

CRIME AND CRIME PREVENTION ON PUBLIC TRANSPORT – RAIL COMMUTER ACTION TOWARDS ENHANCING THEIR TRAVELLING SECURITY

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1. INTRODUCTION

The prevalence of crime in South Africa has had a negative impact not only on national economic growth, investor confidence and tourism, but also on the safety and security of its citizens and residents. Sad testimony to this, is the fact that the incidence of criminal activity has permeated into all facets of society including public transportation.

The CSIR in collaboration with the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) are currently involved in a twenty four month study (ending in October 2000) looking at crime and crime prevention on-board public transportation in South Africa. This paper presents a discussion of the preliminary results arising from research into crime and crime prevention that has affected public transport users in three South African Cities; namely: Pretoria (Bel Ombre Modal Interchange), Durban (Berea Road Modal Interchange) and Cape Town (Wynberg Modal Interchange).

2. CONTEXT

The South African Government through its White Paper on National Transport Policy (1996) places a high value on the level of service afforded to all public transport users, where the Government envisages a system that should:

'Provide safe, reliable, effective, efficient and a fully integrated transport operations and infrastructure which will best meet the needs of freight and passenger customers at improving levels of service and cost, in a fashion which supports Government strategies for economic and social development whilst being environmentally and economically sustainable.'

The above statement reaffirms the Government's intention that public transport users be afforded safe and secure journeys facilitated by public transport providers. Nevertheless, there are users of the public transport system who have developed the perception that he or she may face the prospect of becoming a victim or a witness of crime, whilst using the system or getting to and from it. A number of these perceptions have in cases become real experiences for some commuters. Therefore, to reduce the possibility of such experiences becoming a reality for public transport users, individual commuters (and in some cases groups) have developed personal and group security enhancement mechanisms (not necessarily self defence actions) to enhance their journeying experience.

3. OBJECTIVE

The objective of this paper is to:

- Present an overview of the types of crime (and methods to effect the act) that have affected public transport commuters,
- Indicate ways in which rail commuters have taken it upon themselves to become involved in crime prevention strategies specifically related to their commuter rail travel and
- Present findings of a survey of Durban rail commuters (conducted in October 1999) and their responses to how they perceived their role in crime prevention.

4. METHODOLOGY:

The methodology used in the study was based on qualitative and quantitative methodologies.

- Qualitative

The majority of information being presented in this paper was gained through focus group (FG) interviews. Small groups of commuters in the three study cities, were interviewed in a group setting, each group being not larger than 20 persons. Participants of each FG were randomly selected, and each was asked before forming part of the group if they were users public transport.

- Quantitative

To supplement and validate the experiences of the FG participants a number of mass surveys were undertaken. Results of one such survey are presented in this report.

5. AN OVERVIEW OF CRIME ON PUBLIC TRANSPORT

In presenting an overview of crime on public transport (indicated in Table 1) and the subsequent discussions it must be noted that:

- The authors are not presenting a national picture of crime on public transport nor a description of a situation that is statistically correct. The FG methodology used to obtain the information as presented in this paper does not permit this. It would be erroneous of the reader to accept that what is being presented in this paper happens on all modes and all the time to all commuters, as some types of criminal activity and subsequent crime prevention actions are unique to a particular mode.
- Statistics (in order to substantiate the FG participants' experiences in respect of actual incidents) were in most cases very sketchy or difficult to obtain. In some cases the transport provider was reluctant to provide such statistics postulating that such information could be used inappropriately by third parties to their (that is the transport provider's) detriment. *It must be stressed that the lack of statistical evidence must not be taken to imply that the criminal acts and crime prevention actions as presented in this paper do not happen to public transport users.*
- The majority of crimes affecting public transport users are acts against the person, e.g. robbery, etc., perpetrated by the criminal/s.

Table 1 - Criminal Acts affecting Public Transport Users (after Page, 1999)

| CRIMINAL ACT | EXAMPLES | NOTES |
|---|--|--|
| Violent crimes | Murder | |
| | Attempted murder | |
| | Robbery with aggravating circumstances | Generally including the use of dangerous weapons; depending on the specific circumstances, this class of crime sometimes includes mugging. |
| Social fabric crimes | Rape | At transport interchanges or inside transport vehicles |
| | Assault with grievous bodily harm | |
| | Gross indecency (sexual) | Exposing one's genitalia in public |
| | Common assault | |
| | Theft of motor vehicles (including the theft of minibus taxis) | Hijacking of vehicles (whilst operating with passengers on-board) |
| | Theft from transport vehicles | Theft of passengers belongings or vehicle items, e.g. light bulbs, doors |
| Violence aimed at property | Arson | The setting on fire of the property of the transport provider |
| | Malicious damage to property | Vandalism, graffiti and stone throwing perpetrated from inside or outside the transport vehicle |
| Crimes dependant on transport provider or police action for detection | Illegal possession of firearms | |
| | Drug related crime | Being in personal possession of more than 150 grams of dagga (i.e. cannabis) |
| | Driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs | Applying to drivers of transport vehicles |
| | Prostitution and child prostitution | Using the transport interchange or vehicle as a base for this type of activity. |
| | Fare evasion | |

A listing of the methods used to perpetrate the above criminal acts (as indicated to the author by the FG participants) is summarised in Table 2:

Table 2 - Methods used in the execution of crime on-board public transportation (after Page, 1999)

| METHOD | EXPLANATION |
|----------------|---|
| Verbal demands | This can be either through shouting at the potential victim to instil potential fear in them or the use of suggestive or abusive language. |
| Gun point | A gun is used to force the potential victim to act. This method is usually against drivers of buses or minibus-taxis. Nevertheless, passengers may be injured or killed due to being caught in the cross fire. |
| Knife point | A knife or other sharp instrument is used to intimidate the victim to give whatever is demanded or in extreme cases to physically harm the victim in the process of robbery. |
| Snatching | This action involves the rapid removal of a victim's belongings, e.g. a purse or bag. Criminals could commit this act from inside the vehicle or through an open window |
| Coercion | Obtaining the victim's obedience to act on a command of the perpetrator by using force. |
| Ambush | Usually effected against bus or minibus-taxi drivers at the point of vehicle turn-around. The door or driver's window of the vehicle has often been used to effect this type of crime. |
| Interception | Interception is a method where the last passenger to disembark from a transport vehicle is stopped from doing so and pushed/forced back into the vehicle where a crime (usually sexual) is committed. Female passengers have been the targets for this type of on-board crime perpetrated by males. |

6. RAIL COMMUTER CRIME PREVENTION ACTION

In light of the above, rail commuters have developed a number of innovative actions/strategies to enhance their personal safety and security on their journeys. A summary of such self-help strategies is presented in Table 3.

7. DISCUSSION

Table 3 presented a range of journey security enhancement actions that rail commuters have engaged in. A short discussion of some of these actions now follows.

The cohesive unit

There is a perception (and in cases the reality is) that there is strength in numbers. Therefore like minded people coming together with the same objectives and experiences can with their resources form something that can either facilitate constructive exchange between them and formal organisations (in this case the transport provider) or offer some form of self-help to members. This is one of the reasons for the formation of the cohesive groups that has been learnt in the study (after Page, 1999).

Table 3 - Rail commuter actions to enhance their personal safety whilst travelling (after Page, 1999)

| TYPE OF ACTION | EFFECTED | PROS | CONS |
|--|--|--|---|
| The formation of a cohesive group, e.g. commuter group | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persons coming together in a formalised group • Persons coming together in a semi-formalised group • Persons coming together in an ad-hoc manner to form an informal group | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship and trust building with fellow commuters • Reduction in the level of perceived on-board crime • Empowerment of informal group members • Sharing on-board crime prevention initiatives and other information with the transport provider • Interested in fellow passengers welfare | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The moral integrity of individual members in the cohesive group may be questionable • Composition of the group may be made up of criminals (unknown to other members in the group) • Duplication of activities/services provided by the formal organisations • Participation by, co-operation with and guidance from South African Police Service (SAPS) may be limited • Legal status of the group may be undetermined, which could create problems when the group metes out 'street' justice. |
| Transferring to another mode | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$ Using the bus, taxi or walking \$ Grouping together and chartering a taxi or sharing private vehicle (ride sharing) \$ Purchasing own vehicle (if affordable) | \$ Journeys can be completed at the level of service expected | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$ Increased financial outlay to the commuter \$ Such an action could result in a longer journey time |
| Wearing of trousers on journey | \$ Wearing of trousers by female scholars | \$ Reduces possibility of becoming a victim of gross sexual indecency | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$ Additional personal baggage capacity may be required \$ Extra financial outlay on clothes necessitated |

Table 3 (cntd) - Rail commuter actions to enhance their personal safety whilst travelling (after Page, 1999)

| TYPE OF ACTION | EFFECTED | PROS | CONS |
|--|--|---|---|
| Taking extra money | \$ Extra money is taken in case the commuter has to use another mode, either forcibly or in an emergency | \$ The commuter is able to complete journey if forcibly transferred to another mode | \$ Criminal becomes persistent because he perceives that the potential victim is likely to have money (especially relevant on pay days). |
| Travelling/upgrading to first class | \$ Travelling in the first class section of the train (with an appropriate ticket) | \$ Less people \$ Amongst people of positive, law abiding attitude | \$ Extra financial outlay \$ Third class passengers (who have not purchased a valid ticket) may disrespect first class environment |
| Staying awake/sober on journey | \$ Being vigilant at all times whilst travelling | \$ Allows time to become aware of fellow passengers | \$ Increased vigilance could be interpreted by criminal as nervousness on the part of the potential victim e.g. the commuter may have something to hide. |
| Not purchasing products from in-carriage hawkers | \$ Only buying snacks etc in the station concourse or outside of transport vehicle | \$ There is no need to bring money into public view through the purchase of an item whilst travelling | \$ May not be able to satisfy immediate need, e.g. thirst, and therefore ones enjoyment of the journey is reduced. |
| Waiting on the footbridge or at some other area away from the platform | \$ Not proceeding to board the train until it has arrived at the platform | \$ Gain a strategic view of platform activity | \$ Rushing for the train when it arrives can increase the potential of personal injury due to tripping or stampeding \$ Storming the ticket inspector/barrier often results in commuters who do not have tickets boarding the vehicle. (Discussions with transport operators have revealed that many criminals on their systems are in fact non fare payers). |

As to the different types of cohesive unit, these units may either be formal, semi-formalised or informal. Examples of these can be seen in:

- Formal

An example of a formalised group is the South African Commuters Association (SACO). This national organisation (based in Johannesburg) acts as the mouthpiece of all commuters using public transport. In this role SACO mediates between the commuters, transport operators and Government as and when required. SACO's role in facilitating 'Group and Ride' initiatives is limited. Membership of SACO is open to all commuters.

- Semi-formalised

This can be seen in the 'gospel' carriages, where commuters congregate to hear a sermon whilst they travel.

It has also been determined that commuter rail operators do establish links with community groups and commuters to obtain their perceptions and experience of level of service and market research information.

- Informal groupings

An example of this type of group is seen in Durban, with the Traders Against Crime (TAC) informal crime prevention group. This group (based at the Berea Road/Warwick Junction Modal Interchange) is formed of hawkers and other interested persons (many of whom use commuter rail or other modes of public transport) who came together as a response to the challenges posed by the criminal element in the central business area of Durban. (Further information on the TAC can be gained from Chapter 8 of the Crime and Crime Prevention Second Draft, June 1999).

The fluid nature of rail commuter travel has in some cases reduced the propensity of passengers to form cohesive groups. Using the term 'fluid' the author is indicating that in respect of rail travel different people may travel in different carriages for each and every journey, therefore the element of bonding between commuters is reduced. This can be compared to long distance commuter buses where commuters using these buses often travel at the same time, use the same bus and sit in the same seat. Over time they are able to identify with other commuters not just on facial features alone. It can therefore be seen that the majority of the measures indicated in Table 3 are actions that are done on an individual basis rather than in a group.

8. INDIVIDUAL ACTION STRATEGIES

As already indicated the majority of rail commuter actions to enhance their travelling journeys are individual based. Mention of two of them will be made here:

Not purchasing products from hawkers (outside or inside the vehicle)

Information gained from the FG participants indicated that criminals often identified potential victims by watching them as they purchased items from in-vehicle hawkers or used some other strategy to achieve the same result, e.g. starting a conversation with fellow passenger about items purchased in town. It therefore places the onus on the commuter to make some purchases away from the Modal Interchange (especially ones involving a substantial amount of money) if at all

possible, as this may reduce the possibility of purchasing items at the Modal Interchange in full view of the criminal.

The wearing of trousers by schoolgirls

In an extreme and usual example of commuter initiative in crime prevention it was related to the authors (by female commuters in Cape Town) that there had been incidents where the skirts worn by commuting schoolgirls had become soiled as a result of gross sexually indecent acts by male commuters. Such incidents would occur when the carriage was full and commuters were tightly pressed together. The situation gave the opportunity for the criminals to commit such an act, unknowing to the unfortunate commuter. To reduce the potential embarrassment and allow the scholar to continue to participate in school/college, trousers would be worn on the commuter rail journey allowing the scholar to change into the appropriate school attire on arrival.

When considering what has been discussed in sections 7 and 8, which agency (either formal or informal) do rail commuters consider as being responsible for their travel security? This question will be discussed in the next section.

9. COMMUTER VIEWS ON CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEIR TRAVELLING SECURITY

In October 1999 the authors undertook a survey of commuters at the Berea Road/Warwick Junction Modal Interchange. A total of 1908 commuters were surveyed, over a 5 day period (6am to 18hrs each day); of these 1908 commuters: 58% were males and 42% females. Furthermore, 29% were commuters who had used a minibus-taxi on the day they were surveyed, with 33% respectively for commuter rail, 28% bus, 4% car, 4% walked and 2% did not indicate the type of transport mode used.

Of the 643 rail commuters that were interviewed a question was asked as to, 'which organisation/agency do you think should be responsible for your safety and security whilst using public transport?' The answers are presented in Figure 1.

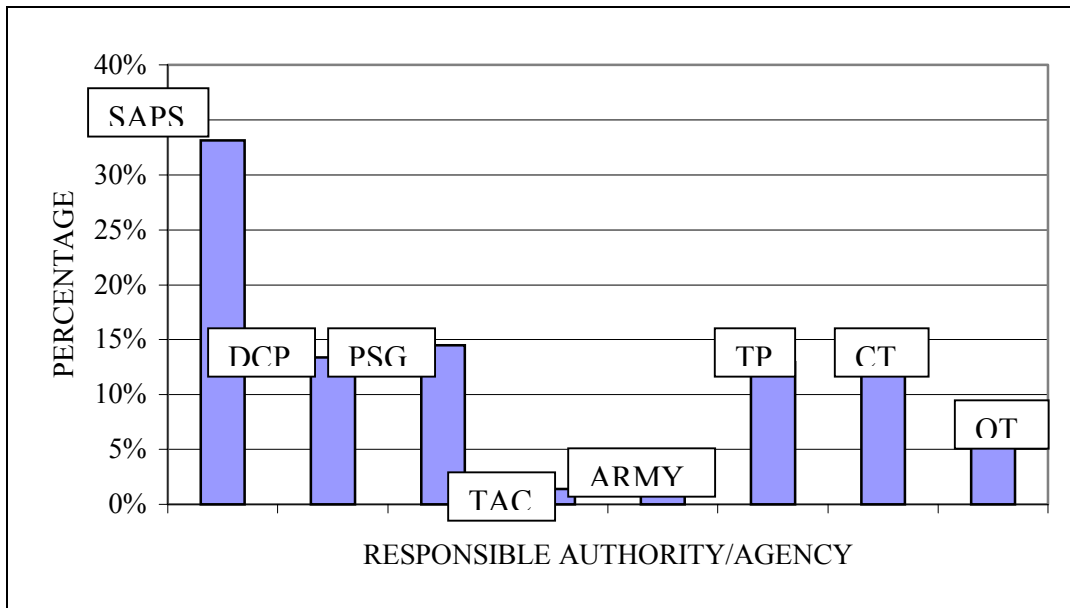
Points of discussion from Figure 1

§ Approximately 1 in 3 of the Durban rail commuters asked felt that the SAPS should be the primary agent responsible for their travelling security. This response is indicative of the respondents belief that the SAPS are the first and foremost agent of crime prevention.

In second place, Durban rail commuters indicated that Private Security Guards (PSG) should play a role here. It is interesting to note that PSG were ahead of the Durban City Police (DCP) by a few percentage points. Discussions with the DCP have indicated that their jurisdiction does not extend to policing the Modal Interchange. Furthermore, discussions with the commuter rail provider at the Berea Road Station have confirmed that PSG are in operation at all times and are therefore more visible than officers of the DCP.

§ The low percentage of respondents who indicated the TAC informal group as being the primary agency responsible their travelling security, could be due to the lack of awareness by the majority of respondents of the existence of the TAC at the Berea Road/Warwick Junction Modal Interchange. It could also be taken to imply that the average commuter still regards the formal security providers (SAPS and the DCP) as being the only agencies which can effectively ensure and enhance crime prevention (within the law).

Figure 1 Durban rail commuter views on which agency is responsible for the travel security



Key for Figure 1: SAPS=South African Police Service, DCP=Durban City Police, PSG=Private Security Guards, TAC=Traders Against Crime, Army=Army/Defence Force, TP=Transport provider, CT=Commuters themselves and OT=Other/not disclosed.

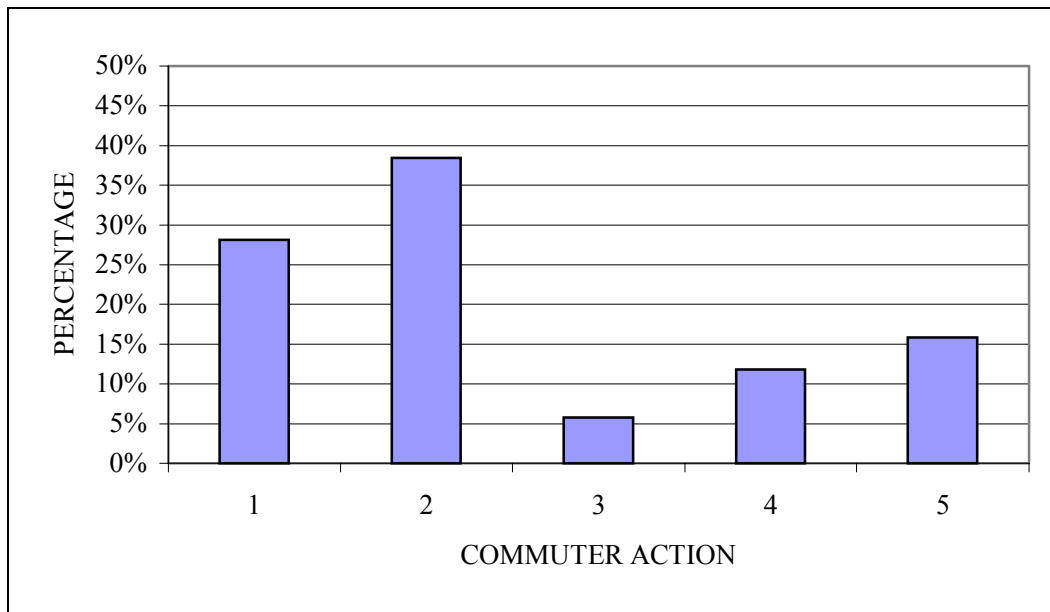
\$ There was an equal split between the commuters themselves and the transport provider (13%) as being the main agencies responsible for rail commuter security. A possible factor influencing the ranking of the transport provider could be its perceived inaccessibility and slow response to the commuter needs.

A second question was posed to the commuters, as to, ‘what role did they see for themselves in crime prevention on public transport?’ Their answers are summarised in Figure 2.

Points of discussion from Figure 2:

- \$ 1 in 3 of the rail commuters responded by indicating that they would cooperate with the SAPS/DCP. Again, this confirms the perception of the rail commuters believed that the SAPS are the primary agents of crime prevention.
- \$ In second place, the reporting of crime to an official authority/officer was indicated by the respondents. The easy identification of officers of the commuter rail provider and the setting up of reporting booths will enable this to be effected. It has been indicated to the authors that information on toll free numbers for commuter rail customers requiring assistance or reporting a criminal incident are available on commuter trains and at stations.
- \$ The low response with respect to the rail commuters role in cooperating with PSG, could be indicative of the commuters’ perception as to the effectiveness of these agents. It is likely that reporting directly to the SAPS/DCP or transport provider would be more effective, than reporting to a PSG who then has to report it to the transport provider etc.
- \$ Arresting/beating the alleged criminal as a first choice, surpassed that of reporting to the PSG. This confirms that if official security agents (SAPS or DCP) are not on hand when a criminal act takes place, there is an increased probability that commuters will take the law into their own hands, at times with serious (if not fatal) results.

Figure 2 The potential role of Durban rail commuters in crime prevention



Key for Figure 2: 1=Report crime to an official authority/officer, 2=Cooperate with SAPS/Durban City Police, 3=Cooperate with Private Security Guards, 4=Arrest/beat/kill the alleged criminal and 5=Other/undisclosed.

10. CONCLUSION

The prevalence of crime in South Africa has permeated into all facets of society including public transportation. In order to ensure that commuter journeys are as secure as can be expected, commuters have developed a number of innovative actions/strategies to enable this desire to be realised. These strategies have either been group (formal or informal) or individual based, with the majority being of the latter type.

It is evident that the rail commuters surveyed in Durban still recognise the SAPS/DCP (formal security agents) as the primary agencies responsible for their travelling security. Furthermore, to consolidate this view, the commuters indicated that they (as a first choice) would cooperate with these formal security agents in combating crime on public transportation. These sentiments do indicate that there is a vital role for the SAPS and DCP to play in the provision of security on public transportation in Durban over and above that of the PSG or the commuters themselves.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made in light of the findings described in this paper:

- The many innovative security enhancement actions developed by public transport commuters need to be codified (i.e. organise these commuter actions into a system) and disseminated to all commuters. Empowerment of the commuter through education is one route to improving the level of service afforded to public transport commuters.
- There is a need to encourage commuters (through education or the media) to be aware of their personal safety and security whilst travelling to increase the probability that their public transport journeys are free from any criminal incidents. This can be effected either by the transport provider, security agents or commuters themselves.

- The formal security providers (e.g. SAPS/DCP) need to continuously monitor their role in crime prevention on public transportation, in light of the fact that the Durban rail commuters surveyed still see these agencies as the primary agencies responsible for their travelling security.
- Consideration needs to be given by commuter rail providers to engage in continuous assessment of the reporting of all criminal incidents to the various agencies involved in crime prevention/security. This may well enable a redeployment and revision of expenditure incurred in the provision of PSG, and/or information booths etc.

12. REFERENCES

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