

COMMUNITY AND SAFER CITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

THE EXTENT OF ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR IN BUS STATIONS AND HOW IT IS ADDRESSED.

REPORT OF HEAD OF SECURITY - NEXUS

12 JANUARY 2010

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide an overview to the Scrutiny Committee on the extent of anti social behaviour in bus stations and how it is addressed.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Nexus is the Tyne and Wear Passenger Transport Executive. Its primary role is to promote the use and convenience of local public transport. However, Nexus is unique in that it owns and operates a light rail system – the Tyne and Wear Metro. In Sunderland the line stretches from Seaburn to the terminus in South Hylton and includes 9 stations. However, bus services are supplied by private companies including major operators such as Arriva, Stagecoach and Go North East.
- 2.2 Public transport is vital to the economic and social well being of Sunderland providing access to employment, leisure and education opportunities. There were **37,461,755** public transport journeys made in 2008/9 in the district of Sunderland. Broken down by mode as follows:

34,817,245 by Bus
2,644,510 by Metro
- 2.3 About 93% of public transport journeys are undertaken by bus. The bus network is extensive throughout the district of Sunderland which includes Washington. There are 1677 bus stops spread over the district and Nexus manages 485 shelters whilst another 155 are under the control of Clear Channel/ Adshel.
- 2.4 There are major bus stations at Park Lane and Washington Galleries and smaller ones at remoter locations i.e. Hetton and Concord. Millions of passengers pass through these bus stations every year.
- 2.5 In 2008/9 there were 134 public transport journeys per head of population, 124 bus journeys per head of population and 9 Metro journeys per head of population.

3.0 Anti-Social Behaviour

3.1 The official definition of anti-social behaviour is:

“ acting in a manner that causes or is likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to one or more person not of the same household.”

Source: Crime and Disorder Act (1998)

3.2 In public transport settings, the impact of anti-social behaviour is two-fold.

3.2.1 Disorderly behaviour degrades the social environments of public transport systems and include: use of threatening behaviour, abusive or insulting behaviour, harassment and intimidation, pushing and jostling, rowdiness, loitering, begging, playing loud music, public drinking and drug taking and smoking.

3.2.2 Disordered environments display the physical effects of anti-social behaviour. These include: graffiti, damage, litter, human and animal waste products and offensive smells.

3.3 Anti-social behaviour has both direct and indirect costs for transport operators. Direct financial costs include controlling disorderly behaviour through prevention and enforcement, and cleaning and repairing disordered environments. Indirect costs include adverse effects on staff and passenger perceptions of security and on rider-ship.

3.4 Anti-social behaviour may also act as a “signal crime”. This may have a disproportionate effect on people’s perception of personal security, on their beliefs about the attractiveness and safety of buses as a means of travel and on the extent to which they use it.

3.5 Passengers seem most worried about the risks of being directly confronted with persons engaged in disorderly behaviours. Common fears concern encountering groups of people hanging about, especially young males using loud, abusive or offensive language, or acting aggressively.

4.0 Perceptions of safety on public transport

4.1 A Department of Transport Survey published in September 2008 entitled “ Experiences and perceptions of anti-social behaviour and crime on public transport” found:

- 84% said they feel safe travelling on public transport
- 3% said they did not use the bus because of concerns about anti-social behaviour.

- 32% gave concerns about anti-social behaviour of young people as a reason for feeling unsafe on buses
 - 22% said they had been a victim of one or more incident of anti-social behaviour on public transport in the preceding year
 - Experiences most often related to intimidating, insulting or disruptive behaviour or environmental anti-social behaviour such as vandalism and littering.
 - 43% of public transport users said they had felt intimidated by the behaviour of other passengers in the last year. This suggests that witnessing certain behaviours even if not directly targeted at the individual, can lead to feelings of intimidation.
 - Public transport users who travelled regularly and after 9pm were more likely to have experienced or witnessed anti-social behaviour
- 4.2 Nexus bi-annual surveys on passenger security at bus stations highlight concerns about groups of teenagers either misbehaving or hanging around bus stations.
- 4.3 Bus stations in Sunderland: There are 4 bus stations in Sunderland district. These (and bus shelters throughout the City) provide warm and sheltered places where some young people like to hang out and socialise with friends. However, sometimes their behaviour at these locations can escalate and become boisterous which might concern the more vulnerable members of the society. This can make the waiting environment appear more unsafe than it actually is and exclude some from using bus travel.
- 4.4 Park Lane has a history of low level nuisance/ anti-social behaviour which has led to Nexus employing private security at this location in the evening. Recently, some anti-social behaviour has led to assault including an assault on a Private Security Officer on 29/10/09. However, minor nuisance is the main concern and this manifests itself in cycling and skateboarding through the bus station.
- 4.4.1 The waiting room for coaches is also a location where young people hang out. They often cause criminal damage to the facility and are an intimidating presence for legitimate users.
- 4.4.2 The Bus Station Manager has formal meetings every month with the Police Neighbourhood Beat Manager and the Contracts Manager of the Private Security firm to discuss and plan actions to address ongoing issues such as anti-social behaviour.
- 4.5 Washington Galleries is a new bus station which is managed by Go North East and no issues of anti-social behaviour are known.
- 4.6 Concord suffers occasional low level anti-social behaviour from young people from neighbouring housing estates. However, there was a serious assault against a passenger waiting for a bus after 2200 on 8/10/09.

- 4.7 Hetton bus station has suffered sporadic problems of anti-social behaviour as has the adjoining town centre. Some shelter damage has occurred and a number of bus windows have been broken in the town centre area. Discussions have taken place with the Police Neighbourhood Beat Manager to address these problems. Seats have been removed from shelters to prevent youths standing on seats and damaging lights. More regular station maintenance inspections have been instigated and CCTV in the station shelters is being considered to deter and identify perpetrators.

5.0 Positive impacts on reducing ASB in bus travel

- 5.1 The following have a positive impact on reducing anti-social behaviour and increasing public confidence in bus travel in Sunderland:

- The general work of the Safer Sunderland Partnership to tackle anti-social behaviour.
- The role of Neighbourhood Policing teams in solving problems, general patrolling by Police to show a high visibility presence and a willingness to engage with local people in the communities.
- The use of CCTV on buses and at bus stations as a tool for reassuring passengers and as a deterrent for wrong doers.
- Environmental improvements such as the removal of dark places and the promotion of well-lit pathways and public spaces through street lighting improvements such as replacing lanterns to produce white light rather than orange light. Also the removal of overgrown vegetation and the reduction in places where wrong doers might lurk.
- Positive engagement with young people and the provision of stimulating activities.

6.0 Tackling Social Exclusion Through Transport

- 6.1 In 2006 City of Sunderland Council and Nexus commissioned some research as part of the Tackling Social Exclusion Through Transport Initiative.
- 6.2 Key issues of concern included vandalised bus shelters and no effort to enforce rules e.g. no drinking and people being abusive. Elderly and minority ethnic people felt unsafe waiting for or actually on public transport.
- 6.3 People with learning disabilities had specific issues around fear. Evidence from the Sunderland People First anti-bullying conference highlighted that people with learning disabilities are particularly fearful of school children. A survey carried out following that conference clearly showed that this fear prevents people with learning disabilities from travelling alone. The following were examples given by people taking part in that survey:

- *Sometimes children shout at me and call me names. The drivers can sometimes be nasty*
- *Young girls taking the Mickey, saying I was drunk because of my speech, saying they were going to hurt me*

6.4 Minority ethnic women reported being verbally abused and fearing for the safety of their children whilst waiting for buses.

6.5 Drivers' failure to control anti-social behaviour on buses adds to a feeling of vulnerability amongst some people. Some of the comments from workshops were:-

"I was sitting at the back of the bus when I was spat at and verbally abused by youths who had been drinking. I was scared on the bus, and when I got off, in case they followed me. No-one did anything to help me, or to stop what was happening" (Young white woman travelling home from work late evening)

"Why can't the bus drivers have the authority to do something – even drive to the nearest police station?"

"Conductors would help control unruly behaviour – they can stop the bus and turn people off. But they'd need training"

7.0 What Nexus does to tackle anti-social behaviour:

7.1 There is a Nexus Bus Station Manager based at Park Lane who also has management responsibility for outlying bus stations at Hetton and Concord. He works with partners such as the Neighbourhood Policing teams to minimise anti-social behaviour at these locations.

7.2 The new Washington Galleries bus station is actively managed by Go North East.

7.3 There are public space CCTV cameras at all 4 locations to deter and address problems of anti-social behaviour.

7.4 Posters have been used to promote the presence of CCTV cameras in bus stations.

7.5 A Private Security company is employed at Park Lane because of past problems of antisocial behaviour. A 2 person operates here from 7 days a week from 1600 through to 2400.

7.6 Over the years Nexus has matched funded programmes with bus operators to install CCTV cameras on buses. All Go North East buses in Sunderland have onboard CCTV and a high percentage of Stagecoach buses also do.

7.7 Nexus conducts bi-annual Security surveys at bus stations to canvas the feelings of customers about safety.

- 7.8 Police are encouraged to travel on buses to reassure passengers and deter those who might be inclined to be anti-social or cause a nuisance.
- 7.9 Infrastructure providers have rapid repair and maintenance policies for damaged bus shelters.
- 7.10 Nexus Infrastructure are striving to provide lighting in more shelters to deter young people hanging about in shelters
- 7.11 Nexus will be trialling CCTV in bus shelters in some parts of Sunderland to tackle the issues of anti-social behaviour and young people hanging around bus shelters.
- 7.12 Nexus will be working with some Sunderland Primary Schools in the early part of 2010 to deliver an **“It’s Your Choice”** event which looks to convey key messages about the consequences of anti-social behaviour.
- 7.13 The Nexus District Bus Manager for Sunderland works with Schools to address anti-social behaviour on Scholars Services and promotes responsible behaviour when travelling on public transport.
- 7.14 Nexus facilitates quarterly Transport Alert meetings where Police and Bus Operators meet to discuss issues including anti-social behaviour.

8.0 Summary

- 8.1 Unfortunately, incidents of anti-social behaviour tend to be managed rather than recorded i.e. staff move along those causing anti-social behaviour. So there are no accurate recordings and anecdotal evidence is the only source of information.
- 8.2 Nevertheless, whilst bus stations in Sunderland are overwhelmingly safe, they can attract low level nuisance and anti-social behaviour in the evening because they are warm and sheltered locations. However, behaviour at these locations can be of concern especially to the more vulnerable members of the community. We should also remember that there is often a lack of tolerance towards the young especially from older adults. So, whilst this behaviour might be boisterous and noisy there is often no anti-social behaviour involved. The perception overrides the reality and generates concerns and fears especially when darkness is thrown into the mix.
- 8.3 However, evening is the period of the day when a significant number of bus users have concerns about their safety and security so this is the time when a visible, uniformed presence is required to reassure them.
- 8.4 Police Officers have travelled on buses to reassure passengers and deter anti-social behaviour and Neighbourhood Police Officers respond

well to intelligence about anti-social behaviour and criminal damage hotspots on the bus network. The local Police team that covers Park Lane has also worked pro-actively with the Bus Station Manager and the private security staff to ensure the safety and security of passengers at this location.

- 8.5 Finally, is anti-social behaviour a big problem for bus users in Sunderland? The answer is:

“ In the evening there is a level of anti-social behaviour at bus stations and other waiting environments (bus shelters) that gives people concerns about travelling at night. We attempt to address this through a uniformed presence, the use of CCTV and working with partners to offer organised activities for the young people who might otherwise be found hanging around bus stations and shelters”.

9.0 Recommendation

- 9.1 Members are asked to note and comment upon this report.