

Transit moves forward with safety recommendations

BY KIM GUTTORMSON, CALGARY HERALD MARCH 19, 2009

Calgary Transit is already moving forward on 80 per cent of the recommendations contained in a review of the system's safety, its boss told a civic committee Thursday.

Fred Wong pointed to more transit security officers, more and better cameras, improved lighting at LRT stations and questions about safety being included on annual customer surveys as work already underway as signs the agency is taking safety seriously.

"The thing that's most striking to me is we've come a long way from transit saying everything's fine," Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart, one of two aldermen to request the transit safety audit, said after the meeting. "Whether people perceive crime or it's actual crime, to me they're one and the same."

Calgary Transit was put on the defensive last year following the slaying of Arcelie Laoagan near a C-Train station, an incident which focused attention on how safe the trains and buses were and highlighted the poor quality of some of the cameras being used on platforms.

Crime statistics were only made available after a freedom of information request was made, raising the ire of some elected officials.

Thursday, Colley-Urquhart said transit has made great strides to being more open about the issues and how they're being dealt with.

"You own the system again," she said.

Last month, crime stats compiled by both the police service and transit were released and this week a more detailed breakdown of what happened at each station was posted to its website.

Brian Whitelaw, a police inspector seconded to head up transit public safety and enforcement for two years, said they are working to identify the roles police and peace officers should play.

"Most crimes are annoying, nuisance type complaints," Whitelaw said. "Ninety per cent of the calls are drunks, intoxicated folks, people we need to check on their health and safety."

Transit officers responded to 7,780 calls last year, while police dealt with 1,653 incidents at transit sites. About half the police calls related to stolen, damaged or stolen-from vehicles.

Calgary Police did not attend Thursday's meeting. Spokesman Kevin Brookwell said there wasn't a formal invitation, but that it supports most of the recommendations made in the report.

The police service is collaborating with transit on how their officers can work together, he added.

Transit will come before the land use, planning and transportation committee within a few months with a report looking at the priority of the safety audit recommendations and any additional funding that may be required to meet them.

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