

Criminal and anti-social behaviour on buses

Independent national passenger watchdog

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Background and methodology

Official statistics show that crime on the West Midlands bus network has fallen by 54% over the last three years. Yet, despite a number of successful initiatives from the Safer Travel Partnership (STP), research by Passenger Focus and Centro, the integrated transport authority for the West Midlands, has found that safety on buses and at bus stops is still an issue for passengers. In November 2010, Passenger Focus in partnership with Centro, who are a STP member, carried out more research to understand why people did not feel safe using buses, despite falling crime levels, and how they could be made to feel safer.

Main findings

What does 'anti-social behaviour' mean?

Participants described a broad spectrum of behaviour such as people putting feet on seats, fare evasion, graffiti, smoking and assaults.

Where and when does anti-social behaviour occur?

Participants thought anti-social behaviour was more common during school travel times, in the evening and on the top deck of buses. Rowdy behaviour was more commonly experienced when school children were using the bus, whilst in the evening participants were more likely to come across passengers who were drinking or drunk on the bus. Rowdy behaviour and smoking were considered more common on the top deck.

"It's highly unlikely you'll get a personal safety issue downstairs. Upstairs anything can go on."

[Wolverhampton, age group 19-35]

Why do people not feel safer despite falling crime figures?

Many participants did not believe crime rates had fallen in the West Midlands and some felt this was due to an increase in crimes which go unreported.

"That's because people are too scared to report it, it's just become normalised."

[Wolverhampton, age group 19-35]

Participants did not distinguish between criminal activity and anti-social behaviour, which could also be driving the gap between perceived crime rates and actual crime rates.

Who should be responsible for dealing with crime and anti-social behaviour?

Most participants agreed that an authority figure, such as the police or police community support officers (PCSOs), should be responsible, not passengers. There were mixed views about what bus drivers should be expected to do.

What do people think of the current initiatives in place?

Participants generally thought the initiatives would be effective in reducing crime and anti-social behaviour. However, many recognised the need for greater advertising to help raise the profile of all the initiatives.

• Safer Travel Team

A group of police officers and PCSOs who patrol buses and target specific routes where there are known problems.

Participants felt that seeing a PCSO or police officer on the bus may have a deterrent effect. Some participants were also in favour of undercover officers patrolling buses to 'catch people in the act', a tactic which is widely used by the STP.

• See Something Say Something

This is an anonymous text service for people to report any anti-social behaviour they may see during their bus journey. They can also ring and send an email. This information is then analysed to pinpoint problems, so that appropriate action can be taken.

Some participants felt this initiative might not get used, or if it were, would offer no immediate help. Some mentioned that the contact numbers on the poster (telephone and text) were not freephone and this may discourage some people from reporting anti-social behaviour.

"I think it's a good idea, but if it's freephone people will use it."

[Wolverhampton, age group 50+]

Others were unsure if comments would be kept confidential to protect their identity and what actions the authorities would take after they reported the incident.

• CCTV cameras

In the West Midlands 70% of buses and some stops have CCTV cameras on board, as do all bus stations and bus interchanges.

Most participants were in favour of CCTV cameras on buses. They were aware that CCTV images were not being monitored



in real-time, but recognised that any anti-social behaviour would be recorded and this offered them some assurance. However, some participants reported instances where cameras were not working or had been vandalised, so were sceptical about their effectiveness.

“I’ve seen cameras tippexed out”

[Coventry, age group 16-18]

• **Gateway checks**

An intelligence-led swoop on buses by police acting with other authorities, which may include monitoring fare evasion, drugs and offensive weapon checks.

The overall feeling from participants was that this would be an unpleasant experience to go through. Some felt that if they experienced a gateway check they would think it was due to terrorist trouble and this would reduce their feelings of safety; others did not mind such a check.

What improvements would participants like to be prioritised?

Participants were asked to rank the anti-social behaviour they wanted to see prioritised for attention. The top five were: rowdiness, shouting or swearing, abusive passengers, smoking on the bus, drinking or behaving drunkenly and litter on the bus or at the bus stop.

Most participants wanted to see the Safer Travel Team continuing to patrol buses, or have other visible authority figures on the buses.

“You’d feel as if you’re being looked after if there were more patrols.”

[Coventry, age group 55+]

Are there any issues specific to disabled, older, or black and minority ethnic groups?

Participants from the harder to reach groups had similar views. However, they felt the initiatives could be advertised in ways which were more accessible to them.

¹ Passenger Focus response to the Department for Transport consultation on Improving Bus Passenger Services through the Regulatory Framework, June 2010

Recommendations

- Many participants wanted to see more of the **Safer Travel Team** patrolling buses. This is difficult due to funding limitations, but the desire to see more authority figures on buses could be addressed by encouraging community wardens and traffic wardens to use buses, and offering them free bus travel in return. This may also encourage safer and more responsible behaviour from school children.
- The **See Something Say Something** poster would be improved if it displayed the cost of calling and sending a text. An assurance of anonymity and details of what happens next should also be communicated clearly in posters and in the automated text reply sent when someone reports an incident.
- Having a TV monitor on the bus, with real-time video footage, could allay fears that **CCTV** cameras are not working. A cheaper alternative option could be to display the message ‘This bus is currently being monitored by CCTV cameras.’
- The Safer Travel Partnership should consider reviewing the priority of the **gateway checks** initiative.
- All initiatives could benefit from **greater promotion**, to help increase awareness. This could be achieved through targeted advertising and press releases, as well as talks with community groups and schools. Appropriate formats should be used to get the message through to all sections of the community.
- Advertising that crime levels have decreased may not be effective; passengers may not believe the figures as they will still experience anti-social behaviour on buses which fall short of criminal activity. However, Centro should continue to encourage passengers to **report criminal and anti-social behaviour** through the initiatives and make it as easy as possible for them to do so.
- Dealing with people **drinking on the bus** was a priority area for attention and most participants were in favour of a drinking ban on buses. Recent research by Passenger Focus¹, carried out to inform a government consultation, backs this: 85% of passengers surveyed in England (outside London) supported a ban on consuming alcohol on buses. Passenger Focus would support the introduction of such a ban.
- Although the existing fleet cannot be changed without considerable cost, there may be some merit in **using single-decker buses** on routes where anti-social behaviour such as graffiti, smoking and rowdy behaviour are prevalent.
- Litter could be addressed by initiatives to discourage litter dropping and by **strengthening cleaning regimes**.

Contact us

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2nd Floor, One Drummond Gate, Pimlico, London SW1V 2QY

† 0300 123 0860 w www.passengerfocus.org.uk e info@passengerfocus.org.uk

Passenger Focus is the operating name of the Passengers’ Council