

Anti-social behaviour on buses

Independent national passenger watchdog

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 Passengerfocus
 putting passengers first
 

Introduction

This short report on anti-social behaviour has been compiled from our most recent Bus Passenger Survey (BPS) data*. These quantitative findings reinforce those from prior Passenger Focus research on anti-social behaviour in the West Midlands¹, and anti-social behaviour experienced by rail passengers².

Bus passengers state that on **one in ten** bus journeys they had a 'cause for concern or worry' arising from other passengers' behaviour. It is important to state that the vast majority of bus journeys happen without cause for concern, however, the 'one in ten' figure does equate to a meaningfully large number of journeys which have been affected in this way (around 200 million annually across our remit area).

The behaviours that cause concern are: the more straightforwardly anti-social (feet on seats and loud music

most common); the unsettling (rowdiness most common); or, albeit in lesser numbers, the deeply concerning (passengers under influence of alcohol /drugs, or threatening behaviour). Passengers' comments show that on some routes such behaviour is just accepted as the norm. Bus Passenger Survey data also reveals it is the younger, male passenger, as well as black and minority ethnic (BME) passengers who are more likely to be concerned. The data also shows that the incidence of concern is much higher when travelling on the top deck of a double-decker bus.

Passengers say they feel powerless to act unilaterally and come across drivers who (they sometimes feel understandably) do not want to get involved. On the vast majority of occasions the other passengers' actions are not 'criminal', so they are unable to call on the police. Accordingly

many passengers feel they just have to suffer such behaviours, or sit tight during threatening situations and hope they don't get embroiled.

Passengers say they want 'order restored' and a greater ownership of the problem. Passenger Focus believes this is an important issue to tackle for

the benefit of existing passengers and, as our research on barriers to bus use³ showed, reduce one of the barriers non-bus users state prevents them making bus journeys.

Passenger Focus recognises this is not an easy problem

to solve – it's one that has many stakeholders and dispersed ownership. Nonetheless, we urge bus companies, local transport authorities, the police and central government to get together, think collectively and develop policies and procedures to minimise the incidence of passenger concern during bus journeys.

1 in 10

bus journeys gave passengers a 'cause for concern or worry'



Footnotes: 1 *Criminal and anti-social behaviour on buses* – Passenger Focus and Centro joint funded research – March 2011. 2 *Passenger perceptions of personal security on the railways* – Passenger Focus, March 2009. 3 *Barriers to bus use in Milton Keynes* – Passenger Focus and Milton Keynes Council joint-funded research – December 2010.

*The BPS was carried out in 20 transport authority area (six metropolitan counties and the remaining 14 a broad mix of unitary and two-tier authorities), two Bus Rapid Transit networks and Reading Buses network. The survey is chiefly designed to provide results at a local transport authority level. However, it does permit a certain amount of whole survey analysis where overall numbers obtained are a reasonable approximation to those that would have been obtained were a full remit-wide survey to be carried out.

Findings from the March 2013 Bus Passenger Survey⁴

The BPS asked passengers: "Did other passengers' behaviour give you cause to worry or make you feel uncomfortable during your journey?" **10 per cent** said they had a cause to worry or feel uncomfortable.

The concern is highest among young passengers and decreases with age. It is also higher among men than women (see figure 1, right).

Combining age and gender shows that young males are the most concerned.

And those from a black and minority ethnic (BME) background also showed a higher level of concern (figure 2).

Those that say they have a disability have a marginal increase in concern (figure 3) of around two per cent.

Another significant determinant of the level of concern/worry during the journey was where the passenger was seated. Figure 4 shows that the incidence of such behaviour is much higher upstairs on a double-decker bus compared with being seated downstairs or being on a single-deck bus.

1 % of journeys where concern/worry was experienced

%	16-18	19-25	26-34	35-59	Over 60
Male	17	14	16	11	7
Female	13	11	11	10	6

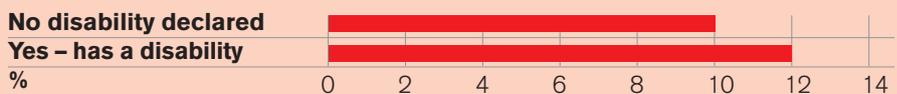
2 % of journeys where concern/worry was experienced

by ethnicity



3 % of journeys where concern/worry was experienced

by having a disability



⁴ Surveying to generate the BPS March 2013 results was between 23 September and 12 December 2012 (excluding the October 2012 half-term holiday period).

4 % of journeys where concern/worry was experienced

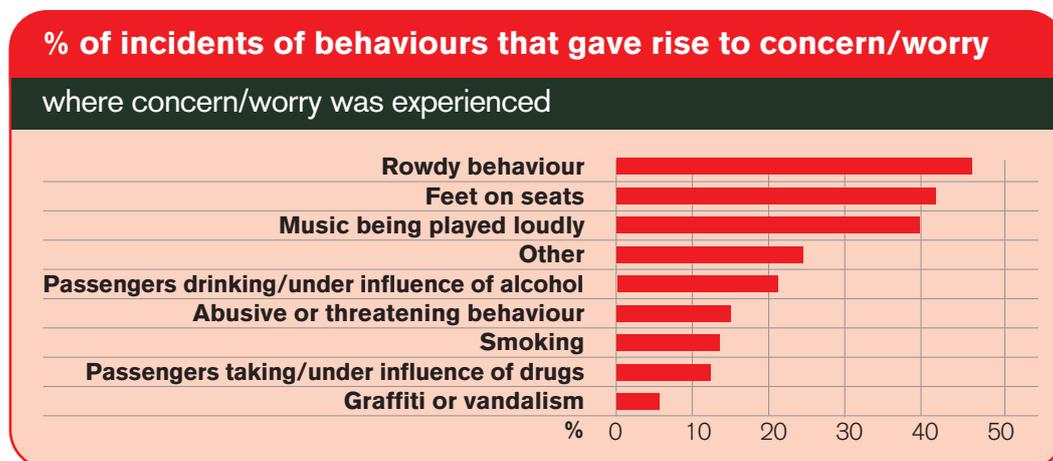
by where passengers sat on the bus



What type of behaviour is it that gives concern?

Where passengers were concerned about other passengers' behaviour, they were asked what type of behaviour was the cause.

The chart below shows the most common examples are rowdy behaviour, feet on seats, and music being played loudly. But, in a notable minority of situations, some of the activities were a level beyond this, such as people being under the influence of alcohol or drugs:



What passengers said about other passengers' behaviour

Passengers were provided an opportunity to state what they would like improved on their journey. An analysis of their comments on other passengers' behaviour shows the following:

1 The disregard for other passengers

What comes through is the disregard for the other passengers by those who are being anti-social and an absence of concern of the impact their behaviour has on them.

"Eating on bus, chicken, chips, etc."

"People eating food and drink and discarding the dross onto the seats and floor of brand new buses."

"Noise [from] mobiles, rubbish left, papers, feet up on seats."

"People who sit down and put their feet all over the seats."

"No loud/angry phone calls."

"Stop people playing loud music, even if it is through headphones – it is annoying."

"People and their iPods do not seem

to grasp that they are 'i'pods and not 'we'pods."

"People with feet on seats.... I have had dirt on my clothes because of people like this."

School kids and students generate their own category of anti-social behaviour when they constitute a significant number of passengers on the bus:

"Rude, loud school kids, swearing and pushing. My son had to cover his ears."

"Not to have school kids on, swearing and throwing each other around and for them to give some respect to elderly people who are travelling."

"I had to get on the bus with all the schoolchildren. A special bus is needed for them. They have no consideration for anyone. The swearing was dreadful. They run about, all over the bus."

But there were frequent mentions of behaviour that simply should not be taking place:

"Bus stank of illegal substance being smoked by passengers sitting at the back."

"Stop drugs and drinking at bus stops."

"People are allowed to drink lager on buses, or [be] drunk."

And in a few cases behaviour became intimidating and/or deeply undesirable:

"Not knowing if youngsters were really that obnoxious or if they were angry at us."

"Passengers with dogs weeing on the seats."

"The behaviour of school children was bad, no threat to myself but could understand how it might intimidate other users of the service."

2 A sense of powerlessness

Passengers say they feel that anti-social passengers almost have free rein to behave as they please, and that behaviour in the passenger area of the bus is unregulated. The driver does not seem to wish to intervene and passengers more often than not feel unable to challenge this type of behaviour; it has to be tolerated.

“I sat on the bus whilst two boys were allowed to sit and throw bits of chewed paper into my hair. I was left in tears with no help. Absolutely disgusting!!!”

“Stop people putting feet on seats, driver never stops them.”

“No-one keeps kids in line on bus.”

“People need to be told not to eat and drink on the bus – getting out of hand.”

“Children were shouting and swearing and the driver did nothing.”

“The person playing loud music to have been told to turn it down or get off the bus. This nuisance is a constant problem on buses.”

This feeling of powerlessness is compounded when a situation escalates and passengers hope, or even ask, the driver to take action, but they do not respond.

“When I observed one passenger being verbally abusive to another, the driver ignored it completely.”

“Told driver about drinking and smell of drugs, he said just sit down, can do nothing.”

“Having to be subjected to people smoking drugs upstairs on the bus. I asked the driver what is being done about this and he said “Sorry, but the company do not care about it.”

“Today young students upstairs [on the] bus were abusive and spitting on the floor. A woman went down, told the driver, he just said okay.”

Furthermore, passengers hoped drivers would have stopped perpetrators from boarding in the first place, rather than abdicating the situation to passengers.

“That the rowdy and abusive passengers did not get on.”

“Keep the drunks off the bus; they smell, they are dirty and their behaviour is unpleasant.”

“I think abusive, drunk or unhygienic people should be barred.”

“Rude men not allowed on bus.”

But equally some recognise the reason why a driver may be reluctant to take action:

“A new bus and more looking after of the bus driver (they get a lot of stick).”

3 A plea to restore order

When passengers tell us what they want done about anti-social behaviour, they use phrases which speak of bringing back a sense of order, control, decency, and respect for fellow passengers. The tone of the comments project a pleading for more order to come from somewhere:

“Something done about unruly and smelly people on the bus.”

“Throwing off the bus yobs with disgusting filthy mouths (bad language).”

“Stop dope being smoked on the buses.”

“No drinking or eating enforced. There was a trail of liquid from front to back of the bus and pop bottle rolling all over.”

“Shut the rowdy children up.”

“The driver to tell those playing music to turn it off.”

“Kick off loud and disturbing passengers.”

“Driver should have on board p.a. to advise passengers to not obstruct aisle, to move down the bus, to stop smoking, to turn music down, off, etc, etc.”

Some speak of having conductors on buses and/or a police presence.

“Less anti-social behaviour. Regular policing of the route(s) and fine(s) for smoking.”

“To stop young teenagers from smoking drugs. That is all you can smell at the back of the bus and upstairs... bring back the bus conductors or community police.”

“Police be on the bus to stop the smoking on the bus.”

“Have a conductor to be able to stop youths with feet on seats, etc.”