

Transport Committee

Oral evidence: Rail safety, HC 694

Monday 6 March 2017

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 6 March 2017.

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Members present: Mrs Louise Ellman (Chair); Robert Flello; Stewart Malcolm McDonald; Mark Menzies; Huw Merriman; Will Quince; Martin Vickers.

Questions 305 - 376

Witnesses

I: Mike Hewitson, Head of Policy, Transport Focus; and Stephen Locke, Chair, London TravelWatch.

II: Ruth Sutherland, Chief Executive, Samaritans; and Andy McCullough, Director of UK Policy and Public Affairs, Railway Children.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Samaritans](#)
- [Railway Children](#)

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Mike Hewitson and Stephen Locke.

Q305 **Chair:** Good afternoon and welcome to the Transport Select Committee. We should be mindful that today is the 30th anniversary of the tragedy of the Herald of Free Enterprise, when nearly 200 people lost their lives because of the lack of adequate safety precautions. Perhaps we should remember that as we look at other safety-related issues this afternoon.

Could you each give us your name and position, please?

Mike Hewitson: I am Mike Hewitson, head of policy at Transport Focus.

Stephen Locke: I am Stephen Locke, chair of London TravelWatch. I am also on the board of Transport Focus as the member for London.

Q306 **Chair:** What kinds of crime are rail passengers most concerned about?

Mike Hewitson: In the national rail passenger survey, as well as the usual range of questions on satisfaction, we ask, "Have you had reason to feel concerned in the last six months of your travel from a personal security perspective?" What typically comes back is antisocial behaviour. It is not so much violence, theft or terrorism; it is lower-level antisocial behaviour. It tends to be rowdy people, feet on seats and general antisocial behaviour, probably because it is more prevalent. Clearly, in the hierarchy of risks, the others are there, but you see more antisocial behaviour, so that tends to be top of mind when we ask our questions in surveys.

Q307 **Chair:** Do you agree with that, Mr Locke?

Stephen Locke: Very much so. London TravelWatch has done qualitative research within the past few years on the travelling environment in general. According to that research, one of the things that bugged passengers most was the feeling that people were misbehaving: feet on seats, smelly curries, music too loud or people shouting or generally misbehaving, but not necessarily in a way that was criminal. That is worrying, partly in its own right but partly also because you never quite know if people might go one step further and carry out some criminal act such as graffiti, vandalism or whatever. A feeling that there is disrespect and a general threatening environment comes through from our research.

Q308 **Chair:** In 2015-16, according to our figures, there was a significant increase in recorded sexual offences on the railway. How do you account for that? Is it more people reporting what is happening, or is it a greater number of offences actually occurring?

Mike Hewitson: The short answer is that we do not quite know yet. I have seen the previous evidence to you from the BTP, which talked of increased awareness, and a cultural change in terms of welcoming such cases coming through. From an anecdotal perspective, that would certainly seem to be true. There are more announcements on trains now



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and there is the text service that the BTP offers. It is entirely possible, but I do not have any numbers or facts to back that up.

Q309 **Chair:** British Transport police has been running campaigns urging people to report crime. Have they had an impact?

Stephen Locke: At one level, high levels of reporting are welcome if they mean a higher incidence of reports on problems that are already happening. It is difficult to get from the reporting numbers to the underlying trends of what is actually happening. There is the question of publicity and the ease of getting hold of the numbers or being able to send a text or an email. There is also the issue of public tolerance and the extent to which people view particular sorts of crime, particularly sexual offences, as unacceptable. There is quite a lot of evidence generally—the Home Office would be the people to advise on that—that tolerance for sexual offences and sexual misbehaviour is reducing. If that is the case, it is a welcome development rather than an unwelcome one, but getting from those background factors to the underlying trend is difficult.

Q310 **Chair:** The figures we have suggest that people are less concerned about their security now—that people are feeling better. Does that reflect your information?

Mike Hewitson: In terms of pure satisfaction, there has been a slight increase over the past five years or so for satisfaction at the station and on the train. It is quite constant. Where we see particular improvements in the design of trains, and modern, lighter stations, when we put investment into stations and remove blind spots and shadows, with CCTV and all that type of stuff, it can help, but I do not think that we have really seen it manifest itself heavily in passenger satisfaction yet.

Q311 **Chair:** How important is visible patrolling? What difference does it make when people can see British Transport police officers around?

Mike Hewitson: As well as asking, "What makes you feel concerned about personal security?" we followed that up with, "What would help? What would address that?" Almost completely, it is the visible presence of uniformed staff or a policeman. It is a physical presence, walking up and down. It is no good being in the corner or tucked away somewhere; walking up and down and reassuring people is probably the No. 1 item that makes them feel safe.

Stephen Locke: I can back that up with the research that London TravelWatch carried out last year in the context of the changes to London Underground ticket offices, although that was the underground rather than surface rail. It was clear from that that passengers were very concerned about the disappearance of an obvious focal point in the station where they could go if there was trouble. They were not sufficiently aware of staff being around on the platform. There was not enough visibility. There was not an obvious go-to point in the event of problems.



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We reported all that to the Mayor and to Transport for London, and it will now be dealt with. Some pilots are working at the moment to see what can be done to improve that. Although the underground context is a bit different, that particular message would have wider resonance, and the visibility issue is something to which people attach a lot of importance.

Q312 Chair: What do you think the important part is? Is it that people feel better and feel more secure when they see someone or that the presence of identifiable people in uniform deters crimes?

Mike Hewitson: It is a bit of both, to be perfectly honest. Whenever we ask any questions about staff, it is about reassurance; there is someone to go and ask or there is someone who can step in if there is an issue. It is the provision of information, particularly during disruption, and especially so for passengers with disability, who have a lower level of personal satisfaction or personal security on trains. It is just human interaction. It is quite natural; there is somebody who can help me, or there is someone I can go to. It is as fundamental as that.

Q313 Huw Merriman: I note that passenger satisfaction with the availability of staff on the railways or on trains has remained flat since 2010. I also note that, on Southern and other train operators, there is a move towards driver-controlled doors or driver-only operated. What are your feelings about that move? Do you think it will enhance the experience of passengers to see second members of staff on board, or do you think it will be worse?

Mike Hewitson: It is the presence of the second member of staff and how visible that second member of staff is that tends to be uppermost in passengers' minds. They do not quite get the intricacies of the guard and the doors and what is safety critical. What they will notice is the presence of a body. The more that person walks up and down, the more opportunities there are for interaction. In everything that we have asked, a second member of staff is wanted. Where that does not exist, on the driver-only services now, it is not such an issue. It does not come through quite so strongly when we ask passengers about priorities for improvement. It still tends to be punctuality and capacity, rather than staff, but, where it exists, the merest mention of taking it away creates a lot of uncertainty and concern.

Q314 Huw Merriman: Have you looked at the subject at all? I can see that, on the one hand, it should be a better experience for passengers because, rather than just focusing on the doors, the second member of staff will be walking up and down the train, so they should be seen more often. In addition, if the train is not cancelled because that member of staff is not essential for movement, it means that there is less overcrowding, which can cause crime. That is a positive. On the negative side of things, there may not be a requirement for a second member of staff at all, so there could be trains with just the driver, in which case no one is there to assist people or deter crime. I can see pluses and minuses, and I wondered what your group thought of it in the round.



Mike Hewitson: It depends so much on context. If you did a poll of people on the last train at night and there was no second member of staff, they would say, "Run the train." If you are on a three-minute or four-minute frequency service and there is another train coming along, perhaps the member of staff becomes more important. It really depends on context.

It is difficult when you ask people, "Do you want a second member of staff?" because they will say, "Yes. Why wouldn't you?" You somehow have to present it in the sense of a range of priorities for improvement, so that you can get a sense of relative importance, and somehow introduce an element of cost as well—there is money on this improvement or on that improvement—to get a sense of balance. It is difficult to take it in isolation.

Stephen Locke: On-board supervision or on-board staffing is not necessarily the only way of delivering that. Within the London area we have a large number of services that are very frequent most of the time—we hope. The distances between stations or stops is fairly short. There is generally nobody on the train. There is nobody on London Underground, nobody on Southern Metro and nobody on Thameslink services, but the majority of the stations have staff on them.

It is possible for station staff, particularly platform staff, to provide quite a high level of reassurance in that sort of context, if you know it is only a few minutes before you come to the next station where there is somebody around. It depends on the context, on the nature of the journey and on the nature of the service. There is a fairly strong argument that one size does not fit all.

Q315 **Robert Flello:** Just to unpick some of those answers a little more, a guard closing the doors will be visible every time they step out on to the platform and look up and down. There is that visibility element. Equally, you mentioned a driver-only operated train pulling into a platform, and there is a member of staff on the platform. Again, that is about visibility.

I want to unpick those a little bit. How detailed are your questions and investigations regarding the sense that there is somebody around if there is a guard stepping out and looking up and down before closing the doors? What about the ultimate situation, where a station is not staffed and the train is driver-only operated? What are the issues around that? Perhaps I can tease some further answers out of either or both of you.

Mike Hewitson: Who opens the door—there has been a lot in the press, and—

Robert Flello: Sorry—this is on the visibility of the person who is doing it.

Mike Hewitson: Yes. You will get announcements, "I am in the fifth carriage. Come and see me if you want me," and such, but what really makes the difference is physically seeing the person walk up and down



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the train. That is when there is a chance to say, "Excuse me, can you just inform me about this?" or if there are some people behaving a bit noisily in the corner, you know, as the person is walking up and down, that somebody has seen it and is aware of it. You do not get that if the person is only on the platform when you need them.

For some people, it is difficult to get through trains or to seek the person on the platform. You have someone physically patrolling the train now, with guards in the traditional sense. Some are extremely good at walking up and down, and some are not. I suspect that with on-board supervisors you will get some who are more diligent than others. It almost comes down to individual culture, training and, to some degree, enforcement—how the train company makes staff meet the job description. I am not talking about some draconian regime, but everything else is mystery-shopped these days, and that is a prime example where it would work really well.

Robert Flello: Mr Locke?

Stephen Locke: I have nothing to add.

Q316 **Martin Vickers:** Even with the protection of the uniform and appearing somewhat official, it can be quite intimidating for a single member of staff to approach a rowdy crowd of young men or whatever. How satisfied are you that train operators train people sufficiently on the appropriate procedures and on how to handle those situations?

Mike Hewitson: It has got a lot better. With the introduction of gatelines, that sort of conflict management has become a lot more prominent than it was before. Passengers do not expect a member of staff to take a bullet for them, but if they see that there is a problem and they do not feel safe confronting it, they can help passengers and move them into other carriages, or there is a phone, and there are the police or a signaller. They have reported it, and they are aware of that. They can at least start the process to get some reinforcements and some help. If there isn't anyone there, you are dependent on a passenger knowing who to ring or to text the BTP. It just takes a bit longer. If there is a member of staff, you have a fast track to some support coming your way. There is much more emphasis on conflict management and avoidance and such with train company staff now than there was five or 10 years ago.

Q317 **Martin Vickers:** Do you have a league table, as it were, of the good and the bad train operators?

Mike Hewitson: No. To some degree, it rather depends on circumstances. There was a particular problem going from York to Middlesbrough from hen and stag dos on the last couple of trains at night, and the railway addressed that and put more staff in. I do not think it is about good and bad train companies; it is about being good or bad at reacting to certain incidents. It would be quite difficult to say that train company X was worse than Y.



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Stephen Locke: In addition to staff training, the right equipment is clearly important, whether it is accessed by the member of staff or by the public. There are help points at many stations, but we are not clear that they are working or staffed properly all the time. If there are things like that that do not work, it is very unreassuring; it makes you feel that the fall-back arrangements do not work very well and, if there is a real emergency, there is nobody who can help. It is important that, where equipment is provided, it is fully functioning and can deal with problems effectively, and there are procedures in place for people to apply.

Q318 **Martin Vickers:** Has consideration been given to having some sort of alarm in each carriage, where the passenger could call the guard?

Mike Hewitson: In many trains these days the emergency alarm tends to connect you to the driver, rather than putting the brakes on, although there is huge inbuilt wariness about pulling the button, because you still think the train is going to career to a halt and such. The Transport police have tried to address that a bit more with their text number, and social media can get you quite a quick response from train companies, Network Rail and the police. They are coming through with that.

In terms of getting hold of the guard, in theory if they are walking up and down anyway, it will be quite hard to have a fixed point to phone them in the first place. As we get more into apps and that world, and as they are connected to train companies and get instant responses, we will probably see things improve as we go through the digital cycle. Ultimately, there is nothing better than somebody walking up and down.

Q319 **Chair:** Not everybody is into using apps. Sometimes if you are sitting in a train and there are no staff around, there might be a sign that says that the carriage is covered by CCTV, but what does that mean in reality? Is someone watching and ready to intervene? What does it actually mean? Should people feel reassured by when they see that?

Mike Hewitson: On a train, I suspect not. At some stations there is live monitoring. There are some help points, where, if you press the emergency button, the cameras will train in on you, and the person on the end of the help phone will be able to say, "We're watching you now. We can see you. Don't worry, we're there." That is live. There have been some schemes like that, but probably not as many as we would like. CCTV is at its best when it is live, rather than when it is recorded.

Q320 **Chair:** What happens to the information you collect, Mr Hewitson? I know that it goes into compiling surveys, which are published, but if you identify a particular problem such as the one that you mentioned before—something that happens with regularity on a particular train—what happens then?

Mike Hewitson: We take it up.

Q321 **Chair:** Do you go to the train operating company straightaway?



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Mike Hewitson: Yes, indeed—straight to the train companies. We tend to pick that up more through complaints we receive or from correspondence, rather than through the surveys. We feed immediate issues through to the train company. If it is a more generic policy issue about live feeds for CCTV, or connecting train company CCTV to the local authority and having CCTV at a prosecutable level, we push for that through franchise aspirations or directly through the Department for Transport. When we identify an issue, we take it up through whichever is the quickest and most suitable mechanism.

Q322 **Chair:** Does the same happen with information that you get, Mr Locke?

Stephen Locke: Yes. We tend to work pretty closely with Transport Focus in that area. We tend to draw on similar data for that kind of material.

There is a role for the secure stations scheme, which is, after all, a quality standard for security in stations, and it covers things such as CCTV, lighting, mirrors and all the issues that people might be concerned about. It is very extensive. I was quite surprised to discover that my local station has met the secure stations requirement. There may be an issue of how well it is publicised. It is not signalled as clearly as it might be in individual stations or more generally. That could help to provide an additional element of passenger reassurance. The accreditation that has to go into that kind of scheme is quite extensive, and it is taken very seriously.

Q323 **Chair:** Are you involved in the follow-up for the accreditation?

Stephen Locke: We would be if we had individual cases that came up, but, systematically, it is too big a job.

Q324 **Chair:** What about helping disabled people feel more secure on the railway? Often, people do not feel very secure. It may be a physical disability, or it might be someone with a learning disability who feels nervous about their journey. What can be done to make that better?

Mike Hewitson: We see that; we definitely see a lower level of satisfaction. It comes through quite clearly, particularly with age-related disabilities, and with learning difficulties, too—that comes through quite strongly. When you are dependent, with a disability, on a member of staff getting you on and off the train, it is again about reassurance and the sense that the person will be there. You feel that you will either not be able to get on the train or sometimes, even worse, get taken past the stop where you want to get off. It is about physical reassurance. The person knows and has acknowledged that you are there: “Don’t worry. You are in the system. We’ve got you.” That is very important.

On the train companies that have schemes, some of them have cards whereby you do not have to announce to the world that you have a particular disability, but you might need a bit more reassurance. That has very much come through the bus world—the ability to show a member of



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staff something that might say, "I have learning difficulties. Please help me," or "I can't hear very well. Please help me," for announcements at stops and such. It is about introducing yourself to the member of staff, so that the member of staff is aware, and you do not have to do it in public. That sort of thing can help.

Q325 Chair: Are you monitoring what happens to assist people with disabilities? Sometimes, if people have a bad experience, they do not always complain; they just do not travel again. Are you monitoring what happens?

Mike Hewitson: Admittedly, we have not done it in the last few years, but we have had several ways of mystery shopping on the passenger assists, which is the booked assistance service where people help to get you on and off the train. We have monitored that. We are going into the field now with some additional research into the experience of travel for passengers with disabilities.

In particular, we are trying to identify people who would like to travel but cannot travel. What blocks them? Again, we will feed those results through. As you would imagine, we also get complaints, particularly from passengers with disabilities. When we do any research now, we make sure that we have either in-depth interviews or appropriate forms of research with passengers with disability, particularly to feed into franchise aspirations and such. We make sure that they do not get lost.

Being able to change some of the physical nature of the railway takes a bit longer, but some of the cultural changes and staff training changes are probably more achievable in the short term than redesigning stations and getting new builds of train.

Q326 Chair: Have the staff training changes been helpful or not?

Mike Hewitson: Yes. When you get good training, it can make a difference.

Q327 Chair: Is there good training?

Mike Hewitson: There is definitely good training. The best training is when members of staff go out and travel with someone with a disability. One of my colleagues is a case in point. You do not realise until you travel and see. That is the best training there is.

Q328 Huw Merriman: Following on from that line of questioning, is there good practice from some train operators that you would recommend to the Committee? If so, are the mechanisms in place to roll it out across all train operators?

Mike Hewitson: I think there are. There is good process when it comes to the passenger assist service—the booking. There is a good process for how and where people are met and the clarity of instructions. Then of course there is reliability—the service turning up. The best, step-change way of progressing that is through each franchise as it comes around.



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With the amount of investment, or the number of targets that can be built into a franchise concerning services, there is a better chance of it happening.

You can certainly build into new contracts to make it compulsory to do follow-up surveys with passengers who have booked passenger assistance and so on, and you can get a proper sense of how that is being handled. You can then require that that is fed back to the customer service director, and it is assessed on a national level.

Outside that, it is bodies such as ours, and colleagues such as Ann Bates saying to people, "This is wrong. Fix it. They are doing this. Have you heard of this?" We have our own accessibility forum at Transport Focus, where we pull together representatives of Age Concern, Guide Dogs and such, and share what is going on. There is a lot going on in the bus world that you can use in rail and vice versa. We do our own networking in that sense. We try to bring in the Office of Rail and Road, and the Department for Transport as well.

Q329 Huw Merriman: Train operators would say that you can pre-book and they will then have somebody at stations that are unmanned. In reality, is that as good as they make it out to be—when they have been before this Committee, for example—or does it fail?

Mike Hewitson: It does fail. Some work perfectly well, and some will fail. It only takes one small part of the cog to break, and there is a problem. It can be that the train was delayed. That is probably the biggest single cause. If, as a member of staff, you were meeting the 7.02 and it is delayed and you now have to be somewhere else for a different train, it gets very difficult at times. It is certainly not a case of every single journey failing. An awful lot go really well.

By far the majority of people with disabilities who travel do so without booking assistance at all. It is a much smaller proportion. Typically, if you need that reassurance and you have booked, it is an even bigger issue if people do not turn up. If you are confident that you could probably do it on your own, or with the people you are travelling with, it is very hard for the train company to have full plans in place. They should make an effort, and they should be able to react and do things, but, if you have booked, there is much greater importance for it to be delivered.

Q330 Chair: Mr Locke, do you want to add anything?

Stephen Locke: Yes, I have two additions. First, on London Overground, as the Committee may be aware, there is a turn up and go commitment, so that people do not have to pre-book. It might be worth the Committee having a look at how that works in practice. It has brought enormous benefits to people with disabilities who need assistance at stations.

Secondly, for people who do not need assistance, one significant barrier is what is sometimes known as the platform-train interface, which is the horrible step you sometimes get between the carriage and the platform.



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In fact, I got on at a station this morning where there was an enormously wide diagonal gap, with a great big yawning hole underneath it. That is a serious disincentive to rail users generally, particularly to those who have some mobility problems. We think there are quite a lot of cheap remedies available that need to be applied to make that a lot better, and we are pleased that the Rail Safety and Standards Board is running a project, on which we are members of the steering group, looking at how to deal with the step-gap problem and how to make it easier for people who have general mobility problems, but who do not necessarily require a wheelchair, to get on and off trains.

Q331 **Chair:** When are they going to report on that?

Stephen Locke: I am not quite sure. The work has just started.

Q332 **Chair:** How did that come about?

Stephen Locke: It is something that London TravelWatch has been concerned about. We know from our research that it is a big problem for a lot of people who want to be able to use trains. They will either not use any trains or not use particular stations, because there is such a horrible barrier to get across.

Q333 **Chair:** Sometimes people forget that the things that can help disabled people help everybody.

Stephen Locke: People with luggage or baby buggies.

Chair: That is a good example.

Stephen Locke: Absolutely—yes.

Q334 **Chair:** What about overcrowding in stations and on trains? We have been told that it does not really present any great threat. What do you think?

Mike Hewitson: On trains, it depends what you are looking at, in essence. If it is the likelihood of a train crashing, we have been told by the safety experts that the evidence is that, whether there are 500 people on the train or 300, it is no more or less likely to crash. Where it comes through more is in the stress and the health impact of being crammed on to a train. Attitudes to that differ, to some degree, by how common it is. If you are on a station where you always have to stand and you are always squeezing in, your expectations are such that it does not always filter through. Yes, you would like a seat, but it has always been like that.

Where we tend to get more of an outcry is when it should be 12 cars but it is eight, or it should be eight cars but it is four, or where there is disruption—a train has been cancelled, and there are two loads of passengers. That is when people get particularly frustrated and angry, and I suspect that is when it feels really unsafe to people, even if the train is no more likely to crash.



Q335 **Chair:** Is enough being done to deal with that?

Mike Hewitson: It sounds a bit trite, but the best way of avoiding some of that is to run a service on time with the right capacity. Certainly there is investment going in on capacity, but that is a very slow fix in many ways. New designs of train, particularly more open plan, with open space—that urban type of train—can help a lot. People feel a bit safer if there is space to stand comfortably. You can hold on to something, so you do not feel that you are going to fall over if the train jolts. That can help.

Fundamentally, with a turn up and go ticketing system, it is really difficult to not have crowding at some points. I am an annual season ticket holder, and I can travel on any train. If people were told at the start of the year that they would have to nominate a particular train in and a particular train back, they would get quite irate. If I had to book each day to see what was available—if I could not stand—that would create a completely different problem, which would probably drive more people on to roads and greater risks. Beyond a classic supply and demand type of argument, it gets difficult to take off the worst of overcrowding, other than, from our perspective, keep building and keep adding more capacity. If it is a boom industry, feed it.

Q336 **Robert Ffello:** On that last point, I am aware that trains heading north out of Birmingham are routinely crowded as far as Wolverhampton.

Mike Hewitson: Yes.

Q337 **Robert Ffello:** Almost every service that leaves Birmingham and goes to Wolverhampton is crowded, with people standing in vestibule areas and down the line of the train. It has been like that for a long time. Clearly, the train operating companies are not doing anything about it. They are saying, “Well, people will have to suffer as far as Wolverhampton. If they are going any further north, they will then get a seat.” Surely something is not working, because that has to be unacceptable to people. It is not at a particular time; it is just about every service.

Mike Hewitson: To some degree it comes back to the franchise specification—how many targets there are and the onus on the operator to look at its train plan and its capacity plan. If it is not in the franchise, a franchise company is not going to invest in new carriages when it has three or four years of the franchise left. It must come in either centrally via the Government or through targets that change trains, and put capacity targets, measures, enforcement and such in place.

On the current franchise—I am trying to do this from memory—I think there is a line about reasonable endeavours so that no one has to stand for more than 20 minutes. On a turn up and go railway, it is quite hard to say, “Put in £1 million of new carriages for a 20-minute journey” if it is going to be empty thereafter. We would always say, put more capacity in, because experience says that it gets filled very quickly. If you feed the demand, it increases, which has to be a good thing for the railways, but,



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ultimately, it is through franchise planning that we will address that type of issue, rather than through an individual train company.

Q338 **Robert Ffello:** But given that the Birmingham-Wolverhampton issue, for example, is not new—

Mike Hewitson: No, it is not.

Robert Ffello: It is clearly something that would have been either known or not far off known at the time when the franchise was put together.

Mike Hewitson: Yes.

Stephen Locke: There is a very limited amount that you can do via information. Some train companies, including Thameslink, provide charts at stations saying how crowded, on average, a particular train might be. There is very little evidence that many people change their travel patterns from reading those charts, because they have to get to work at a particular time, they have to take their kids to school or they have to be at a hospital appointment. The amount of flexibility people have in their travel time is not necessarily great, and they are very unlikely to flex what they do in order to have a slightly better chance of a seat.

Perhaps a bit more materially, if and when there is overcrowding and people are already on the station platform or on the train, there may be a certain amount that can be done through messaging. London Underground might have some useful lessons for national rail, as there are set procedures for keeping people informed if there is a delay on a particular platform, for telling people when the next train is coming along, for managing platform crowding and for managing difficult situations. That may be something that could be copied elsewhere. London Underground has an awful lot of experience of that, for better or for worse.

Q339 **Robert Ffello:** I am sure you are right, and it could be copied in many places. Another example would be the Stoke to Derby line, which is a single carriage, which is a nightmare.

Stephen Locke: Hopeless.

Mike Hewitson: That is when it is far harder for passengers to accept crowding; if you are on a 12-car train and it is full, yeah, but if you are on a two-car or three-car train and it is full—

Robert Ffello: Or a one-car train.

Mike Hewitson: Yes. It is much harder, because the instant reaction is, "Well, put more carriages on." Then it becomes an investment question and an issue.

Robert Ffello: Or a lack of investment.



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Mike Hewitson: Or a lack of investment question. That is probably where the emphasis needs to shift. When they do demand forecasts for a franchise, they do not always get them accurate. They traditionally underestimate the demand that actually comes through. We often suffer for that, because we are locked into it, in essence.

Q340 **Chair:** Apart from looking at the franchise issue, what else could be done to deal with the problem? Mr Locke, you mentioned London Underground. Are they successful in what they are doing in relation to dealing with crowding?

Stephen Locke: They have a different kind of problem. To some extent it is more difficult, because of the huge numbers involved. To some extent it is a bit easier, because we are talking about short journeys with fairly high frequency and a fairly high probability that, if you cannot get on a train, there will be another one quite soon. From what we are able to observe, the quality of information and the management of people's expectations is quite high. There is constant messaging about unplanned disruption, engineering works or trains that might be delayed at a signal when you are on the train. All that sort of thing helps to provide a significant amount of reassurance, even if it does absolutely nothing for your physical comfort.

Q341 **Chair:** Do you think it could be replicated?

Stephen Locke: It might have some implications that could be picked up elsewhere, yes.

Mike Hewitson: There are signs. At Euston now—I know it is different—there are indicators; they are quite crude, but they show occupancies of carriages in terms of booked tickets, so you can get a sense from that, "Ah, there's an unreserved carriage and it's here." Of course it doesn't help you if you are further down the line and all the seats have been taken by the time you get there. Price is the traditional railway response to crowding. Can we offer cheaper tickets on other services to draw people away? On longer-distance services, they do cheaper tickets, and they try to pull people there, but for an awful lot of people who have to be somewhere at a particular time, that's it—it is that train.

Q342 **Chair:** Will expanding the night-time economy lead to more alcohol-related incidents?

Mike Hewitson: Gosh. It tends to be a symptom of what is going on in society as much as anything else. It is not people drinking on the railway, but that they drink and then go on the railway. If there is a problem in society, it gets reflected on the railway. There are certainly an awful lot of people who have a drink on the train. As part of a long journey, it is one of the great pleasures, watching the world go by.

You see it increasingly on some commuter services now—not the 10-minute ones, but the 50-minute journeys and such—people decompress on a journey home with a drink and then carry on with their lives. If it is



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done sensibly and does not cause any pain to people, it is entirely feasible that it happens. It is people who tend to have had too much to drink before they get on the train, rather than drinking on the train, where the antisocial behaviour issues come, and the things I was talking about earlier. Will the night-time economy increase the numbers or will it spread them over the evening? I do not know. We had that argument when we had licensing hours relaxed. It is a bit of both sometimes.

Q343 Will Quince: Trains are one of the few places where you can buy alcohol quite early in the morning, and at all points in the day. Do you think there is any issue with alcohol being served on trains?

Mike Hewitson: Again, it goes back to context. If I am on a five-minute journey, there is absolutely no need. If I am on a five-hour journey, it is quite a nice part of the journey. You often see, on long distances, people with a glass of wine. It is how it is done, rather than the act. It is entirely possible to have a drink and behave perfectly sociably and perfectly normally. It is entirely possible for people to have a drink and behave dreadfully.

The risk of just banning it all is that you take away some people's enjoyment. If you then do not police and enforce that ban, all you have done is stop people who would behave respectfully from doing something without stopping the people who would ignore it anyway. That goes back to patrolling the train, keeping an eye on how things are going and having a quiet word—"Keep it down, now"—which is probably as effective as anything else. If we are going to look at alcohol on the train itself, we have to look at the amount of alcohol in people before they get on the train as well.

It is no good if the person at the station simply drinks whatever they've got and then gets on the train. You have not resolved the problem at all. If anything, you have probably magnified it. It probably has to be taken in the round, and as part of a societal response as well as a railway one.

Stephen Locke: Of course, you do not have the luxury of a glass of wine as you trundle through Tulse Hill, or a beer as you go through Ealing Broadway, because alcohol has been banned on Transport for London tubes and trains, and trams and buses for that matter, since 2008. I think there is a ban in Scotland as well, at night. There is scope for selective bans in particular areas.

Q344 Chair: And on Merseyrail.

Mike Hewitson: Yes, indeed.

Stephen Locke: The London ban is reasonably well respected and, I think, well enforced. Indeed, there is no point having it if it is not enforced. In the first three years, there was quite a significant drop in the number of assaults recorded on TfL services, according to the British Transport police, and it has quite wide public support. The situation in London, which is a containable area, where journeys are unlikely to be



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more than about an hour unless you are very unlucky, is obviously a different story from that in other parts of the country.

Mike Hewitson: Where there is a particular problem, it is sometimes a good solution. Mersey was having a problem and trialled it at various events, and it worked. Scotland had a problem in the evenings, and reacted to it. The Valley lines in Cardiff have bans. There are bans on certain last trains at night in certain places, and dry train orders are made around football matches and such. There is a range of measures to address problems either where they occur or where they are anticipated. It is a bit too simplistic to say, "Stop it completely." Again, I go back to enforcement: the people who will ignore it ignore it.

Q345 **Chair:** Are British Transport police responsive to passengers' needs, from what you have seen? Mr Hewitson, what are your findings on that?

Mike Hewitson: They have certainly got more responsive; they have the text—the "Contact us with your issues." Visibility is probably still an issue. Where the Transport police exist—you see them an awful lot round the big stations in London—they are visible and responsive. Their presence gets less as you move further away from London.

Q346 **Chair:** But do they respond to the needs that are there and are articulated—or even if they are not?

Mike Hewitson: Yes, I think they do. Their policing targets reflect the visibility question. They have certainly put more resources into having officers visible later at night. They are trying to match their targets with the things that passengers tell them they want. Yes, I think they are responsive, but it is a question of resource sometimes.

Q347 **Chair:** Have you identified any issues to do with how they address people with disabilities, in particular autism?

Mike Hewitson: No, I have not. I doubt that is something we would pick up through our research, and I am not aware that it is something we have had complaints about.

Stephen Locke: We have not either, I am afraid, but I can say that, organisationally, British Transport police have been punctilious about keeping us in touch with their thinking and ideas and getting input from us as a passenger organisation. That relationship is taken very seriously, and we very much welcome it. They attend our board meetings from time to time and give a presentation about what is going on, and feed back some of their thoughts about next steps.

That has been very productive on the whole, particularly where it has been in association with transport operators, including Transport for London. The BTP has the advantage of a lot of specialist knowledge, and we would be very reluctant to see that disappear.

Q348 **Chair:** Do you think that is important?



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Stephen Locke: Extremely important, yes. There are quite a lot of specifically transport-related situations and crimes that the BTP has developed expertise in handling—things such as cable theft, objects thrown from bridges and carriage steaming. There are a lot of things that are quite specific to the railways, and where the BTP has developed a lot of expertise in handling the issues.

They are also able to operate across boundaries. If there is a football special running from London to Liverpool, for example, they can be on the whole of that, and there is no need to split responsibilities between the different police forces whose area the train might pass through. The advantages of having that kind of function are very strong. We do not have a view about the governance of the system, or indeed the overall structure, but, in terms of what we see and the relationship we have, I would say that it is quite positive.

Q349 **Chair:** Mr Hewitson, do you agree with that?

Mike Hewitson: Yes.

Q350 **Chair:** Is it reflected in the work you have done?

Mike Hewitson: Absolutely. Would cable theft have had the same prominence and response if it had been part of Home Office policing? Probably not, because there would have been something more important.

In the way the Transport police clear a person hit by a train—forgive me if that is the wrong term these days—there is an awareness of how to go about it, and a desire to try to reopen the railway within 90 minutes. That may seem insensitive, but it is trying to balance the need to investigate something. Is it the scene of a crime, or is it something else?

There is an awareness that they need to get the railway running that we probably would not see, and we probably do not see, if it is a police force that is not used to dealing with that.

Q351 **Chair:** Would you be concerned if things changed and they were not there as a specialist police force, but were integrated into something else?

Mike Hewitson: Yes—unless the Home Office forces created a specialist function. But if the function is there, what governance it is under is a secondary issue, as long as it is there. There are genuine advantages in having a specialist transport police function.

Q352 **Chair:** Mr Locke, do you want to add anything?

Stephen Locke: I strongly endorse that. I have exactly the same point of view.

Chair: Thank you very much.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Ruth Sutherland and Andy McCullough.

Q353 **Chair:** Good afternoon. Welcome to the Transport Select Committee. Could you tell us your name and your position in your organisation?

Ruth Sutherland: I am Ruth Sutherland. I am the chief executive of Samaritans and co-chair of the National Suicide Prevention Alliance.

Andy McCullough: I am Andy McCullough, director for Railway Children, which is an international NGO that works in east Africa, India and the UK with children alone and at risk.

Q354 **Chair:** Mr McCullough, could you tell us why so many children and young people who are vulnerable end up in railway stations?

Andy McCullough: I will give you a bit of context to start with. It is good to be back again, two years on. Every year, 100,000 children who are under 16 run away, and 18,000 of them end up sleeping rough. Among that group, children who are looked after are three times more likely to be represented.

Many use the rail networks to escape a range of issues, including running from the placements they have been placed in, usually out of area, often putting themselves at risk. Evidence that we can now bring to the Committee, which we did not have last time, shows that young people travel long distances to return to their area and the host agency they were placed from. They go to transport hubs because they are becoming more like city centres and places where, in some cases, they might be able to beg or do other things. There may be issues of self-harm and they may be trafficked and exploited.

In 2016, BTP reported over 4,400 child-safety incidents. Following the last Transport Select Committee report in 2014, we, alongside the BTP, developed the Safeguarding on Transport programme. I will unpack that in a bit in terms of what it has done and who it has reached. I was asked, "Is enough research done on these children?" These children are running away. If you would like some numbers, there are 4,401 child concern reports, of which 1,325 are for children who have run away or gone missing, and 2,771 are on incidents reported to the local authority, so they are deemed to be at risk. Of those children, 275 are repeat—they keep coming back and police find them through various ways; 375 of the children were found to be at risk of sexual exploitation, either through meeting somebody or being coerced; 140 children were deemed so high risk that there was an immediate response by the local authority; and 975 of them were looked-after children.

It gives you a big change from when we were here before, when we were asked about statistics. There was a little bit of putting the finger in the air. The BTP has gone away with a safeguarding unit and has begun to create a picture, which I hope to share with you as we go on.



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Q355 **Chair:** You appeared before the previous Transport Committee in the last Parliament when we were looking at this issue in its own right. Have you noticed changes since that time? We made a number of recommendations.

Andy McCullough: Yes, there were a number of recommendations, one of which was about data, because we didn't quite know. I have worked with different police forces for nearly 32 years. BTP has made massive moves with the safeguarding hub that it developed in terms of gathering statistics and intelligence. That has been really good. We have numbers. We know the stations with the highest incidents. I will share a couple of those with you. In the top 10, Manchester Piccadilly has one of the highest incidences of CYP1 forms being done on children at risk. Then it is Glasgow, Birmingham, Leeds, Waterloo, Victoria, Euston, Hull, Reading and St Pancras.

Q356 **Chair:** How old are the children involved?

Andy McCullough: The majority are around 15. I am a really good undercover policeman, as you can imagine. I did a shift with BTP not so long back, and there were two 17-year-olds who were going to meet a 40-year-old. A member of the public had overheard a conversation and reported it. They were going to meet a man off the internet they had never met before. I will share some of those cases. We have the data. We have also begun to look at how we get the messages out, alongside colleagues such as Samaritans. There are some clear messages: "Do something. Tell somebody."

Industry standards were developed alongside that, as part of the RDG and others, about be aware, be concerned, listen, reassure and report. We have made sure that the language fits into that. We have recruited 250 safeguarding champions through the industry. We have gone to Network Rail and Virgin, and recruited people to present a 20-minute session to their colleagues in their lunch breaks, or whenever they can do it, telling them that some of those children might not be involved in the antisocial stuff that is going on. "Sometimes you might just want to walk away from it, but tell somebody about it." In the stations where we are beginning to make a difference, those incidences are going up, but that is not a badge of shame. It means they are beginning to report it and to react to it.

Q357 **Chair:** Ms Sutherland, what can you tell us about the trends in death by suicide on the railways?

Ruth Sutherland: More than 6,000 people die by suicide each year. That is three times as many people as die in road traffic accidents. It will equate to 13 people today. Three quarters of them are men; you are three times more likely to die from suicide if you are a man than a woman. It is the biggest killer for men under 50, and it is the biggest killer of young people between the ages of 20 and 34. There was a decreasing trend in suicide between 1990 and 2007, but since 2007 there



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has been a gradual increase again. The most likely explanation is the financial crisis. We know that suicide rates track economic performance. As you can imagine, a social recession is longer and deeper than an economic one; if you lose your job, your relationship or your house at a time of economic crisis, the impact will last much longer. The rates now, or in 2015—the last available figures—are significantly higher than they were in 2007. The male rate per 100,000 of the population has gone up from 15.6 to 16.6, and for females it has gone up from 4.7 to 5.4. The rates now are higher than they have been since 2004. It is a significant problem.

Suicides on the rails account for about 4.5% of all the suicides. Predominantly, it is men; 80% of the suicides on railways are men. If you are in a low income group, you are 10 times more likely, if you are a middle-aged man—35 to 55—to be involved in a suicide incident than the rest of the population. There is a deep association with social deprivation. We have a further report on that out today, if you want more information on that aspect.

Q358 Chair: You have been working with the rail industry for some time on addressing the issue. What do you think has happened that has been constructive?

Ruth Sutherland: It has been a seven-year partnership. The biggest thing from that seven years has been a real culture change in the rail industry's approach. That culture change has been that suicide is preventable. That is something we know: suicide is preventable. Perhaps the attitude before we started seven years ago was, "We can't really do anything about this." Each suicide costs the rail industry £230,000. One incident last year cost in excess of £1 million. If you imagine between 250 and 300 suicides on the rail network a year, there is a massive cost, which is in delay minutes, compensation and sickness in drivers. Since 2010, 5,000 driver days have been lost because of the impact of suicide. It is the most catastrophic thing for anybody on the rail network to have to witness.

The programme involves three key pillars, which are education and training, prevention and postvention work. The satisfying thing is that in the last two years we have seen a decrease, against the backdrop of an increase in national rates. In 2015-16, there were 253 suicides on the network and that was a 12% reduction from the year before. This year, 2016-17, there is a 7% decline on the same period from last year, but it is only 10 months. We need some caution though, because we are in only the third year of a decrease. The research people tell us that it is a bit early to say that it is a trend, but we are hopeful.

The biggest change has been the culture change in the attitude. More than 15,000 railway workers, many of them men—they are the target group so it has a personal impact on their own wellbeing as well—have been trained. We have also developed an online learning tool to extend the programme's reach, and a further 15,000 people have viewed that



learning tool. It has won a number of awards. We can now say after seven years of working that perhaps one in seven people in the rail industry—about 200,000 workers—is suicide aware. We have seen more than 1,000 interventions by members of staff who have identified vulnerable people, approached them, talked to them and brought them away from a situation of danger. We feel very positive about the whole partnership.

Q359 **Chair:** Mr McCullough, do you want to add anything?

Andy McCullough: The attitude stuff and the change in culture is definitely what we are pushing for by becoming involved with BTP when they recruit—making sure that they look beyond the surface behaviour at what is going on. Having the rail Minister actively involved has been crucial, and having the DFT look at involving vulnerability and safeguarding in the safer station accreditation process, which they have agreed to do, will be pivotal.

There is a huge movement at the top, with transport providers and others who are really keen to do the right thing. Then you trickle down to the people on the frontline, who are the ones balancing everything, and say to them, “You need to include the needs of children and young people,” among all the other things, and it is a bit of a tough gig. Certainly Network Rail and others have jumped at the chance to be seen as doing something a bit more than just taking people from A to B, but it is going to be a long haul.

The RDG has invited us on a number of occasions to spend time with them and look at the different balancing acts they need to do because, unlike costing a suicide prevention, doing the right thing with a child is a bit different. We have also had to work with local authorities to say, “When you receive a referral from BTP and others, take it seriously and feed back. Let them know whether they have helped or hindered.”

I have been impressed with BTP. They are specialists. They manage a certain estate and they know those areas. They also know the individuals who turn up periodically and cause a bit of chaos. We are hearing stories of better interaction with children and young people. In terms of the train providers, it is a longer haul, but when it is part of the safer stations accreditation perhaps they will take it more on board. Of the ones that we have, we hear of train drivers who speak to young people who have a one-way ticket or are on a very late train, and ask where they are going, and they communicate with the BTP when they are concerned. There have been a number of occasions when they have found out that those children are missing or running away. Then there is the conversation about taking them back.

A constant that comes through is definitely about out-of-area placements. An example is children from London who are placed in Manchester and run away, back to London; they are picked up because they do not have a ticket, or they are travelling at a strange time of night



or they may be still in their school uniform. People are beginning to ask those questions and respond to them. The whole idea has to be that we do not turn safeguarding into a specialism for those people. We must make it accessible and say, "Do you know what's the worst that could happen? Just tell somebody. You might have got it wrong. You spoke to somebody, you told the BTP, and they find out that, no, they are travelling like any other person. That is the worst that could happen."

The best thing that could happen is what I mentioned earlier—the two young women who had been approached on the internet by a 40-year old who offered to buy them a meal. A passenger on board heard something and passed it on to the conductor, who phoned BTP and said, "We are aware this might not be anything," but they told the story to the BTP. We met them off the train; all we had was a conversation and a description, but it turned out that they were going to meet a man. They had not thought of the consequences. They thought he sounded all right, that they were only an hour away from home and they could always leave if they wanted to. Their parents did not know that they were in Manchester.

Things are trickling through. Our goal is to create a safety network. We know that the high instances are around the Manchester, Birmingham and London areas. As well as awareness training, we provide Railway Children workers with the opportunity to do some follow-up and decrease the number of young people returning. We look at the children's homes where there are particular issues and do some work with them, to see if we can negotiate safe trips back home rather than trips where they are jumping a train, they don't quite know where they are going and they don't quite know whether the person over there is saying they will help out of the goodness of their heart or whether they want to harm them.

Q360 Mark Menzies: Ms Sutherland, you laid out the issue of suicide in a very powerful way. A driver in my constituency came to see me about a suicide incident that affected him. This was a long time after the incident. It never left him. You are right to identify the impact it has on staff. What messaging could be put out that would help to persuade people who felt that suicide was the only course of action open to them? What can we say to them that pulls them back, makes them stop and think and makes them access help or counselling?

Ruth Sutherland: Samaritans take 5.4 million contacts a year from people. Every six seconds somebody contacts us. What we know about suicidal behaviour is that the deeper into the thought that "There is no other option except to end my life," the harder it is to get the person to open up and think of other options. We have signs on stations, and we get a lot of calls from those signs. Those are people who are imminently going to end their lives.

One of the satisfying things about this area of work is that the right intervention at the right moment can produce a 100% success rate. The person can rethink their situation. It is a response to unbearable pain. Whatever the pain is caused by, the deeper the person gets into suicidal



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thinking, the more they think there is no option. The further down that journey they get, the less likely they are to ask for help. Their vision of how they are going to end their life is the end of their pain. They don't want to tell anyone because that person might stop them. It is very careful work.

In terms of the rail network, it is literally human contact, which is something that can break that thinking. The training we offer is, literally, to approach people and ask, "Are you okay?" When they say they are not okay, the training equips you to know what to say next. You take the person away from the situation. You take them to have a cup of tea with you. You call other services to help you, including British Transport police and local services. Basically, the person then has help. The help is opening up options. There are always other options, but people lock down the idea that there is another option.

When people contact Samaritans—we are entirely manned, or personed, by volunteers—it is a human service. It is not a specialist mental health service; it is literally creating a human contact, that somebody cares enough to listen to what is going on with you. The sooner we can get to people, the better. People can feel overwhelmed. There are a lot of campaigns that the rail industry has supported Samaritans to do, because there is such a huge reach on the rail network—1.9 billion passenger journeys.

One of the things is to have the Samaritans number on the back of all tickets, which shows where help is. There is encouragement to seek help. The Samaritans service is confidential and non-judgmental. We don't know who you are; we are just going to help you to work it out. We do not fix people. We support people to fix themselves, which is, of course, a much more sustainable approach. We know from research that, once people have turned away from suicidal thinking, they do not go somewhere else or choose another method. They have opened up the possibility that there is another way of looking at the situation they are in.

Q361 Mark Menzies: You are absolutely right. I am aware of a number of people who have been in that situation. They have stepped back from it and gone on to experience great pleasure, happiness and so on, which at that moment in time they thought was impossible to ever experience again. It is breaking that thought process, that cycle, in enough time. I certainly appreciate the work of the Samaritans.

Ruth Sutherland: Great. One other thing I wanted to highlight that the rail industry has done is the Suicide Prevention Duty Holders Group. The group has produced guidance for creating a suicide prevention plan for all the rail industry to follow, to develop their own suicide prevention plans. It is a great initiative, and they are also getting it written into the franchise agreements. If you go for a franchise, you need to set out what your suicide prevention plan is. That is an important step forward.



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Q362 **Will Quince:** My questions are probably more directed to Ms Sutherland. It is heartening to hear about the number of people you manage to catch at the point before they take their own life. I am interested in the work you do with those people after you have taken them back from the brink. It is fantastic to know that they do not, in the main, go off and have suicidal thoughts in the future, which is brilliant. What work do you do to try to identify why they chose, for want of a better word, the rail network as a place to take their life? Could that research be used to identify ways in which that chain or cycle could be broken in the future for others?

Ruth Sutherland: That is an area where research into suicidal behaviour is very thin. It would be one of the general things that we would call for. Access to means creates suicidal opportunities. There are occupations that have higher risks of suicide because they have access to the means of death. Everybody lives quite near a railway, so the access to means is one thing that you cannot limit or change. For some people, it can be a snap decision and for other people it can be a long-term plan that they have had.

Research in the area is not very conclusive, but one suggestion is that people believe that the method is imminent, certain and painless, and that is an attraction. The reality is not quite that case. With British Transport police and the rail industry, we were involved in some research with Middlesex University looking at that, and "Quick" and "Painless" were by far the two most common responses for survey respondents. Those were people who had made an attempt.

Q363 **Will Quince:** Could I interject at this point? Perhaps it is an awful thing to suggest and you can slap me down if I am wrong. Given that people, potentially, know the disruption that is caused, is it almost a cry for help as well in that regard—as in to be noticed and recognised? Maybe it is a moot point, I don't know.

Ruth Sutherland: It is hard to say. There have been suggestions that, maybe if people knew the distress it caused railway drivers and people like that, they would not do it. Unfortunately, that is not the case, because you are so completely fixated on what is happening with you that you do not think about anything else.

If I could use the parallel of smoking, for example, we know that smoking kills us. We have known that since 1948, but quite a lot of people still smoke. In relation to behaviour, knowing and doing are quite different things. We need to concentrate on reducing suicide across the whole population. That is the way we will reduce the numbers on the rails as well as everywhere else.

Q364 **Will Quince:** Given the disruption we know it causes, given that it is a tragic loss of life in every single case and given the huge cost to the rail industry, do you think that the rail operating companies and Network Rail should be doing more to finance research into the area so that we could try to stop more people from taking their own life on the railways?



Ruth Sutherland: The rail industry has shown great leadership in this area and has invested a lot. It still costs them far more than they are investing. The cost to the state of one life lost, as calculated by the LSE in 2009, is £1.6 million per life lost. If you look at the amount spent on research, and the amount of Government money that is spent on research, it is minimal. I would ask everybody to make a contribution. The rail industry has shown good leadership and they are doing a lot, but there is a lot more that could be done. It needs to be done across the piece. We hope that the Select Committee on Health, which is looking for the first time at suicide prevention, will come out with very robust recommendations about how the suicide prevention strategy can be implemented. It is a good strategy. It just needs to be implemented.

Q365 **Huw Merriman:** I use Southern and Southeastern. When you were talking about the backs of tickets, I checked mine. Southeastern does not have the Samaritans details, so there is work for Southeastern. Perhaps I can give Southern some credit, which is not often said in this Committee. The local Southern stations have Samaritans posters up. It really looks effective. My question is whether Network Rail and the train operators could use their sound monitors, so that when we hear announcements perhaps they could talk about the availability of the Samaritans at that stage. Maybe that happens already and I just have not heard it.

Ruth Sutherland: We have been involved in three campaigns with Network Rail since 2010. The last one was called the We Listen campaign and was the most successful we have had so far; 20 train operating companies across Great Britain were involved and 29 million people had the opportunity to see it—it was on the barriers as they went through. We have had focus times and we have had events. Samaritans have run events on different stations, raising awareness and handing out information to passengers as they come through.

Of course, we would like to build on those campaigns and get a bit more upstream, because we want to get to people before they come to the railway line. There is a lot more involvement with each local authority having the responsibility for local suicide prevention plans. The rail industry is getting involved with local authorities, particularly in priority locations where they want to work more concertedly together. There is multi-agency work on reducing suicides. Raising public awareness is a key element, because everybody can do something. A word from somebody can sometimes change things completely; we have many examples of that. There are people on the platforms who have been trained as well.

Q366 **Huw Merriman:** My second question is linked to promoting what you do. How do you balance the difficulties of explaining the dangers to people and trying to look after them to make sure that they do not take that step, but at the same time not giving out too much information? We know that there are wicked websites out there, and they may have more information than is good for them. How do you balance that?



Ruth Sutherland: We have to look to the evidence base that we have. We do not talk about method. The campaigns are usually like We Listen, which is that whatever is going on with you, however overwhelmed you are, there is always somebody who can listen to what is happening. It is a general everybody needs to look after everybody type of message as opposed to a safety message. There is a mixture of approaches. At a station you would look at physical improvements to the station; when new stations are designed, quite a lot of things can be done that are suicide preventing. We have tried all sorts of research, such as hatching on the side of the platform, so that people don't stand in that area, as well as different types of lighting. There are all sorts of things that are introduced to try to make a safer environment. The signposts, the number to call and things like that are all part of that package of physical improvements, as well as the education and training ones.

Q367 **Huw Merriman:** Let me bring in Mr McCullough. As far as you are aware, do the train operators work with child and adolescent mental health services—CAMHS—to train their staff to make sure that they are particularly aware of the behaviour, difficulty and concerns that young people may be experiencing? It may be apparent with training and they can intervene.

Andy McCullough: Our experience is that there is not much going on in terms of engaging around issues of risk; people get caught up in the day to day how to get people from A to B as quickly as possible without being called out on the news, and by your Committee sometimes. We do not come across that a lot, which is why we felt at this moment in time we did not want to do anything public facing. We know that Samaritans have messages. Indeed, there is quite a lot of messaging when you look around a station about texting BTP and about the public doing their bit, which is good news.

We wanted to concentrate on making sure that the industry felt confident just to tell somebody else, including people like SSP and the people who run all the different food and coffee franchises around the stations. We are concentrating on that. We are enabling the person who cleans the toilets to be just as important as the person who is telling you where to go, because the intelligence they pick up is paramount.

When we talk to BTP, which is often, they say that it is about the sharing of intelligence—good intelligence, getting people together, going on their hunches, sharing things and making the connections. BTP has been really good at joining them up. We have to work more with the TOCs so that they make time, first of all, to have a bit of training and some awareness, and to make sure that they have some numbers at hand, so that they know where their local homelessness shelter is and what their local services are. We need to move them on quite quickly, including some attitudes; there is an old school and a new school within rail and we meet both. Some of them say, "They are a bloody nuisance and we don't want anything to do with these children and young people," yet others



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genuinely say, "They deserve the right to have a safe passage and be safe while they are with us."

Over the last couple of months it has been very heartening to hear the Home Office police talking about the BTP very differently. BTP has been seen as just a security firm that manages transport hubs and stuff, but now when I talk to the National Crime Agency and other people, they say, "There is some really good intelligence about how people travel and where they travel." They can learn from the use of CCTV, but they also learn about how space is managed, which is critical, and could be transferred to a city centre or a shopping centre in terms of who you get involved with and how you get involved. I am not sure that answers your question. Maybe I am being political.

Huw Merriman: That was a lot of information. Thank you.

Q368 **Chair:** Mr McCullough, is the specialist knowledge that BTP has important or is it something that could be done by someone else, such as another police force?

Andy McCullough: Everybody has watched the argument about what if the territorial police took on the role of managing transport. I think that safeguarding, suicide prevention and a number of other things would slip off the agenda slowly, because the arguments with the Met about what they concentrate on would be massive.

What has been really positive is that, because there is a central command, if something is going to happen, it goes across the whole board. We are going to have problems with Scotland in the future, depending on how devolution goes, but talking to one group of people through one command structure is really useful.

Detective Superintendent Richard Mann, who manages safeguarding, was the first to say that their training was not that good on safeguarding, so they engaged with the National Crime Agency and ourselves to roll out even more specialist training. They are really good. If you want to see a visible police force, don't walk around Manchester city centre; go into Piccadilly, and you will see visible police and some really good PCSOs as well. If you had told me 10 years ago that I would be advocating for the police—wow, how times have changed.

Q369 **Chair:** Times change. You mentioned the TOCs, Mr McCullough, and that you wanted to see different attitudes in some of them. Am I right in saying that? Is there any other part of the rail sector you would like to change, to help you to do your work?

Andy McCullough: We have relied on well-meaning and good people within the industry. That is good, but in terms of stickability they move on to other things pretty quickly, depending on what the pressures are. We feel that we need to systematise some things. ATOC and the RDG have merged. They have been very proactive and, indeed, will have a chair who is ex-BTP. That will be really useful in making sure that



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safeguarding, alongside all the other things that make people safe, is kept in.

A lot is going on in the franchising process, but safeguarding should be in it, to include adults and children. More and more, those environments are going out into communities. As we see the development of transport hubs, people begin to live around those areas. As a consequence, those hubs will be part of their lives.

We would certainly like to see that some of this stuff ends up as committed obligations for stations—that these are the things they are going to do as part of living and being part of a community. We think that SSP and others, who run the shops and other things, have a real role. We have also spent time with signallers and people who deal with trespassing and we are beginning to look at patterns. All those elements need to change. It needs good leadership. BTP has shown that. What we need now are the TOCs, who have been pretty good but a bit sporadic, to show more leadership.

Q370 **Chair:** You need better consistent leadership from the TOCs.

Andy McCullough: Yes. It has certainly helped to have a Minister who likes trains and getting involved in trains, and a Department that is saying, “Yes, we will do the right thing.” Safeguarding children will not improve the amount of revenue you get. It will not improve trains getting from A to B any quicker, but it shows that you, as much as every citizen on the street, have a responsible role.

Q371 **Will Quince:** Having listened to the evidence from both of you to the Committee, it seems to me that you are both heavily reliant on people. As we know, different train operating companies are reducing their staff, especially at the more remote stations, but it seems to me that the more remote stations, where through trains might not stop, might be some of the more high-risk areas, or priority areas that you would want to look at.

Are there advances in technology, such as lasers being set off as you approach the platform edge to warn you, and audio warnings that would disrupt your behaviour? If you have had too much to drink, if you step over the line, a siren goes off and it tells you, “Stand back. You are too close.” Are there call points for young people to get help? Where we see less interaction with individuals because there are fewer staff available at stations, are there technology advances that we can utilise that will help to make your jobs easier?

Ruth Sutherland: The suggestion you make is a good one. I am sure the technology—

Q372 **Will Quince:** Does it exist?

Ruth Sutherland: No it doesn't. There could be far more use of technology. CCTV is used a lot on the rail network, and there could be



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more developments. As you enter the station, more technology could be used. It is hard to replace the impact that people have. We would not really have a view about whether people should be on the trains, but we would like there to be people on the platforms and at stations, because human contact is vital in terms of safety.

Q373 Chair: Is there anything else you would like the sector to do as a whole to assist your work?

Ruth Sutherland: Funding is in place for the work we have been doing until 2020. There is always uncertainty; money cannot be committed longer term. The duty holders group recommendation is that there should be a national fund that is ring-fenced and long term for that area of work. It is too important to be in the stop-start of short-term contracts. That would be one thing.

We would like it to spread. We think it is a good example. The London Underground network did a year's worth of work in this area, which was good. We worked with them to produce a learning tool, but it feels a little bit like job done. The culture change that is required is longer term. There is no quick solution to this kind of work. It needs a longer-term commitment. We think it could go to other parts of the transport sector. We are just beginning a partnership with Highways England, and we would like to see similar work on the road network.

Q374 Chair: Is that done on the moment on the roads? Do you have any initiatives with Highways England?

Ruth Sutherland: No. We are just beginning a partnership with Highways England, and we hope to be able to develop a similar model in that area.

Q375 Chair: Mr McCullough, do you want to answer Mr Quince's question about technology?

Andy McCullough: There are two elements. In terms of the industry, there are buses and other things that connect with stations. We have been doing a number of pilots with some of the bus services, such as Stagecoach and various others, to make sure that bus drivers are looking for unusual behaviour, looking for lone children and making sure it is reported. That has been quite successful, but getting funding for it is another challenge.

I like the idea about technology. I have seen some really good stuff in Manchester. You can tell I come from Manchester, because I always talk about Manchester. Some of the bus stations have charging points. We have been working for a number of years around the issue of runaway children and children going missing. They have always told us that charging points would be really useful.

There may be that nagging thing of, "If they run away and they are able to charge their phone, might that sustain them?", but it does mean that



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they can phone some of the helplines and keep in contact with their loved ones or others to make sure that they are okay. There are a number of USB ports along the Piccadilly station approach. We might need to look at some way of making sure that people can stay connected. I am sure that will echo Ruth Sutherland's experience as well. If the phone runs out of charge, there is nobody you can speak to.

Q376 **Chair:** How many stations have that kind of charging facility?

Andy McCullough: I have only ever seen it in Manchester, and I thought it was a really good, cheap idea to keep people connected. I know that from my own children; I ask why their phone wasn't on and why didn't they answer, only to be told that they had run out of charge. There is no excuse if they are in Manchester now.

Chair: Are there any further questions from members of the Committee? Thank you very much indeed.