

Public Safety on Victoria's Train System

Tabled 24 February 2016

The Auditor-General provides assurance to Parliament on the accountability and performance of the Victorian Public Sector. The Auditor-General conducts financial audits and performance audits, and reports on the results of these audits to Parliament.

On 24 February 2016, the Acting Auditor-General tabled his performance audit report, Public Safety on Victoria's Train System.

Overview

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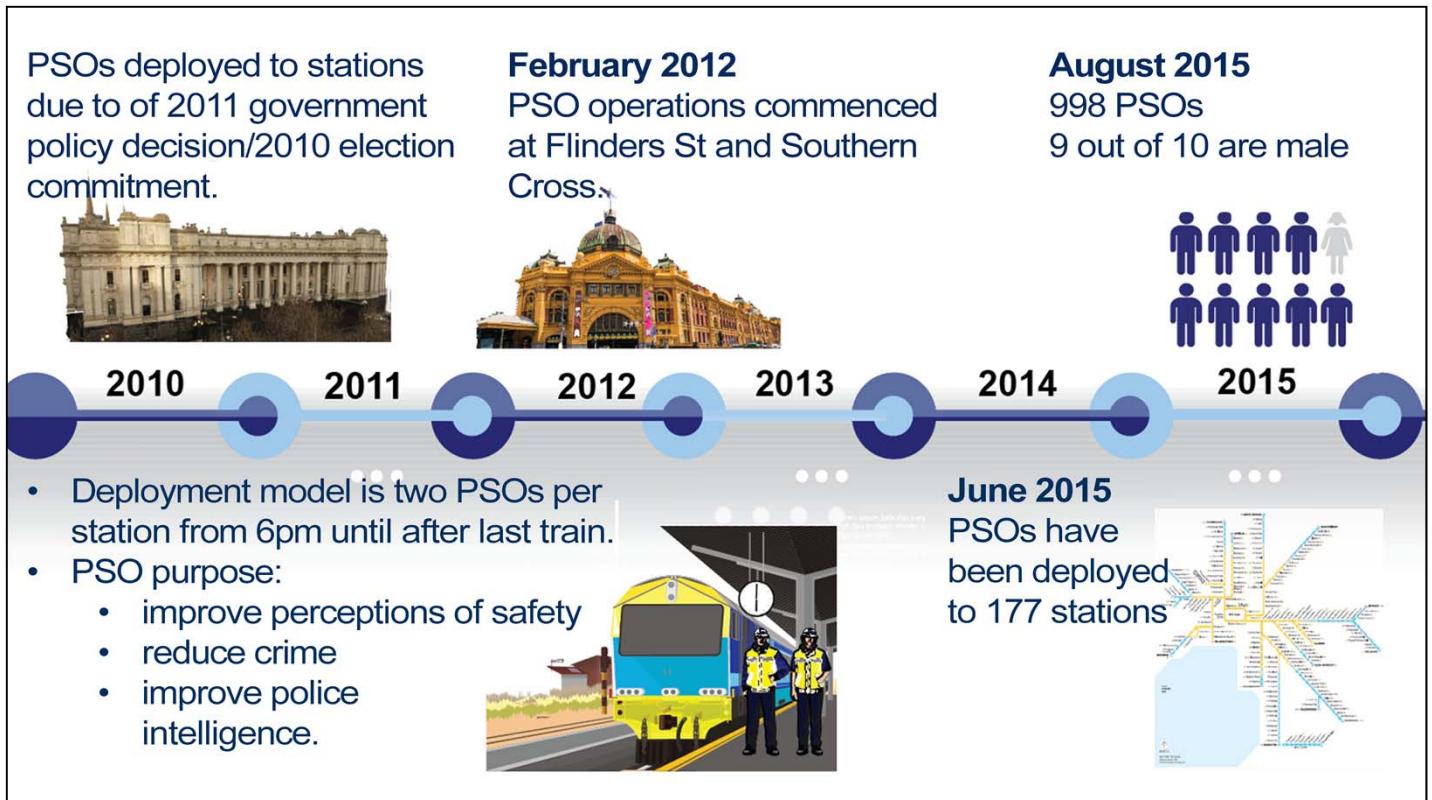
- Perceptions of the safety of the metropolitan train system at night have improved since the start of the protective services officers (PSO) program
- It is not possible to assess if PSOs have had any impact on crime
- If performance monitoring improves, government could be given options to use PSOs more effectively and efficiently
- Strategic, inter-agency coordination on commuter safety and security is insufficient

This audit focused on the effectiveness of the protective services officers, or PSO, program.

We found that whilst there is evidence that people feel train travel at night is safer since PSOs began patrolling stations, there is insufficient data to assess whether PSOs have had any impact on crime.

Victoria Police currently lacks effective performance monitoring for the PSO program. Until this improves, it will not have the evidence necessary to provide government with quality advice on the performance or potential improvements to the PSO program.

We also found that strategic-level coordination between government agencies on commuter personal safety and security is lacking.



The PSO program was approved by government in 2011, with the first PSO patrols at Flinders Street and Southern Cross stations starting in February 2012.

It was intended that PSOs would deter crime, violence and anti-social behaviour on the train system, whilst improving perceptions of the safety of train travel at night. Additionally, PSOs were intended to enhance opportunities for local crime prevention and intelligence gathering, to assist broader policing initiatives.

As of June 2015, PSOs had been deployed to 177 stations. Full deployment—that is, two PSOs at every metropolitan and selected regional train stations—will occur in June 2016.

Focus of this audit

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Objective

To determine the effectiveness of PSOs deployed across Victoria's train system

Key areas examined

- The effect PSOs had on crime and public perceptions of safety
- If appropriate advice supported government decision-making
- If personal safety and security governance arrangements support PSOs

This audit examined the effectiveness of PSOs on the train system. Our key areas of focus were:

- the effect PSOs had on crime and public perceptions of safety;
- whether appropriate advice was available to support government decision-making; and
- whether the governance arrangements for personal safety and security on the train system supported the work of PSOs.

Focus of this audit – *continued*

Agencies

- Victoria Police
- Department of Justice & Regulation (DJR)
- Public Transport Victoria (PTV)



Photograph courtesy of PTV.

The audit focused on Victoria Police, the Department of Justice and Regulation, or DJR and Public Transport Victoria, or PTV.

Impact of PSOs

- Perceptions of the safety of the train system at night have improved.
- No current strategies to increase public awareness of PSOs.



*Photo courtesy of
Victoria Police.*

A strategy to improve public awareness of personal safety and security initiatives is needed.

We found that multiple surveys point to an increase in commuter and community perceptions of the safety of the metropolitan train system at night since the start of the PSO program. But we cannot assess whether the increases in perceptions of safety can be considered adequate, as government did not set any targets for improvement.

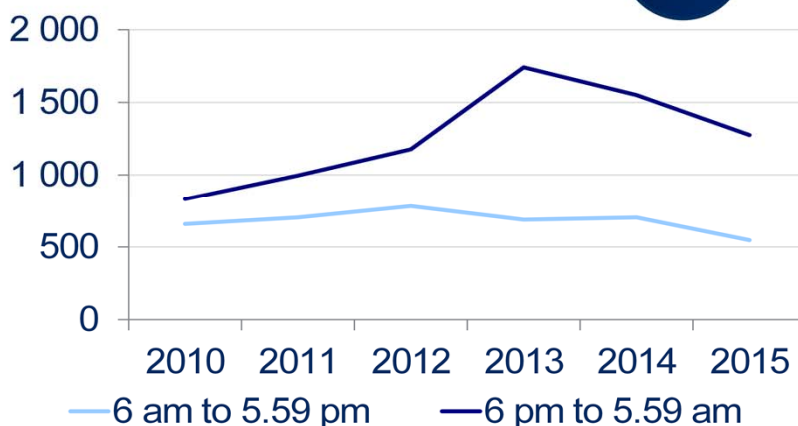
A key priority for PTV is to improve perceptions of safety on the network, as this is one of the most effective ways to increase patronage. However, it is not taking advantage of the presence of PSOs.

There is currently no strategy to raise public awareness of the PSOs and their role in improving commuter safety at night. We found that community knowledge of PSOs' presence at train stations has come mostly through direct interactions.

Impact of PSOs

- Recorded crime at rail stations has increased since PSO deployment
- Data limitations prevent full assessment
- Increase in recorded crime may be due to increased detection and reporting of crime

Number of crime incidents



After full deployment, the PSO program should be evaluated to see if it has achieved its objectives.

Data limitations have prevented assessment of the impact of PSO on crime across the metropolitan train network. However, our analysis of the first 11 stations to have PSOs deployed showed a sharp increase in recorded offences coinciding with the first year of PSO operations. This was followed by a gradual reduction over the following 12 to 18 months. This is illustrated by the displayed graph.

But increasing police numbers typically leads to an increase in reported crime, as more personnel are available to detect more crime, and increased accessibility of officers enables people to easily report crime.

Despite reducing crime and antisocial behaviour on the train network being a policy objective of the PSO program, Victoria Police and DJR have not conducted any formal evaluation of whether this has been achieved.

Maximising efficiency and effectiveness

- Quality advice has so far been provided to government
- Victoria Police does not have an effective performance monitoring regime in place for the PSO program
 - This will impact the ability of Victoria Police to provide government with evidence-based advice on the best use of PSOs in the future

A PSO performance monitoring regime is required to ensure the quality of future advice.

All agencies have so far provided government with quality and comprehensive advice on the PSO program. This has included providing government with options to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the PSO program, and to reduce its costs. Whilst government chose not to follow this advice, the options were nevertheless comprehensive and soundly based.

Performance monitoring for the PSO program has been limited to providing government with feedback on its specific areas of interest. This narrow focus means Victoria Police does not have an effective performance monitoring regime that is capable of supporting ongoing development or future advice on the PSO program.

Until Victoria Police improves its approach to monitoring the performance of the PSO program, it will not have the evidence necessary to inform future government decisions.

Maximising efficiency and effectiveness

- Cross-agency coordination on commuter safety and security is effective at operational and agency levels
 - Formalising governance arrangements will ensure this continues
- Coordination currently insufficient at the strategic level
 - No overarching strategy to guide decision-making
 - No executive-level committee to drive system improvements

Governance framework needed to improve cross-agency coordination on personal safety and security.

Operational and agency-level information sharing and coordination is effective. However, there is currently a lack of formal governance arrangements.

Strategic-level coordination between agencies regarding personal safety and security on trains is lacking. There is no overarching strategy to guide agency decision-making, nor is there an executive level committee to promote strategic, cross-agency initiatives.

Recommendations

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		Accept
1.	That DJR and Victoria Police evaluate the PSO program once full deployment has occurred, with a focus on demonstrating achievement of objectives.	✓
2.	That PTV and Victoria Police develop and implement a strategy to address the lack of public awareness of personal safety and security initiatives on night-time trains, and monitor its impact.	✓

We have made four recommendations to ensure that agencies are well placed to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the PSO program going forward.

Victoria Police, DJR and PTV have accepted all recommendations.

Recommendations – *continued*

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		Accept
3.	That Victoria Police establishes a performance monitoring framework for the PSO program, which captures accurate and relevant data to inform future decisions to improve effectiveness and efficiency.	✓
4.	That Victoria Police, DJR and PTV formalise a governance framework for strategic cross-agency coordination on personal safety and security on the metropolitan transport system.	✓

By adopting these recommendations, Victoria Police, DJR and PTV will be well placed to provide government with quality and comprehensive advice on the future use of the PSO program.

Key messages

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A strategy to improve public awareness of personal safety and security initiatives is needed.

After full deployment, the PSO program should be evaluated to see if it has achieved its objectives.

A PSO performance monitoring regime is required to ensure the quality of future advice.

Governance framework needed to improve cross-agency coordination on personal safety and security.

In summary, the key messages from the audit are that:

- A strategy to improve public awareness of personal safety and security initiatives is needed.
- After full deployment, the PSO program should be evaluated to see if it has achieved its objectives.
- A PSO performance monitoring regime is required to ensure the quality of future advice
- And a governance framework is needed to improve cross-agency coordination on personal safety and security.

Overall message

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People feel safer, but it is not possible to assess if PSOs have reduced crime.

Our overall message is that whilst perceptions of the safety of Melbourne's train at night have improved since the start of the PSO program, there is insufficient data to assess whether they have actually reduced crime.

Contact details

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For further information on this presentation please contact:

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