

PUBLIC TRANSPORT, COMMUTERS' SAFETY

319. Mr A.P. O'GORMAN to the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure:

Can the minister outline what steps are being taken to protect commuters on our expanding public transport system?

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN replied:

I thank the member for the question. I know that he and the member for Wanneroo, and all the members representing electorates served by the train system, are very keenly interested in the performance of the government in train security. Over the past week there has been a fear campaign about safety on the rail system. It must be acknowledged that this campaign has been orchestrated by some interest groups, in particular, regrettably, the Western Australian Police Union, in the lead-up to its conference. It has been aided and abetted by some sections of the electronic media.

I want to get this absolutely straight. When the Labor Party was in opposition, it had a policy to have the police operating rail security services at night. When the government was elected, the Minister for Police and Emergency Services and I approached the Commissioner of Police at the time to see whether that could be done. The Commissioner of Police was not prepared to roster his officers in any way that we could rely on. He said that he would employ them on the trains when they did not have other more important duties. We were not prepared to make a sacrifice like that. We had made a commitment to have transit guards on the trains, and we were not prepared to sacrifice the quality of that service if we could not get the Police Service to make a reasonable commitment to roster its personnel. As a result, we expanded the number of transit guards, to ensure that they could cover both the day and the night.

Mr P.D. Omodei: Have they been covering both the day and the night?

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: Yes, they have been covering both daytime and night-time services. They have done a pretty good job, and we have seen a definite improvement in the perception of safety on the trains. On daytime services, the perception of safety is now up to around 95 per cent. It goes down to around 75 per cent at night, but that is an improvement on the previous figure, which was around 60 per cent. We do not say that more cannot be done - of course it can. However the government is doing all that is reasonably possible. It is now spending 22 per cent of the operational rail budget on security. We have just allocated \$22 million to rail safety infrastructure. There is now closed-circuit television, which makes sure that the villains on the trains are caught.

However, we do want to speak with the police. The Minister for Police and Emergency Services and I have initiated discussions with the Commissioner of Police. We have said that we want to use police on the trains at night, and increase the perception of safety, but the Police Service must make the commitment to roster the police officers so that we can guarantee to the customers that there will be security on the trains at night. If we can get those guarantees from the Commissioner of Police, we will go back to our original plan, and put police on the trains at night. There are problems, but we are making progress. Compared with other jurisdictions around the world, rail safety in Western Australia is doing very well.