
PUBLIC TRANSPORT SAFETY: A COMMUNITY RIGHT AND A COMMUNAL RESPONSIBILITY

by

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Abstract A new program, Travel Safe, was introduced at the end of 1990 to deal with problems of passenger safety and vandalism on the train, tram and bus systems operated by the Public Transport Corporation of the State of Victoria, AUS. New information-gathering and analysis systems were created, and a forum was established for community consultation. Improved procedures for cleansing of graffiti, repair of vandalism and collection of litter were introduced. Security and customer safety were enhanced by better lighting and closed-circuit television surveillance and through the provision of more public telephones throughout the system. Patrolling of trains, stations and other facilities was greatly increased. As a result, there were large reductions in crimes against persons, vandalism and graffiti, and the number of trains removed from service. To ensure that these improvements are maintained, the Public Transport Corporation is working with other agencies such as local government to instill much greater respect for public property in the community.*

INTRODUCTION

Victoria's public transport system consists of trains, trams and buses, and operates in both metropolitan and rural areas of the state. The system covers 5,107 route kilometers of railway lines and 235 route kilometers

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of tramway lines. There are 206 metropolitan railway stations (three of which are underground, encircling the central business district of Melbourne), and 150 country railway stations. The bus system covers 270 metropolitan routes, and 567 provincial and rural routes. There are over 11,000 tram and/or bus stops in the metropolitan area alone. The system handles in excess of 300 million passenger journeys each year, in a 7-day-a-week, 20-hour-per-day operation.

The system is now policed solely by the Victoria Police, but, until October 1992, the system was policed jointly by the Victoria Police and an internal Public Transport Corporation security force—the Transit Patrol. The Transit Patrol has now been decommissioned.

The emphasis of this paper will be on metropolitan rail, as this is the area in which most problems have been experienced.

How "Unsafe" is the Victorian Public Transport System?

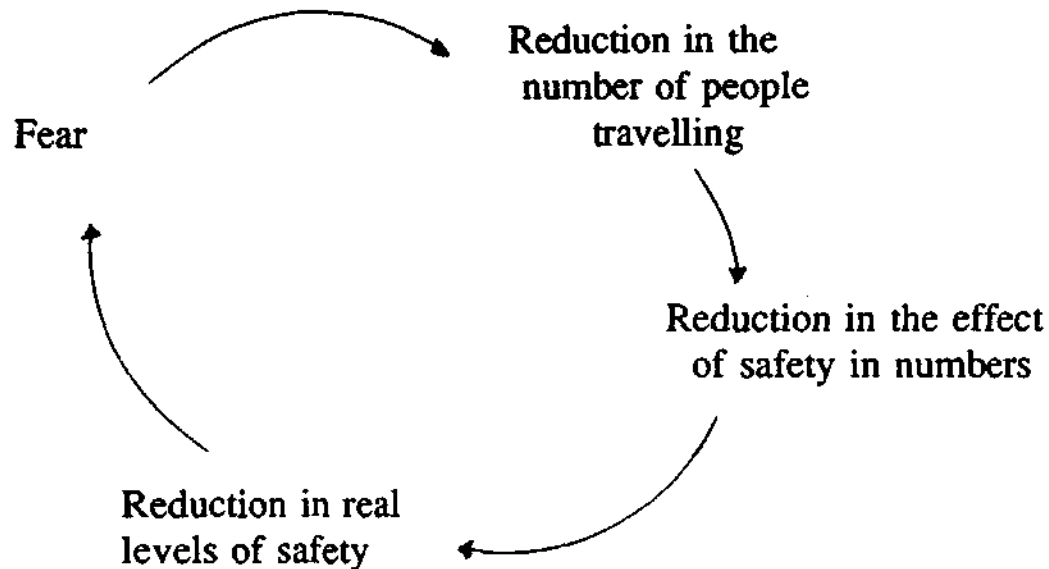
Public transport is an integral part of community infrastructure, providing access to mobility for both business and social purposes. However, public transport does attract its share of crimes against persons and property, often accentuated by the media, which creates a poor perception of this facility and reinforces a sense of fear. The result is that people make less use of public transport, and either have to abandon journeys they might have made or have recourse to often more expensive and less convenient modes of transport (Easteal and Wilson, 1991).

It is important to put the issue of safety on public transport in context. In 1990 there were approximately 690 crimes against persons on the public transport system, compared with 32,000 similar incidents in the state as a whole. The figure of 690 crimes against persons should also be considered in the broader context of more than 300 million passenger journeys in the same period (Public Transport Corporation, 1990).

When these figures are considered in context, it becomes clear that in reality the problem is small. But it is also clear that there is a major perception problem (Public Transport Corporation, 1991). Many passengers travel, at times, in fear for their own safety. A number of factors have contributed to this sense of fear:

- (1) the unclean condition of vehicles, stations, and bus/tram stops;
- (2) the intimidating effect of graffiti on the system;
- (3) exposure to often rowdy, offensive groups; and
- (4) the role of the media in overstating fear-generating incidents occurring both on the transport system and in the community generally.

These factors create a cycle that feeds on itself (See Figure 1).

Figure 1: Cycle of Fear

Initiatives to Improve Security

Both the reality (Hertan, 1989) and the perception issues are being addressed by the Public Transport Corporation (PTC) through its "Travel Safe" program (McCullough, 1991). Travel Safe is a marketing name created to identify to customers and the broader community new initiatives relating to safety and security.

The first step undertaken through the Travel Safe program was to significantly improve information systems so that:

- (1) better quality data is collected, analyzed, and used as intelligence;
- (2) community interests are considered (through the formation of a consultative community forum); and
- (3) links are established with researchers in the field of graffiti/vandalism to ensure that the PTC keeps abreast of data gathered, particularly in relation to local trends.

The second step was to develop strategies for issues such as cleaning up the system (by removing graffiti and repairing vandalism). Specific actions included:

- (1) the railway station cleanup program, in which all 206 metropolitan rail stations were graffiti cleaned during 1991, and are being kept graffiti-free by quickly cleaning off any new graffiti;
- (2) the development of community involvement in the improvement of stations, initially in painting out graffiti, more recently through activities such as landscaping;

- (3) improved vehicle cleaning, including immediate removal of graffiti, where timetabling requirements permit (the entire train fleet is now delittered daily and cleaned every 3 days);
- (4) the installation of public telephones at all metropolitan stations;
- (5) improvements to lighting at all metropolitan stations, which is 80% completed so far;
- (6) the development of the "Travel Safe Station" concept, whereby selected stations will be upgraded to provide significantly improved customer amenities and reflect the customer focus embodied in the PTC's "Service Now" program (a project to change the culture of the PTC from being inwardly focused to being customer focused); and
- (7) entering into a partnership with the private sector to install up to 4,000 internally-illuminated tram and bus shelters (some with telephones) throughout the metropolitan area.

A third, and complementary, step was to improve protective measures on the system, such as:

- (1) enhanced Transit Patrol and police presence, targeting specific trouble areas and times;
- (2) the regionalization of the Transit Patrol to improve response times;
- (3) installation of both fixed and mobile closed-circuit television cameras and recorders at stations and fixed installations on trains and buses;
- (4) increased presence of PTC staff on the system through train and station monitoring exercises whereby office-based staff volunteer to provide a visible authoritative presence by roving through trains and around stations;
- (5) enhanced stabling yard security using state-of-the-art surveillance systems;
- (6) guards regularly roving on trains; and
- (7) station staff escorting customers to their vehicles in car parks.

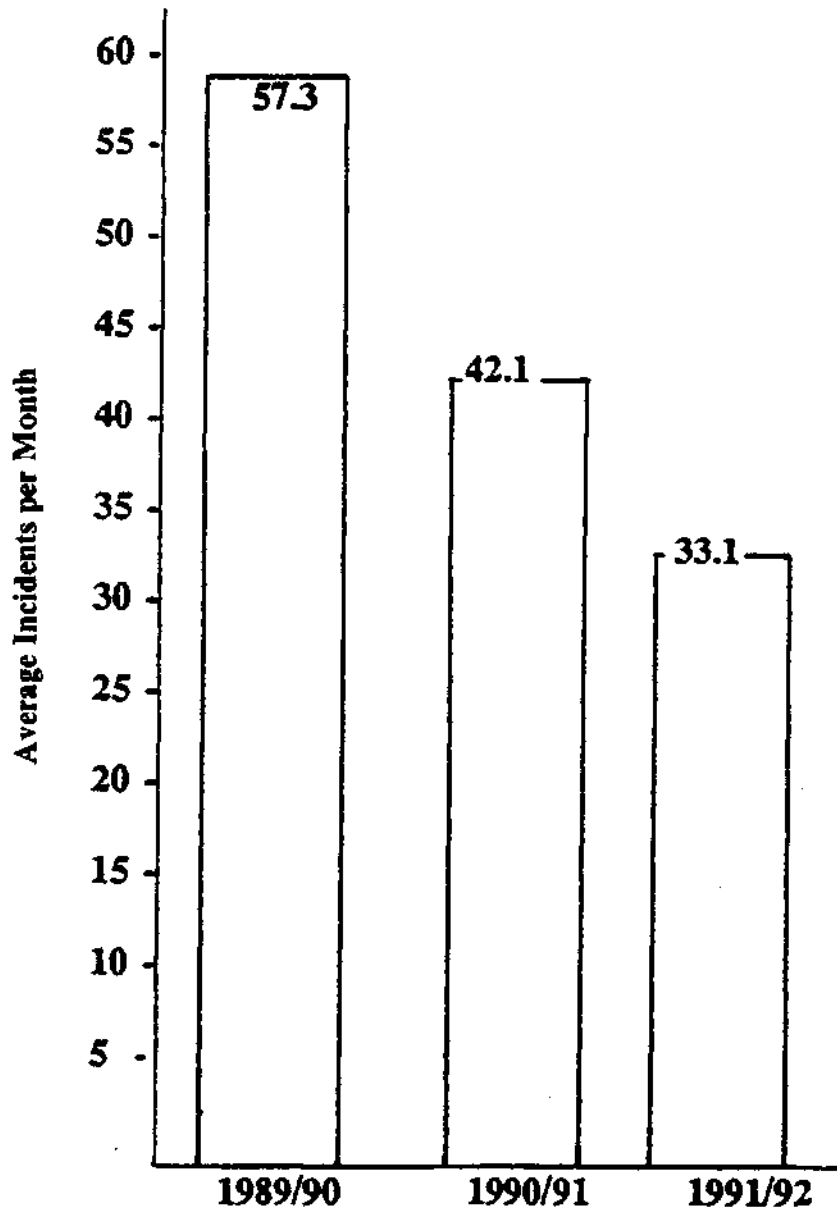
RESULTS

The key result of these initiatives has been the reduction of crimes against persons on the public transport system by 42% over two years. In 1989-90 there was an average of about 57 incidents per month, whereas in 1991-92 this figure had dropped to about 33 (See Figure 2). Other categories of crime have also been significantly reduced (Public Transport Corporation, 1992).

Another positive result has been greater train availability due to reduced vandalism. In November 1990 only 65-70% of the fleet was available in peak periods, compared with 98% in 1992. Reduced train

Figure 2: Crimes Against Persons

Public Transport System, Victoria, 1989/90, 1990/91 and 1991/92



window breakages are reflected in Table 1. In late 1990, an average of 700 broken windows were being replaced each week, compared with between 100 and 120 per week in 1992. This represents savings of about of A\$5 million per year in replacement costs.

Graffiti has also been significantly reduced on stations. From multiple "hits" per station per week in 1990, the system now averages one hit per station every three weeks (see Figure 3). It is also important to note that the nature of the graffiti has changed from large murals to a predominance of tagging.

Community Role and Responsibilities

The reductions in crimes against persons and in graffiti and vandalism that have been achieved so far address the immediate concerns of improving the system today. Experience in other cities has shown that the problems of graffiti and vandalism do not go away, they are only controlled. This means that continuing vigilance will be required. However, the PTC recognizes that plans for mid- to long-term change are also needed so that the positive impact of the actions outlined so far can be built on, and the cost to the community be diminished over time (Buchanan, 1990).

The PTC is committed to a clean, safe, and secure public transport system, but the PTC cannot work alone. Public transport safety is a joint responsibility of state government, local government and the general community. The PTC needs to build on the steps taken, bringing about a change in the culture of the community as a whole to regain respect for people and property. This cultural change needs to be addressed on many levels. There are a number of other ways in which the message of

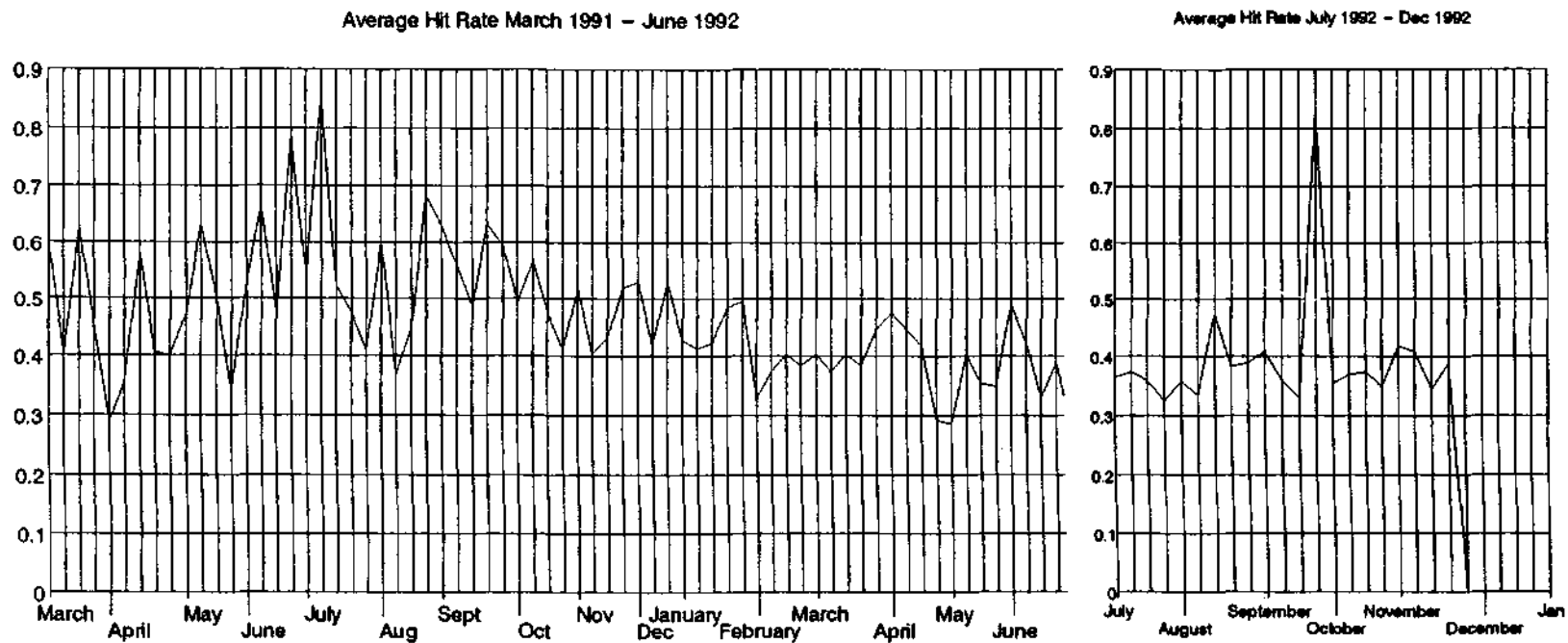
Table 1: Train Window Breakages

Public Transport System, Victoria, October 1990 - October 1992

<u>Period</u>	<u>Weekly Average Broken Windows</u>
Sept./Oct. 90	700
Nov./Dec. 90	240
Jan./Feb. 91	130
March/April 91	105
May/June 91	90
July/Aug. 91	90
Sept./Oct. 91	105
Nov./Dec. 91	115
Jan./Feb. 92	105
March/April 92	105
May/June 92	100
Jul./Aug. 92	120
Sept./Oct. 92	115

Figure 3: Incidents of Graffiti

Weekly Rate for 206 Stations in the Public Transport System, Victoria, March 1991–December 1992



community ownership, involvement and responsibility for the public transport system is being spread. These include:

- (1) a school-based education program conducted by the PTC's Travel Safe Community Relations Unit;
- (2) the "Travel Safe" Bus, which features static and video displays, and is available for school visits, community festivals, agricultural shows etc.;
- (3) involvement in seminars/conferences;
- (4) presentations to, and liaison with, local government officials; and
- (5) recognition of the serious nature of graffiti offenses in enabling magistrates to order convicted offenders to undertake a number of hours of community work cleaning up graffiti on the system.

The adolescents currently involved in graffiti and vandalism—or those at risk of involvement—need to be provided with meaningful community-based alternative activities that will act as deflectors from crime (Buchanan, 1990). For younger children, education in "acceptable behavior" is a critical factor, along with youth and adults providing leadership by example. We have the opportunity, and responsibility, to ensure that the next generation of our youth do not get involved in antisocial activities, and that they grow with a sense of values that includes respect for the property of others, and for people. Education programs are currently being run by some local government areas. Hawthorne, an inner-Melbourne suburb, is a good example of a local community that has recognized the problem and initiated the development of teaching aids for use in local schools.

More could be done by other local authorities, for example, through involvement in community-based projects such as station landscaping. These activities have been demonstrably successful in generating community pride in, and "ownership" of local stations. Community groups could adapt the concept of "Neighborhood Watch" to have a separate "Station Watch." Another option is the development of "Entertainment Trains" such as those running out of Lilydale and Frankston (outer-Melbourne suburbs). Local authorities could attempt to promote a heightened awareness within the community of the joint PTC/public responsibility towards the protection of commuters and PTC assets, and the need for a change in the current laissez-faire attitude, through creating opportunities for informed public debate.

CONCLUSION

The PTC's Travel Safe program—consisting of greatly improved security on the trains, tram and bus systems—has brought about a

significant reduction in personal crimes of assault and in graffiti and vandalism. Fewer cancellations have been necessary, which has resulted in a much improved service for the public and a more pleasant transport environment. The PTC, local government and community groups are beginning to work together to improve the public transport system in Victoria. It is becoming apparent that the sense of community ownership of the public transport system is improving, and people are again starting to take pride in "their" system. This program is a long-term one, and PTC expects that it may be up to five years before a significant shift in community attitudes is achieved. The PTC also recognizes that this will only come about through a coordinated strategy of proactive programs that raise the level of community debate. The alternative of continuing to fund only reactive programs is unacceptable.



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