

Rider Safety and Protection Are Not Addressed in Rail Plans

By Dale Evans

Missing from Honolulu's proposed \$5 billion transit project are security plans and costs to protect riders and operators against transit crime.

"Women and Transit Security: A New Look at an Old Issue," by Dorothy Schultz and Susan Gilbert, (2003)ⁱ reported that:

"Transit agencies have learned within the past 20 years that citizens are far more fearful of their transit systems than they are of their city streets. Jane Jacobs in Death and Life of Great American Cities (1961) stressed that people fear being alone in dark places, particularly when they could not be observed by those they trusted and when they felt they could easily be trapped by those they did not trust.

"Today we also know that women and the elderly fear such situations more than do adult males, a factor that is certainly important for transit agencies, which carry large numbers of elderly people who do not drive and a growing number of women who commute to jobs that often require them to arrive early and remain late if they are to compete with their male colleagues in race up the corporate ladder."

Rosenbloom and Burns' studies on women programs found that women have a disproportionate need to use a car. The Long Island Railroad Police Department noted that women, comprising 40 percent of its commuters, complained most about parking lot crimes.

A 2002 UCLA study, "*Protecting Against Transit Crime: The Importance of the Built Environment*," cautions planners and policy makers not to rely on crime statistics. "Transit crime is a rather persistent but underreported trend that scares and intimidates riders – particularly women."ⁱⁱ

Another UCLA study, "*Crime in Public Transit Systems: An Environmental Design Perspective*," by Adele Pearlstein and Martin Wachs, shows that

"... crime on transit has increased about in proportion to transit ridership, and that it is concentrated in both space and time. Crimes occur mostly on routes which traverse areas having high crime rates in general. Although most transit crimes occur at hours when ridership is high, the rates of occurrence are disproportionately high during the evening hours."ⁱⁱⁱ

Stations pose security threats as transit systems and the areas surrounding them are magnets for crime. Portland's light rail system is praised as a national model. In reality, crime on Portland's MAX has reached epidemic proportions and is criticized by Portland police as being lax in security. Gresham's mayor complained that Max officials "pooh-pooed his crime concerns," the day before a 71-year-old man was beaten.^{iv}

Safety measures have been ignored for 20 years. Riders complain that eliminating free fares will not adequately address the security crisis.^v TriMet avoids public input by invitation-only meetings, limiting time and space to discuss public's perception of lawlessness on the transit system and mounting police frustration.^{vi}

But "violent crime" is not the transit riders' only fear. As reported in London's The Guardian article, "Female spaces – the only answer to harassment?"^{vii}

There is a growing worldwide trend for women-only spaces on trains, beaches and in hotels. But do they really make women any safer? Two out of every three subway riders in New York have been sexually harassed. The survey was of a mixed group, with almost 70 percent of respondents being women.

In Tokyo, the problem is just as bad -- 64 percent of women in their 20s and 30s reported being groped on the train or in transit stations. In fact, the problem is so well recognized in Japan, that there's even a specific name for subway harassment: chikan. And the city's answer to such large-scale harassment? Establishing a woman-only train carriage aimed at protecting potential victims.

As Reuters reported on January 23, 2008, Mexico's transit system added "women-only" carriages to subway and bus routes after years of women's complaints of "groping" and sexual assaults.^{viii}

On January 21, 2008, MassTransitMag.com reported that Toronto's 200 transit bus, streetcar and subway operators suffer from severe stress usually associated with survivors of combat, natural disasters and rape. Rate of post-traumatic stress disorder is about four times that of police officers who patrol Toronto streets. Transit drivers suffer wide range of abuse – shot at with air rifle, punched in the eye, head butted in mouth, gashed with broken beer bottle. 102 operators report missing weeks or months of work because of anxiety, neurotic disorders and depression.^{ix}

This vital need for plans and funding to protect riders against crimes at the stations and on the trains should not be ignored.

"It is highly unlikely that planners of a new transit system would neglect these issues. Newer systems are also making use of surveillance technology not only at passenger stations, but also in parking lots and employee facilities." — Women and Transit Security^x

Transit security is extremely costly. New York Sun, January 24, 2008 article reports that New York's MTA security upgrade is not only behind schedule, the program's costs increased to \$837 million from \$591 million.^{xi} The enactment of the U.S. Transit Security Law on August 3, 2007 follows a transit workers union's 6-year battle, winning \$3.4 billion in federal funding over four years.^{xii}

Without transit attendants and security police, the elevated rail stations will be hideaways for criminals to prey on their unsuspecting elderly and female victims.

As planners Horst Rittel and Mel Webber wrote, "Planning deals with 'wicked' problems." There is nothing more wicked than crime.^{xiii}

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Footnotes:

ⁱ <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/ohim/womens/chap30.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Protecting Against Transit Crime: The Importance of the Built Environment (18pp), Robin Liggett, Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris, Hiroyuki Iseki, Urban Planning, UCLA, Jan 1, 2004, <http://repositories.cdlib.org/cqi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1031&context=uclaspa>

ⁱⁱⁱ Crime in public transit systems: An environmental design perspective, Transportation Journal, Adele Pearlstein and Martin Wachs, Springer Netherlands, Vol. 11, Number 3, Sep 1982 <http://www.springerlink.com/content/q84006493160j8u4/>

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- iv Hire 160 officers for light rail, city tells TriMet, Oregonian, 1/17/08
http://www.oregonlive.com/oregonian/stories/index.ssf?base/metro_south_news/1200365720199210.xml&coll=7
- v MAX safety long ago left on a siding, S. Renee Mitchell, Oregonian, 12/12/07
<http://www.oregonlive.com/oregonian/stories/index.ssf?base/news/1197426510120430.xml&coll=7&thispage=1>
- vi TriMet, Cities, Police Talk to Get Safety Back on Track, Dylan Rivera, The Oregonian, 12/4/07
<http://www.masstransitmag.com/online/article.jsp?siteSection=3&id=4909>
- vii Female spaces – the only answer to harassment?, Jessica Valenti, The Guardian, London, 8/06/07
<http://www.taipetimes.com/News/editorials/archives/2007/08/06/2003372947>
- viii Mexico battles groping and verbal abuse with buses for women only
Reuters, National Post, 1/23/08
http://www.nationalpost.com/todays_paper/story.html?id=256865
- ix It's Hell on the TTC: Operators "War" Victims, 1/21/08,
[http://www.masstransitmag.com/web/online/Top-Transit-News/Its-Hell-on-the-TTC--Operators-War-Victims/3\\$5194](http://www.masstransitmag.com/web/online/Top-Transit-News/Its-Hell-on-the-TTC--Operators-War-Victims/3$5194)
- x **Women and Transit Security, D. Schulz and S. Gilbert, 2003,**
<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/ohim/womens/chap30.pdf>
- xi Comptroller: MTA Security Program Is Flawed, New York Sun, 1/24/08
<http://www.nysun.com/article/70113>
- xii Transit Security Provisions of H.R. 1, enacted Aug 3, 2007
<http://www.atu.org/agenda/legislative/transit-security-provisions.html>
- xiii 2003 Chester Rankin Award for the Best Article in Vol. 22: "The Geography of Transit Crime," Journal of Planning, Education And Research, citing Horst Rittel and Mel Webber (1973)
<http://jpe.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/23/1/107.pdf>
<http://www-iurd.ced.berkeley.edu/Tribute-to-Mel-Webber.pdf>