

Getting Safety on Track

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People base their travel choices on their perceptions of personal safety in environments such as transit stations. Women are more likely to perceive public spaces as threatening and they use public transit more than men, to access fundamental needs such as employment, childcare, education and healthcare. Effective design can reduce crime and fear by creating defensible spaces that assert ownership, and offer opportunities for natural surveillance. This is the underlying concept of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED).

Creating transit stations that make users feel safe could potentially increase use of public transit among women, particularly at off-peak hours. Identifying elements that affect women's feelings of safety in suburban (non-central) surface LRT stations in Edmonton can guide future station development, and reduce experiences of fear in existing stations for a safer and more inclusive transit system.

The aim of this study is to determine how the City of Edmonton can better address women's safety in suburban (non-central) surface LRT stations through expanding their existing design guidelines to incorporate both CPTED guidelines as well as additional elements addressed by the safety audit checklist provided in the City of Edmonton's *Safety Audit Guide for Crime Prevention* (2000). The main questions guiding research are:

1. In what ways do the City of Edmonton's existing *LRT Design Guidelines* for Edmonton Transit System (ETS) incorporate CPTED guidelines, if at all?
2. What are the similarities and differences between the CPTED guidelines and the criteria that enhance safety in public spaces as noted in the *Safety Audit Guide for Crime Prevention* developed by the City of Edmonton, which is based on the Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence Against Women and Children (METRAC) *Women's Safety Audit Guide*?
3. How can the City of Edmonton's *LRT Design Guidelines* be expanded to enhance women's safety at above-ground suburban light-rail transit stations?

The research involved a review of the published literature on gendered fear of crime in public spaces, the relationship of the built environment to perceptions of safety, and situational crime prevention. This was followed by a document review of the City of Edmonton's *LRT Design Guidelines* for Edmonton Transit System (ETS) (2011), as well as CPTED guidelines from the existing literature. A safety audit was undertaken using the a slightly modified version of the *Checklist of Safety Audit for Crime Prevention* in the City of Edmonton's *Safety Audit Guide for Crime Prevention* (2000).

The key CPTED principles of natural surveillance, territorial definition, compatible building placement, and building form formed the broad framework under which the specific concerns addressed by the safety audit were classified. The findings of the safety audits conducted at Clareview and Century Park stations showed that there had been some, but not full, integration of CPTED principles in the design and upkeep of these stations.

The newer Century Park station benefitted from the transparency resulting from the extensive use of glass in the building, and offered better natural surveillance opportunities than the older Clareview station which used concrete and had no windows on the lower level. Century Park was also noticeably better-maintained than Clareview, where signs of vandalism, disrepair, and poor maintenance contributed to feelings of insecurity. Both stations were fairly isolated at night, due to lack of activity-generating land uses in the immediate area of the station. The findings of the safety audit emphasize the importance of natural surveillance.

