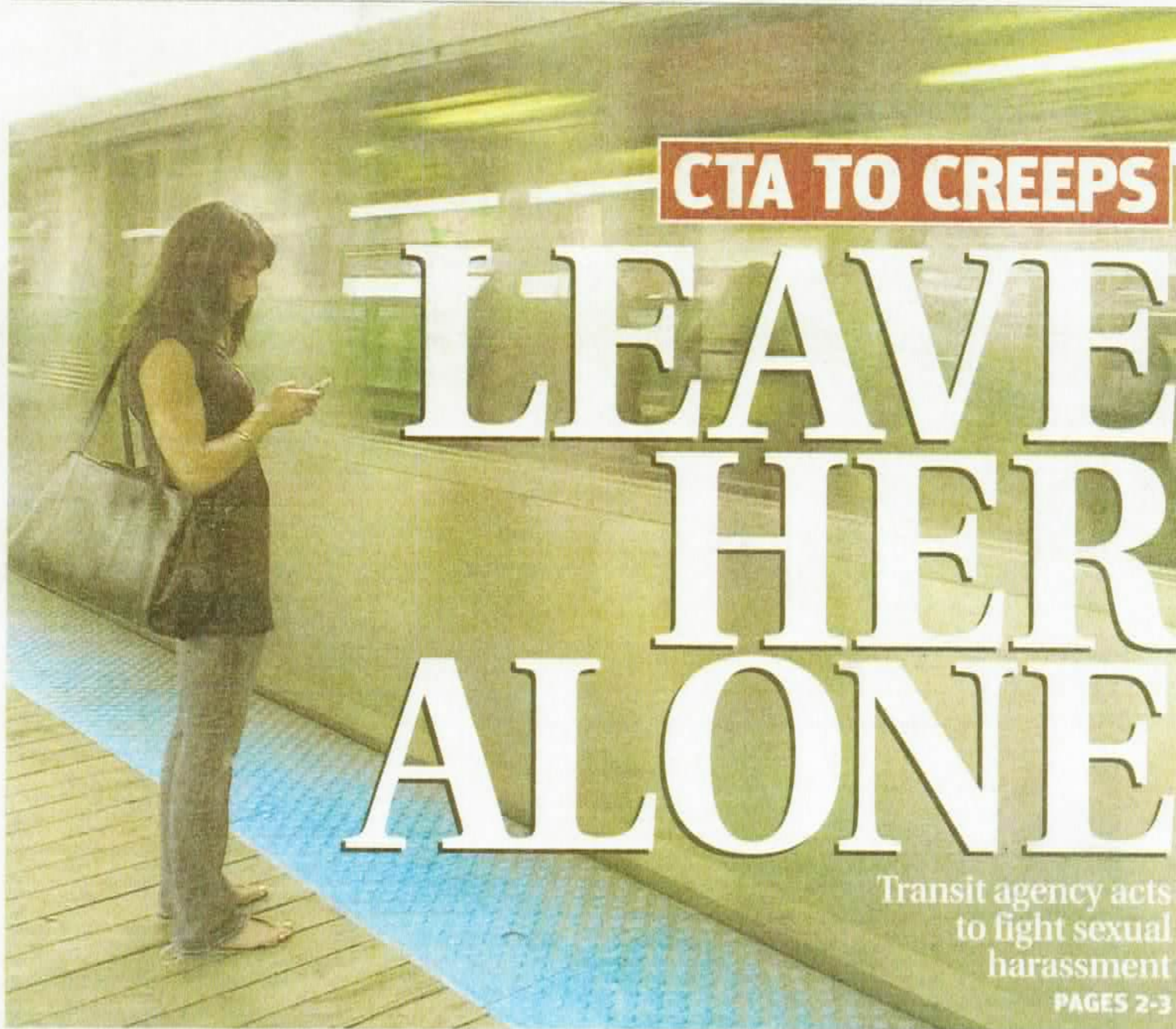


CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

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CTA TO CREEPS

LEAVE HER ALONE

Transit agency acts
to fight sexual
harassment

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PUTTING WOMEN AT EASE ON CTA

Agency orders bus, train operators to take more active role to fight sexual harassment

BY MARY WISNIEWSKI

Transportation Reporter
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Responding to a group of young Rogers Park women who complained about sexual harassment on the CTA, transit agency officials have expanded policies on how bus and rail operators should handle obnoxious behavior on cars and trains.

"It's a beginning," said Ronnett Lockett, 20, a Northern Illinois University student and a member of the Rogers Park Young Women's Action Team.

The group had surveyed 639 CTA riders and found that half had been sexually harassed on the system, and 13 percent had been assaulted.

In response to the concerns first reported in the Chicago Sun-Times, the CTA has changed how it wants bus or rail operators to respond to harassment complaints.

Before, if a customer felt she was being threatened or harassed by another passenger, the operator may just decide to "keep an eye" on the situation, or tell the offender to move, or call the Control Center if they felt the situation needed an immediate response, according to Amy Kovalan, CTA's senior vice president of safety, security and risk compliance.

"Now, operators are instructed to ask an offending individual to stop the behavior," Kovalan said. "If that

person does not cease, the operator immediately will call the Control Center and will be instructed on how to proceed." The rule applies to any kind of harassment — not just sexual.

The CTA also is updating its public safety tips brochure to include information about harassment, and how to report it.

In addition, the CTA is expanding its "If you see something, say something" posters and audio announcements to include sexual harassment. Harassment complaints to the CTA customer service line will now have a special code, so that the agency can better monitor the problem.

Lillian Matanmi, a member of the Rogers Park group, said one problem is that some women don't know that they have a right to be free of lewd language and behavior from fellow passengers — and may not know what to do.

"They think that's just part of their day," said Matanmi, 19, a student at Malcolm X College.

Only 9 percent of those surveyed reported the harassing behavior to authorities. Of the 44 percent who have personally witnessed harassment or sexual assault on the CTA, just 22 percent intervened. The Red Line, which runs 24 hours, had the most reports of harassment.

Comment at suntimes.com.

WHAT DO CTA RIDERS THINK?



**Gregory Thornton,
Chicago**

Rides Brown and Red lines and occasionally the Blue Line. Has a friend who was raped on a train last winter.

"I think there needs to be more security and being aware of what goes on on the trains as well as the platforms."



**Erika Cabrera,
Rogers Park**

Rides mostly to and from downtown. Hasn't had any experience with harassment on the CTA.

"The only trouble I sometimes see on CTA are people being loud or either begging for money, but it doesn't get out of hand."



**Marcy Mises,
Portage Park neighborhood**

Mostly rides Metra and occasionally the Blue Line.

"I wish there was a little more security, and on the Metra, as well."

"I actually saw a guy running away from a girl after he exposed himself to her about a couple of months ago."



**Jackie Zuniga,
Hammond, Ind.**

Infrequent CTA rider with friends and co-workers who ride regularly.

"I've heard some very crazy stories from co-workers about men exposing themselves and making very rude comments."

"One of my friends was told, 'You should be in a porno video. You're very sexy.'"