

PUBLIC TRANSPORT, SAFETY AT NIGHT

Grievance

MRS C.L. EDWARDES (Kingsley) [9.38 am]: I wish to raise a grievance with the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure. Over the past month or so I have received a number of complaints and concerns from women who travel by train at night-time, generally on their own, perhaps after working late at night such as on a Thursday for a retail store. They feel very unsafe and vulnerable. The minister published a survey in August 2004 indicating that the number of people who felt unsafe at bus stations was 31 per cent and the number who felt unsafe at train stations was 35 per cent. Women reported higher levels of concern than men.

Ms A.J. MacTiernan: What is that document?

Mrs C.L. EDWARDES: It is entitled "Transperth - providing public transport services for the Perth metro area - Wed, 25 Aug 2004." It is from the web site.

Ms A.J. MacTiernan interjected.

Mrs C.L. EDWARDES: I would like to finish my grievance. I have a considerable amount to get through. These women are feeling very unsafe and vulnerable. They have had their cars broken into at the train stations and there is no security presence at the train stations or in the car parks.

I thought I would do a train hop on Monday night of this week. I went with a couple of female constituents from my electorate. We got on the train at the Whitfords train station and we were the only people at the station. We caught the train from Whitfords to Warwick. There were no guards on the Whitfords train station; there was one in the office but no one on the station. The minister would be aware that the stations at Warwick and Whitfords are split level. From Whitfords to Warwick there were four guards on the train, all in one of the front carriages talking to each other. They did not move through the train at all. We got off at the Warwick train station. There was a sole woman standing on the train station and a number of youths got off with us. We hung back a bit and watched the youths approach the sole woman and ask her for money. I spoke with her later. We went upstairs to see who was patrolling the Warwick train station. There was no-one around other than the cleaners. There were no guards. A transit station van was parked where we could see it, but there was no visible presence of any guards. We went back down to the bottom platform and spoke with the woman. She said that she had worked back late because she was shifting work premises. She also said that she normally parked her car at the Edgewater train station, and that she did not normally travel at eight o'clock at night and certainly would not do it again but would get her kids to pick her up from work. The feeling she experienced is the same as that which has been expressed to me repeatedly. One of the common complaints is about youths constantly asking for money. Women feel very vulnerable. They do not want to open their purse in front of a group of youths, but they do not want to refuse to give money either, because they do not know whether any of the youths are under the influence of any substances. Therefore, they feel very frightened.

There are many corners at these train stations. Although they might provide privacy for commuters during the day, they also provide a number of hiding spots. From a particular spot, a person has no vision of the whole length of the railway station. A number of commuters also got off at the Edgewater train station when we did. Nobody was patrolling the car park. We were the only people at the Edgewater train station. The emergency telephone handset was missing; it had been removed. The sign advising people to press the red button in case of emergency was very difficult to read. I commend the people who respond on the information line. When we pressed the info line button, a woman answered immediately. We felt a lot safer knowing that we could immediately speak to someone in an emergency.

One of the questions that my constituents would like to ask is: why do the train guards not do the rounds of the car parks and each station when the train pulls in or when they conduct rounds by vehicles? A higher visible presence is a far better deterrent than cameras, particularly to young people who want to approach others. Women feel very unsafe. On Monday night no-one was patrolling the car park at either Edgewater or Whitfords train stations. It was before nine o'clock at night and I understood that those car parks were supposed to be patrolled. While I have the minister's attention on the issue of security at car parks, I advise her that the number of parking machines at the Whitfords car park is inadequate. Two machines are not enough, especially first thing in the morning when it is pouring with rain and a number of people want to catch the train. There are queues galore. I return to the real issue: my constituents want an even higher visible presence of security guards. That was not evident to me on Monday night.

MS A.J. MacTIERNAN (Armadale - Minister for Planning and Infrastructure) [9.43 am]: I acknowledge that we will never be able to provide perfection on our rail system. There will always be ongoing issues of security, as there are in our community generally. However, I believe that the Government has done an extraordinary job in trying to address those security issues. The measures that we have put in place are very comprehensive but, as

I say, not absolutely perfect, and nor will they ever be. By any reasonable yardstick of a rail system in a large city, we have a system that is safe. It is clear from the passenger satisfaction ratings and the detailed studies that have been done that there is an increasingly good story to tell. The percentage of people who feel safe and secure on our rail system, both during the day and at night, is increasing. The percentage of people who feel unsafe is declining.

I could go through in detail all the comprehensive systems that have been put in place to deal with this matter. We have obviously put in place security guards. As the member has acknowledged, there were four security guards on the train the member got on. They are supposed to walk up and down the train, but it would have been clearly evident to anyone on the train that there were four security guards. There is also a video monitoring system on trains, so that we can monitor what the security guards are doing. As the member said, she got on the train and saw four officers. Had there been an incident on the train, those four officers would have been capable of walking to the other end of the train to deal with the incident. That performance itself is strong.

A number of stations are manned. We never said that each station would be manned; quite simply that would be prohibitively expensive. The stations that are manned on the railway line in the member's electorate are Joondalup, Whitfords, Warwick, Stirling and Glendalough. The member has said that guards were present at the station at which she got on the train. She has said that she saw them in the office.

Mrs C.L. Edwardes: One was in the office, but not when we came back.

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: Those stations are guarded. If the member gives me the specific time that she claims they were not there, I will certainly have that checked out. The Edgewater station is not a manned station, but there is a car park attendant at the station Monday to Friday from 7.00 am to 9.00 pm. In theory we could continue to ramp up the number of people we put into the system. We have invested a great deal in train security. We have committed to provide a transit guard on every train - as the member has said, there were four guards on the train she was on - and to ensure that security is provided at key stations. We have invested some \$20 million in the camera systems. We now have remote monitoring on trains and on railway stations. The SmartRider ticketing system will provide barrier entry and will be introduced into the system in March next year. These are all very substantial measures, but we will never entirely eliminate problems. It is the same with our Police Force; no matter how many police officers we put on, we will never entirely eliminate the problem of crime. We must constantly review what we are doing. We must constantly look at whether the system that is in place is adequate. I point to the passenger satisfaction monitoring, which demonstrates a clear trajectory of an increase in the number of people feeling safe on our trains and a decrease in the number of people feeling unsafe. On that objective measure, we are improving the situation. This is a work in progress. There will never be an end point at which we can say we have created a miracle and there is no problem. It will need constant monitoring to make sure that we have the best possible training and that proper systems are in place to ensure that transit guards are doing the job that they are supposed to do. If the member wants to provide details of the particular times that she was on the stations and felt there were concerns, I would be more than happy to get a detailed report. I am confident that although we have not reached a state of perfection or nirvana, we have made substantial improvements and the system is working. We always appreciate the member's input and we acknowledge that we need to constantly monitor the situation.