



# **Personal security and anti-social behaviour on bus**

**Research and policy review**

A passenger perspective

November 2024

## 1. Introduction

As part of Transport Focus's business plan activity to improve passenger satisfaction of personal security on bus and rail, we have carried out a deep dive into our data to identify the key concerns passengers have while waiting at bus stops and travelling on board services. This short report on anti-social behaviour has been compiled from our most recent *Your Bus Journey 2023* survey data for England.

While this report focuses on bus, consideration needs to be given to the fact that for many people, using the bus is only part of their end-to-end journey and perceptions of safety may also be influenced by factors such as safe walking/cycling routes to bus stations/bus stops, or when changing modes. It is imperative to understand the journeys passengers are making and also which journeys they want to make to facilitate safe journeys.

## 2. Background

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<sup>1</sup>. While this sounds encouraging, bus patronage in many areas has still not fully recovered since the covid pandemic.

Localised offers and the government two-pound capped fare initiative have helped turn things around in a more positive direction and encouraged more people to use the bus, including previous non-users or infrequent users. But there is still more to do, especially if government is to meet ambitious sustainability targets. If people are to be encouraged to use bus more, it needs to be an attractive proposition – especially when trying to get people to switch from car use. Similarly, those for whom bus is their only option may miss out on important opportunities if they feel services are unreliable or they do not feel safe.

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, coupled with dedicated leads for personal security on transport (in the West Midlands) seeks to drive improvements in tackling unwanted behaviour. While great strides are being made, it is clear there is still much to be done.

Estimates from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) for year ending June 2024 survey<sup>2</sup> show that 36 per cent of people had experienced or witnessed some type of anti-social behaviour (ASB). This is slightly higher than in the year ending June 2023 survey (34 per cent). There was no change in the volume of police recorded ASB incidents in year ending June 2024 (including the British Transport Police), compared with year ending June 2023 (1 million incidents).

It is no surprise that problems in wider society are also reflected on public transport. Research by the Suzy Lamplugh Trust (2021)<sup>3</sup> shows that the vast majority of participants who said they experienced unwanted behaviour on public transport in the past five years indicated that these behaviours took place on either a train (62 per cent) or a bus (56 per cent).

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<sup>1</sup> [Annual bus statistics: year ending March 2023 \(revised\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/annual-bus-statistics-year-ending-march-2023-revised)

<sup>2</sup> [Crime in England and Wales: year ending June 2024](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/crime-in-england-and-wales-year-ending-june-2024) Office for National Statistics (October 2024).

<sup>3</sup> [Driving out violence and aggression on public transport](https://www.suzy-lamplugh-trust.org.uk/research), Suzy Lamplugh Trust (2021)

Office for National Statistics data<sup>4</sup> shows that women aged 16 to 34 felt less safe using public transport than men or any other age group. As would be expected, the data also show people felt less safe using public transport after dark than during the day. Across all settings in the day and after dark, the latest data for February to March 2022 also showed that disabled adults felt less safe than non-disabled adults.

### 3. Earlier Transport Focus research

Transport Focus has also published a series of research relating to criminality and anti-social behaviour on public transport. Rail passengers often cite the anti-social behaviour of other passengers as the main reason they are concerned about their personal security<sup>5</sup>. This is typified by things such as rowdy behaviour, putting feet on seats, playing music loudly and being under the influence of alcohol/drugs. When asked what would make passengers feel safer the answers invariably include the presence of staff and police, CCTV and a welcoming station environment (such as good lighting and well-maintained facilities).

We have also looked previously at personal security on buses. Our most recent research on bus passenger priorities for improvement found that 'more effort to tackle anti-social behaviour' was the sixth highest priority (out of 30 criteria)<sup>6</sup>. For non-users of bus, our data show that more efforts to tackle anti-social behaviour is ranked seventh highest.

In 2011, we undertook a focused piece of work on anti-social behaviour in the West Midlands area<sup>7</sup>. 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, while 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. While participants thought that CCTV was a useful feature to deter and detect nefarious behaviour, there was not always confidence that it was being monitored or that it was in working order.

Further work on bus in 2013<sup>8</sup> again highlighted similar themes, with rowdy behaviour topping the list of unpleasant behaviours and it pointed to the challenges in dispersed ownership of the various elements of the transport network. There are various players involved, each with their own remit and set of priorities, e.g. bus operators, local authorities, transport authorities, which can make it difficult to manage in a holistic way.

Our research on information and infrastructure barriers in Wales<sup>9</sup> also provides some additional useful insights which are translatable across the nations. We spoke to a diverse range of bus users in both rural and urban areas in Wales. Personal safety was evidently important to passengers.

Poorly maintained bus stops with evidence of anti-social behaviour including graffiti,

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<sup>4</sup> [Perceptions of personal safety and experiences of harassment, Great Britain: 16 February to 13 March 2022](#), Office for National Statistics (published May 2022)

<sup>5</sup> [Anti-social behaviour – rail passenger views](#), Transport Focus (2010); [Passenger perceptions of personal security on the railway](#) Transport Focus (2016);

<sup>6</sup> [Bus passenger priorities for improvement](#) Transport Focus (2020)

<sup>7</sup> [Criminal and anti-social behaviour on buses summary report](#), Transport Focus, (March 2011)

<sup>8</sup> [Anti-social behaviour on buses](#), Transport Focus (2013)

<sup>9</sup> [Information and infrastructure barriers to bus use in Wales](#), Transport Focus (May 2024)

broken windows and litter can put people off using the stop or using the bus at all. Passenger comments help to add context about some of their concerns.

*“The lighting is poor and when I’ve waited there in the night, I feel very unsafe which is why I’ve not really gone out in the evenings again.”*

*“Anti-social behaviour and Friday/Saturday time, there can be so many drunk people around that I don’t feel safe.”*

*“The sheltered bus stops near me are battered up, there’s a bench to sit on and it looked ok, but the glass was smashed, it’s not a pretty thing to want to sit on. That’s off-putting, and it can make you anxious sitting there on your own and you’re more exposed to the road and bad weather.”*

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 to feel safer, drawing on examples of good practice both here and abroad.

#### **4. Findings from the 2023 Your Bus Journey survey**

Our *Your Bus Journey*<sup>10</sup> survey was launched in January 2023 and seeks to monitor 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 in England outside London. It involved talking to passengers about their experience on more than 35,000 journeys up until the end of 2023.

This robust dataset provides valuable insight into the drivers of passenger satisfaction. The survey sample consists of people making journeys both throughout the daytime and into the evening and the results are weighted to ensure they represent the views of a cross section of the travelling public. The survey asks passengers about the specific journeys they are making and not their general experience, although via verbatim comments, some passengers may reflect on other bus journeys they have taken.

Results for Scotland<sup>11</sup> were published separately and data for Wales will become available in Spring 2025. From Spring 2025 we will start to see trend data relating to passenger satisfaction. Additionally, we will also have data available in relation to Transport Safety Officers, and how they are perceived in terms of providing reassurance and support for the travelling public.

The majority of passengers reflect positively on their journeys. Our data show that overall, 72 per cent of passengers rated their safety at the bus stop as good, while 80 per cent rated their safety as good on the bus itself. While it is encouraging to see that satisfaction is generally positive, there are passengers who indicate they had experienced concerns.

As part of the survey, passengers are asked specific questions about their perceptions of personal security.

##### **i. Which behaviours cause passengers to be concerned?**

Our data shows that eight percent of passengers said they had experienced something

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<sup>10</sup> [Your Bus Journey. Transport Focus \(2024\)](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Your Bus Journey Scotland. Transport Focus \(2024\)](#)



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

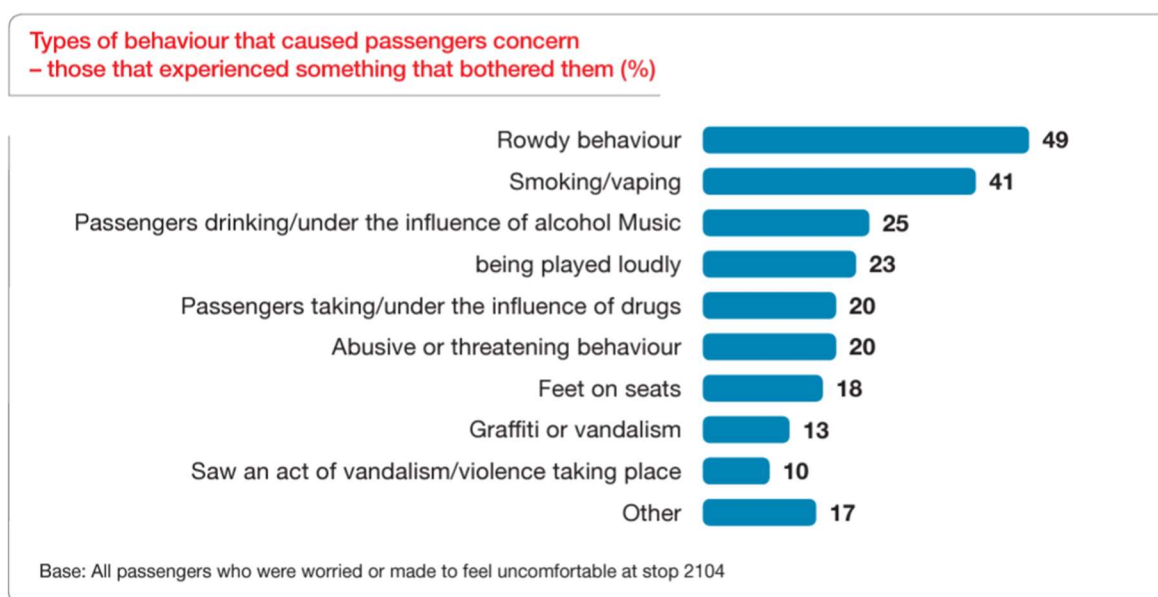
Our *Your Bus Journey* survey asks, 'Did other passengers' behaviour make you feel worried or uncomfortable during your journey at the bus stop or on the bus?'

When people break rules or display negative behaviours even at level which may be considered low, they are effectively sending out a message that their behaviour may be unpredictable and may break other rules too. If you feel vulnerable and you cannot easily remove yourself from the situation, you may feel help is not easily at hand from either the driver or police. This can lead to anxiety increasing even if the behaviour does not actually escalate further at the time into something more serious – it is the 'what if?' in terms of what may happen.

Respondents were asked if they had experienced anything which caused them concern and if they had, they were able to select from a range of pre-determined behaviours. They also had the option to add 'something else' if there was another behaviour causing them concern which was not listed.

## ii. 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 for those passengers who said they had experienced something that made them feel worried or uncomfortable at the bus stop (49 per cent), followed by smoking / vaping (41 per cent). It is not clear if smoking and vaping are perceived as equally offensive or whether one causes more concern than the other. It is likely that the environment will impact upon perception e.g. proximity to those smoking or vaping, size of shelter, sufficient ventilation, or ability to move away from the offending behaviour while waiting for the bus to arrive.

There are also some unknowns about the longer-term health impacts of vaping, whereas the dangers of passive smoking are well documented to have a negative effect on health which may influence perceptions. There are potentially differences in perception between smokers and non-smokers/vapers which are not explored here.

Some 25 per cent who noted something of concern at the bus stop 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 more concerns for safety and invariably, some of this falls into the realm of criminality.

Passengers under the influence of intoxicants can be unpredictable which may cause anxiety. Where this sort of behaviour happens on routes with infrequent or unreliable services, it could potentially mean passengers are left waiting, feeling uncomfortable for some time. This is where real-time information is invaluable to passengers so they know how long they may have to wait so they can assess options in the event they do feel unsafe. The availability of tracking information online and via apps can be helpful to passengers so they can plan effectively and are able to limit the time they spend hanging around at stops waiting in the first place.

Music being played loudly has historically featured as a key thing which passengers are concerned about. Technology has evolved over time – personal CD players and iPods have given way to sophisticated smartphones as the source of annoyance. Traditional telephone calls are often replaced by more intrusive video calls.

TikTok, YouTube and similar have inspired a new generation – it is less about the favourite songs on repeat, but more the cacophony of random content, consumed at speed which can be overwhelming for those who prefer a relaxing environment. New media tends to be more social in nature, with friends sharing and discussing content, and therefore not using headphones as you might with your own playlist.

Disturbingly, 20 per cent who had a concern at the bus stop cited that abuse or threatening behaviour had caused them to worry, although there is scant information about specific threatening behaviours. It is likely that this intersects with alcohol and drug consumption among other factors. It is not clear whether the behaviour is aimed at the passengers themselves, between other passengers, or from passers-by.

'Feet on seats' also featured with 18 per cent of passengers who had cause for concern on their journey saying this had bothered them. This is consistent with our previous research.

A total of 13 per cent who indicated a concern found graffiti or vandalism was an issue at the bus stop. Even if there is no anti-social behaviour seen by a passenger at the stop while waiting for their bus, the presence of graffiti and vandalism is indicative that there is anti-social behaviour in the area and can impact perceptions of safety.

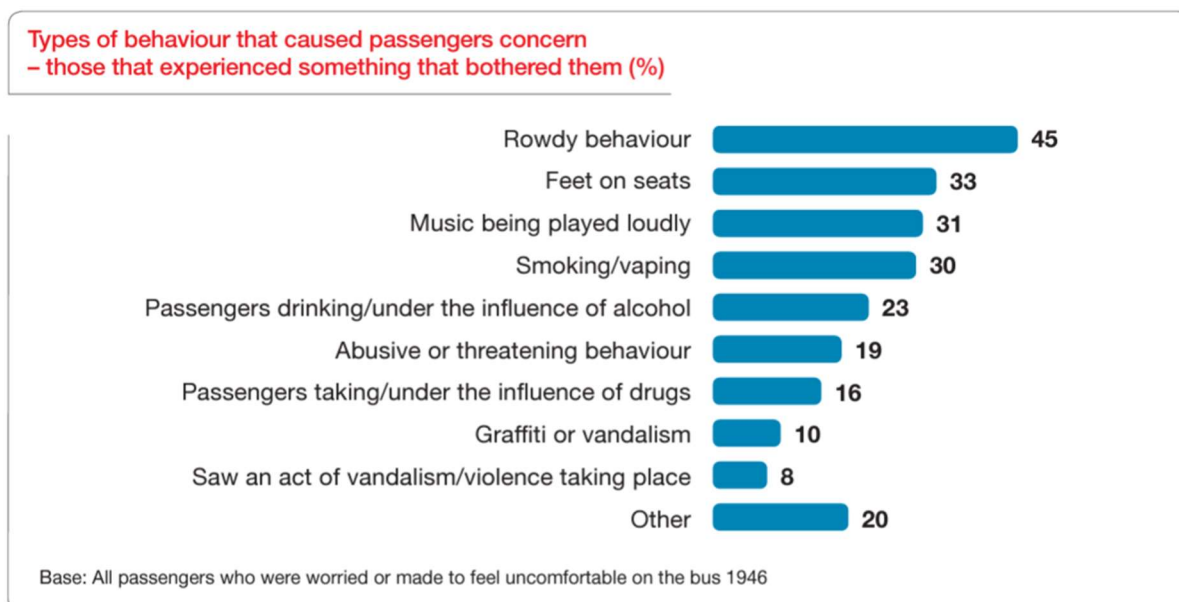
They may perceive the stop as having been abandoned by the authorities, particularly if the stop is not quickly repaired. It is recognised that merely removing offending graffiti and fixing damaged infrastructure may not solve an issue, and it can be costly. It may be that there is persistent anti-social behaviour in the area which needs a more focussed and inter-agency approach.

*“The bus driver on this route is always very cheerful and helpful, truly part of the community, makes the journey a pleasure. The downside is the awful, shabby state of all the local bus stops. They are dirty, full of graffiti and have panels missing. Hardly encouraging use of public transport.”*

At bus stops (as opposed to bus stations), there are no protective measures in place in terms of a physical presence to deter anti-social behaviour. This can leave passengers feeling isolated or reliant on each other for support, although intervention is unlikely where behaviour is more aggressive, as passengers will be fearful of repercussions. We know that some bus stations can attract anti-social behaviour in the evenings, and these are complex issues, relating to drugs, alcohol and homelessness. These environments can be worrying for passengers despite the fact there is often an increased staff visibility. These are wider societal issues.

### iii. 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



On the bus, again rowdy behaviour causes the greatest concern for passengers (45 per cent) and verbatim comments provided by passengers using the services provide some useful context. School children are often cited as the source of behaviour which other passengers find reprehensible and a source of anxiety or disappointment, although there are some examples of young people showing respect to other passengers, or being victims of negative behaviour themselves.

We know from our data that young people rate their perception of safety less favourably than other groups. Pushing, being noisy, vaping and playing music loudly are just some of the behaviours attributed to school children.

*“Bus comfortable and well driven, some damage/graffiti but not loads, conduct of two school children absolutely deplorable... Vaping, swearing, openly aggressive, after alighting they lunged, yelled at and kicked the bus...”*

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

*“School kids make any journey bad. All kids doesn’t matter what age should have an adult with them or band (sic) from buses. All kids have no respect for any one once on a bus.”*

*“Nothing particular on this journey, but on previous journeys there are very often people vaping on the bus (mostly school children). This should be controlled much better, an absolute minimum of more signs saying that it is not permitted.”*

*“The older kids go to school so sometimes we find that we can never get onto the bus that early in the morning sometime for school and it’s bad my little girl got attacked on it”.*

*“...Someone at my school who gets a different bus said people vape on the bus which they do not like.”*

*“...good: quite quick bad: school children vaping people playing videos on full volume”.*

*“...bad, noisy and sometimes school children are violent...”*

*“Crowded bus, school boys stood to offer seat.”*

*“It’s good because there was no school children to cause anti-social behaviour, as several times I’ve caught this bus on school times and the children are aggressive and rude towards passengers and bus drivers. They have scared my son before.”*

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. It appears that some of the issues raised concern expectations of mutual respect, manners and etiquette. Other passengers not conforming to expected behavioural norms, and failing to obey rules is clearly problematic and impacts the journey quality of other users. Failing to obey rules, and lack of authority figures or other passengers challenging the offending behaviour, almost seems to perpetuate the issues as there is no recourse for those who do not play by the rules and it emboldens them to continue.

*“...What I don’t like in general is that some passengers put their feet with their dirty shoes on that other passengers have to sit on”.*

*“Other passengers being annoying with loud devices and lounging around with their feet on the seats!”*

*“I would like to see customers with their feet on the floor as opposed to putting them on seats, maybe putting a sign on the opposite seat requesting that?”*

*“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. Young people occupying seats for the old.”*

Music being played loudly on board also features as something which impacts on how



comfortable passengers feel on their journey. This is likely to be compounded by the fact that the environment is compact with people sitting/standing in close proximity to each other.

Some 23 per cent of passengers who expressed a concern highlighted that music being played loudly was an issue. It was slightly less of an issue at stops (21 per cent). Some passengers clearly enjoy passing the time listening to music and tell us it helps them to relax on their journey, but it is when it becomes intrusive that it impacts on others and it is seen to be anti-social in nature. It is possible that some passengers do not realise some of their behaviours are causing stress for others.

*“The journey was pleasant except the noise from a passenger who was listening to WhatsApp music from his phone without using headphone speakers. Which was very annoying. Plus resting his feet onto the seat opposite him, which again I found to be inconsiderate”*

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

*“The journey was good, and we arrived at our destination quickly however a few passengers were playing music out loud which is slightly annoying as they are only thinking about themselves and not others...”*

*“There were a group of youths passing music obnoxiously loud: I don't mind them playing music but loud enough to feel it in the air is a bit ridiculous.”*

*“I take the bus every day, so most things are good, just get on and close my eyes or listen to music / podcast.”*

*“Was a very quick journey. I always find buses peaceful as I am with my music and my thoughts.”*

*“I enjoyed my journey because I like talking to people on the bus and listening to my own music on the bus and I like looking at the buildings from the bus windows”.*

*“Normal, just quiet and peaceful as always, although sometimes it can be loud, I'm autistic so I always have music as the buss can be to loud’*

*“It was okay. Mostly sat on my phone and talked with friends while listening to music as I'm meeting up with them hopefully at 12pm ish. I take this bus every Mon - Fri and don't tend to look out of the window or come off my phone. Not a very social person, also have soundproof headphones cause bus rides can get loud and I hate loud noise.”*

A total of 23 per cent of passengers who had concerns about other passenger's behaviour on the bus were worried about others being under the influence of alcohol on board and 16 per cent taking or under the influence of drugs. It is likely that anxieties are heightened within a constrained environment, with limited opportunity for passengers to remove themselves from the situation.

While in some cases the driver can act as a gatekeeper by potentially preventing passengers who are likely to cause a disturbance from boarding in the first place, it is not straightforward. The driver may be fearful for their own safety by intervening, and support

may take some time to arrive should a situation escalate. Additionally, there could be safeguarding issues relating to the person under the influence and leaving them at a potentially isolated spot may render them vulnerable to harm. Passengers appreciate the difficult position drivers are in.

*“Journey was good and nice to see so many using the bus. The bad side was a drunk got on board and was a pain! I know it must have been difficult the the driver to make the right decision whether to stop and ask him to leave or to carry on. A difficult call but did feel once the drunk had fallen off his seat I think he should have asked him to leave (personal opinion)”.*

Drivers are also providing a safety-critical role while conveying passengers from A to B with a focus on navigating the roads on the route safely and maintaining a punctual service.

*“The driver seems very nice; bus was clean and not many people were there. There was one person absolutely drunk and aggressively taking on the phone about Satan and killing some people. He was holding the beer which he thrown on the sit next to him splashing some of the liquid on one of the passengers. He was pacing backward and forward on the lower deck of the bus which made me feel very anxious and unsafe. When he left the bus, the driver secured the dirty seats on the bus preventing other passengers to sit there and said that he will be taking the bus for cleaning after his route. He was very nice and had chat with some of the passengers.”*

*“The buses are usually delayed a lot or cancelled and theirs (sic) people on the bus that are either on drugs or causing a scene or trying to talk to people underage.”*

*“This journey was good but on the \* and \* there are constantly drug abusers and often times stains such as vomit on one of the seats and at the station there have been fights happening.”*

*“It has a nice, well-behaved, middle-class crowd. In the other bus services, like the \* (number of bus), there's a lot of antisocial behaviour (drug addicts, drinkers, homeless people).”*

*“It was unfortunately a bad journey, with a gentleman very drunk in the back of the bus drinking cider, then he walked to the front of the bus spilling his cider on people on the bus, the driver did ask him if he wanted off the bus but he didn't and continued to travel in the seats behind the driver, punching the windows and swearing and saying he was going to kill people and then fell off his seat just before we reached commercial road he became very agitated and got off the bus at the stop before going round the corner for the safety of other passengers on the bus which I was happy about, was not a very good experience for anyone on the bus.”*

*“The bus was delayed as a drunk had urinated on the back seats of the bus.”*

*“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”*

*“I liked the charging points on the bus. There was a drunk guy arguing with teenagers on the bus which wasn't very nice...”*

*“The journey to Penzance was pleasant, however on the return journey two drunks boarded and made me feel uneasy.”*

Bus drivers may not always be aware of what is happening on board and may be limited in terms of what they can do once they are aware if they are in a location where there are few safe stopping points. It needs to be easy to report anti-social or criminal behaviour seen on board as well as at stops.

Passengers also told us about ‘other’ behaviours they had experienced on their journey which caused them concern. A total of 20 per cent of those who had cause for concern said it was something else which bothered them on the bus, compared with 17 per cent at the stop.

Many chose to elaborate more on the general behaviours on the pre prescribed list, however there were some comments which illustrate more gender-based issues are prevalent.

While instances reported via our survey are relatively low, when they do happen, they can cause a lot of anxiety for those on the receiving end of this behaviour. There is some useful insight, however, from those who did disclose other behaviour which had worried them. Staring, invading personal space, and strangers talking to women are some of the examples provided which can make female passengers uncomfortable and unsafe.

*“Men I didn't know watching me and following me on the bus and off as well as before”*

*“man trying to talk to me that I didn't know”*

*“Shifty looking people, making me feel on edge, staring etc”*

*“An elderly gentleman chose to sit next to me on my bench when he could've sat on any other free bench. He then proceeded to talk to me about the bus while I was on the phone to the company, and lifted my bag onto my shoulder when I got up. Unsure whether that was him being friendly or otherwise, but it was uncomfortable for me.”*

*“I felt stares on me even off the bus every car that drive by and stopped would stare at me and give me looks even though I am clearly underage but it's doesn't matter what age it feels very uncomfortable when men are staring.”*

*“Overly solicitous strange man at the bus stop.”*

*“Asking odd questions about myself”*

*“Insisted on talking to me despise (sic) wearing earbuds and clearly not wanting to talk”*

*“Men staring at me continuously”*

*“Bus on time, nice lady giving the feedback questionnaires. On the other side, sometimes the people taking the buses in Birmingham are creepy and scary, many times it happened - especially on bus number \*, that me (and/or my friends)*

*are actually scared”*

Additionally, some cited that begging and homeless people hanging around transport hubs/ at stops was a cause for concern. This is clearly a societal issue which cannot be tackled by bus operators alone and requires a partnership approach.

This data can also be broken down and looked at through different lenses – for example to see how attitudes differ between key passenger demographics (for example age, gender, ethnicity and disability) or by things like the time of day.

#### **iv. Age**

It is clear that certain age groups are more inclined to rate their perceptions of personal security less favourably than others. 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). Over 60s, however, generally indicate that perceptions of personal security are less of a concern. It is not clear why older people tend to feel safer, and this would warrant further investigation. It could be linked to whether they are accompanied or not on their travel, (22 per cent sat next to someone they knew, compared to 17 per cent for those aged under 60).

We know that in general terms, whether or not you are sat next to someone can influence responses (particularly when sat with someone they did not know). It may also be related to where they choose to sit (e.g. lower deck as opposed to upper deck) etc. There is anecdotal evidence that older people often try to complete their journeys before schools close to avoid big groups of schoolchildren as they head home for the day on public transport.

#### **v. Disability**

A lot of work is going on to make buses and bus stops more accessible and inclusive spaces, although there is arguably much more that needs to be done in this space. Our data show some discernible differences about perceptions of safety with those who indicated they have a disability compared with those who did not.

Those with difficulty learning, understanding or concentrating, were 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 twice as likely 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 perceptions of safety at the bus stop as poor overall compared to those with no disability (12 per cent compared with six per cent). Nobody wants to spend longer at the stop than they have to, and certain groups can feel particularly vulnerable when waiting, so having access to reliable real time information and being able to identify their bus when it comes can build confidence and help avoid unnecessary anxiety.

Navigating the environment around bus stops and interchanges can be a challenge from finding out information, to the physical layout and drawing attention to the bus driver to make them stop in the first place. There is some good practice such as talking bus stops<sup>12</sup> in the Brighton and Hove area which provide information about next services so

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<sup>12</sup> [Talking Bus Stops](#)

people know how long they have to wait, and the partnership with Henshaws<sup>13</sup> in Manchester where visually impaired passengers can use bus hailers so they can confidently hail a bus without the danger of it leaving behind.

Data also show that one in four passengers travelling with a helper said that passenger behaviour caused them concern on the bus (27 per cent). Disabled users were more than twice as likely to rate their security on the bus as poor than non-disabled passengers when using the bus for travelling to/from education (12 per cent compared with five per cent)

Verbatim comments provide additional context around some behaviours which cause particular issues for disabled passengers, although they are related more to other passengers respecting spaces which are designated for those with disabilities. Numerous passengers raised the issue of non-disabled people taking up disabled persons' seats and it is clear this is felt to show them a lack of respect.

*“Passengers ignoring disabled seating.”*

*“Safe journey on bus. Came very full on the journey, I have a walking stick. I like to use the disabled seats. Not always possible as other people use it.”*

*“People standing around near entrance when there's several seats at the rear of the bus and able-bodied teenagers sitting in disabled seats and won't move for people with sticks etc.”*

*“Young male students using disabled seating for themselves and bags”*

*“Bus was crowded as it was the one school children use to get home in the afternoon. School girl sat in the front disabled seat and ignored the fact that an elderly passenger was suffering in the seat next to me. The bus driver didn't say anything to her.”*

*“The journey was good this time as there were no students on it. Usually, it is full and not good when young ones won't get up and let older or people with disabilities sit down.”*

*“Bus journey was good compared to previous bus journeys managed to get a seat but I do think overall that buses do get to packed and people standing to far forward and blocking the passageway so that people can't get on and off the bus safely also when you get school kids on the buses they have no respect for people with disabilities and don't offer a seat or move over to enable someone else to take a seat and they also keep their bags on the seat again not moving it so that someone can take a seat there are also times that bad language is happening and is uncomfortable to hear so I do think in general that bus safety needs to be looked into.”*

It is not clear to what extent that reporting mechanisms for anti-social behaviour are accessible to passengers with disabilities or vulnerable people who may be digitally excluded and not have access to a smart phone. Since this group is one of the most impacted by anti-social behaviour, it is important that their voices are heard.

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<sup>13</sup> [How to Use Bus Hailers - Henshaws](#)



## vi. Ethnicity

Passengers from ethnic minority groups are more likely to rate their personal security on board the bus as 'fairly poor' or 'poor' than those who identify as white. The picture is, however, more nuanced between the ethnic groups. While the sample is relatively small, and therefore, there needs to be some caution in interpreting the results, there is evidence to suggest that passengers who describe their ethnicity as 'Arab' were over three times more likely to rate their personal security on the bus as 'fairly poor'/'poor' compared to those who described themselves as white (12 per cent v three per cent).

Sixteen per cent of respondents who identify as Arab and 11 per cent of respondents who identify as Asian/British Asian said that other passenger's behaviour caused them concern on the bus (compared to six per cent of those who identified as white). This certainly warrants further exploration to identify if there are specific issues impacting on these particular groups so interventions can be more effectively targeted to enable these passengers to feel safer.

## vii. Time of day

Invariably, perceptions of personal security will be influenced by other factors such as the time of day a passenger is travelling. Those travelling after 18:30 were twice as likely to say that passenger behaviour caused them concern at the bus stop than those travelling at other times of the day. (16 per cent v seven per cent).

*"Today's journey was in time. Sometimes it's late and it's a long journey to Lytham. Sometimes late at night it's a bit unsettling with certain people as can be mouthy and you feel scared esp when with kids"*

*"Bus was on time. This is important, especially when travelling at night. Driver was courteous. Bus well lit. Bus was clean."*

*"The waiting times are too long, they're roughly every hour and a half at this time of night."*

## viii. Frequency of services

In a challenging financial environment, sometimes difficult decisions have to be made around the provision of services, which can lead to reduced frequency in some areas. This in turn can make people feel less safe as they are left waiting for longer.

*"Have to wait longer as buses have been cut"*

*"Fine but it's not very frequent and that's more unsafe at night"*

*"Service is every hourly which is annoying as I have to wait for 45min I'm regular for this route as I live in the area but frustrating when have wait so long for next one and I have a disability, newborn child and 3 other children and being female and going dark early I don't feel safe."*

## 5. 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. In this section we explore some of the suggestions made by passengers and highlight some

examples, both in Great Britain and overseas, of initiatives designed to make people feel safer. While there is a lot of innovative activity happening to tackle some of this behaviour, it is less clear how effective they are.

### **i. Better behaviour campaigns**

There may be value in 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.

It is evident that anti-social behaviour is an issue which is not exclusive to operators in the UK.

We found a number of examples of operators overseas stepping up messaging reinforcing positive behaviours, including showing respect to public transport staff.

- The Société de Transport de Montréal recently launched its 'C'est Bon' campaign<sup>14</sup> (September 2024). This understands that some people may realise that their behaviour causes concern for others. Rather than call out poor behaviour, it promotes good travel habits to make the travel experience more pleasant for the travelling public.
- In February 2024, Adelaide Metro promoted tips on 'How to catch a bus like a South Aussie'<sup>15</sup>. The light-hearted approach asks passengers to display good bus manners.
- In America the Metropolitan Transportation Authority launched its 'Courtesy Counts' campaign in October 2023. The 34 illustrations that formed a part of this campaign featured a variety of creative artwork with messaging reminding transit customers about different ways to respect fellow riders and encourage courteous behaviour in public spaces.
- Public Transport Victoria (Australia) launched an innovative campaign<sup>16</sup> 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.

### **ii. Gender based violence and sexual harassment initiatives**

Recent research by Dr Lucy Baker of Aberystwyth University resulted in a set of key policy recommendations<sup>17</sup> 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.

Transport authorities and operators are also collaborating on awareness campaigns.

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<sup>14</sup> C'est Bon campaign, Société de Transport de Montreal (September 2024) [STM promotes good habits with new rider awareness campaign | Société de transport de Montréal](#)

<sup>15</sup> [How to catch a bus like a South Aussie - Adelaide Metro](#) (February 2024)

<sup>16</sup> [Respect our transport workers - Public Transport Victoria](#)

<sup>17</sup> [Safer journeys for women and girls: Policy report](#). Dr Lucy Baker, Aberystwyth University (July 2024)

- 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.
- Transport for London has launched a campaign to encourage a culture of active bystanders on public transport.

### iii. Reporting mechanisms

Suzy Lamplugh Trust research<sup>18</sup> (2021) showed that very few people (14 per cent) chose to make a report to police, with the main reasons cited by respondents being that they felt it would not be worth the emotional stress, or that it would not be taken seriously. Building trust with passengers in the event they do experience unwanted behaviour is of paramount importance.

Equally, 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 about how to report incidents of concern. Recent Transport Focus website and app sampling activity, however, shows that many operator apps and websites do not have any information about how to do this. Where there is information, it is often not easy to find and using search functions often just return older news items about local initiatives. A 'one click' approach would enable people to access the information they need more quickly should they need it.

The system of reporting is fragmented making it difficult for people to know which reporting systems apply in the various areas. For example, in the West Midlands, there is a well-established text function to report concerns on the bus (81018) and having key partners co-located in one place responding to the reports enables effective interventions. In other areas, advice is less clear, with the 101 number as the suggested route to reporting.

National Express Coaches launched 'operation safe space', encouraging people to report any harassment and unwanted behaviours and have a dedicated mobile number. Nexus, the Tyne and Wear Passenger Transport Executive has a designated number '66777'. The British Transport Police has its own dedicated text number for rail as part of the 'see it, say it, sorted' campaign which is widely promoted across the rail network. It is used for reporting a whole range of behaviours from suspicious activity, counter-terrorism, to dealing with lower-level anti-social behaviour. The system of reporting is fragmented making it difficult for people to know which reporting systems apply in the various areas.

### iv. CCTV

Many buses have CCTV, and this can be reassuring for some passengers. Although it may act as a deterrent for some behaviours, it may not deter others, such as those under the influence of intoxicants or those with certain mental health issues. 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.

In support of Denver Regional Transportation District's (RTD) Welcoming Transit Environment initiative, a substantial safety and security project has been completed and

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<sup>18</sup> Driving out violence and aggression on public transport, Suzy Lamplugh Trust, 2021

is in use on all RTD buses: the addition of live look-in equipment in case of an emergency situation. With the addition of the live look-in system, RTD's public safety dispatchers can use a secure, cellular network connection to hear audio and view video in real time from the cameras on board that vehicle. The new approach helps bus dispatch and Transit Police better understand an issue, including how to assist employees and the public in a timely manner.

## **v. Children**

It is clear that a number of passengers are less comfortable travelling when school children are using the services in large numbers. This is linked to crowding and rowdy behaviour. While some suggest schools have their own provision, it is not practical or in many cases not financially possible.

It is important to engage young people in transport discussions and there are good examples of this in other jurisdictions. The Maryland Transit Administration (MTA), for example, has formed a [youth transit council](#) for young people in the area aged 14-18. The aim is to empower younger people to shape the future of transport, by engaging them in its planning processes and enables it to better understand the needs of young people. The initiative also promotes careers in the industry and helps young people to understand how the MTA operates.

Involving children in decision-making processes is also something proffered by the Children's Commissioner for England in her March 2024 report<sup>19</sup>. This recommends that every local authority should complete a local child safety audit to map and improve the places that children don't feel safe. Children use public spaces in different ways to adults and have different priorities, but their views are often overlooked. The report argues that local authorities must consult with children, including those with different needs, about what improvements to the built environment are needed, such as lighting on school routes and in parks, access to playgrounds and open space for games, and safe and accessible transport.'

There are examples of work others are doing to support children getting to school. SBS Transit (Singapore) recently launched a school-friendly public bus service. While this was primarily driven by a shortage of private bus drivers, it 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.

## **vi. The driver**

Our research shows passengers greatly value the role of 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.

Passengers comment on the positive actions of drivers even when they are not the recipient of the support themselves – they appreciate that support is being provided for the more vulnerable and this engenders a sense of community. Passengers seem to appreciate consistency of drivers on the route they use, since they like to see a familiar face and appreciate how the driver can respond to any individual needs they may have.

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<sup>19</sup> [The Big Ambition | Children's Commissioner for England](#)

Drivers very much provide that presence and reassurance to passengers on their journeys.

Drivers are also commended for their assistance when calling unfamiliar stops, providing directions for onward journeys and managing the onboard space for the various needs of passengers needing priority spaces such as wheelchair users and passengers with push chairs.

A friendly, approachable driver is valued, especially when they are seen to maintain order and good manners on board, although in more serious situations where the environment is perceived to be more volatile or dealing with more challenging passengers such as those under the influence of drink or drugs, the expectations are less clear.

*“The driver always makes it easier for over 60s getting on and off the bus by going as close to their house as possible and lowering the bus to the pavement level. Journey is usually quiet and peaceful; driver will ask anyone using their phone very loudly to use head phones.”*

*“The journey today seemed relatively quick which is a good thing and there was a member of stagecoach on the bus helping the driver and the passengers which made me feel safe.”*

*“Thank you for all the bus drivers who are always helpful. Just wish that we had bus conductors in these days to be able to make it easier for the bus drivers, especially when some people cause trouble and argument on the bus.”*

*“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.”*

*“A very normal journey so far. I enjoy when the bus stops at Mere oak for a while to look at the plants across the road and take the time to listen to my podcasts. 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.”*

Staff visibility generally gives passengers reassurance and real-time information is also important.

*“At Cambourne Bus Station, no seats, no staff, no toilets, no electronic boards to show when bus expected, what a derelict place, not a safe place. We are New Zealanders on holiday just visiting Cambourne.”*

The layout of the bus has also been cited as providing some security.

*“Really good like usual. Like the Unibus style lots more just because it's more friendly although I do like the buses that have single seats good too because otherwise, I'm scared there'll be a strange guy who'll sit next to me”.*

## **vii. Bus stops and facilities**

As has been set out above 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.

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 Metro Transit (Minneapolis-St Paul area) has an 'adopt a stop' scheme, similar to what exists in rail in Britain. The Adopt-A-Stop is a program that helps businesses, individuals, community organisations and schools make a real difference in their neighbourhoods by "adopting" local transit stops.

Metro Transit employees make regular visits to shelters (in some cases, daily) to make sure that they are clean and damage-free. An adopter assists by joining in this work and alerting them to special maintenance needs and reporting vandalism or suspicious activity.

## **6. Conclusions**

While this report focuses on bus, consideration needs to be given to the fact that for many people, using the bus is only part of their end-to-end journey and perceptions of safety may also be influenced by factors such as safe walking / cycling routes to bus stations / bus stops, or when changing modes. It imperative to understand the journeys passengers are making and also which journeys they want to make to facilitate safe journeys.

Our research into anti-social behaviour and criminality on the public transport network over numerous years, tells the same story with the same types of behaviours concerning passengers. Technology has evolved, which means that the way the behaviour is carried out may have changed, but the fundamental problem has not. There are, however, more emerging concerns about women's safety in particular. National dialogue is perhaps bringing this more to the forefront and encouraging reporting.

It is clear from our extensive research that there are certain groups of passengers such as those with disabilities, women, young people, and passengers from certain ethnic groups that have increased concern about personal security. There is also some suggestion that those travelling with children feel anxious when negative behaviours are encountered on the network. It is important to have a firm understanding of the issues which affect these specific groups so mitigations can be put in place to ensure they are comfortable travelling on the public transport network. These areas would warrant further research.

There are various types of behaviour which impact on passengers which have been identified via our research which require very different approaches.

- Lower-level anti-social behaviour such as feet on seats, music being played loudly, vaping and rowdy behaviour – aspects of common courtesy and mutual respect.
- Activity which is criminal / rule breaking or related to unpredictable behaviour such as drug taking and alcohol consumption
- Specific gender-based issues and intrusive actions by men such as staring, invading personal space, following.

In terms of the lower-level behaviour, it is clear that school children are often the source of anxiety, but young people also have concerns about their safety so it is a complex picture.

Demonising young people is not helpful – they need support and encouragement too. While anti-social behaviour is targeted via the education delivery within schools, it is not clear how well this is working. Engaging with young people and involving them in transport decisions which affect them is vital.

The frequency of buses in the evenings is cited as problematic in some areas, as this means people can be waiting around for long periods in the dark. Reliable real-time information can help so passengers at least know when to expect the next service. Where people can access this remotely, they can time their arrival to spend less time waiting at the stop.

In order to understand the full scale of the problem, passengers need to be encouraged to report offending behaviour. However, as we have seen, reporting mechanisms can vary across regions and across modes which can render it difficult for passengers to know where to turn to for help. The system of reporting is fragmented making it difficult for people to know which reporting systems apply in the various areas.

It is recognised, however, that certain groups may be less inclined to report through traditional channels. It is important where other channels exist, that the relevant partners work together to share data to get a holistic view of the issues.

There is a need for partnership working to tackle the broad range of issues – some relate to societal issues and require a holistic approach. It is not something that the bus operators can tackle alone. Alcohol and substance misuse, homelessness and begging are complex issues and require specialist interventions.

While poster campaigns may be effective for anti-social behaviour (particularly those which use a behavioural science approach), they are not a panacea. Campaigns need a more coordinated and targeted approach. Conditions of Carriage documents and passenger charters vary in quality – they need to be living breathing documents which drive the right behaviours if they are to be effective. It is not clear if passengers know what is expected of them – it depends how widely these are promoted.

If people are not challenged for behaviour which is deemed anti-social, passengers can lose trust. Transport Focus supported the National Bus Strategy by providing operators and authorities with a suite of good practice guidance.<sup>20</sup> This includes guidance on passenger charters which uses our evidence base around what is important to passengers.

There is a lot of good practice both within the transport industry and within customer-facing industries, but there is no formal mechanism to capture this. A one-stop-shop for what works would prevent people from having to reinvent the wheel when faced with issues. The College of Policing has a toolkit<sup>21</sup> which is an evidence-based toolkit for dealing with anti-social behaviour. It gives examples of situations and what works.

We do not seem to fully understand what personal security measures passengers would find most reassuring, and this would warrant further exploration. Where new interventions

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<sup>20</sup> [National Bus Strategy - Transport Focus](#)

<sup>21</sup> [Anti-social behaviour | College of Policing](#)

are trialled, there needs to be a systemic way of measuring satisfaction with personal security before, during and after interventions are put in place.

We know, for example, that while CCTV can be a useful tool in providing reassurance, our previous research<sup>22</sup> has shown that not all passengers trust it is being monitored or are unsure if it is always in working order. Improved communications around this may help to address some of these passenger concerns.

## 7. A 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), while 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

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<sup>22</sup>[Criminal and anti-social behaviour on buses summary report](#). Transport Focus (March 2011)

needs to be a clear overall strategy and consistent way to measure passenger perceptions of personal security which may involve multiple agencies.

## Contact Transport Focus

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Transport Focus is the operating name of the Passengers' Council