

ARMADALE RAIL LINE — ATTACK ON PUBLIC TRANSPORT AUTHORITY OFFICERS

**807. Mr J.M. FRANCIS to the Minister for Transport:**

I am sure that every member in this house was deeply disturbed about the reports of the cowardly attack on some transport security guards over the weekend. I ask the minister whether he can enlighten the house on the details of that particular attack and also whether he can update us on the condition of the two security guards.

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL replied:**

I thank the member for the question. Obviously, there was an incident on Sunday morning on the 2.15 train on the Armadale, or south eastern, line from the city. I do not need to go into all the details of it; I think members in this house will be well apprised of it. Suffice it to say that transit officers from the Public Transport Authority found themselves on the Beckenham platform with a group of people who effectively had been fighting with another group on that train. I watched the CCTV footage on the Sunday afternoon and received a briefing from the PTA. Those officers performed very well in dispersing that crowd. Their training really shone through and they conducted themselves in a very professional way in a difficult circumstance.

Subsequent to the dispersal of the majority of people, one officer in particular, Dave Lambert, had his notebook out and was effectively taking some notes from one of the participants in the fight on the train when another one approached him from the side, struck him and knocked him off the platform. That CCTV footage has gone to the courts and the courts will deal with that. A second officer was subsequently injured as she attempted to restrain the offender. She either had a bottle thrown at her or was struck across the back of the head. I can tell the house that the footage is disgusting. The cowardly nature of the attacks shocked me. I am sure it would shock anybody who looked at the footage.

I visited Dave Lambert yesterday in hospital. He is remarkably buoyant considering what he has been through. He has three fractured vertebrae. He informed me that he hopes to be fully physically healed in about six weeks, although I suspect his full recovery may take some time longer. He is certainly looking forward to returning to work. The female officer, Jessica, received 20 stitches to her cheek and neck area. I spoke to her on the phone last night. She is a remarkable person and is still very buoyant. I was both proud of, and humbled by, the approach of these two individuals. They are extremely proud of their job and the level of professionalism they display in what they do. Remarkably, all they want to do is get back to work so that they can help their mates in what is probably the most unforgiving and misunderstood job in the public sector in Western Australia. Ultimately, these people physically place themselves between very aggressive people on a very regular basis. We will monitor and support the officers during their rehabilitation and I hope that both of them will soon be back where they want to be, which is in the workplace. I am sure I speak on behalf of every member in this house when I say how sorry we are that they were subject to this attack. We all wish them a very speedy recovery. I again say that they are remarkable individuals and it was a great privilege to have an opportunity to meet with them yesterday.

There has been a lot of discussion on this issue of train security. This government has increased the number of transit officers. We have to understand that transit officers are well trained. They have powers of arrest and all of the training that is incumbent on someone who has those powers of arrest. They do an excellent job on our public transport system. In 2008 there were about 220 transit officers; by the end of this year there will be just over 240. That is about a 10 per cent increase across the last three years. They are out there serving our community.

The government has also made a major investment in improving the level of CCTV surveillance in our buses, on our trains and centrally through the central monitoring unit. I am not sure whether we would say this is a positive, but I hope the quality of the CCTV footage will help the court make the appropriate determination in relation to the two offenders. The government is taking action on train security and we will continue to take action. A few years ago there was an issue with buses. We all remember the case of Gerard Sin, who was attacked with a brick. Subsequent to that and other attacks on drivers, we made a range of changes, and the number of security incidents on buses is declining. We will continue to invest to tackle the issues on our trains. As the Minister for Police pointed out, Operation Rail Safe will commence this week and run over a period of four weeks. I am very confident that will help to deal with the issues that have arisen, particularly on the Armadale line out to Oats Street. I have asked the PTA to commence a more aggressive recruiting campaign next year to put on more transit officers. We have made some improvements in numbers. I think we have more work to do.

Over the next couple of weeks I will be meeting with transit officers on the job to sit down and have discussions with them. Already they have made some positive suggestions to me. One example is around the reintroduction of paid tickets on late-night services. The transit officers say to me that if a person needs to have a ticket, it helps the transit officers in keeping the peace on the platforms and on the trains; and I accept that advice 100 per cent.

I think we need to work with the transit officers as well to look at some aspects of platform design; their argument is that certain elements of the platform design need to be addressed.

So we will engage with the transit officers, and we will invest and will leave no stone unturned in continuing to make our trains safe. I think we have to understand that we have a great public transport system in Western Australia. The unfortunate reality is that there are a few cowardly, gutless individuals who think that the way to finish a good night out is to attempt to assault one of our public officers. These public officers go to work to help make the travelling experience safer for us, so I support their efforts. Our thoughts are with the two officers who were injured, and we will continue to invest to make our train system safer.