

Disability Hate Crime on Public Transport: Raising Awareness and Facilitating Crime Reduction

Dr David Wilkin, Honorary Visiting Fellow at the School of Criminology, University of Leicester, conducted the first ever study concerning experiences of disability hate crime on public transport. Public transport is an area which has been overlooked in both the academic and policy spheres and yet this research highlighted that everyday experiences of hate are commonplace, and that the harms caused are exacerbated by inadequate responses from public transport providers. David's passion for this topic comes from his own experience of being a victim.

From 2017-2019 David researched this topic. From a pool of 267 people, David held interviews and focus groups with 56 participants using a flexible range of interactions to understand the experiences of disabled people who have been victims of hate crime. To explore levels of safeguarding potential victims, David also gathered data from; 14 members of public transport staff; 28 regulatory authorities; 53 public transport providers; 67 disabled people's organisations in addition to police and government sources.

Findings were taken forward to drive impactful measures in collaboration with the following bodies:-

- David worked as a consultant with key figures within Scottish Disabled and Deaf People's Organisations (DDPOs) to help drive a new strategy to protect disabled users of public transport in their collaborative work with Scottish Government and Transport for Scotland (TfS). The first outcome, already published, is a nationwide publicity campaign to make public transport users aware of the rights and equalities that disabled people should be able to enjoy whilst using buses and trains in Scotland. The future hope is that TfS will adopt a Hate Crime Charter for public transport and David has offered help toward achieving that aim.
- Blackpool Transport Buses are using findings from David's written research and suggestions to make buses a safer place for disabled people. Blackpool Transport are now in the process of adapting their driver training regime and annual refresher training to make their staff more aware of the possibility of hate offences and how to help customers report these issues. The company's Chief Executive Officer is also the Bus Sector Champion for Disabled People reporting directly to the Minister for Disabled People. Hopefully therefore, the impact realised through the adapted training will therefore be cascaded nationwide.
- Two Train Operating Companies, East Midlands Railway and Cross Country Trains, are revising their strategies for dealing with disabled customers. David presented his findings to these companies who were previously unaware of the potential for hate offences against their disabled customers. Whilst national strategies for rail transport are aligned with accessing stations and trains, there was little awareness of the possibility of hate offences being carried out and the distress that these offences might cause. The two companies have committed to improve the safety of their disabled customers by adopting David's suggestions into their initial and refresher

training packages. Furthermore, they have both committed to consider the use of a Hate Crime Charter for public transport. Lastly, one of the company's representatives has committed to take David's findings to the national forum for rail operators – the Rail Delivery Group for wider dissemination and consideration.

- The British Transport Police are revising their approach to dealing with Disability Hate Crime. David provided the force with his findings and provided enlightening evidence as to the techniques of hate crime perpetration being used aboard trains. David also provided a sample of perpetrator profiles. The Deputy Chief Constable of BTP, also responsible for equalities, committed to revising how the force deals with disabled people and with disability hate crime. The DCC was appreciative of David's work in that it broke new ground and provided much needed information with which the force can develop its strategies.
- David has been working with Essex County Council to share his findings and to make direct inputs into their annual refresher training for bus drivers providing services in Essex. This training package has been provided and may be rolled out to bus staff in the near future. The County Council is central here as it would provide an incentive for all bus companies within its area of responsibility to make the journeys of disabled customers' safer and therefore make a positive impact on its citizens.
- Gloucestershire County Council consulted with David as to incorporating the use of a Hate Crime Charter for public transport. As an external consultant, David provided advice toward meeting those aims and how the Charter might be delivered through integrated staff training. The aim for the Council is to improve the safety of disabled bus users.
- Nottingham Express Transit – the city's tram provider – has expressed an interest in adopting a Hate Crime Charter for public transport. The primary impact was attracting the interest of this service provider. If accepted by Nottingham City Council, the wider impact would be the enhanced safety of disabled users of the tram system in Nottingham.
- The University of Leicester now provides a digital training module promoted for use by public transport service providers to raise awareness of disability hate crime and how to help potential victims. The module, co-authored by David, is designed to address the specific environment of the bus or train and can be adapted to reflect company brands or specific needs. This module has been presented to multiple public service providers across the UK. Audiences have shown considerable interest in the product and it is hoped that it will provide a much needed, ready to run, online training intervention that will raise awareness of hate crime. Being a concise module, it would be relatively simple to incorporate in most public transport inaugural and refresher training regimes without a heavy time commitment to the training team.