



Personal security and anti-social behaviour on bus

A passenger perspective

November 2024

Introduction

1.6 billion bus journeys were made in England, outside of London, in the year ending March 2023 – up 19 per cent on the previous year. While this sounds encouraging, bus patronage in many areas has still not fully recovered since the covid pandemic. There is still more to do, especially if government is to meet ambitious sustainability targets and get people to switch from car use. This will be much harder to achieve if people feel services are unreliable or they do not feel safe when travelling.

There has been much in the media over recent times about personal security in general with some worrying high-profile cases putting the spotlight on this area. The cases of Hollie Gazzard and Sarah Everard have put women's safety at the forefront of

the political agenda with a renewed drive to make the world a safer place, particularly for women.

The government's violence and intimidation against women and girls strategy seeks to drive improvements in tackling unwanted behaviour. While great strides are being made, it is clear there is still much to be done.

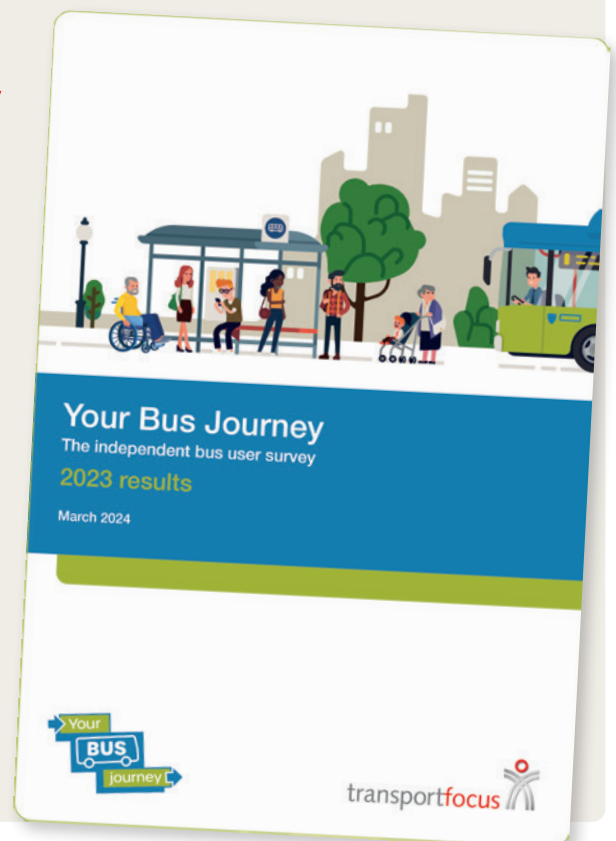
Transport Focus has previously published a series of research reports relating to criminality and anti-social behaviour on public transport¹. This new report looks to build on these findings. It uses Transport Focus's extensive survey of bus passenger satisfaction to examine attitudes to, and perceptions of, personal security. It also looks at what can help people feel safer.

Findings from the 2023 Your Bus Journey survey

Our *Your Bus Journey* survey was launched in January 2023 and monitors passenger satisfaction across a range of factors, both at the bus stop and on board. It includes 34 local transport authority areas and one bus operator and involved talking to passengers about their experience on more than 35,000 journeys up until the end of 2023.

The survey sample consists of people making journeys both throughout the daytime and into the evening and results are weighted to ensure they represent the views of a cross section of the travelling public. This robust dataset provides valuable insight into the drivers of passenger satisfaction.

As part of the survey, passengers are asked specific questions about their perceptions of personal security on the journey they were making.



¹ [Anti-social behaviour rail passenger views](#), Transport Focus (2010)
[Passenger perceptions of personal security on the railway](#), Transport Focus (2016)
[Transport User Panel Personal-security \(2019\)](#) Transport Focus (2019)
[Criminal and anti-social behaviour on buses summary report](#) Transport Focus (March 2011),
[Anti-social behaviour on buses](#), Transport Focus (2013)
[Information and infrastructure barriers to bus use in Wales](#), Transport Focus (2024)

Which behaviours cause passengers to be concerned?

Our *Your Bus Journey* survey asks passengers to rate their personal safety when at the bus stop and personal security on the bus. The results show that overall, 72 per cent of passengers feel safe at the bus stop whilst 80 per cent feel secure on the bus itself. Whilst it is encouraging to see that satisfaction is generally positive, there are passengers who indicate they had experienced concerns.

Respondents were also asked, 'Did other passengers' behaviour make you feel worried or uncomfortable during your journey at the bus stop

or on the bus?' and if it did, they were able to select from a range of pre-determined behaviours.

Our data shows that eight percent of passengers said they had experienced something which caused them concern at the bus stop.

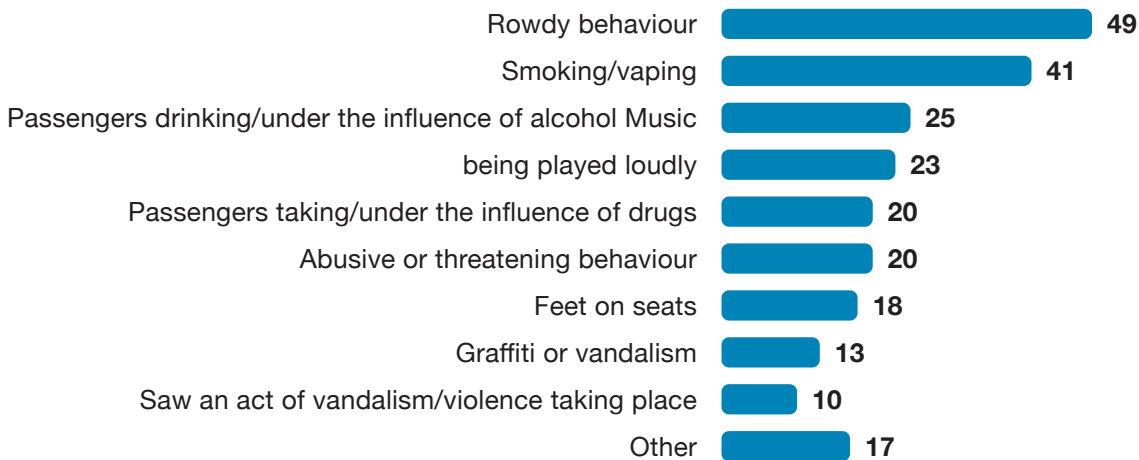
The same percentage reported that other passengers' behaviour caused them concern on the bus. While eight per cent seems a small number, for those passengers who do tell us they have experienced concerns, it can make travelling by us feel like a less favourable proposition.

At the bus stop

The chart below shows the types of behaviour that caused passengers concern, for those who indicated they experienced something which bothered them at the bus stop.

Overall, rowdy/nuisance behaviour was the top concern (49 per cent), followed by smoking/vaping (41 per cent).

Types of behaviour that caused passengers concern – those that experienced something that bothered them (%)



Base: All passengers who were worried or made to feel uncomfortable at stop 2104

Some 25 per cent were worried about passengers drinking or under the influence of alcohol, and 20 per cent about those taking/under the influence of drugs. It is clear that some of these behaviours go beyond annoyance to concerns for safety and invariably, some of this falls into the realm of criminality.

Disturbingly, 20 per cent who had a concern at the bus stop cited that abuse or threatening behaviour had caused them to worry. It is likely that this intersects with alcohol and drug consumption among other factors.

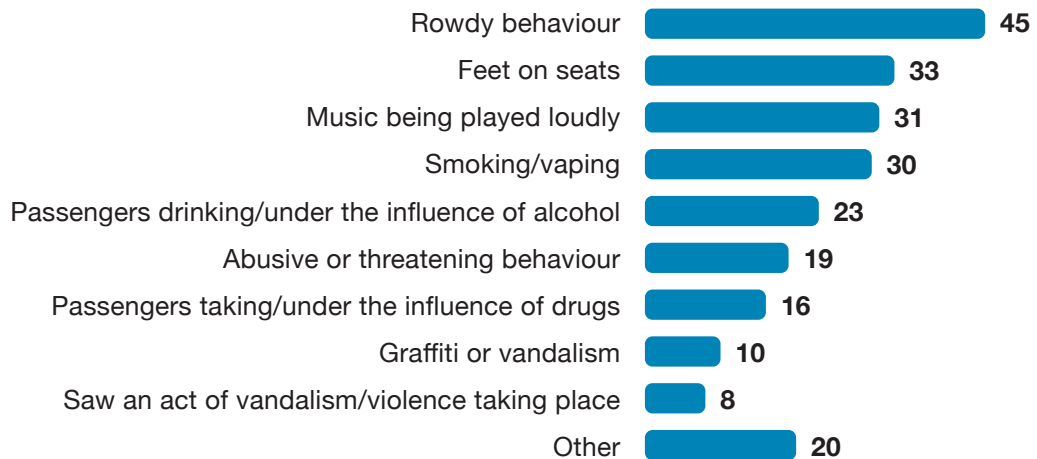
“The journey was fine, no issues to report. Sometimes in the evening people on the bus listen to loud music/don't wear earphones. A little message inciting civility could help.”

On the bus

The chart below shows the types of behaviour that caused passengers concern, **for those who indicated they experienced something which bothered them** on the bus.

“Men staring at me continuously.”

Types of behaviour that caused passengers concern – those that experienced something that bothered them (%)



Base: All passengers who were worried or made to feel uncomfortable on the bus 1946

On the bus, rowdy behaviour again causes the greatest concern for passengers (45 per cent). School children are often cited as the cause with pushing, being noisy, vaping and playing music loudly just some of the behaviours attributed to them.

Feet on seats also featured prominently with 33 per cent of passengers who had cause for concern on their journey saying this had bothered them, while music being played loudly on board also features (31 per cent).

“The journey was good, except for school days. The kids push and crowd each other and push every other passenger out of the way.”

Case study

School kids

- SBS Transit (Singapore) recently launched a school-friendly public bus service. This aims to help young students travel safely, independently, and confidently.

Dedicated Bus Ambassadors (drawn from the school’s parent volunteer group), act as trusted guides, and accompany students on their journeys to ensure a smooth passage to and from school.

“People had their feet up on seats at the back, it’s become normal. People shouting into phones or talking very loud. It’s also become the norm.”

Who feels unsafe?

There are also some noticeable differences when looking at the results based on age, disability, and ethnicity:

- 16-18 year olds are three times as likely to rate their personal security on the bus as poor (nine per cent) compared to those over the age of 18 (three per cent).
- Those with difficulty learning, understanding or concentrating, were around three times as likely to say that other passengers' behaviour caused them concern at the bus stop (21 per cent compared with six per cent) and on the bus (18 per cent compared with seven per cent) than those without any disability/impairment. Those with a visual impairment were twice as likely to rate their perception of safety at the bus stop as 'poor' compared to those with no disability (12 per cent compared with six per cent).
- Passengers from ethnic groups are more likely to rate their personal security on board the bus as 'fairly poor' or 'poor' than those who identify as white.

"Yesterday on my bus ride though, there were rowdy guys on the bus that yelled for no reason and my bus driver had called them out to stop their nonsense. I appreciated that a lot because their behaviour was startling."

Case study

Bus stops/facilities

- Tri Met (in the Portland, Oregon region) has started installing security phones across its network. The devices themselves are bright red towers with the word 'security' written down the side, helping to make them easy to spot, day or night with the blue lights at the top.
The phones also come equipped with cameras, giving TriMet's security team more views of station areas and show the person calling. They also ask riders to report graffiti, vandalism and suspicious activity.

Case study

Gender based/sexual harassment

- Transport for London has launched a campaign to encourage a culture of active bystanders on public transport.
- Stagecoach Cambridgeshire has signed up to **Businesses Against Abuse** which is a free training scheme to get businesses working together to prevent sexual harassment and abuse against women and girls by tackling predatory behaviour.

"...man trying to talk to me that I didn't know."

Case study

Good behaviour

- In February 2024, Adelaide Metro promoted tips on '**How to catch a bus like a South Aussie**'. The light-hearted approach asks passengers to display good bus manners.
- Public Transit Victoria (Australia) launched an **innovative campaign** about respecting staff members who can often be the target of negative behaviours, particularly during times of disruption. Based on principles of psychology, it encourages people to see the person behind the uniform – staff physically wear their life story on their hi-vis vests.

"The buses are usually delayed a lot or cancelled and there's people on the bus that are either on drugs or causing a scene or trying to talk to people underage."

What would make people feel safer?

While we have a whole range of insight from passengers about the types of behaviours that worry them, we know less about what interventions would make them feel safer. There is a lot of good practice happening both within the transport industry and other customer-facing industries both in the UK and beyond, but there is no coordinated approach to identifying these and understanding what works.

“Drunken lady yelling and passenger playing music without ear phones. Both trying to outdo each other. That made for an uncomfortable journey.”

Some areas to consider based on our research and that of others are:

Better behaviour campaigns

There can be value in operators promoting good behaviours and reminding people of the types of behaviours which cause concern, though clearly any such campaign is unlikely to be a panacea and would need to be effectively targeted and complemented by other measures.

Gender-based violence and sexual harassment initiatives

Recent research by Dr Lucy Baker of Aberystwyth University resulted in a set of key policy recommendations to improve responses to gender-based violence specifically, highlighting a range of recommendations such as the need for better staff training, a need to review, clarify and standardise how transport companies and their staff respond to incidents, developing and promoting clear mechanisms for reporting, a need for gender sensitive auditing of infrastructure, and travel safer partnerships as standard practice.

Reporting mechanisms

Clear routes to reporting unwanted behaviour are key to identifying patterns and bringing perpetrators to justice. It is important to have information readily at hand at stops and on operator apps and websites about how to report incidents of concern. Reporting mechanisms vary across modes and there are some regional initiatives which means it can be difficult to know how

to report depending on where you are and which form of transport you are using. It is important to recognise that not all people will report via traditional channels.

CCTV

Many buses have CCTV and this can be reassuring for some passengers. However, our previous research has shown that not all passengers trust it is being monitored or are unsure if it is always in working order. Without a live ‘look-in’ facility, CCTV can often just be seen as a mechanism for supporting a prosecution if something does go wrong and does not necessarily prevent it from happening in the first place.

The bus driver

Our research shows passengers greatly value the role of the bus driver, often using words such as ‘polite’, helpful ‘patient’, friendly, and ‘courteous’ to describe their interactions while on their journeys. This is particularly the case in relation to passengers with disabilities, learning difficulties or mobility issues who may be in need a bit of extra support and encouragement. Drivers very much provide that presence and reassurance to passengers on their journeys.

Bus stops and facilities

Our research shows that the condition of a bus stop can make passengers concerned about their safety. A brightly lit, graffiti-free and well maintained bus stop sends a more positive message to passengers than one that has been vandalised.

General observations

We do not seem to fully understand more generally the broader personal security measures which passengers would find most reassuring, and this would warrant further exploration. Where new interventions are trialled, there needs to be a systemic way of measuring satisfaction with personal security before, during and after interventions are put in place.

“I felt intimidated by a drunken man on my bus journey home I felt he shouldn’t have been allowed on the bus as he was very intoxicated talking to himself loudly and just made me uncomfortable.”

Conclusions and way forward

Personal security is clearly a complex issue that cuts across society as a whole rather than being specific to the bus sector and, as a result, is not something bus companies can address on their own. It is equally clear that a lot of good work is already underway, but that more can still be done. This brief report highlights several broad areas/themes in which the industry could make improvements for passengers:

- An appreciation within the industry that lower-level anti-social behaviour (e.g, feet on seats, vaping/smoking, playing music loudly, etc), although may seem less pressing than more violent/intrusive behaviours, nevertheless impacts greatly on passenger perceptions of personal security and needs to be given attention.
- Partnership working with local authorities and police – especially when it comes to more effective targeting of perpetrators.
- Harmonisation of reporting arrangements to make it easier for people to report issues and concerns, and formalisation of working with other agencies which may receive reports from more vulnerable groups to ensure we understand the full picture.
- Better promotion of those reporting mechanisms at stops, on board and on apps and websites to make it easy for passengers to get help and support in one ‘click’/one easy step. This needs to take into consideration support for vulnerable groups.
- Developing a systemic way to measure the effectiveness of any new interventions aimed at improving personal security, and a clearer understanding of what interventions would provide most reassurance for passengers. The latter could be a useful further research piece.
- Further research to understand the specific needs of certain groups such as disabled people, people from certain ethnic groups, and young people and understanding their end-to-end journeys and information/reporting needs. This also includes a better understanding of the harder to reach groups, including those who are not currently travelling.
- Develop a consistent way to identify and share good practice which may exist in transport and other relevant industries, both UK and overseas in relation to personal security, particularly around supporting vulnerable groups, tackling lower-level anti-social behaviour and working with young people.
- The availability and transparency of data – monitoring of security data can help facilitate a focus on improvement and provide reassurance to passengers. There needs to be a clear overall strategy and consistent way to measure passenger perceptions of personal security which may involve multiple agencies.

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Transport Focus is the operating
name of the Passengers' Council