

## Young People in Northbridge Policy

### DIVERSION PROPOSAL

#### **Background:**

The Office of Crime Prevention published the Young People in Northbridge Policy in June 2003, and it is this document that is commonly referred to as the “Northbridge Curfew” policy by the media.

The aim of the policy was to detail the government’s concerns in regards to young people frequenting the Northbridge precinct, which is largely an adult entertainment area, late at night and unsupervised. The policy attempts to provide parameters that would determine when a young person is deemed to be ‘at risk’, and the appropriate action to be taken when these circumstances are present.

The policy encourages authorised officers (DCD, Police) to take appropriate action to ensure that ‘at risk’ young people are kept safe and returned to appropriate care givers. There are three main interventions detailed in the policy, and these are:

*Diversion* – encouraging young people considered to be a ‘low risk’ to leave the area

*Removal* – young people are assisted from the streets when deemed to be at ‘medium to high risk’, assessed and transported to a safe place.

*Apprehension* – young people who are engaged in offending behaviour will be liable to police action in accordance with current laws.

It should be noted that the policy is not legislation, and therefore has no legal basis, but is a document that forms part of the decision making process when determining whether young people are ‘at risk’, and in need of assistance.

The agencies involved in the ‘policing’ of the Northbridge area continue to operate under Section 138B of the Child Welfare Act, and has done so for a number of years. The introduction of the policy has not altered the manner in which these agencies operate, and in effect there is no ‘curfew’ in operation.

#### **Diversion Proposal:**

The aim of this proposal is to address the diversionary aspect of the policy document, as there are sufficient resources and processes allocated to the management of the removal of young people in need of assistance, or who are offending, but there appears to be insufficient incentives available to encourage young people to leave the area of their own free will.

The aim of the interventions with young people in Northbridge is to promote appropriate use of the area, and to encourage appropriate behaviours while present. In some cases appropriate use of the area may mean that an adult should be present with the young person, or that the young person should be leaving the area at a time that is appropriate for their age.

At present young people frequenting the area are engaging with a number of agencies, including YMCA, Step 1, Drug-Arm, DCD, Police, Mission Australia on a regular basis, and it appears that these resources have been able to influence and address some of the negative behaviours that were present 12 months ago when the policy was introduced. However, Youth Workers have very little to offer as incentives for young people to leave the area at an

appropriate time, and what occurs is young people remaining in Northbridge until the last train service on the night (2.00am) or, sometimes later.

While it is acknowledged that there is a need for further development of local areas to provide alternative activities for young people to access instead of the Northbridge area, consideration needs to be given to assisting those young people who are attending Northbridge, and what can be done to encourage them to make positive choices in their own lives.

As a means of providing young people with incentive to make appropriate use of the Northbridge area, it is proposed that a trial period be undertaken that would involve the introduction of 'free trains' at appropriate times. The aim of the proposal would be as follows:

- Free trains could be provided for a certain time frame that it deemed to be an appropriate time for young people to be leaving the Northbridge area. It is suggested that this initially be trains leaving Perth between the 10.00pm and Midnight on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights.
- The ability to access free trains would enhance the effectiveness of the role of Outreach Workers, and agencies such as the Noongar Patrol, as they would be able to discuss this service with young people and escort them to link with the trains.
- The provision of free trains provides an acknowledgment of the appropriate times to be leaving the Northbridge area, and shows a further commitment from the government to assist young people in this process. It removes the excuse of not having sufficient funds to purchase a ticket, and also removes the prospect of young people receiving fines and accumulating debt when trying to get home.
- It provides young people with a choice on the night. They are able to make decisions about the appropriateness of when to leave the area, and the possible consequences of choosing they remain, ie possible police intervention.

The provision of free trains could be managed by the availability of tickets or passes that can be used by agencies on the night, either directly by Transit Guards, or by Police, DCD, Noongar Patrol, and other agencies. The cost of providing this service would be reflected in terms of lost revenue rather than a direct cost to a particular agency, and it is not clear what the overall cost would be. It is suggested that the costs be absorbed by existing agencies initially with the option of seeking funding or sponsorship being considered should the need be identified to support the plan on an ongoing basis.

**Positive aspects of the proposal:**

- Increased options available to Outreach / Youth workers at the street level
- Potential for young people to choose to leave the Northbridge area at more appropriate times, therefore reducing the number of young people present on the streets late at night
- Less use of police resources needed to 'process' young people, enabling an improved response to young people with high priority needs, or other policing issues
- No initial upfront 'costs' to any agency, ie no funding required to implement this proposal

**Possible Concerns:**

- Potential loss of revenue to Westrail if the proposal is successful

- Young people become dependent on the provision of free trains, and do not take responsibility for ensuring they have the means to transport themselves home
- Young people may not want to access the service at the times provided

**Comment – Duty of Care:**

The issue of duty of care is raised regularly in the context of working with young people at a street level, and it is suggested that the provision of free trains would not create an issue for agencies involved in this process. The rationale for this stance is that young people will be accessing public transport regardless of whether they are assisted to do this or not, and once this is accessed there is not further responsibility attributed to the agencies involved. Any concerns the agencies have in relation to the young person being capable of catching public transport need to be addressed by that agency in an appropriate manner.

**Recommendations:**

1. The provision of free trains be trialed for a period of one to three months, with the initial costs being absorbed by Westrail (in terms of lost revenue)
2. The provision of free trains be implemented by the introduction of a ‘pass’ system, that will enable workers to provide young people with permission to board the train free of charge. These ‘passes’ could be managed by Police, Transit Guards, DCD, and other relevant agencies working in the Northbridge area.
3. The provision of the pass system to commence effective from September 2004.
4. The management of this proposal be linked into the existing resources working in Northbridge as part of the Young People in Northbridge Policy, ie DCD, JAG, Mission Australia.
5. The proposal be reviewed on a monthly basis to identify the number of young people accessing the service, and the potential costs involved, in order to ensure how effective the service is, and whether funding will need to be accessed.

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