

PUBLIC TRANSPORT - TRANSIT GUARDS

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

Can the minister advise the house of the latest innovation to improve the effectiveness of transit guards and safety on our trains?

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN replied:

I thank the member for the question, given that he is such a powerful advocate for public transport services, particularly rail services. Before I answer the question, the Minister for Employment Protection has asked me to thank the member for Roe for again wearing an orange tie today, which is a day of action. The member did a similar thing on the last day of action. We appreciate his covert support for the day of action! He is under deep cover in the Liberal Party, but we know that he is capable of conversion.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, members! It is time to start again.

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: Today the government is pleased to announce its latest innovation for the continuous improvement of security on our trains. As members know, we instituted transit guards on our trains. Currently, 220 highly trained and professional guards provide protection on our trains. We have put in place a \$30 million infrastructure project, which has a state-of-the-art closed circuit television system that is monitored 24/7. It is of a very high standard and has improved lighting etc.

The latest development is today's announcement that from 1 January 2007 we will commence issuing pepper spray as a routine item to those guards who are rostered on stations or mobile patrols. In a trial that began more than six months ago pepper spray was issued to certain senior officers. That trial has gone very well, although it proved that there was little need to use pepper spray. Indeed, the presence of pepper spray and a warning about pepper spray has been successful in de-escalating many difficult circumstances. Perhaps we should use pepper spray in this chamber to de-escalate the agitation of members opposite! Perhaps we should use it to spice them up! This measure is yet another demonstration that the government is committed to improving security on trains. I was pleased to see statistics that reveal a decline in serious and violent offences and antisocial behaviour on the rail network. However, that will not prevent us from continuing to improve and strengthen the system. We are quite clearly producing results.