

Written submission from the British Transport Police (SPP0110)

Executive summary

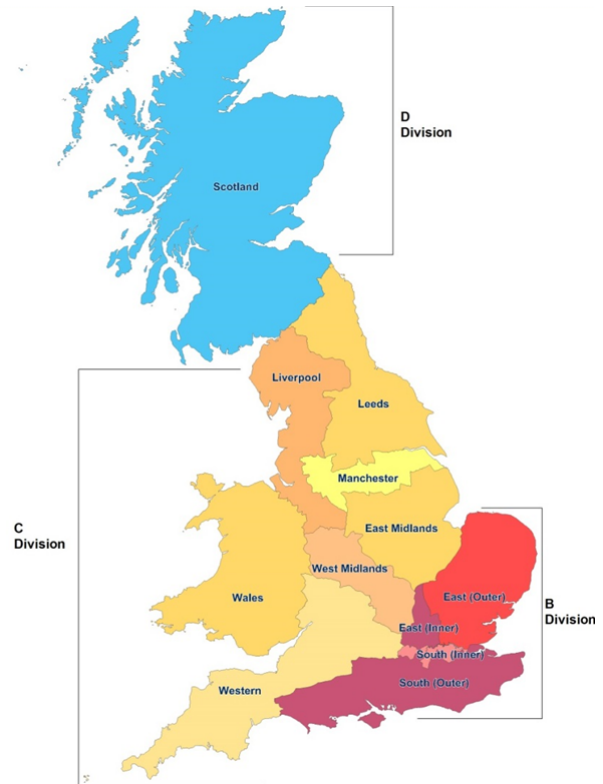
- This evidence submission gives an overview of the BTP perspective on sexual harassment and assault on the national transport network and should be read in conjunction with the submission from Transport for London (TfL).
- BTP recorded just over 2,000 sexual offences in the last year to date. The majority of these have occurred within BTP's 'B' division and a majority of those offences have been recorded on the London Underground network. However sexual assault and harassment occur in all of the Force's three geographical policing regions covering England, Wales, and Scotland.
- The vast majority of victims who have reported these offences to BTP are female.
- The types of offences reported to BTP vary and include Sexual Assault, Outraging Public Decency (OPD), Exposure, Assault by Penetration, and Rape.
- The nature of the transport environment can provide enabling factors for some types of sexual offending.
- A continual rise in the number of reported sexual offences has been seen on the transport network in recent years; a rise that coincides with work carried out by the police and partner agencies to encourage reporting of unwanted sexual behaviour on the transport network.
- BTP explore and continuously develop an array of tactical and strategic options to tackle sexual offences on the transport network alongside Home Office police colleagues and key partner agencies.
- Taking photographs of a sexual nature without a person's consent ('up skirting') is an emerging offence type on the transport network, as well as in the wider public context; an issue not yet fully understood in terms of prevalence due to current recording practices and legislation.

1. Introduction

1.1 As the Police Force responsible for policing the national rail network, we welcome the opportunity to contribute evidence to this inquiry. Our key aim is to help the nation's travelling public get home every day, safe, secure, and on time.

1.2 Tackling all forms of sexual assault and harassment on public transport is a priority for BTP. We take any offence of this nature extremely seriously and we are committed to developing a transport network which is free from harassment and accessible to everyone. We have worked hard to send a clear message to people who experience this that they will be taken seriously and we will investigate offences using all available avenues, such as CCTV, witnesses, and forensics.

1.3 This submission should be considered in conjunction with the submission from TfL. The evidence they have provided gives oversight of the scale and nature of the issue on the London transport network and summarises the partnership work between BTP, the Metropolitan Police Service, and the City of London Police. This evidence submission does not seek to replicate the information provided by TfL, but rather to supplement this by giving a national overview from a BTP perspective.



2. Sexual harassment of women and girls on the UK's transport network

2.1 Sexual harassment and assault occur across the whole of BTP's jurisdiction, with the majority of victims – approximately 90% - being female. Departmental data from BTP's Sexual Offences Coordination Unit (**Fig.1**) shows the current 'year to date' picture for the number of sexual offences reported to BTP. **Fig.2** indicates the geographical break down of the policing divisions referred to in the data table.

Fig.1*

Fig. 2

Sexual Offences 2017/18 YTD

Division	Previous YTD	Current YTD	Difference	
B Division	1,550	1,810	260	16.8%
C Division	330	410	80	24.2%
D Division	44	50	6	13.6%
Forcewide	1,924	2,270	346	18.0%

**please note these are SOCU departmental figures*

provided to give a summary of reported offence levels; they are not official BTP statistics.

2.2 The majority of BTP’s reported offences – approximately 80% - occur within our B Division (figures in **Fig.1**), which includes the London Underground network.

2.3 Sexual harassment and assault can take many forms on the transport network. The most common sexual offence reported on BTP jurisdiction is sexual assault (section 3 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003). This includes activity such as groping, rubbing, and stroking, and accounts for between 55-60% of overall BTP sexual offences. Outraging Public Decency (OPD) accounts for around 25% of this overall figure; this includes activity such as taking images of a sexual nature of someone in public without that person’s consent – known as ‘up skirting’ - as well as public masturbation etc. Another of the most common offences reported to BTP is exposure, which accounts for approximately 8% of our sexual offences. Incidents involving penetration, such as assault by penetration and rape, are reported less frequently on the transport network with each offence accounting for just under 1% of BTP sexual offences.

2.4 Public transport can provide an enabling environment for some offenders. Busy commuter carriages allow offenders to be within close physical proximity to others where they can use train movements and crowding as an excuse for deliberate sexual touching. Less crowded environments create their own challenges; situations where lone victims and/or a lack of witnesses can enable different types of sexual offences, such as public masturbation, exposure, and in some cases,

penetrative assaults and rape. In recent years, BTP have also seen the use of technology to facilitate sexual offending on the railway, in the form of ‘up skirting’. These types of incidents occur in a variety of ways; offenders have been known to use both overt and covert cameras, as well as using various opportunities/objects/design features to try and hide what they are doing, such as taking photographs under tables on board trains, and using the angles of escalator travel to discreetly take such photographs. Some BTP investigations into this type of offence have led to uncovering predatory, prolific offenders^{1 2}. Cybercrime work by BTP has also identified an online element to this where ‘up skirting’ type images taken on the transport network are uploaded and shared via websites.

2.5 A continual rise in reported sexual offences has been seen on the transport network over the last few years as outlined in the below table (**Fig.3**) from a collection of data from BTP’s Annual Statistical Bulletin. This rise coincides with the introduction of Project Guardian and the ‘Report it to Stop it’ (RITSI) campaign, both aimed at encouraging people to report experiences of unwanted sexual behaviour on the transport network to the police. BTP have not conducted any formal evaluations into whether this is a result of an increase in prevalence or an increase in reporting, but the Office of National Statistics and academic research (e.g. Did they report it to stop it?) have suggested that this increase could arguably be at least in part due to improvements in police recording practices, as well as an increase in the willingness of victims to report these offences, rather than an increase in the prevalence of sexual offences. BTP have worked hard to encourage reporting to enable us to have a more accurate picture of offending and use this to inform our policing approach. However, we believe that sexual assault and harassment are still unreported, both in general as well as on the transport network.

Fig.3

Number of sexual offences reported and % of overall sexual offences for the year				
BTP sub-divisions	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017
B Division East	161 (14.4%)	217 (15.6%)	286 (14.7%)	286 (13.4%)

B Division South	239 (21.4%)	266 (19%)	366 (18.8%)	404 (18.9%)
B Division Transport for London	429 (38.4%)	567 (40.5%)	894 (45.8%)	1,032 (48.4%)
B Division Total	829 (74.2%)	1,050 (75.1%)	1,546 (79.2%)	1,722 (80.8%)
C Division Midland	72 (6.4%)	80 (5.7%)	102 (5.2%)	106 (5%)
C Division Pennines	122 (10.9%)	145 (10.4%)	174 (8.9%)	167 (7.8%)
C Division Wales	19 (1.7%)	22 (1.6%)	26 (1.3%)	30 (1.4%)
C Division Western	39 (3.5%)	52 (3.7%)	45 (2.3%)	61 (2.9%)
C Division Total	252 (22.5%)	299 (21.4%)	347 (17.8)	364 (17.1%)
D Division Scotland	36 (3.3%)	50 (3.5%)	59 (3%)	46 (2.1%)
BTP Total	1,117	1,399	1,952	2,132

3. Preventing and responding to sexual harassment of women and girls in public places

3.1 Key BTP activity to tackle sexual offences on the transport network includes:

3.1.2 The creation of a Sexual Offences Coordination Unit (SOCU) to coordinate and drive national activity within BTP to combat sexual offences. Some responsibilities of the unit include roles in governance, external scrutiny, managing stakeholder relationships, and sex offender management.

3.1.3 Proactively gathering and disseminating guidance, lessons learned, and good practice around dealing with sexual offences to continuously improve the way we deal with this challenging type of offence.

- 3.1.4** Developing national forums and working groups to support our officers and staff in responding to sexual offences to aid in their continuous personal development.
- 3.1.5** Supporting regular external scrutiny of BTP's processes through the newly established External Independent Sexual Offences Scrutiny Panel.
- 3.1.6** Providing a centralised portfolio of sexual offences data to guide and support our operational deployments of both high visibility and plain clothed police officers who both proactively and reactively patrol the network.
- 3.1.7** Being a key partner in the 'Report it to Stop it' Campaign to instill confidence in reporting unwanted sexual behaviour on the transport network to the police. Alongside the work outlined in the TfL submission regarding London, we have nationally rolled out phase 1 of the 'Report it to Stop it' campaign, and are currently planning to launch phase 2 of the campaign at our policing posts across the Force. Sexual assault and harassment can happen anywhere on the network and we are keen to ensure that all victims receive a consistent response from BTP, wherever they may be when they experience this type of offending.
- 3.1.8** Creation and continual promotion of our text 61016 number to provide an easy and discreet reporting mechanism.
- 3.1.9** Maintaining a dedicated Sexual Offences Unit (SOU) in our policing division that covers London and the South East to investigate the majority of our sexual offences.
- 3.1.10** Developing an investigative toolkit to support investigators in their roles
- 3.1.11** Exploring training and equipment requirements to undertake proactive investigations to tackle sexual offenders utilising the internet to share material related to sexual offending on the transport network.
- 3.1.12** Regularly disseminating wanted images to wide police networks and the general public to assist in identifying unknown offenders.
- 3.1.13** Publishing successful prosecutions to demonstrate that this is something we take very seriously and that this activity will not be tolerated on the rail network.

- 3.1.14** Identifying opportunities for continuous professional development for our investigators who deal with sexual offences.
- 3.1.15** Gathering, analysing, and researching relevant intelligence to identify and monitor offenders who pose a risk to the travelling public through the national BTP Sex Offenders Risk Matrix (SORM).
- 3.1.16** Identifying opportunities for proactive monitoring of prolific/high risk sex offenders to try and minimize their likelihood of reoffending.
- 3.1.17** Maintaining effective working relationships with Home Office Police colleagues to assist with the management of registered sex offenders who offend on the rail network.
- 3.1.18** Encouraging and supporting applications for Sexual Harm Prevention Orders (SHPO) and Sexual Risk Orders (SRO) to disrupt offending activity.
- 3.1.19** Development of a database to effectively manage unidentified CCTV images of sex offenders.
- 3.1.20** Commission of a PhD research study with a focus on offenders to inform any future public messaging and/or offender management strategies.
- 3.1.21** Designing a victim satisfaction survey to provide those who have experienced a sexual offence with the opportunity to provide feedback on their experience of the service they receive from BTP.
- 3.1.22** Developing training materials for both BTP and partner agency staff (e.g. rail staff) to ensure public facing officers and staff are suitably equipped to respond effectively to those who may disclose to them that they have experienced sexual assault or harassment.
- 3.1.23** Commission of a PhD research study with a focus on victim experience to inform any future public messaging and/or victim service delivery improvements.
- 3.1.24** Commission of internal research into victim disengagement to see how we can further support those who take the challenging step of reporting their experience to the police.
- 3.1.25** Raising awareness to our officers and staff through guidance, briefings, and training about support services available to those who have experienced sexual assault or harassment.

3.2 One potential barrier in tackling this issue is the current legislation used to prosecute offenders who conduct ‘up skirting offences’. A manual review of BTP’s OPD offences from January 2017 to the end of February 2018 show around 80 of these recorded, the majority of these being on the London Underground network. From an intelligence and information perspective, it is difficult to accurately and effectively capture the true number of these offences and fully analyse any trends/patterns due to the fact that this falls under the general OPD umbrella, which encompasses an array of other types of non-sexual behaviour. The lack of specific sexual offence legislation for ‘up skirting’ also causes issues for the police from an offender management perspective. OPD is not an offence that qualifies a convicted person for sex offender registration; this will only occur if a Sexual Harm Prevention Order (SHPO) is applied for and obtained. This makes it more challenging for law enforcement agencies to put measures in place to manage these offenders.

4.0 Conclusion

4.1 BTP welcomes the Committee’s inquiry into sexual harassment and assault in public places. At a time where this topic is very much at the forefront of public discourse we are keen to reassure the public we serve that the railway is a safe place, but that we are working hard with the support of the public and partners to make it even safer. We will continue to encourage both reporting and a robust response to this unacceptable behaviour. We also understand that there is still more work to be done to tackle this type of offending and we are keen to explore any innovative opportunities that may arise as a result of this dialogue.

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¹ [Wanstead man convicted after filming up women’s skirts](#), BTP website, 07 Mar 2017

² [Child sex offender jailed following a BTP investigation – London](#), BTP website, 21 Apr 2017