Public transport

The Free to Be map for Melbourne was devised by the children’s charity Plan International Australia. The ‘happy’ or ‘sad’ designations for spaces were formulated in consultation with young women who were then asked to identify where in the city they felt safe and welcome (happy) or unsafe and unwelcome (sad) via a web-based interactive map. The final map was crowdsourced over a three-month period and gathered these perceptions of safety in Melbourne. While primarily targeted at young women, the map was open to all, and comments on some pins suggest that many older women and some men also added their perceptions. Plan International intends to feed this information back to councils, public transport operators, and the police.

Analysis
The Free to Be map recorded over 1300 pins. A further more than 600 posts supported the pinnings. Some of the pins were annotated giving details of the reasons for the pinning, and some of the support posts also involved comments.

Around 14% of all the annotations were connected in some way to public transport. Very few pins referred to buses, but over 60% referred to rail transport, and more than a third recorded issues with trams.

Comments grouped into three major areas: railway stations (particularly travel to and from a station), incidents and fears when waiting for public transport, and the recording of incidents on public transport.

Railway Stations
Over half of all the comments referred to train stations themselves, or the perceived safety of the area around the station for accessing and exiting it. Comments advised the safest stations at night, and the ones to avoid. Some stations were described as well-lit and the presence of PSO’s and/or
transport staff made a significant difference to perceptions of safety. Over one-quarter of the comments noted positive responses to particular stations, these were typically because of obvious security:

I wouldn’t say Flinders Street Station is the safest place in the city by any means, but I think the all night trains on the weekend and the prevalence of the PSO's has made a massive difference. I used to really dislike catching the nightrider bus from the scummy end of Swanston Street, I'd be constantly looking over my shoulder. At least inside the station I feel more secure, even in the early hours. The CCTV cameras help as well. (Female 26)

Other stations were described as dark and isolated, and consequently perceived as dangerous:

The train station is deserted and dark. The trains are very infrequent. If something happened and you screamed for help, no one would hear you. (Macaulay Station; Female 32)

The following chart lists specific stations that were commented upon a number of times:

**Safe Stations**

- **Melbourne Central**  
  “Better to get on or off the train here than at Flagstaff or Parliament because there are more people around and better lighting.” (Comment)

- **Glen Waverley**  
  Well-lit and generally busy

- **Hawksburn**  
  “Surprisingly safe train station, always staffed and has PSOs after dark.” (Female 30)

- **Southern Cross**  
  “It is well lit and the wide open space makes it feel safe.” (Female 36)

- **South Kensington**  
  “The station is basic but I always feel safe there.” (Female 22)

- **Eaglemont**  
  “I have never felt unsafe here, even catching the train home after midnight.” (Female 23)

- **West Footscray**  
  “With the relatively new station (and therefore new lighting etc) and also the community/police officers at the station, I feel quite safe here.” (Female 35)

**Unsafe Stations**

- **Flinders St**  
  Received the most pins/comments as might be expected for the busiest rail station in Australia. The majority of pins were unfavourable, although there were some exceptions such as that cited above.

- **Richmond**  
  One pin advised: “Avoid this station at night if you can.”

- **Brunswick**  
  “Creepy men” day and night. Dark and “unnerving” at night

- **Box Hill**  
  “Has always made me feel like I need to be extra cautious.” (Female 18)

- **Footscray**  
  Scary at night. The presence of PSOs did not seem to make a difference as they were observed as restricting their activities to the entrance stairs leaving the platforms unattended

- **Jewell**  
  Dark and isolated

- **Jacana**  
  “Me and my friends had a joke rating for each station, Jacana was 5/5 skulls. To be fair it has improved since they bought in the armed transit officers but it’s still very rough.” (Comment by man)

More commonly, however, it was the getting to and from a station that was observed as the most unsafe aspect of train stations. Even if the station itself was considered safe, when access was compromised a station attracted unsafe comments. The perception around the safety of movement
to and from stations affected behaviour such as stations women would not use after a certain time. Some access ways, underpasses, ramps and carparks were noted as especially intimidating:

**Safe station but unsafe access include:**

- **Victoria Park** Station good, but ramp access problematic. “Those ramps are terrifying, I would rather walk over the road (five lanes?) much safer.” (One of five comments regarding the ramps at this station)

- **Clifton Hill** “Although I appreciate the presence of PSO’s on the platform, the underpass makes me feel unsafe.” (Female 22, plus several support comments)

- **Darebin** “The station itself is fine, but if you have to head south by foot from it there is pretty much no non-terrifying option. The fear I felt coming home in winter is a big reason I moved house and left this area.” (Female 25)

- **Ivanhoe** I catch the train here a lot and always feel pretty safe (especially during the day) but at night I wish the PSO’s monitored the carpark more (not just the train platforms). It’s pretty big and dimly lit and I always feel vulnerable as soon as I leave the main area if it’s late at night. (Female 26)

**Stations with problematic access include:**

- **Coburg** The most pins of any stations for access problems. The underpass was declared poorly lit and to be avoided. The paths around the station were similarly problematic.

- **Collingwood** “The entrance to the station is really quiet, lots of dark areas, trees, people hanging out under the walk ways, etc. I usually take an uber home now instead of the train.” (Female 20)

In addition, eight women reported incidents of being followed from stations. If women had no choice but to be in a situation they judged risky, they modify their behaviour:

“Always a 'keys between the fingers', 000 on speed dial type of walk.” (Coburg Station; Female 32)

“All the women you see alone around here walk quickly and with their heads down. (Jacana Station; Comment)

“I feel so nervous walking home at night from the station that I literally speed walk.” (Northcote Station; Female 43)

The perception of safety around a station was clearly affected by the physical nature of the surroundings, particularly at night with dark and isolated stations and access inducing the greatest fears. However, these were not the only determinants. The regular presence of drunk or drug-affected people (mainly men) in the vicinity of or in the station was cited by at least a quarter of the respondents as the source of their perceptions of a lack of safety. This included some comments from the few men who placed comments on the site:

**Stations considered unsafe due to the presence of people:**

- **Flinders St** “Many people are affected by drugs and alcohol and I do not feel safe leaving work late.” (Female 39)
• Flagstaff  “There are so many homeless people surrounding the station on a daily basis, some are abusive.” (Female 39)
• Flemington Bridge  “I never use this train station at night. Often there are young men loitering.” (Female 36)
• Anstey  “Drunks from the pub and people hanging around the station at night hassle you as you walk past. Women waiting for buses frequently shouted at by passing car.” (Male 45)
• Richmond  “I think in general there needs to be more police protection at Richmond Station at night as men get chased by drunkards as well. They’re indiscriminate when it comes to gender.” (Comment by male)

Waiting for public transport

There were some overlaps between comments about stations and incidents that occurred while waiting for a train. However, the main waiting issues reported were for trams which tallied two-thirds of such comments. There was only one comment about a safe tram stop and that was for Swanston Street beside the State Library/Melbourne Central.

While tram stops, like railway stations, were reported as being more dangerous at night, there were a significant number of incidents reported as occurring in “broad daylight”:

Got groped in broad daylight at the tram. (Caulfield; Female 24)

A number of incidents involved drug-affected or drunk people congregating around particular tram stops, sometimes directly intimidating people and sometimes acting in a disturbing manner. This was reported as happening at any time of the day.

Get hassled waiting for a tram, feel like a sitting duck. (corner of La Trobe and Elizabeth Streets; Female 34)

A couple of people were concerned about the school children who used particular tram stops being exposed to this behaviour:

Lots of drug affected people surround this area, especially the tram stops. I have witnessed many of these people act aggressively and irrationally. There are lots of school children who use these tram stops and it is not safe. (Lennox Street and Bridge Road, Richmond; Female 17. Female 27 noted the same point)

Victoria Street east of North Richmond Station gathered a high number of pins and comments regarding incidents and the lack of safety in the area for those waiting for the #12 and #109 trams.

Don’t feel comfortable getting off or on the tram here. There always seems to be someone asking for change, a cigarette or basically just out of it and screaming at the world. (Lennox and Victoria; Female 55)

One commentator, however, argued that by the Victoria Gardens stop it was much safer and the incidents that marred other stops on the routes did not extend that far east.

The Sydney and Albion Streets corner in Brunswick was also highlighted by a number of pins as a place of high harassment on the #19 route.

As with trains, the women adjusted their behaviour to accommodate the perceived danger, avoiding particular stops and in particular some transport interchanges:
Melrose St Tram stop is desolate and unpleasant especially at night time. I choose to change between the 57 and 59 tram at the Children’s Hospital instead, which sometimes means I miss a connection I could have otherwise made, just so I feel safer waiting. (Female 36)

The 55 tram stop here is honestly terrifying at night. Pitch black, in the middle of a huge park. If I ever had to transfer from the train to the tram I would find any other way to do it than stop here, because the stress alone would ruin my night. (Royal Park; Female 22)

So at the train station you can see what time is your tram but not your train. Sometimes I wait for my train when actually none runs because there is an issue on the line. (Batman Station; Female 35)

Observations and incidents were not always against women. One pin reported an incident of man being mugged at a bus stop. Bus stops that were highlighted included Footscray Plaza, the Warrandyte Webb St bus interchange, and the Altona Station stop.

On transport
There were around forty pins that recorded incidents on public transport. Trams were the most problematic with particular mention made of specific tram lines. The #57 was the most notable for negative comments:

#57 trams are the most vile and unsafe for women of any I've seen. The three months I spent living in North Melbourne were scary. (Comment)

I tell everyone in Melbourne to not catch the 57 tram. The things I’ve had said to me, heard and seen in this area makes me so relieved I do not live there anymore. I moved out of the area due to this issue. (Female 25)

Totally agree, the 57 feels unsafe most of the day but especially at night when it is always over crowded. I have been groped, yelled at, sworn at & followed off the tram. Called Yarra Trams and they didn't care. (Comment on #57 tram posting)

Anytime I jump on the tram 57 (the line I live on/frequent) I fear for what is going to happen. Sadly there seems to always be a drug affected or drunk person(s) on it who always cause a stir. I'm scared to board the tram now. And there isn't ever inspectors on there either :/ (Female 33)

The #86 tram also attracted negative comments and stories, but these were confined to the Collingwood area.

This location is just a general point to refer to the 86 tram line around the Collingwood area where you get all kinds of characters on board the tram who are drunk, rowdy and unpredictable. (Female 31)

I am approached nearly weekly by men on the 86 tram trying to pick me up, including one time I was groped and verbally harassed. I just want to travel in peace. (Female 21)

There is often intimidating people getting on trams all down Smith St. When I was 13 a group of men said sexually inappropriate things to me on the 86 tram in Smith St. (Female 21)
Once again women changed their behaviour to avoid possible dangerous interactions and situations getting off trams earlier or later than intended to avoid problems. One thought that “the new E class trams help because there’s more space between passengers and you have more room to run away from them/aren't forced into their personal space.” (#86 tram; Female 21)

While many of the women were wary of the drunk and drug-affected particularly at night, assaults were also reported in daylight and from outwardly respectable men. These were mainly recorded as happening at train stations:

- I had a businessman get off at Flinders St Station after trying to reach his hand under my dress on a crowded train in the morning. (Female 21)

- I was on the train and a middle-aged man sexually harassed me by groping me as he left. I was too shocked to respond and I felt disgusted and scared. (Lilydale/Belgrave line; Female 18)

One young woman recorded a man following her and a friend through several carriages on a train, off the train and through the station until they finally were able to find a place of safety.

**Suggestions**

While not specifically intended as a vehicle for collecting data about public transport, the Free to Be map inevitably did so. It also garnered some suggestions from contributors as to what might help. There were a number of requests to extend the remit of PSOs moving beyond the stations to cover the areas around them, especially access corridors such as ramps and underpasses, as well as carparks.

- They need police at various stops and guards coming through on a regular basis during the evenings until the disgusting men learn their behaviour will not be tolerated. (Comment on #57 tram posting)

Another suggestion involved helplines and education:

- I think some ideas to improve feeling safe on public transport are helplines to report sexual harassment. And having advertisements on trains to say that sexually harassing behaviour is unacceptable. (Female 25, supported by others)

Finally, one young woman suggested some kind of distress app, an idea that was enthusiastically endorsed by others:

- A distress app would be awesome. You could register your location or where you are travelling to so that someone could meet you there. This would provide comfort and protection. (Female 20, supported by eight others)