

Media Release: Rail and Maritime Transport Union

Monday 15 December 2014

Britomart violence raises questions over rail staff safety

The Rail and Maritime Transport Union is raising serious questions over the safety of the staff on Auckland's train network after violent incidents on Saturday night stopped services at Britomart Station and frightened staff and passengers at other stations.

The violence followed the annual Christmas in the Park event. At around 10pm dozens of brawling youths brought Auckland's Britomart station to a standstill, throwing rocks and other objects at each other and clambering across turnstiles as security guards and Maori wardens struggled to get control of the situation. Even police were shocked at the intensity of the situation, and passengers were left stunned.

Once trains were moving again another fight broke out at Glen Innes Station, when youths held train doors open and threw rocks at the train, breaking nine windows. The Train Manager ordered that the train be evacuated, moving passengers to a safe point.

Another train manager was assaulted from a fight that broke out inside a train on the Western line.

The Rail and Maritime Transport Union is appalled that staff on the rail network and members of the public were left exposed to such violence, according to General Secretary Wayne Butson.

There is no excuse for this kind of a situation, and the offenders must be held to account.

However the larger concern is with Auckland Transport, whose biggest fear was getting trains moving rather than the safety of staff and passengers. This is not the first time we have brought up the issue of safety on the rail network, but this is the worst incident yet.

Under no circumstances should rail staff or passengers have to face such security risks in their workplace, and it raises serious questions about the preparedness of security and police to deal with these risks after major events.

Members have also expressed concerns that those involved in the Britomart violence were then put on to different trains to separate them. Putting potentially violent individuals and groups onto the trains puts both staff and passengers at risk and is an extremely inappropriate course of action.

Wayne Butson added that the actions of the Glen Innes Train Manager ought to garner high praise and respect.

Train Managers normally go unnoticed, but his clear instructions to passengers and willingness to put passengers' safety ahead of his own should be well noted.

Ends.

For further comment:

Wayne Butson, General Secretary, Rail & Maritime Transport Union, on 027 496 2461

Stuart Johnstone, Auckland Regional Organiser, Rail & Maritime Transport Union, on 027 246 4961