

1 Introduction:

London TravelWatch is the official body set up by Parliament to provide a voice for London's travelling public, including the users of all forms of public transport. Our role is to:

- Speak up for transport users in discussions with policy-makers and the media;
- Consult with the transport industry, its regulators and funders on matters affecting users;
- Investigate complaints users have been unable to resolve with service providers, and;
- Monitor trends in service quality.

Our aim is to press in all that we do for a better travel experience all those living, working or visiting London and its surrounding region.

Security on the railway is fundamental to meeting passenger needs because:-

- After reliability and cost, the travelling environment dominates passenger concerns about their journeys
- It has a significant effect on whether passengers think they get good value for money for their ticket

It needs however, a stronger commitment from train operators, Network Rail, the British Transport Police (BTP), the Office of Rail Regulation (ORR) and the Department for Transport (DfT) to tackle this issue – particularly by prioritising the availability and prominence of staff on trains and at stations, by introducing environmental quality targets and through strengthened co-ordination between the BTP and territorial police forces

In preparing this response we have liaised with Passenger Focus on issues of common interest.

2 The Inquiry

London TravelWatch welcomes the House of Commons Transport Committee's inquiry, looking at security on the railway, as recent research we have published shows that, after reliability and the cost of travel, the travelling environment dominates passengers' concerns about their journeys. Our latest research¹ amongst passengers in London identified a hierarchy of needs of which the most fundamental was to tackle the problem of anti-social behaviour and fear of crime whilst travelling. The executive summary of the research is attached as Appendix A to this report.

Passengers recognised that whilst there have been major improvements in recent years in the travelling environment in London, nevertheless there is still considerable room for improvement. In particular, they wanted to see more staff available on trains

¹ The London Travelling Environment report- what consumers think (January 2014)

<http://www.londontravelwatch.org.uk/document/14439>

and in stations - in places where they would be able to deter anti-social behaviour and crime, and intervene where necessary. They also wanted the industry to address the issue of excessive gaps between the train and the platform, the presence of which contributes to passengers concerns about their safety whilst travelling.

Often many actions considered by passengers to be anti-social are not criminal in nature. They are therefore more of a matter for operators to resolve than for the police. The police may have a role to play in underpinning public reassurance, but this does raise a number of potentially difficult strategic decisions about the deployment of fully trained police officers as against those who perform a Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) role. The BTP has its own PCSOs such as Railway Enforcement and Travelsafe Officers who whilst employed directly by the rail operators are accredited by the BTP.

The BTP plays a significant role in passenger safety on the rail network. In particular, the issue of dealing with stranded trains as a result of technical faults or external factors (such as suicides) is one where their expertise and presence is invaluable in ensuring that passengers and staff are kept safe (both physically and from the threat of crime arising from an incident) and that disruption is kept to a minimum. It is also important that individual train operators have (and follow) robust procedures for managing incidents of stranded trains so that passengers are not tempted to take unilateral action and try and evacuate themselves from train, thereby putting themselves, other passengers and staff in danger.

London TravelWatch takes a very keen interest in matters relating to safety and security on the railway, with regular meetings with BTP chief officers, participation in safer transport partnerships, and the involvement of our rail safety officer in Office of Rail Regulation and trade safety working groups.

3 Recent trends in crime and perceptions of crime on the railway and the steps that train operators and Network Rail are taking to reduce this.

As noted above, the research we conducted showed that there was an acknowledgement by passengers that improvements have been made to the travelling environment in recent years, of which crime and the perception of crime is a major part. Reduced fear of crime can also be attributed, at least in part, to the general fall in actual crime levels. However, non- or infrequent users do not necessarily recognise this recent trend, and past poor experiences of public transport are therefore a major barrier to these groups of people from making more use of public transport.

For passengers, London TravelWatch's research has shown that, after fare levels and service reliability, the travelling environment is a major determinant of passenger satisfaction with public transport and its attractiveness to non-users. There is a particularly strong relationship between the travelling environment and passenger perceptions of value for money.

Stations

Personal security issues around stations led to participants in our research feeling vulnerable at certain times when travelling alone. This is heightened when stations are not overlooked by houses or if it is unlikely that there will be other people nearby.

Passages, subways or car parks that are poorly lit are a special cause for concern. Most participants in our research assumed that stations had closed circuit television (CCTV) but were not sure whether it was monitored in real time.

We have therefore recommended that operators and Network Rail

- should pay more attention to the quality of lighting and CCTV, especially in in closed passageways and subways, and in car parks;
- should reassure passengers that CCTV is monitored and is effective in preventing incidents occurring.

Trains

There are several features of train design and maintenance that could significantly help to reduce fear of crime and exposure to anti-social behaviour. Research that we published in August 2013 on what London passengers think about value for money² found that passengers felt more secure in trains that had layouts that were open with a clear view of other passengers, and which would allow them to leave a situation easily if they felt uncomfortable or threatened in any way. They also wanted arm rests to clearly delineate the personal space of each passenger. This is important in the context of crowding, as passengers in our travelling environment research reported that their anxiety levels about their personal security rose as the density of crowding increased. Tackling crowding issues by increasing train frequencies and capacity therefore has a benefit in terms of increasing passengers' feelings of well being and security whilst travelling, by reducing the potential for conflict between passengers and also with staff.

General

The presence of graffiti and general poor cleanliness of trains, stations and the railway tracksides was also seen by participants in our research as indicating that crime or anti-social behaviour might affect them. Similarly, it was felt that the apparent toleration by the authorities of these nuisances gave irresponsible people the confidence to act in criminal or anti-social ways. We therefore consider that a systematic and ongoing initiative by operators and Network Rail to tackle these issues would have a significant impact in helping reduce crime, fear of crime and anti-social behaviour on the rail network.

Disappointingly, this is still a long way from reality. We have seen few signs that train operators and Network Rail recognise that tackling the issue of graffiti and cleanliness in general is a particular priority. For example there is no reference to this in documents such as the High Level Output Statement or the ORR determination for the Periodic Review covering Network Rail for control period five (2014-2019). We had argued, in the consultation leading up to the determination, that the ORR should include specific local environmental quality targets for Network Rail . But this case does not appear to have been accepted.

² Value for money on London's transport services: what consumers think (August 2013)

<http://www.londontravelwatch.org.uk/document/14387>

5 The role of the British Transport Police in reducing crime, including whether BTP's current strategic plan is sufficiently challenging and whether the BTP has sufficient resources to deliver the plan

London TravelWatch is pleased that the BTP has put in place plans that reflect the general concerns of passengers in relation to crime on the network. In particular we are keen that, in carrying out their plans, the BTP should focus on

- as a first priority - issues relating directly to passengers' personal security whilst travelling – such as sexual harassment and theft (especially in cycle storage areas and station car parks);
- issues that affect the reliability of services – criminal damage to railway vehicles and equipment, and which therefore have a significant impact on a large number of passengers collectively.

Actions covered under these headings are also likely to be committed by people who behave in a similar way outside of the transport environment – and so close co-ordination between the BTP and territorial forces is going to be essential in tackling this.

The BTP has introduced some innovative ways of reporting and recording crime such as using texts and Twitter feeds, which is particularly useful when travellers may not wish to be seen or heard reporting a crime whilst in transit, or when, because of the nature of travel, it would be difficult to report through a territorial police force.

6 Relationships between BTP and train operators and Network Rail, and BTP's accountability to DfT and to Parliament

London TravelWatch considers that there is a strong case for the retention and enhancement of a specialised police force dedicated to the transport network. The BTP in our view fulfils this role well, because of its specialist knowledge and skills base in dealing with the particular requirements and nature of transport operations.

The BTP is publicly accountable in a number of ways both directly to DfT, Parliament and Transport for London, but also indirectly through Network Rail, the franchised train operators and publicly owned operators such as London Underground, Docklands Light Railway and London Tramlink.

London TravelWatch is not able to comment authoritatively on the relationship between BTP, train operators and Network Rail, but we do not have any evidence that would suggest a poor relationship between these bodies.

7 Collaboration and partnership working between BTP and other forces and the Home Office.

Relationships at senior level do in our view seem to work very well between BTP and other forces. However, we are aware at local level (but only with anecdotal evidence) there is often only limited contact between the BTP and the Safer Neighbourhood Teams operated by the Metropolitan Police.

London TravelWatch considers that:-

- There should be a concerted effort by the transport industry to address passenger concerns about the travelling environment focusing on reducing anti-social behaviour, increasing passenger confidence in their personal security especially in places and at times where passengers feel vulnerable: and by tackling the 'signal' issues of litter, rubbish, graffiti and cleanliness that deter the use of the transport network because of the fear of crime or anti-social behaviour.
- There should also be greater priority given to the availability and prominence of staff – both on stations and on trains – as a deterrent to anti-social behaviour and as a means of increasing public reassurance
- There should be recognition by the regulatory and franchising authorities that environmental quality targets – for trains, stations and the trackside - need to be included in the outputs that they expect from the rail industry.
- The BTP should be retained and enhanced as an independent specialist police force
- There should be strengthened local co-ordination between the BTP and territorial police forces

We recognise these initiatives would require additional resources, but in our view a lot could be achieved with the right kind of commitment and training of staff, and with a consistent and thorough approach to management of the travel environment. These in turn would result in reduced costs arising from disruption to passengers journeys, and by increased revenues flowing from greater passenger confidence in their travelling environment.

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London TravelWatch
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Appendix A

Key findings of 'The London travelling environment : what consumers think:-

³ <http://www.londontravelwatch.org.uk/document/14387>

Passengers tell us that the most important aspects of their journey are the reliability of their journey and the cost of travel. These issues tend to dominate people's perceptions of public transport in particular. Recent research by London TravelWatch³, exploring passenger attitudes to 'Value for Money' found that the travelling environment can exert a positive or negative impact on overall value for money perceptions.

Many regular travellers however, especially commuters, are resigned to accepting that they will have to pay high fares and endure poor travelling conditions. Most are pragmatic and tolerate that there will be compromises and constraints on journeys made in the London area compared to those made by public transport in other parts of the country.

In spite of this however, this research found some evidence to suggest that passengers think that recent investment in stations and vehicles by TfL and Train Operating Companies (TOCs) is having a positive impact on many aspects of the travelling environment. This was true particularly for frequent travellers. However, non-users generally did not believe this was the case.

Requirements in relation to the travelling environment are naturally idiosyncratic and vary according to the specific circumstances of each journey. During the course of this research, it has been possible to identify a hierarchy that can be used to help understand the needs that will generally apply to most passengers and journeys across all modes. This can also be used to help identify what should be the priorities for future improvement to the travelling environment for public transport services in the London area.

Addressing the problem of anti-social behaviour is the most fundamental need and important priority at the foundation of this hierarchy. There is a universal requirement for the industry to be more proactive in tackling these issues. This is because many of the actions regarded by passengers as anti-social behaviour are not criminal in nature and it is therefore a matter for operators to resolve rather than the police. In these cases passengers want more visible and frequent operations by revenue protection inspectors (RPIs), and officers who perform a Police Community Support Officer role such as Railway Enforcement and Travelsafe officers. This is borne out by TfL's crime statistics bulletins which show a decline in crime, but nevertheless passengers are still concerned about this issue.

Nevertheless, in terms of the travelling environment, this was consistently identified as a driver of dissatisfaction among regular users and an important barrier amongst infrequent users.

The continued existence of large steps / gaps on the rail network between trains and platforms is a particular area of concern that passengers believe the industry needs to address urgently. In the wider context of accessibility passengers expect this to be easy as part of the basic customer offer that the transport industry provides, and therefore should have priority in terms of investment.

The problem of overcrowding at peak times is a demand and capacity issue that is unlikely to improve without fundamental changes to entrenched working patterns and the fare structure. However, this is an element of the travelling environment that was identified as having deteriorated in the past and is likely to get worse in the future.

This represents a major barrier to using public transport more frequently among those who are infrequent and non-users.

Passengers believe that the travelling environment would be significantly enhanced if more attention was paid by operators to the cleanliness of vehicles especially and stations and stops to a lesser extent. In contrast to anti-social behaviour and overcrowding, this is an issue that is considered to be the clear responsibility of service providers to address.