

Nine Malvern Electorate Stations Among 119 Without Permanent PSO Coverage ALJ330 Assignment 2

Protective Services Officers have been removed from dozens of Melbourne train stations and redeployed to stations deemed higher risk for crime.

The Victorian Government's decision was made using "intelligence", this approach has left 119 stations with only 'roving' patrols.

State Member for Malvern, Michael O'Brien said the changes are leaving many commuters feeling as though they are gambling with their own safety. "Having PSOs there (on all platforms) at night was an extraordinary deterrence to crime," he said.

Stations such as Dandenong, Mernda and Sunshine undoubtedly require consistent protection from PSOs. For the 9 stations in the electorate of Malvern now without this same standard of surveillance, O'Brien contended the reduced presence of PSOs could leave these smaller suburban stations feeling more vulnerable.

"The reason we had such low crime on some stations is precisely because we had blanket PSO coverage." He said. "Yes, some stations will be better protected, but other stations will be left to fend for themselves."

University student Natasha Ekelmans uses the train twice a week to get to and from the Australian Catholic University campus in Fitzroy. Often returning home in the dark, she now has reservations about how she acts when she alights the train at Glen Iris.

"I feel I have to be more vigilant than before. It's as simple as no longer wearing headphones once the train stops." She said.

Glen Iris is one of the 9 stations in the electorate of Malvern downgraded to roving PSO patrol by the State Government in April. Other stations include East Malvern, Darling, Gardiner, Armadale, Toorak, Heyington, Kooyong and Tooronga.

These stations, like the other 110 now without permanent nightly coverage, previously benefited from a security presence, which only 73 stations retain.

The Public Transport Users Association supports the State Government's redeployment strategy. In a statement on their website, they said that assigning PSOs to higher risk stations was a more effective use of such limited resources.

However, Michael O'Brien argued that the presence of PSOs ultimately provides greater comfort and security to commuters, particularly after dark. He suggested that many are unable to feel safe if the PSOs are not visible.

"If they (the State Government) wanted to add more PSOs to more stations, hire more PSOs."

The Victorian Government has stated in press releases on April 20, that the changes ultimately reflect the operational needs of the public transport network.

The State Budget however, revealed their intention to hire and train 50 more Protective Services Officers at a cost of \$44 million to deploy across the public transport network. It will be some time before these new hires make it onto station platforms.

For many of Michael O'Brien's constituents, his advice for now, is for individuals to make decisions based on their own sense of safety.

"If that means getting off the train one station earlier or one station later because you know PSOs will be there, do that."

Despite this, it remains unclear as to the effectiveness of the new PSO deployment model. Data detailing the effectiveness of the changes is not yet available.



Darling Station after dark, not a single PSO on either platform.