

## Aberystwyth University

### *Safer journeys for women and girls*

Baker, Lucy

*Publication date:*  
2024

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Baker, L. (2024). *Safer journeys for women and girls: Policy report*. Transport and Health Integrated Research Network.

#### **General rights**

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the Aberystwyth Research Portal (the Institutional Repository) are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the Aberystwyth Research Portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the Aberystwyth Research Portal

#### **Take down policy**

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

tel: +44 1970 62 2400  
email: [is@aber.ac.uk](mailto:is@aber.ac.uk)

# Safer Journeys for Women and Girls



Transport and Health  
Integrated Research  
Network

## Policy Report

June 2024

Dr Lucy Baker, Aberystwyth University



# Introduction

A study by Transport Focus [1] reveals that nearly half of women surveyed in the UK (49%) have felt threatened while using public transport. Gender-based violence (GBV) significantly contributes to many women feeling unsafe and being at real risk of harm. Female, non-binary and transgender passengers tend to experience harassment, sexual harassment, sexual violence, and sexual assault, more so than men. These incidents mostly involve male perpetrators and are based on relations of power, an intention to be superior to women and are used to negatively affect women both individually and more widely in society.

Public transport is the 4th most common place sexual harassment occurs (including sexual assault and violence), of which, 84% of women in the UK have experienced in their lifetime [2].

The effect of GBV on women's journeys is such that they avoid certain transport modes for fear of their safety - sometimes when a journey is isolated or crowded, is after daylight hours, on weekend evenings, or to an unfamiliar place. Not being able to travel safely by public transport limits women's access to employment, health services, social opportunities, cities, towns, retail spaces, and decision-making activities. Experiencing GBV negatively affects women's mental health and wellbeing [3] and is a public health issue requiring preventive intervention [4].

## Public transport personal safety is an equity issue.

Gender-based violence intersects with other forms of identity discrimination. LGBTQIA+ people, women of minority ethnicities and/or religious identities, disabled people and young women are all more at risk of experiencing sexual harassment and discrimination.

Women rely more so on public transport for their journeys than men and public transport use is higher than average among marginalised and/or low-income groups.

Those dependent on public transport are more at risk of encountering harassment, violence, and discrimination, than those who have access to a car either as a driver or passenger. A UK study [5] reports, of public transport users that have experienced sexual harassment, the incidents most occurred on bus followed by rail/tram and underground.

All passengers should receive the same level of care over their safety. However, in the UK, interventions, legislation, and law enforcement are not consistent across transport modes.





## Public transport personal safety is an environmental issue.

Without a safe public transport network, it is difficult to encourage car drivers and passengers to change their journeys to bus, coach, or rail. The safety of using private car relative to public transport is a significant motivating factor for people (particularly for women) to continue using car aside from convenience and journey time savings.

# Research Objectives

This research primarily focuses on gender-based violence (GBV) and personal safety for bus and coach passengers in Wales and the UK. The study aimed to:

- Review interventions, policies and procedures used across the UK bus and coach network to ensure the personal safety of passengers, and to tackle GBV;
- Identify challenges to improving passenger personal safety;
- Capture lived experiences of GBV, women's safety perceptions and the interventions women would like implemented to improve their safety;
- Consider best practice in training bus and coach drivers on awareness and response to GBV.

# Research Highlights

## Key findings

- Most women involved in the study shared experiences of GBV.
- Several factors contribute to women feeling at risk of experiencing GBV while using buses and coaches such as waiting in crowded or isolated spaces, the night-time economy and alcohol use, limited presence of staff, limitations in the design and maintenance of the built environment, distrust in police and reporting mechanisms, and distrust in others to intervene.
- Women change their behaviour to keep themselves safe, such as avoiding travel to certain places and unfamiliar places, travelling at certain times, or by not using bus altogether.
- Interventions, policies, and procedures used to make public transport safer for passengers are inconsistent, lack detail and clarity, and do not specifically consider women's personal safety, gender, or GBV.
- There is a lack of accountability, monitoring, and evaluation among stakeholders.
- There is a lack of service and wayfinding information for passengers.
- Bus and coach stakeholders note a lack of police support and partnership.

## Policy Recommendations

1. Review, clarify and standardise how transport companies and their staff respond to incidents.
2. Review, renew and monitor the training of frontline transport staff.
3. Develop and promote a clear mechanism for reporting incidents.
4. Standardise use of statutory guidance on wayfinding and service information. Ensure new legislation on provision of accessible information on buses and coaches is enforced.
5. Introduce gender-sensitive auditing of infrastructure.
6. Travel safe partnerships as a standard requirement for local or regional authorities, police constabularies and transport providers.
7. Review legislation and measures protecting bus passenger rights in the case of delayed, cancelled, or disrupted services.

# Research Method

The research engaged with the bus and coach industry and other stakeholders across the UK between 2023 and 2024 through an online survey and semi-structured interviews. Participants included senior managers of 3 bus and coach companies, a regional representative of the bus and coach membership organisation Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT), 2 representatives of travel safe partnerships from regional transport authorities, and 2 training consultants. Survey responses did not enable a quantitative analysis but supported the qualitative analysis.

A discourse analysis of Bus Passenger Charters (BPCs) and bus and coach company conditions of carriage reviewed approaches to provide for passenger personal safety and to examine the extent to which bus and coach companies refer to women's safety, GBV, hate crime or incidents of discrimination.

The research engaged with 47 women through workshops and interviews collecting data on their lived experiences of GBV, and/or their fear of GBV during their journeys, how they behave in response to GBV, what their expectations are of different stakeholders in terms of their personal safety, and what interventions they would like implemented. Many participants also discussed their experiences of rail travel although the research focused primarily on bus and coach travel.

Four of the workshops were held online for people living in Wales (2 were for people living in rural communities and small towns), 1 took place in Cardiff in collaboration with Transport for Wales. The 16 individual in-depth semi-structured interviews with women were participated by women of various ages, 56% disabled, 50% white Welsh, 38% white British, 6% Chinese, 6% white European and 38% of participants disclosed they are survivors of domestic abuse. Online workshops and individual interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. The data was thematically coded to identify common themes, patterns, and associations.



# Research Findings

## Women's Experiences

**Women's fear of GBV is present because of the incidents they have experienced, witnessed, or are aware of in public places, and a normalisation of and tolerance to some incidents. This fear is not irrational and results from GBV, inaction from stakeholders and a failure to design our environments for women's personal safety.**

### **Situations in which women feel unsafe and where they experience or see more incidents**

Women perceive they are most likely to experience GBV at certain times and in certain situations. For example, while travelling in the evening and particularly on weekends (from Thursday to Sunday in some cases) associated with alcohol consumption and activities of the night-time economy including major events (most referred to rugby and football matches). Women fear waiting in isolated and crowded places because both situations enable perpetrators to target women. In isolated places there are less people to intervene, and perpetrators may perceive women as vulnerable. In a crowd, anonymity is offered to perpetrators where they may be concealed and where the proximity of moving or stationary bodies creates uncertainty over experiences.

### **A lack of care**

Women also do not have confidence in relevant stakeholders (the police, transport companies, transport staff, local and regional authorities, national governments, and other related public institutions) to take responsibility for their personal safety and wellbeing. Many women are not confident others will intervene if they encounter GBV. Some participants fear they will be stranded for a long time if a bus does not arrive, is significantly delayed (or early), or does not stop for them.

### **Not enough information**

Women feel uncertain when traveling to unfamiliar places and this is partly because of a lack of information available to passengers. They perceive they are more vulnerable when they appear unsure or lost.

### **Factors relating to the night**

Although women did report incidents occurring on their morning commute and in the day, most reported feeling reasonably safe travelling by and getting to and from bus/coach (and rail) during the day. At night, less staff are available in stations to assist passengers, there are fewer establishments open and less people around.

### **Issues with the built environment**

Participants report feeling vulnerable in places that are not well lit because they are unable to scan their environment. The same vulnerability arises in subways, or for example, on foot bridges and bus stops with a screened perimeter.



## **Incidents women recalled having experienced included:**

- Men moving close to women, brushing past or touching them on crowded vehicles or while standing in a que, including incidents of frottage (genitals rubbed against victim)
- Men approaching women who have sat at a distance from them (sometimes with verbal abuse such as, “why are you sat over there? You’re so frigid”)
- Men sitting next to women despite other unused seating with or without intrusive questioning
- Men refusing to move to give space for women to leave the bus without touching them
- Misogynistic verbal abuse
- Pushing past or shoving women
- Men making unwanted sexual propositions at women
- Being physically dragged and verbally abused directed at the victim’s gender non-conformity
- Transphobic verbal abuse
- Homophobic hate crime (a bottle thrown at a woman who was with a same-sex partner)
- Being heckled and leered at while using a toilet in a train stuck partially open
- Exposure of genitals
- Staring
- Being followed off transport and through the next stage of journey
- Some women had experienced harassment on repeated occasions while using bus stops where men use a nearby space for other purposes, such as work or socialising.

## **Impact of GBV on transport use**

Women shared several coping strategies used to make themselves safer, such as sitting/standing next to women, wearing headphones, avoiding eye contact and sitting on an aisle seat, and talking to friends on the phone. Some had decided to stop using public transport following one experience of sexual harassment that has stood out for them as particularly traumatic. Others do not use public transport because of incidents they’ve experienced that, as isolated events were not considered to be particularly traumatic, but overtime deterred them from using public transport.



# Key Issues

## 1. Distrust in reporting and low awareness of reporting procedures.

- There is distrust in the police, transport providers and their staff to intervene or follow-up on reports of incidents perceived as low-level. Whereas most participants perceived that police and transport staff would respond to a high-level incident. Participants thought they would report violence or sexual violence/assault to the police.
- Some women considered reporting to the police to be a disproportionate response to some perceived low-level incidents of harassment.
- Distrust was highest among LGBTQIA+ participants.
- Information on reporting is not apparent in buses, or at bus stops, which reduces confidence of women in being able to report or that they would be supported.
- Women fear being further victimised or traumatised when reporting. For many incidents of harassment women do not consider reporting to be worth the time and effort or the frustration/disempowerment felt when nothing happens in response to their report.
- A lack of bystander intervention on public transport also contributes to women feeling like they will not be taken seriously because many forms of harassment are tolerated and normalised.
- There are also digital barriers to reporting. Examples cited were irregular phone signal limiting text report services, a fear of perpetrators watching them reporting, the potential of apps to freeze, and phone batteries to run flat.

## 2. Interventions, policies, and procedures used to make public transport safer are inconsistent, lack detail, are primarily not gender sensitive.

Measures used to make public transport safer for women include:

- Improving methods of reporting incidents and reporting campaigns
- Behaviour change and bystander awareness campaigns
- Promotion of zero-tolerance stances against GBV
- Increased staff, police, or security presence
- CCTV to deter offenders and support investigations
- Live-tracking vehicle position systems
- Designated safe spaces (such as bus stations)
- Transport staff awareness and intervention training
- Encouraging more women into frontline, managerial and transport planning/engineering roles
- Improving wayfinding and service information
- Improving lighting and design of access spaces

However, there is currently little consistency in personal safety interventions, policies and procedures used across the bus/coach network in Wales and the UK. Most transport companies and local authorities do not undertake interventions specifically to improve women's safety.

### **Passenger Charter Analysis**

Our study identified 41 bus passenger charters and conditions of carriage set out by local authorities and transport companies. Only one (West Yorkshire Combined Authority) refers to women's safety although 28 (68%) refer more generally to passenger safety, personal security, or safeguarding. The West Midlands Combined Authority refer to violence against women and campaign to reduce GBV in their Safer Travel Plan[6]. Transport for London refer to measures undertaken as part of its 'Women's Safety Programme' in its Bus Action Plan [7]. Eighteen (44%) cited the use of CCTV in vehicles to help passengers feel safe and to tackle anti-social behaviour. However, according to the Department for Transport, in England, 96% of buses are fitted with CCTV [8]. It is likely that not all companies communicate CCTV is used in their passenger charter.

### **Staff Training on GBV Awareness**

It is commonly the responsibility of the driver to determine how they should intervene depending on risk to themselves and the other passengers. However, there is very little clarity and guidance on how they should respond. Drivers are usually trained to respond in emergency situations by calling the police and to take care of disabled passengers' safety and accessibility, but most are not trained on awareness of, or response to, GBV. The study found GBV awareness training is provided in London as part of driver equality and diversity training, in Liverpool and Merseyside, Greater Manchester, and for drivers of the TrawsCymru bus services contracted by Transport for Wales as part of their customer service training.

## **3. A lack of accountability, monitoring, and evaluation among stakeholders**

Women passengers thought responsibility for their safety and accountability to follow legislation, guidance and policies were lacking on part of local authorities, the police, the government, and transport companies. They felt it is up to themselves and other passengers to look out for each other.

The study found no evidence that GBV incidents were being monitored except for incidents perceived as high-level emergencies. Approaches in responding to incidents taken by transport companies are inconsistent, some of which are more clearly outlined, regularly reviewed, and updated than others.

## Difficulties applying interventions

- Unsafe for drivers to intervene.
- Limited time for drivers to report incidents perceived as low-level.
- Distrust in reporting mechanisms among drivers.
- Drivers' attitudes and perceptions of GBV relating to their age and gender (majority male, over 50 years old). The age of bus drivers is increasing with more drivers employed over the ages of 53 and 60 than 10 years ago.
- Insufficient police support for drivers and bus/coach services.
- Drivers have other tasks demanding their attention (e.g. ensuring the bus is driven safely and to schedule, navigating road works and congestion, ensuring passengers are seated and have paid fares).
- A lack of guidance on appropriate and safe intervention procedures.
- A lack of governance compared to rail, which has a central strategic body overseeing operations (Network Rail), and fewer rail providers. Similarly, the security and law enforcement of rail and its passengers are upheld more centrally by British Transport Police.
- Cost of driver awareness training.
- Commercial benefit of training unknown.
- Staff shortage makes it less feasible to take drivers off the road for training.
- The responsibility also lies with other stakeholders to prevent incidents through education, law enforcement, making the built environment safer (e.g. more lighting and CCTV at bus stops, staff, and police at bus stations).
- Local authorities pressured to spend funding on interventions within a financial year, which can impact on quality and evaluation.
- Few women in frontline roles and in strategic and influential positions (across all stakeholders).
- No resources to analyse data for monitoring, evaluation, and strategic decision-making if reporting increases.

## Case Study: A need to design accountability into interventions

An interviewee recalled how a regional travel authority received funding from the Home Office for transport safety interventions including bus driver GBV awareness training. Local bus and coach operators said they would not have the time for drivers to attend a training course and suggested the Travel Safe partnership develop a short video. The partnership was given a deadline to spend the funding and without more time decided to release a short bystander awareness training video targeted to bus drivers on YouTube. However, the delivery of training through YouTube has meant that its use by transport companies to train staff could not be monitored effectively. Accountability to deliver training to drivers could not be upheld, nor was it planned into the delivery of the training. The video has been viewed 150 times in two years and is available to the public.



## 4. A lack of service and wayfinding information for passengers

Provision of wayfinding information across bus services and access/departure spaces is not consistent. Operators are required to provide information on board vehicles under the Bus Services Act 2017, C.17 and the Equality Act 2010 Sec. 181A. Local authorities are required under Section 139 of the Transport Act 2000 “*from time to time*” to ensure what information should be made available and how it is made available in consultation with bus users. However, what constitutes ‘*time to time*’ is unclear and local authorities may not be held to account to uphold this requirement. At present, there appears to be no transparent monitoring of the information provided by transport companies and local authorities, such as bus timetables, live information, signage to connecting rail services or amenities, or clearly indicating the name of a bus stop.



Disabled women and women who speak a minority language feel particularly excluded and vulnerable due to limited information through text, icon, audio, and tactile methods. Passengers affected by delayed or cancelled bus services outside of major city centres do not receive the information they require to minimise waiting time at the bus stop, to make alternative travel arrangements, or to feel safe. Some operators update information about route changes, service cancellations, or disruptions on their website, or through an app if passengers sign-up to news alerts, but this is voluntary.

The new Public Service Vehicles (Accessible Information) Regulations 2023 will apply to equipping relevant technologies to new vehicles in the first instance to be phased in over two years. The limitations to this legislation are that:

- it applies only to operators to ensure vehicles are fitted with a minimum standard of equipment for information sharing enforced through the DVSA and Traffic Commissioners. It does not hold local authorities or regional public transport governing bodies to account over their responsibility for the provision of information;
- its enforcement relies on passengers being aware of the legislation to make complaints on noncompliance, yet educational campaigns may not be well funded.

## 5. A lack of police support and partnership

Law enforcement and security on rail services is more advanced than that of the bus network because of investment in and the existence of the British Transport Police. That is a police force dedicated to enforcing the law across the rail network. The bus and coach networks are policed by local police constabularies. Police lack resources and strategic management to support bus drivers and companies in responding to incidents directed at either passengers or drivers, nor do they take a preventative approach through educational campaigns or being present.

Bus and coach companies and their staff do not always feel supported by their local police force, which limits their responses to GBV incidents and the support they can give to victim-survivors. Transport companies often advise staff to remain in their cabs and some are considering using screens to protect drivers. It was suggested screens could make drivers less approachable for victim-survivors and bystanders, and in some cases unable to intervene or to speak to a victim.

There are a small number of exemptions where combined authority, police and transport provider partnerships exist in London, Merseyside and Liverpool, Greater Manchester, and West Midlands. These Travel Safe partnerships are formed through public and private funding. Some large bus companies individually invest in police partnership but a representing body for bus and coach suggested for many smaller bus operators this investment would not be feasible.



## 6. Limitations to current legislation and regulations

### Legislation places responsibility on individuals and drivers but is difficult to enforce and lacks detail.

The Public Services Vehicles Regulations 1990 (Conduct of Drivers, Inspectors, Conductors and Passengers) states no passenger should “*put at risk or unreasonably impede or cause discomfort to any person travelling on or entering or leaving the vehicle*”. But this is difficult for drivers to enforce while working alone and with little police or security support available.

The same legislation primarily refers to driver responsibility but does not refer to obligations of transport companies, such as having a policy referring to response procedures when passengers are assaulted or discriminated by other passengers or having support mechanisms in place for drivers. Drivers are expected to “*take all reasonable precautions to ensure the safety of passengers who are on, or who are entering or leaving, the vehicle*”. What constitutes reasonable precautions or safety are not defined and are likely to be different for different passengers.

Current statutory guidance for bus and coach drivers also lacks detail. It states, “*as a bus or coach driver, you should follow employer and government guidance to ensure the safety of yourself, your passengers, other road users and pedestrians [9]*.” There is no reference to such guidance.



### A regulatory gap in the protection of bus passengers in case of service delay, disruption, or cancellation.

This is contrary to the legal protection of rail, ferry, and long-distance coach passengers. On the rail network, transport providers must “take reasonable measures” to inform passengers and keep them up to date [10]. After a delay of 60 minutes rail operators have an obligation (set in EU 2021/782 and UK legislation on rail passenger rights) to assist passengers with rerouting their journey, getting back to the start point or destination, assisting in providing alternative transport and/or accommodation, and compensating against costs in circumstances caused by the rail operation. Rail operators are obliged to make contingency plans in case of passengers being stranded by disrupted services. These obligations are referred to by rail companies in their passenger charters.

Similar obligations are placed on transport companies providing bus and coach services of over 250km and lasting more than 3 hours when services are delayed by more than 2 hours/cancelled.

However, research by the European Commission suggests that the Regulation (EU) No 181/2011 concerning the rights of passengers in bus and coach transport, which is also used in the UK, states that the 250km route threshold “restricts the implementation of extended rights only to a handful of passengers” (or 7.5% of EU and UK bus and coach passengers) [11]. The legislation leaves most bus and coach passengers without rights in the event of service cancellation or delay because the rights implied in the legislation extend only to services of more than 250km (156 miles) and delays of over 2 hours.

Other key limitations to this legislation are:

- In Wales, the bus network covering long distance trips is broken into several services run by different operators and so passengers travelling long distance would not be protected.
- It stipulates assistance to provide alternative transport or accommodation should be administered from coach terminals, of which there are only 3 in the UK (London Victoria, Birmingham, and Belfast), where trained staff are available.

The UK Government Public Services Vehicle Licensing regulation requires bus and coach providers to run 95% of services from stated timed points no more than one minute early or 5 minutes late. It is enforced by Traffic Commissioners to set reliability standards for passengers as far as providers can control but does not consider what happens to passengers in case of delay or cancellation.

Bus operators accept no liability of losses, damages, cost, or inconvenience passengers suffer because of delays or terminated services and maintain their right to cancel services at any time, as stated in their conditions of carriage. The situation puts passengers at risk when stranded and reduces people’s confidence to travel by bus, particularly for women and vulnerable passengers.

These limitations are particularly problematic for passengers where services are infrequent, and/or finish in the early evening, in places they cannot safely wait, and for those who cannot afford or cannot access alternative transport.



# Policy Recommendations

## 1. Review, clarify and standardise how transport companies and their staff respond to incidents.

There is a need to improve consistency across transport providers and services in how staff intervene during and following incidents of GBV. Clear policies and statutory guidance are required to clarify appropriate procedures. These should outline staff responsibilities and give clear guidance, such as response and victim support protocols for frontline staff and those in roles supporting frontline staff such as operational managers and wellbeing staff.

## 2. Review, renew and monitor the training of frontline transport staff.

There is a need to ensure staff are effectively trained to recognise and safely respond to incidents of GBV, to support and signpost victim-survivors to report incidents. A review is needed to assess the current state of training bus and coach drivers receive with a view to improve the quality and relevance of training relating to passenger personal safety, and to set a baseline against which training is monitored. A review should consider content and method of delivery, whether the current requirement of 37.5 hours over 5 years to cover all of drivers' training is sufficient, and how trainers and providers are accredited. A review should consider feasibility of providing online training to compliment classroom-based training to reduce the cost of training provision.

The reliance women have on driver intervention for their safety should be recognised in the statutory syllabus for driver training (the Certificate of Professional Competence). The syllabus is used to quality assure and accredit training courses for drivers by the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) Training Accreditation team (formerly JAUPT). Currently it requires bus and coach drivers to be trained to ensure passenger comfort and safety including "specificities of certain groups of passengers (disabled persons, children)"[i], but does not acknowledge the safety needs of women and girls. The DVSA require specific guidance on what should be included in GBV awareness training courses.

Additional requirements for training drivers and operational managers could be applied when contracts are awarded to companies by local or regional authorities. This would need monitoring and enforcing. Local/regional authorities need to be guided to ensure this training provision is requested and agreed in contracts. In Wales, council operated bus companies (Newport Bus and Cardiff Bus) do not currently train drivers GBV awareness or response. If training requirements are incorporated into the CPC syllabus all drivers would be trained ensuring consistency across services.



### **3. Develop and promote a clear mechanism for reporting incidents.**

A reporting mechanism needs to be clear, efficient, inclusive (available by phone, online platforms/apps/sms messaging) and easy to access. Strategic campaigns that acknowledge GBV (and other forms of discrimination or hate crimes) are required to build trust in reporting. Disclosures need to be taken seriously and investigated, resulting in prosecutions, which are monitored and reported on transparently. Police training and diversity of police staff are required for improved reporting and investigation procedures. The interventions should aim to reduce the effort and trauma of reporting and ensure cases are dealt with consistently. Stakeholders suggest a need for one national reporting mechanism rather than having several that are associated to regions, transport modes, or companies.

New legislation criminalising gender-based public harassment (currently under review in the House of Lords) could enable prosecutions and deter perpetrators if sufficient resources are made available to enforce it.

### **4. Standardise wayfinding and service information. Ensure new legislation on provision of accessible information on buses and coaches is enforced.**

There is a need to standardise provision of accessible journey information both onboard transport and at access/departure places. This should also include provision of accessible information for temporary changes to routes and services, such as use of use of tactile maps and audio descriptions. Including communication methods for minority language communities should be considered where relevant to context. A minimum level of staff should be available in stations when transport services are running for information and security. Digital technologies should feature in wayfinding policy alongside other methods but should not be used in isolation.

There is a need for improved accountability that demonstrates transport providers and public institutions/local authorities are ensuring a minimum standard of accurate, accessible, up-to-date information as per statutory guidance [12] and legislation [13]. There should be accessible mechanisms to report non-compliance on part of responsible stakeholders and maintenance issues. If the responsibility to monitor compliance falls on passengers, campaigns to educate them on their rights and how to report non-compliance need funding.

## **5. A need for gender-sensitive auditing of infrastructure.**

Although there is current guidance[ 14] on inclusive transport infrastructure, it is not used consistently. A gender-sensitive audit of public transport infrastructure (street access, stations, and bus stops) is required to review the extent of inconsistencies against current guidance and to provide a benchmark from which improvements on inclusion can be monitored. There should also be accessible and efficient mechanisms to report inconsistencies to the guidance, and to report maintenance issues and damaged infrastructure. This should be monitored and reported on to improve accountability and to build the trust of passengers.

Design guidance should also feature up-to-date best practice for a gender sensitive approach to infrastructure design. This is likely to require further research, pilot interventions and evaluation studies, sharing of knowledge and assessing and adjusting current guidance. Women and gender minorities should be involved in consultation on design guidance and auditing measures with improvements made to the inclusivity of methods and recruitment process.

## **6. Travel safe partnerships as a standard requirement for local or regional authorities, police constabularies and transport providers.**

Legislation could be established that mandates or facilitates the formation of travel safe partnerships. Travel safe partnerships enable a collaborative approach to passenger safety and can facilitate communication and collective intervention across geographies that extend the boundaries of local authorities. Existing partnerships demonstrate a commitment to passenger safety and can facilitate accountability on the part of multiple stakeholders.

Travel safe stakeholders collect and analyse data on passenger personal safety. They run campaigns to discourage GBV, encourage bystander intervention, and build trust in reporting mechanisms. The partnerships can help to enforce zero-tolerance policies against GBV. Through the partnerships, police resources are dedicated to support the security of public transport for both passengers and staff by increasing police presence on the street and onboard transport, 24/7 monitoring of CCTV using a control room on standby to respond to incidents, and engaging with young people in schools to raise awareness of address issues of GBV, discrimination, and anti-social behaviour.

The partnerships can be used to strengthen legislation and enforce new byelaws relevant to bus and coach passenger safety. Transport for West Midlands is the first regional transport authority to have established the use of bus byelaws [15] to deal more effectively with antisocial behaviour and harassment. The byelaws strengthen existing terms of carriage related to passenger safety, conduct, and consumption of alcohol across the us/coach network, aligning legislation to that securing the rail network. Byelaws can be established in such a way that they may be enforced by designated staff other than the police.

Travel Safe partnerships may need the support of public funding but may also be supported by private investment from transport companies and businesses engaged in the night-time economy and large/major events commonly associated with incidents of GBV and anti-social behaviour.

## **7. Review legislation and measures protecting bus passenger rights in the case of delayed, cancelled, or disrupted services.**

There is a need to consider the feasibility of transport providers and regional/local authorities taking measures to protect stranded bus and coach passengers affected by disruptions and cancellations. Measures could include:

- Reducing/removing the 250km service distance threshold therefore obligating service providers to assist more bus/coach passengers.
- A national helpline for stranded bus passengers requiring assistance to find alternative transport, accommodation, and safety.
- Provision of compensation for transport alternatives and accommodation.
- A collaborative approach is required to make contingency plans for passengers should they become stranded, for example, assessing the availability of alternative vehicles, services, transport modes, safe spaces to wait and accommodation.

## **Conclusion**

The overarching message of this policy brief is that while a small number of actors and regions are proactively taking steps to tackle GBV across local public transport networks, elsewhere stakeholders can do more, collectively, to demonstrate they are taking up responsibility and care for all passengers, and showing a willingness to consider their needs with equal merit. In doing so, a message will be given to perpetrators of GBV that any harm inflicted on others will not be tolerated, including any behaviours that restrict the mobility of women, girls, and marginalised groups of people. Improved guidance, expertise, policies, procedures, monitoring, and accountability will be integral to collaborative intervention. GBV should not be normal and will not be accepted as part of everyday life. Public transport is one of the key areas where a consistent and collaborative approach is required to target GBV.

# Further Reading

**West Midlands Combined Authority** (2022) Transport Champions for Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls. Available at: <https://www.wmca.org.uk/documents/strategies/violence-against-women-and-girls-strategy/transport-champions-for-tackling-violence-against-women-and-girls/>

**Transport Scotland/Skellington Orr, K. et al.** (2023) Women's and girl's views and experiences of personal safety when using public transport: Summary Report. Available at: <https://www.transport.gov.scot/media/52985/womens-and-girls-views-and-experiences-of-personal-safety-when-using-public-transport-summary-report-march-2023.pdf>

**Suzy Lamplugh Trust** (2021) Driving Out Violence and Aggression on Public Transport. Available at: <https://www.suzylamplugh.org/national-personal-safety-day-2021-campaign>

**International Transport Forum** (2018) Women's Safety and Security: A Public Transport Priority, OECD Publishing, Paris. Available at: [https://www.itf-oecd.org/sites/default/files/docs/womens-safety-security\\_0.pdf](https://www.itf-oecd.org/sites/default/files/docs/womens-safety-security_0.pdf)

**Atkins Realis (N.D.)** Getting Home Safely: Safe by Design by Women Transport Planners. Available at: <https://www.atkinsrealis.com/~media/Files/A/atkinsrealis/documents/transportation/get-home-safe.pdf>

**London Travel Watch** (2021) Personal Security on London's Transport Network: Recommendations for Safer Travel. Available at: <https://www.londontravelwatch.org.uk/campaigns/personal-security/>

**The World Bank** (2020) Handbook for Gender-Inclusive Planning and Design. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/urbandevelopment/publication/handbook-for-gender-inclusive-urban-planning-and-design>

**Kalms, N. et al.** (2020) Tramlab Toolkits: Improving the safety of women and girls on public transport. Monash University. Available at: <https://www.monash.edu/mada/xyx-lab/projects/tram-lab>

## Acknowledgements

This research was part funded by the Transport and Health Integrated Research Network (THINK), Health and Care Research Wales and The Waterloo Foundation. With thanks to all research participants and to Transport for Wales for collaborating in the design and delivery of the Cardiff and online workshops. Thanks to other researchers involved in collecting and analysing data; Kate Woodley and Catrin Wallace.

## Author Details

Contact: Dr Lucy Baker, Aberystwyth University: [lub59@aber.ac.uk](mailto:lub59@aber.ac.uk)

# References

- [1] Transport Focus, 2022. Experiences of women and girls on transport. <https://www.transportfocus.org.uk/publication/experiences-of-women-and-girls-on-transport/>
- [2] Adams, L et al. 2020. 2020 Sexual Harassment Survey. Government Equalities Office, IFF Research.
- [3] DelGreco, M. and Christensen, J., 2020. Effects of street harassment on anxiety, depression, and sleep quality of college women. *Sex Roles*, 82(7), pp.473-481. Fairchild, K. and Rudman, L.A., 2008. Everyday stranger harassment and women's objectification. *Social Justice Research*, 21(3), pp.338-357.
- [4] Useche, S.A., Colomer, N., Alonso, F. and Faus, M., 2024. Invasion of privacy or structural violence? Harassment against women in public transport environments: A systematic review. *Plos one*, 19(2), p.e0296830; Ison, J. and Matthewson, G., 2023. More than a dot point: Connecting primary prevention of violence against women and public transport. *Journal of Transport & Health*, 30, p.101591.
- [5] Adams, L et al. 2020. 2020 Sexual Harassment Survey. Government Equalities Office, IFF Research.
- [6] West Midlands Combined Authority, 2021. Safer Travel Plan 2021-2024. Available at: <https://www.wmca.org.uk/media/5484/safer-travel-plan-2021-2024.pdf>
- [7] Transport for London, 2022. Bus Action Plan. Available at: <https://tfl.gov.uk/modes/buses/improving-buses>
- [8] Department for Transport, 2023. Annual Bus Statistics. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/annual-bus-statistics-year-ending-march-2023/annual-bus-statistics-year-ending-march-2023#bus-fleet>
- [9] DVLA, 2020. Guidance for Drivers: Passenger Carrying Vehicles. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-vocational-drivers/guidance-for-drivers-passenger-carrying-vehicles-pcvs#driver-conduct>
- [10] National Rail, 2024. National Rail Conditions of Travel, p. 20. Available at: [https://assets.nationalrail.co.uk/e8xgegruud3g/77fuBWp62YPSrGwBP1mNQX/5f912e6484a2dc7efbad3b4ed0c9b383/National\\_Rail\\_Conditions\\_of\\_Travel\\_2024.pdf](https://assets.nationalrail.co.uk/e8xgegruud3g/77fuBWp62YPSrGwBP1mNQX/5f912e6484a2dc7efbad3b4ed0c9b383/National_Rail_Conditions_of_Travel_2024.pdf)
- [11] European Commission/Steer, 2021. Study on the EU Framework for Passenger Rights: Part B - Evaluation of Regulation (EU) No 181/2011 on the rights of passengers travelling by bus and coach. Brussels: European Commission, P. 63.
- [12] UK Government, 2021. Statutory guidance: Driver Certificate of Professional Competence (CPC) syllabus. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/driver-cpc-syllabus/driver-certificate-of-professional-competence-cpc-syllabus--2>
- [13] Department for Transport, 2021. Inclusive Mobility A Guide to Best Practice on Access to Pedestrian and Transport Infrastructure. Available at: [www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-transport](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-transport)
- [14] UK Government, Department for Transport, 2023. Public Services Vehicles (Accessible Information Regulations) 2023. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2023/9780348246872>
- [15] Department for Transport, 2021. Inclusive Mobility A Guide to Best Practice on Access to Pedestrian and Transport Infrastructure. Available at: [www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-transport](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-transport)
- [16] West Midlands Combined Authority, 2021. WEST MIDLANDS BUS PREMISES BYELAWS. Available at: <https://www.tfwm.org.uk/media/414pfvzi/byelaw-final-documentation.pdf>

# The Gender+ Bus project

This research was undertaken as part of a project titled 'Gender+ Bus : Tackling harassment, sexual harassment and violence against women for a gender-inclusive bus service in Wales and the UK'.

By tackling inappropriate sexual and violent behaviour, the project aims to reduce women's isolation in communities because of fear of harassment and violence, which negatively impacts their wellbeing.

The project is developing intervention training for bus and coach drivers in partnership with a local transport operator and Welsh Women's Aid. The training will ensure staff are able to recognise GBV, safely respond to incidents, support victim-survivors and signpost them to reporting and helplines.

The project is supported by the Waterloo Foundation, the Transport and Health Integrated Research Network, and Health and Care Research Wales. For more information, please visit the [project webpage](https://think.aber.ac.uk/think-projects/gender-bus-tackling-sexual-harassment-and-violence-against-women-for-a-gender-inclusive-bus-service/) (https://think.aber.ac.uk/think-projects/gender-bus-tackling-sexual-harassment-and-violence-against-women-for-a-gender-inclusive-bus-service/)

