

Tram drivers say end of 86 route a dangerous area

**Timna Jacks
Nicole Precei**

The tram stop where Aii Maasarwe disembarked before she was killed has long been viewed by Route 86 tram drivers as a danger zone for women.

Three tram drivers speaking to *The Age* under condition of anonymity said they had worried for years about female students riding the tram alone to get to La Trobe University or nearby student accommodation.

Stop 61 on the 86 tram and the next stop at La Trobe University are dark, surrounded by tall trees, and close to Bundoora Park, where teenagers are known to drink and cause trouble.

"I've been wary of these young girls getting off late at night because you do see these men looking at them, patrolling the trams - walking up and down - looking for young girls to sit next to and talk to," one driver said.

Another driver said stops at the end of the 86 tram in Bundoora were "very dark" and needed better lighting and a stronger police presence.

"Police think it [violence] will happen on Friday and Saturday nights. It doesn't. Any time after dark you can have a problem there," they said.

A third tram driver said she believed women were attacked or approached in an aggressive manner on a weekly basis on Melbourne's trams.

She said the 86 tram was particularly dangerous and agreed there needed to be more lighting at stops near the end of the line in Bundoora.

"Have you ridden the 86? It goes to nowhere, it's in the middle of nowhere. We are safe in our cabin, but we do have to change ends. There is no one around. It's a massive safety risk, but for passengers, I think, we were a whole lot safer when we had conductors."

These drivers have witnessed many violent incidents on the 86

line including seeing a woman be stabbed and drunk men verbally abuse their female partners. The drivers also said they've had their lives threatened as well as being choked, punched and thrown against trams.

The Andrews government is facing calls to beef up security on the tram network following the death of Ms Maasarwe - a La Trobe University international student who was killed after stepping off the 86 tram in Bundoora near her apartment about 12.10am on Wednesday.

Experts and transport advocates are calling for Protective Service Officers to be deployed on the 250-kilometre tram network and for better lighting at stops.



Stop 61 on the 86 tram in Bundoora.

One in 11 sexual assault cases that occur in public spaces happen on public transport, according to Victoria Police figures.

Monash University's XYX Lab director Nicole Kalms said many women felt more at risk in areas close to public transport such as stations, pedestrian subways and bridges and were now avoiding using public transport to protect themselves.

"Women are using up their income to use Ubers and taxis to get around ... they're changing their behaviour to avoid dangerous situations," Dr Kalms said.

PSOs patrol train stations but do not regularly work on Melbourne's tram network.

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