

New team on trams hopes to keep your safety on track

EXCLUSIVE

Patrick Hatch



Tram safety team members (from left) Myles Pearce, Primrose Busary and Marianne Cardona. Photo: Jason South

Yarra Trams has employed a small team of security staff to ride on routes and patrol stops in an effort to make the network feel safer for passengers.

The private tram operator deployed 14 of its new Network Safety Team members last month, working as a dedicated unit that can respond to safety incidents and emergencies.

Yarra Trams chief safety officer James McMillan said the security staff would ride on trams and patrol “known hotspots” for safety incidents, starting with the Elizabeth Street CBD terminus and Acland Street in St Kilda.

“The team’s focus is really on providing a visible presence on the network to deter antisocial behaviour,” he said.

McMillan said team members would be rostered on daily across most of the afternoon commuter peak and some of the night timetable. They also have cars, so they can drive to incidents across the network. The safety team members have the same legal powers as the authorised officers (or ticket inspectors) already on the public transport network, and wear distinctive orange vests. They are unarmed but have the power to detain and arrest people, and can issue on-the-stop fines or infringement notices.

Protective service officers, who patrol Melbourne train stations from 6pm to midnight, are Victoria Police members, carry guns and have the power to apprehend, arrest, search and fine people.

Transport reporter

McMillan said network safety members had received training in conflict resolution, mental health emergencies and first aid, and would call police in situations they could not handle themselves.

He said they were also building relationships with homelessness services and Victoria’s new public intoxication outreach services, introduced after public drunkenness was decriminalised on November 7.

“Say someone is having a mental health crisis on board a tram, or someone might be drug-affected – this team has the skills required to really help resolve the situation in a positive way,” McMillan said. “Where they feel they can’t, that’s when they call the emergency services.”

In June, police Tasered a man on a No.48 tram in the CBD after he allegedly threatened to kill other passengers with a knife.

Productivity Commission survey data shows that in 2022, only 31 per cent of Victorians said they felt “safe” or “very safe” using public transport at night.

Public Transport Users Association spokesman Daniel Bowen said the introduction of more than 1400 protective service officers had made people feel safer using the train network, and he questioned whether just 14 network safety team members could achieve the same for trams. “Once upon a time, we had additional staff on every tram selling tickets. We’re not going back to those days, but if they are able to respond more quickly with additional staff, that’s got to be of benefit to passengers,” he said.

McMillan said the network was generally safe but there was a perception it was not, and the team members would “help people feel more comfortable to continue to keep travelling on trams”.

The team of 14 includes two former protective service officers, two former tram drivers, some

existing authorised officers and one former police officer.

Myles Pearce left Victoria Police in 2021 after eight years to seek a better work-life balance, and said he was interested in the network safety role because he missed being engaged with the public.

“We’ve had really positive interactions with the community, but also the tram drivers and customer service team – they’re really happy to have us out on the network,” he said.