 per cent of the entire public transport patronage, there is a very distinct inequality between the rail and bus services. The security provision on rail has gone a long way to restoring the public's confidence in the rail system.

Speaker; Ms Katie Hodson-Thomas; Mrs Cheryl Edwardes; Mrs Michelle Roberts; Ms Alannah MacTiernan;
Acting Speaker; Mr Mike Board

Government members interjected.

Mrs HODSON-THOMAS: The two ministers will have their opportunity to reply and I will endeavour to listen to them in silence. I wish they would at least allow me to put forward my argument. The security provision for rail passengers has gone a long way to restoring public confidence in the system; I admit that. However, the bus network that carries 60 per cent of the total public transport patronage in this State does not have that same level of security afforded to it. Bus passengers fall well short of what is being invested in rail and it is now being cut.

I wrote about rail security to the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure in August this year on behalf of a constituent. The parliamentary secretary assisting the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure responded to my query. The advice he gave concerning the initiatives for rail security stated -

By early next year, every train service will be staffed by a Transit Guard and 20 train stations will also be staffed. The new security force will include officers from the newly established Transit Guards, who will be employees of the WA Government Railways Commission, as well as a team of police officers attached to the Police Transit Unit.

The transit guards will replace the current security on Perth's trains. The initiative will result in the number of security personnel being boosted from about 180 to approximately 235. The new transit guards will have all the powers of arrest and will focus on providing a safe, secure environment for passengers at all times.

Why can that not be done for the buses? The letter continues -

In addition to security, they will be responsible for fare enforcement and customer services.

Ms MacTiernan: Have you ever caught a bus?

Mrs HODSON-THOMAS: Have I ever caught a bus? I catch buses and trains. The minister should not be so damn patronising. There is something about the minister; she shows no humility in this place, and one day we might all be blessed to see a little bit of that!

Ms MacTiernan: You can hurl it but you cannot take it.

Mrs HODSON-THOMAS: I can take it.

Ms MacTiernan: You are too precious.

Mrs HODSON-THOMAS: Look who is talking. Why are bus passengers not being treated in the same way as rail passengers? A huge investment has been made in our bus network that should and must be preserved. Removing funding for the security services is a retrograde step and contradicts the Government's objective to get commuters out of their cars and onto buses. Patronage levels will decrease given this unreasonable decision and it will leave bus passengers and drivers in a vulnerable situation in which they will be at risk.

The Minister Assisting the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure said in a media statement of 9 September 2001 titled "State Government boosts security on suburban trains" -

We need to encourage more people to use public transport and safety is an extremely important issue that we are addressing with a highly visible and effective response team,

I again ask the minister why she is discriminating against bus passengers. In her media statement of 6 September 2001, titled "Record numbers of Perth commuters use public transport system" the minister referred to a survey of bus passengers -

... the bus service recorded improvements in almost every aspect surveyed, including frequency of services, punctuality and safety.

That is fine, but that survey was done before the security service was cut. The results are an endorsement of the original level of funding for the security service. It alarms me that the Government has made this short-sighted decision and is discriminating against bus passengers.

Mrs Roberts: There is no cut.

Mrs HODSON-THOMAS: The minister will have an opportunity to expand on that.

Mrs Roberts: Your argument is based on a false premise.

Mrs HODSON-THOMAS: It is a nonsense for the Government to suggest that the police could respond to security issues on buses. That should not be seen as an option. Police resources are already stretched, and, in my view, police have higher priorities. The bus companies have told me that when they have had to rely on

Speaker; Ms Katie Hodson-Thomas; Mrs Cheryl Edwardes; Mrs Michelle Roberts; Ms Alannah MacTiernan;
Acting Speaker; Mr Mike Board

police to respond to security issues on buses, the response time has been lengthy and, as a consequence, ineffective.

The Government says it treats rail security as a priority. However, what happens to those who cause havoc on our trains? Where do they go when they are moved on? Those people move on to the bus network, where they can cause further havoc and put bus passengers and drivers at risk. A large number of bus passengers have real concerns for their personal safety, particularly when travelling on buses or waiting at interchanges at night. Many people to whom I have spoken who travel during these times have no alternative means of travel. They rely on the bus services to deliver them to their destinations safely. Passengers who choose to use public transport often do so because it is environmentally responsible. Those passengers will revert to car use if their safety on board buses or at interchanges is compromised. Much of the concern expressed to me by passengers relates to the antisocial behaviour of some young people. I understand that drugs and alcohol are often involved. People are intimidated by the use of abusive behaviour and vandalism. The latest version of antisocial behaviour is “scratchiti”, which I am sure the minister knows a great deal about. That is alarming and of concern. Night patronage levels will decline as a result of this antisocial behaviour, and those people who have no alternative to using buses could well be at risk.

I understand that a survey conducted by Donovan Research found that although most people felt safe using buses during the day, they did not feel safe on buses at night. The key reason people gave for feeling unsafe on buses at night was the threat of personal harm and violence. It is neither practical nor safe for a bus driver to confront a troublemaker or a group of potential troublemakers. Not only would the bus driver put himself in danger, but also his actions would put at risk the safety of bus passengers. However, unlike the train system, there is no physical presence on buses - other than the bus driver - to act as a deterrent to possible troublemakers or engender passenger confidence. The bus driver's primary role is to drive the bus safely and ensure that his passengers experience a comfortable journey and arrive at their destination.

The Opposition calls on the Government to immediately reinstate security patrols on the bus network and to implement a program of transit guards, similar to that which exists on our rail network. This could be done by expanding the role of the railway security officers, so that they become part of a unit that covers all modes of public transport. Such a unit could provide a physical presence on buses and act as a deterrent to those who are likely to offend, thereby restoring public confidence. The minister has acknowledged the importance of that in her media statements. Users of the bus network have a right to travel without interference or having their journey spoilt. I understand that the bus network is both complex and diverse. It would not be practical nor cost effective to have a guard on every bus. A mobile unit would be in a position to board buses in a planned, systematic manner. By adopting this approach, a mobile unit could respond to potential hot spots, which are well known, and prevent incidents before they occur. The public would become accustomed to having uniformed security board buses at random to ensure everything is in order. As I said previously, it would go a long way towards restoring public confidence while acting as a deterrent to potential troublemakers, who would also be aware that security might board any bus at night.

Again, I reiterate that the Opposition calls on the Government to immediately reinstate the security patrols on the bus network, and implement a program of transit guards, similar to those operating on the rail network.

MRS EDWARDES (Kingsley) [2.57 pm]: I also support the motion. I will address the need for bus drivers to have a safe workplace environment. I have received concerns from not only companies that want to ensure a safe working environment for their bus drivers, but also the bus drivers themselves, who are worried about security. I raised this issue in this place earlier this year. At that time, I spoke about the extent of the rock throwing that was occurring in and around the northern suburbs. Of course, many more activities are taking place. Youths are throwing bottles and star pickets at buses and drunken youths are harassing drivers. On one occasion, two drivers on two buses were robbed and threatened with syringes within a period of several hours. All sorts of activities are occurring on and off the buses. If the rail transit police encounter a problematic kid on the train, they put him off at the next station. That kid then jumps on a bus. He is still a problem kid.

After I raised these issues in this place earlier this year, the minister in her response said that the Government had called for tenders to install security cameras on buses so that when offences occur, staff can review the tape and identify the offender. There is a problem with that. The Government has had to seek new tenders because of problems with the installation of some of the cameras, which were not wired correctly. The minister might like to ensure that the problem with the bus security cameras is addressed by the new contract. Currently, they are not admissible as evidence because they are not tamper proof, unlike those used on the rail network.

Another issue is that the cameras are on only the new buses, but the new buses do not have a security cab, unlike the old buses. Because of the vandalism and serious antisocial behaviour that is occurring, the drivers feel more

Speaker; Ms Katie Hodson-Thomas; Mrs Cheryl Edwardes; Mrs Michelle Roberts; Ms Alannah MacTiernan;
Acting Speaker; Mr Mike Board

comfortable in a bus with a security cab than in a bus with only a security camera. Unfortunately, on a hot night, those security cabs do not provide a very good work environment.

When the minister was reported as saying that more security cameras would be installed, the bus drivers got in touch with me immediately and said that they support the installation of security cameras, but that they are ineffective without the support of security officers. They also said that the spokesperson for the Minister for Police had said that the visual presence of a driver on every bus also acted as a deterrent to would-be vandals. The evidence we have indicates that that is not necessarily the case; otherwise there would not be the three and a half pages of incidents that I have in front of me today. It is a bit of a joke in any event, because the driver is facing ahead and doing what he is supposed to do, as the member for Carine said; that is, driving the bus.

The bus drivers highlighted some of the real issues in dealing with the security cameras and why a security person is required on the buses on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights, particularly on some routes with problem spots. Cameras are fixed in one position, so that it is impossible to view vandals if they are down behind the seats, or if they cover their faces or turn their backs to the camera. Cameras are good only for assisting in the conviction of a vandal; they do not deter or stop the vandalism. Students or would-be vandals stick chewing gum and other stuff across the lens of the camera, thereby making the camera ineffective. Vandals find it a bigger challenge to vandalise a vehicle with cameras fitted. Members need only look at the new buses to see the incidence of that. Vehicles have had to be withdrawn from service so that evidence can be downloaded, and that affects the bus service. Therefore, sometimes that does not happen, and people record over the film in the camera. That is obviously an issue.

Cameras do not catch rock throwers, who are outside on the street. The cameras take good photographs only of the aftermath. I have a few photographs that I will lay on the Table of the House.

Mrs Roberts: There could be a security agent on the bus, and he would not be able to catch the rock thrower either.

Mrs EDWARDES: I will get to that, if I can. I will lay those papers on the Table of the House so that members can see how good the cameras are. However, the issue is that they do not catch the offender.

[The papers were tabled for the information of members.]

Ms MacTiernan: How do you think a security guard on a bus would be able to see a rock being thrown from outside the bus?

Mrs EDWARDES: It is interesting that the member should raise that point, because the mobile security guards who were following behind the buses were able to intervene in that regard. The members for Joondalup and Wanneroo met with Path Transit. Just as my constituents had spoken with me, their constituents had told them that there was a major problem, it was getting worse, and something needed to be done about it. That meeting then took place. Since then, each department has been asked to make cuts in its budget. When the Department for Planning and Infrastructure was looking at pruning its budget, it found that no specific contract was in place with Secureforce International. Therefore, it decided to make cuts in that area. Letters were received by Path Transit and the southern operation stating that the security patrols would cease from 2 December. I would be pleased to know whether the minister has put a stop to that, after the issue was reported in the newspapers last Sunday.

The bus drivers are pretty angry. The security patrols were to operate on Thursday, Friday and Saturday. Each person was paid for 27 hours, at a cost of \$1 200 a week. At least some level of security and comfort was provided, although it was not the maximum level of protection. If the Liberal Party were in government, it would be considering this situation, because a major issue is involved. The reason that the rail transit police were put in place was to ensure the safety of passengers and to increase patronage on the rail system.

On a bus, the driver is in a vulnerable position. Although in some instances rocks or other objects are thrown from bridges onto trains, the problem of rocks being thrown at buses is increasing. Some people think it is a sport. It is only because of pure luck, not good management, that somebody has not been killed as a result of this activity. When a rock is thrown at a bus, it can shatter the windscreen and land in the bus. If the driver is hit, no-one is in control of the bus. If the bus is going around a bend, it could go on to the kerb and hit a pedestrian, or run into a house or shop, depending on the location. Not only rocks but also star pickets and beer bottles have been thrown at buses. This is not new, and it is increasing. It is a major issue in the northern suburbs, and it is also an issue in the southern suburbs.

The Government cannot say that because of cost cutting it will not do anything about this issue. It can install new cameras - that is fine - but there are problems with security cameras. It must also be remembered that a bus is different from a train. The previous Government allocated extra money for rail security. The current

Speaker; Ms Katie Hodson-Thomas; Mrs Cheryl Edwardes; Mrs Michelle Roberts; Ms Alannah MacTiernan;
Acting Speaker; Mr Mike Board

Government has put extra transit police on trains. We are now asking the Government to consider the buses, the passengers and the drivers. It should consider the potential hazard and danger to the wider community. Bus drivers are concerned about a safe working environment, as is the Opposition. We ask the Government to reinstate the security patrols; or perhaps the Government will tell us that those patrols did not stop on 2 August and that the security people will follow behind the buses tonight, as has always been the case.

Mrs Roberts: It has not always been the case. You are wrong.

Mrs EDWARDES: No, I am sorry. That is not what the company or the bus drivers have told me. I would prefer the word of the bus drivers over the minister's word. Those patrols should be reinstated, and the Government should think about introducing a mobile flying squad that can be used on both the trains and the buses.

MRS ROBERTS (Midland - Minister Assisting the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure) [3.07 pm]: After eight years of neglect of the public transport system, it is amazing that those opposite have now discovered public transport and are feigning an interest in it. If the Liberal Party had won government in February, there would still not be an increased presence of security officers on our trains. It did not promise to lift its game in that respect. This Government has moved remarkably quickly to sort out the situation on the trains. Not only has it increased the number of transit police, but also it has put real police on the trains. In fact, 50 police are devoted to security on our trains.

This matter of public interest that has been moved today is probably one of the most poorly thought-through and poorly researched MPIs that I have ever seen on the Notice Paper. First, the facts are wrong. Secondly, the suggestions that have been made are impractical. It is suggested in the motion that we should implement a program of transit guards on our buses. A lot of time has been devoted to the rock-throwing problem and so forth. That is a major problem that Transperth is moving to address. However, having a transit guard on a bus, at an enormous cost, would not sort out the problem of rock throwing at buses, for starters. Let us look at the real facts of the case. I suggest that members opposite listen very carefully because they will learn that they have based their arguments on a false premise. The members opposite have accused the Government and Transperth of removing a service that was previously in place. I tell the House loudly and clearly that there has been no change in the standard practice of employing security services on the Transperth bus network, relative to the previous Government's position. No cost-cutting has been embarked upon, and no change - I say that loudly and clearly - has been made to the standard practice of employing security services on Transperth. It is necessary for me to clarify this matter so there can be no further misunderstanding. The House is aware that a comprehensive security program operates on our urban rail system in Perth. This Government has significantly increased its commitment to security on the urban rail system. With respect to the bus system, the employment of a contracted security firm has always focused on providing static security at major bus stations. This situation existed under the previous coalition Government, and this Government has not changed these arrangements.

Mrs Edwardes: What about the mobile car that follows behind buses?

Mrs ROBERTS: If the member will be quiet for a moment, I will explain. The member for Kingsley has accused Transperth of lying. She prefers to believe the word of bus drivers. She should at least let me present Transperth's side of the story.

Mr Barnett: What have you got against bus drivers; they are decent people?

Mrs ROBERTS: Yes, they are decent working people.

Mr Barnett: Why do you knock them?

Mrs ROBERTS: I am not knocking them at all. The member for Kingsley has put one point of view and has quoted one party in this debate. However, what Transperth is saying is different. The member at least owes it to the hardworking people in the Department of Transport to listen to their side of the story. The contracted security arrangements for the bus system that existed under the coalition Government, continues to exist today.

[Quorum formed.]

Mrs ROBERTS: There is a static security presence during daylight hours - typically between 7.00 am and early evening - at the following bus stations: Mirrabooka, Morley, Rockingham, Booragoon, Wellington Street, Murdoch Park 'n' Ride and Kwinana. Some flexibility is provided in the contract to adjust the hours allocated between bus stations to provide additional services at particular bus stations should a spate of incidents, or a trend of behaviour, occur. In addition to the static security presence at the listed bus stations during the day, the contracted security operator also provides mobile patrols to check the security of bus station facilities throughout the night. Transperth has focused its security efforts on bus stations because passengers have recorded that this is where they feel most vulnerable. Transperth's annual passenger satisfaction monitor -

Speaker; Ms Katie Hodson-Thomas; Mrs Cheryl Edwardes; Mrs Michelle Roberts; Ms Alannah MacTiernan;
Acting Speaker; Mr Mike Board

Mrs Edwardes: Have you stopped the night bus patrols?

Mrs ROBERTS: I have not stopped anything. I will explain that to the member line by line.

Mrs Edwardes: The act of transferring the directors has defended the decision.

Mrs ROBERTS: No it has not.

Mrs Edwardes: What was the decision then?

Mrs ROBERTS: The member is basing her comments on what she has read in the *Sunday Times*. It is always best to check the facts rather than rely on reports in the newspaper.

Mrs Edwardes: We did check the facts; we went back to the managers and the bus drivers.

Mrs ROBERTS: Why not go to the Department of Transport, or to Transperth, and ask them directly?

Mr Johnson: Because it takes about six weeks to get an answer from the minister's office.

Mrs ROBERTS: What nonsense. Mr Burgess was quoted in the *Sunday Times*; ring him and use a bit of initiative.

Transperth's annual passenger satisfaction monitor is a detailed survey of passenger attitudes and perspectives about public transport.

Several members interjected.

Mrs ROBERTS: These are the people who refused to let me go to a bus station and meet with bus drivers when they were in government; one and the same lot of people. What a bunch of hypocrites we have sitting opposite.

The SPEAKER: Order, members!

Mrs Hodson-Thomas: Will you take an interjection?

Mrs ROBERTS: No, the member said that she would sit quietly and I think she should do that.

The passenger satisfaction monitor has, for some years, clearly shown that passenger concerns regarding personal security are most significant at train and bus stations. That same passenger satisfaction monitor has indicated that passenger concerns are significantly reduced when they are travelling on a bus compared with waiting at the bus station. Nevertheless, on occasions Transperth has seen the need to employ mobile security services to deal with particular hot spots as they have arisen. Employing additional mobile patrols on an as-required basis to deal with specific areas usually follows a spate of incidents, or a pattern of behaviour, developing on a particular bus route, or in a particular suburb that buses travel through. Transperth employed ad hoc patrols under the previous coalition Government, and has continued to use them on an as-required basis under this Government. Over the past few months, Transperth has employed either two or three mobile patrols on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights to deal with specific trends that have arisen in certain areas traversed by bus services. Transperth has now ceased these patrols, which operated on three nights a week, but may consider reintroducing them if they are required.

Mrs Edwardes: So those patrols have ceased.

Mrs ROBERTS: No. There has been no change to the system. The patrols were always ad hoc. When trouble spots or hot spots occurred - particularly in those areas in which a problem existed - Transperth, for a period of weeks, employed a patrol to monitor that situation. At the conclusion of that contract, Transperth then continued to monitor things and again, on an ad hoc basis -

Mrs Edwardes: And the system has now been discontinued.

Mrs ROBERTS: No, it is the same system. There have only ever been ad hoc patrols. There has been no cost-cutting or change to the system. From time to time, these patrols have been put in place and they are then discontinued. If the need arises in the same, or another, area, the patrol is employed on the same basis. There have been no cuts. This is the system that the previous Government operated and there has been no change.

One of the major security challenges that has arisen over the past decade is dealing with individuals who throw rocks at buses and other vehicles. As members opposite have said, this is an extremely dangerous practice. It is a matter best dealt with by the Western Australia Police Service because it is best equipped to respond to such incidents and to pursue prosecution. There would be a significant budget implication if Transperth were to employ a security agent for every bus on every route in the State, as would happen if a vehicle were to follow every bus. The system, which has not changed since the change of government -

Mrs Edwardes: The facts include a letter, which I am sure you will be pleased to read.

Speaker; Ms Katie Hodson-Thomas; Mrs Cheryl Edwardes; Mrs Michelle Roberts; Ms Alannah MacTiernan;
Acting Speaker; Mr Mike Board

Mrs ROBERTS: I will, because Transperth has informed me that there has been no continuous program in which security vehicles follow buses. It has only been done on a needs basis, which is the same process that occurred under the previous Government; such patrols commence and cease on a needs basis. The member should consider the cost that would be involved if a security guard was employed on every bus or, if someone was employed to drive behind every bus.

Mrs Hodson-Thomas: I was not suggesting that, minister.

Mrs ROBERTS: The member should read her motion in which she is asking the Government to put a transit guard on every bus. She should have a look at how badly her motion is worded. It is terrible. It is impractical, and the cost would be prohibitive. Putting a security guard on every bus would do nothing to tackle the most serious problem highlighted by members opposite - rock throwing. The Police Service should deal with rock throwing incidents. It is a very dangerous practice. The Police Service has more cars out on the road than any security company. How can dozens of police cars compare to one or two security cars following a bus around? The member for Kingsley has said that she is very concerned about occupational health and safety. If there was one person in a vehicle following buses around, communication must be established with the driver, because problems on the bus may need to be dealt with. If there is a rock-throwing incident, is that one person, who is not a trained policeman, expected to pursue the person who is throwing the rock?

Ms MacTiernan: A police vehicle could then travel with the escort vehicle. The bus could be followed by a private security vehicle, which could then be followed by police car.

Mrs ROBERTS: The Transperth fleet has 900 buses, operating 400 regular bus routes. That does not include any special school bus services. Transperth operations are spread from Two Rocks in the north to the suburbs south of Mandurah, and to Wooroloo in the east. This is a large geographic area, and a very large number of mobile patrols would be needed to provide comprehensive contract security coverage. The whole motion today is based on a false premise, because there has been no cost cutting. The system of employing security vehicles to follow certain buses on certain routes in certain areas has only ever been applied on an ad hoc basis, to respond to particular incidents.

Mrs Hodson-Thomas: The minister is playing with words.

Mrs ROBERTS: In accusing me of that, the member for Carine is accusing Transperth of that, because that is the clear advice that Transperth has given to me. There has been no cost cutting, and no change to the system. Where a specific spate of incidents occurs, or where a particular problem exists, and it is felt that a mobile security patrol would be beneficial, it is put in place as a temporary arrangement for a particular period. If other incidents occur, the service can be reinstated in the same or another area. Transperth does not preclude the option of implementing these patrols as required basis in the area the members are concerned about, but the Government will continue to be prudent in its allocation of resources to deal with public security issues on the public transport network.

I reaffirm the Government's commitment to the public transport system, including the bus network. The strengths of our public transport system are confirmed by the increase in patronage, which was 6.7 per cent across the system in the last financial year. Public support is also being confirmed in the feedback provided by the annual passenger satisfaction monitor. Members of this House should also be aware of the Government's significant commitment to improvements in the bus network, which include improvement to bus routes, new gas-powered buses, the trial of hydrogen gas buses, and better coordination of bus schedules with train schedules. Public transport is in a vastly better position today than when the previous Government left office. The future for public transport under a Labor Government in this State has never been brighter.

MS MacTIERNAN (Armadale - Minister for Planning and Infrastructure) [3.25 pm]: Thank you -

Mr Barnett: Did the minister have a spin on the Autobahn while in Germany recently?

Ms MacTIERNAN: I did not, actually. Does the Leader of the Opposition think I should have?

Mr Barnett: For the sake of German motorists, I hope you did not.

Ms MacTIERNAN: Does the Leader of the Opposition think I should have extended my stay? I am glad to say that I have the support of the Methodist Leader of the Opposition to take another trip to Germany to have a run on the Autobahn. However, this is a very modest spending Government, and I am certainly not proposing to do that.

Now, if I can get the vege patch to quieten down for a little while -

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Order, members!

Speaker; Ms Katie Hodson-Thomas; Mrs Cheryl Edwardes; Mrs Michelle Roberts; Ms Alannah MacTiernan;
Acting Speaker; Mr Mike Board

Ms MacTIERNAN: I think a cabbage is always useful.

I acknowledge that security on public transport, and the level of expenditure on public transport, is always a problem. For all Governments, public transport is an imperative for social equity, for developing a city that works, and for environmental considerations. From this triple bottom line approach, public transport is a great imperative for Government. It must also be acknowledged that it is a very expensive item of government activity. No-one is in the position to do all they would like to do in the area of public transport. The motion before the House today calls upon it to institute a transit guard system similar to that operating on the train system. I take it as a compliment that the member for Carine is endorsing the very positive moves the Government has made on rail security, and I thank the Opposition for that vote of confidence. All other things being equal, one would love to be able to do as the member for Carine has suggested; that is, put a transit guard on every bus.

Mrs Hodson-Thomas: I do not propose that.

Ms MacTIERNAN: I recommend the member for Carine read her motion and what she actually said in the transcript.

Mrs Hodson-Thomas: I qualified the motion with what I said in here. I understand it is a large network, and there is no way a transit guard can be put on every bus. I am not sure that the minister was present when I said that.

Ms MacTIERNAN: It is interesting that the member's speech included a qualification of the motion. The actual text of the motion reads, in part -

... and to implement a program of transit guards, similar to that which operates on Perth's rail network, to ensure that passenger system is more accessible ...

The key to the Government's policy is that a transit guard will be provided on every train. I will give the member some idea of the cost of that. The Minister Assisting the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure mentioned that the Transperth fleet included over 900 buses. If school buses are included there are approximately 1 000 buses operating in Perth. With the average salary of the guards of somewhere between \$30 000 and \$35 000, and given the shifts over which these buses operate, to put just one guard on every bus - and there are two guards on each train at night - would require some 1 500 guards. A rough calculation shows that it would cost something in the order of \$45 million a year to implement the program the member for Carine has called upon the Government to do. Quite simply, if the Government were to do that, there would be a vast reduction in the amount of money it would be able to spend on acquiring new buses, and on the breadth of the service.

I point out to the member for Carine that there is a big difference in the level of safety between buses and trains. That is not to say that the system is perfect. We all have to operate within the financial means available to us. Under the previous Government it was proposed that a bus service in my electorate be discontinued at night. People would not be able to catch a bus along Albany Highway to Kelmscott at night and they would be required to catch a train. A number of people were very concerned about that because they felt much safer on a bus than on a train. That is easy to understand if one has ever been on a bus and a train. A bus is smaller and has a driver in the passenger compartment. A train is much larger and its driver is in a separate compartment and does not see what is going on. There are evident differences and that is why people feel more comfortable on a bus that does not have a security guard than they do on a train that does not have a security guard. It is also the case that anyone getting on a bus has to go past the driver and have a ticket.

Mrs Edwardes: The Department of Transport cannot put off someone under the age of 16 years, even if they do not have a ticket.

Ms MacTIERNAN: I am not sure about that but I know that under the previous Government people under the age of 16 were put off buses. I remember picking up a 15-year-old hitchhiker one day who had been forced off a bus in Forrestdale by a bus driver because he did not have change for a ticket. The 15-year-old apprentice was stuck out in the middle of the bush. Fortunately, I drove by and took him to safety.

Mrs Edwardes: He jumped in the car before he found out about the minister's driving record.

Ms MacTIERNAN: I would love an exercise in honesty by comparing the number of demerit points I have with the number of demerit points opposition members have. I would like members opposite to table their demerit point records. It would be interesting. I admit that I went over the speed limit when coming off the South Western Highway. I am not Robinson Crusoe in that respect. I have certainly paid the price. I am interested to know whether any of the perfect members opposite have ever had a speeding ticket. Is it possible that none of

Speaker; Ms Katie Hodson-Thomas; Mrs Cheryl Edwardes; Mrs Michelle Roberts; Ms Alannah MacTiernan;
Acting Speaker; Mr Mike Board

them has ever had a speeding ticket? It is extraordinary. It is good to know the level of perfection achieved by members opposite.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Dean): Order ! Members should stick to relevance.

Ms MacTIERNAN: The Government has increased the amount of money allocated to public transport quite significantly. We would always like to do more but there is no bottomless pit of money. We will continue to work on the issues of safety and security as we recognise the importance of the centrality of public transport to the Labor program. It is not something that can be achieved overnight. The Government assures all parties that it will continue to work on what is a very vexed problem.

MR BOARD (Murdoch) [3.34 pm]: There is not much point in investing hundreds of millions of dollars - in the case of the railway, billions of dollars - in public transport unless people use it and feel safe on it. The reality is that the previous Government put a lot of money into bus transport and bus transit lanes, particularly south of the river. A fast bus lane from South Street is nearly completed. It has an interchange at Canning Bridge and is an extension to the Murdoch Park 'n' Ride. A huge amount of money been invested in not only bus infrastructure for buses, but also in bus routes which link various centres. The money has been invested in recognition of the fast-growing southern corridor and the nature of the changing environment in which people live. Many students are dependent on buses. Universities and colleges in the area are expanding. Most importantly, older people rely on bus transport. We have an ageing population. We have just heard the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure speak on this issue. She knows that many planning decisions, particularly around aged care facilities, are based on bus transport links. The majority of people who use buses are older. Unless they feel secure on the buses and that they can travel in safety they will not use them. The majority of people get on a bus at a bus stop; they do not get on a bus at the terminus. Older people use buses to go to shopping centres and access other facilities. It is important that they feel safe, not just during the day but particularly at night. That is the most critical time. We know it is not practical to have a security officer on every bus in the metropolitan area. The motion does not call for that.

Ms MacTiernan: It reads like that.

Mr BOARD: No, it does not. The minister tried to avoid facing up to what she has done. I would love to hear from the minister whether the security systems that travel with and behind the buses are currently employed. They are not. What is the likelihood of them being employed in the near future? They are being cut back and that is why the drivers are complaining about their security and the security of the passengers. The minister should be expanding security arrangements. I think the minister, for some reason, is busphobic. She does not seem to be concerned about buses. Maybe she had only a train set when she was a child. The previous Government spent a lot of money on bus infrastructure and supporting the community and developing bus links. The minister should take a drive along the freeway to Canning Bridge. The electorate of the member sitting next to her will benefit from the hundreds of millions of dollars spent on the fast bus lane, the improvements to the Narrows Bridge, the Murdoch Park 'n' Ride expansion and the transit crossover at Canning Bridge. It is all for buses, not trains. We will not see a train there for four or five years and the minister knows it. People will want to use the buses and use them after-hours. Instead of cutting back on security for those in our community who are vulnerable, the minister should be beefing it up. The planning decisions made by this minister should provide support to an ageing population. Older people want to get around; they are not in total care. They want to travel to shopping centres and go to the city. The previous Government cut transport costs for people with gold cards and so forth. We gave them free days to encourage them to use the buses. It is important that they feel secure. Without that security they will not use the buses. I can guarantee it. They will lock themselves in their homes. The Government should not only maintain security on buses, but it should also increase that security. The minister should take a message back to the department saying that it should not only employ these people more often and regularly but also increase their presence. We do not expect the impossible, but we expect the Government not only to maintain what we put in place but also to improve it. We expect security on the buses and that is what we expect this Government to provide.

Question put and a division taken with the following result -

Extract from *Hansard*
[ASSEMBLY - Thursday, 6 December 2001]
p6664b-6672a

Speaker; Ms Katie Hodson-Thomas; Mrs Cheryl Edwardes; Mrs Michelle Roberts; Ms Alannah MacTiernan;
Acting Speaker; Mr Mike Board

Ayes (19)

Mr Barnett	Mr Edwards	Mr McNee	Mr Waldron
Mr Birney	Mr Grylls	Mr Marshall	Ms Sue Walker
Mr Board	Mrs Hodson-Thomas	Mr Masters	Dr Woollard
Mr Day	Mr House	Mr Pendal	Mr Bradshaw (<i>Teller</i>)
Mrs Edwardes	Mr Johnson	Mr Sweetman	

Noes (28)

Mr Andrews	Ms Guise	Mr McGinty	Mr Quigley
Mr Brown	Mr Hill	Mr McGowan	Ms Radisich
Mr Carpenter	Mr Hyde	Ms McHale	Mr Ripper
Mr D'Orazio	Mr Kobelke	Mr McRae	Mrs Roberts
Dr Edwards	Mr Kucera	Mrs Martin	Mr Templeman
Dr Gallop	Mr Logan	Mr Murray	Mr Watson
Mr Graham	Ms MacTiernan	Mr O'Gorman	Ms Quirk (<i>Teller</i>)

Pairs

	Mr Omodei	Mr Bowler
	Mr Barron-Sullivan	Mr Whitely
	Mr Ainsworth	Mr Marlborough

Question thus negatived.