

Melbourne CBD rampage: 'no record' of mental illness



Police bomb squad inspect the car on Flinders Street in Melbourne. Picture: Tony Gough

Pia Akerman, The Australian, 12:00AM October 3, 2017

Police claims that a driver who sped through central Melbourne on grand final day, narrowly missing pedestrians, had a history of mental illness have been called into question after a court heard the alleged offender had no mental health issues.

The 15-year-old boy faced Melbourne Children's Court yesterday charged with two counts of attempted murder for allegedly driving a Toyota RAV4 directly at two people with the intention of killing them. He is also charged with six counts of reckless conduct endangering life for allegedly deliberately speeding through red lights towards pedestrians and cyclists, and of assaulting police and resisting arrest.

The youth, from Melbourne's east, has a physical disability that cannot be identified for legal reasons. His lawyer told the court this disability should be noted by authorities while he was in custody, but there were no other issues, including mental health issues.

The sight of the RAV4 driving erratically down Swanston Street towards Flinders Street station, reignited memories of January's Bourke Street rampage which left six people dead, including a baby and a 10-year-old girl.

Police were swift to dismiss fears the latest incident was linked to terrorism. Soon after the teenager was arrested wearing a helmet and dressed in black, Acting Superintendent Wayne Newman said terrorism was not being considered "in any depth" as a possible motive and police were "treating it simply as a mental health issue". Victoria Police declined to comment yesterday when asked why Mr Newman made this statement.

Prosecutor Adrian Trotman said the boy's electronic devices were seized and would be examined by Victoria's e-crime unit. "There's potentially more charges to follow as the investigation takes its course," he said.

Investigators needed extra time to compile a brief of evidence as there were at least 45 witnesses to be interviewed and mobile phone and CCTV footage to be examined. The presiding judge said from "an evidentiary point of view", the case might hinge on whether the witness statements shed light on the events beyond CCTV footage.

The youth was remanded to face court again on October 23.