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TRAVELWATCH

Personal Security

Research Debrief: How do passengers
feel about their personal security on
London Transport?



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Background and methodology



Our research method in detail

Forty 90-minute interviews

90-minute interviews to understand how passengers feel about personal safety on transport in London. What are the drivers of 'safety', what leads them to feel unsafe, and what can be done to improve their experiences?

TravelWatch Working Group

15 respondents were brought together who identified as feeling 'fairly' or 'very' unsafe on public transport. We brought them together to openly discuss the challenges transport faces and how they could be overcome.

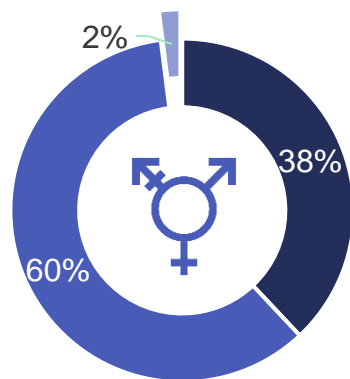
Quantitative Research

A survey of 400 respondents to test the hypotheses made in the qualitative research. London TravelWatch is distributing the survey through its website to give as many people as possible the chance to give their feedback.

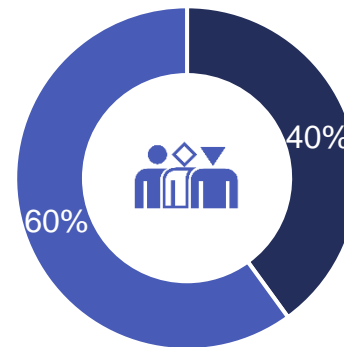
Who did we speak to in our qualitative research?

40

90-minute in-depth interviews with public transport users in London



- Male
- Female
- Non-binary



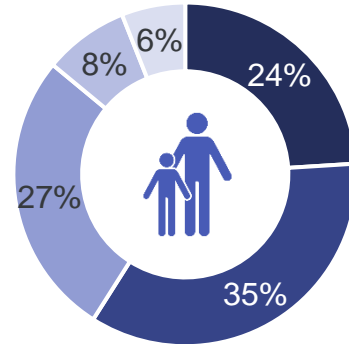
- BAME
- White British

5 of respondents identified as LGBTQ+

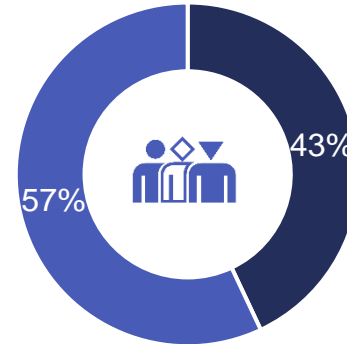
5 of respondents dressed in a religiously significant way

5 of respondents identified as having a disability

Who did we speak to in our quantitative research?



■ 18-24 ■ 25-36 ■ 37-54
■ 55-64 ■ 65+

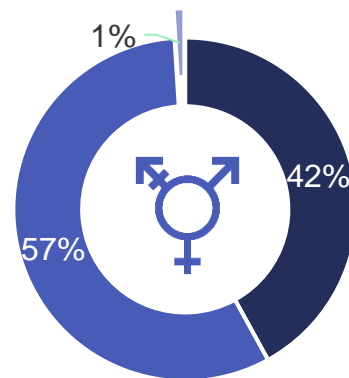


■ BAME
■ White British

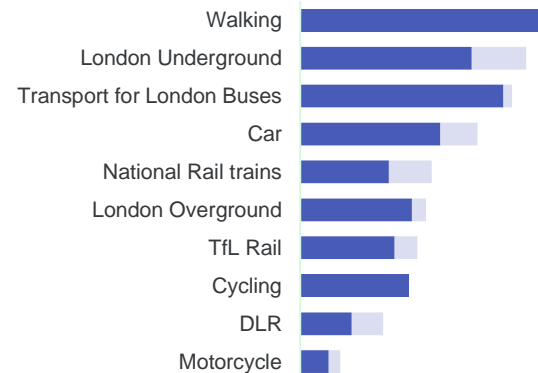
07% of respondents identified as LGBTQ+

31% of respondents dressed in a religiously significant way

16% of respondents identified as having a disability



■ Male
■ Female
■ Non-binary



■ Currently use ■ Used pre-COVID

377

15-minute online interviews with transport users in London

Perceptions and Definitions of Safety



Safety is almost universally understood as the absence of crime or anti-social behaviour

Most spontaneously mention London transport as a major part of what makes them feel safe or unsafe

Pedestrian crime is understood as high-impact but low-likelihood. London transport appears to be where the most 'routine' uncomfortable situations are likely to occur.

In addition, safety is a feeling, driven by familiarity and comfort

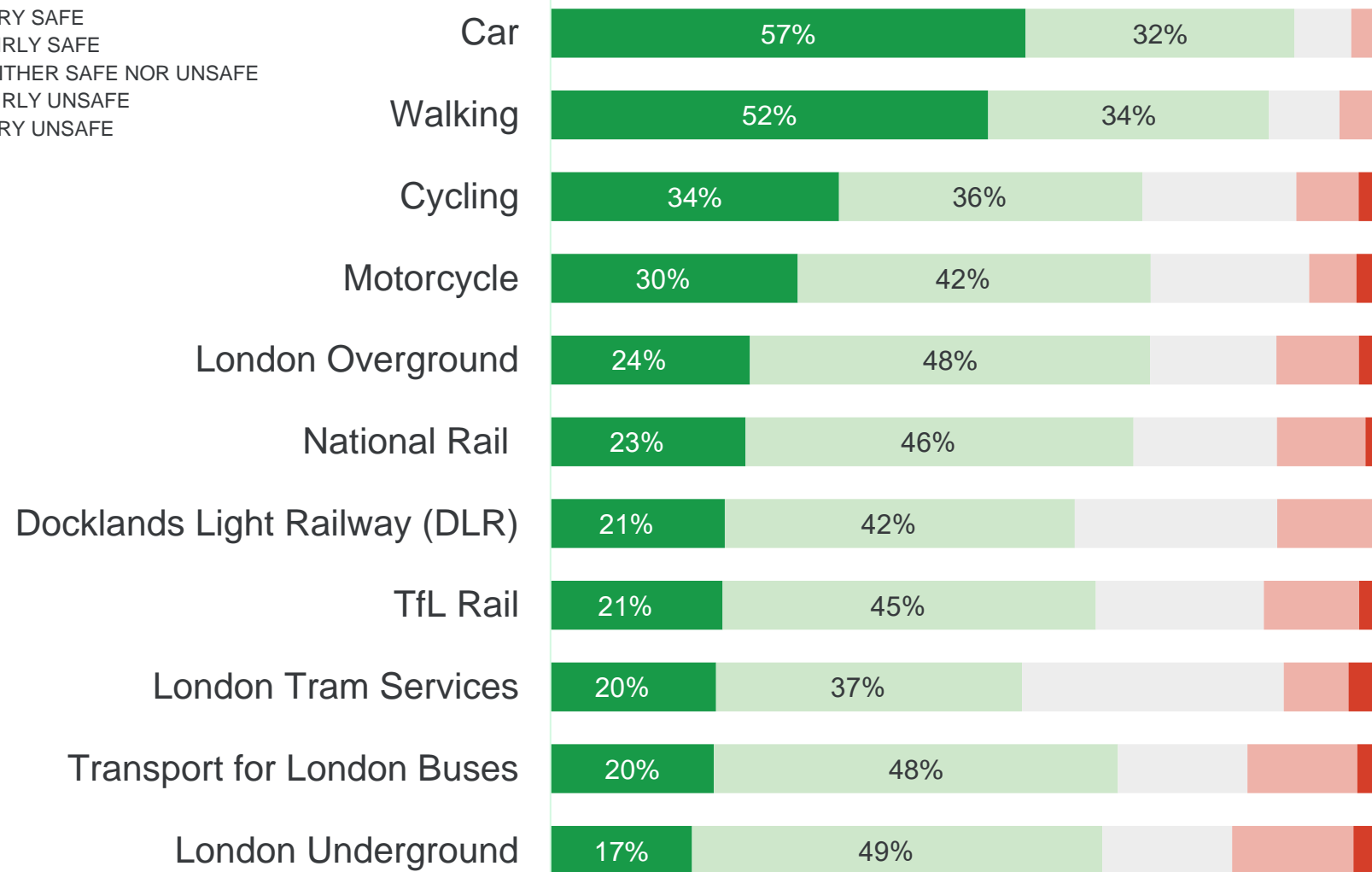
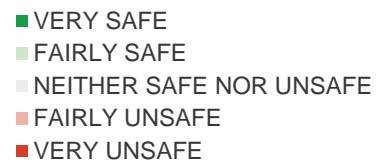
Lighting in particular was a major driver of feeling safe, both at street level and on the transport network. Passengers unfamiliar with a given place do not know where the dangerous areas are, where to avoid, and where to gravitate towards.

In almost all demographics, transport users would rather travel during the day than during the night, and younger women in particular will actively avoid the Night Tube or other late-night transport and opt for the taxi instead.

I don't really know how to define safety other than whether I feel comfortable or not, or if I'm thinking 'oh god, I wish this person would go away'...I tend to never be in places where there is nobody. Like when I go to Slough where my girlfriend lives, there is hardly anybody there! I feel unsafe then because there is nobody about but when I'm in London there are always people about.

Older Female, LGBTQ+

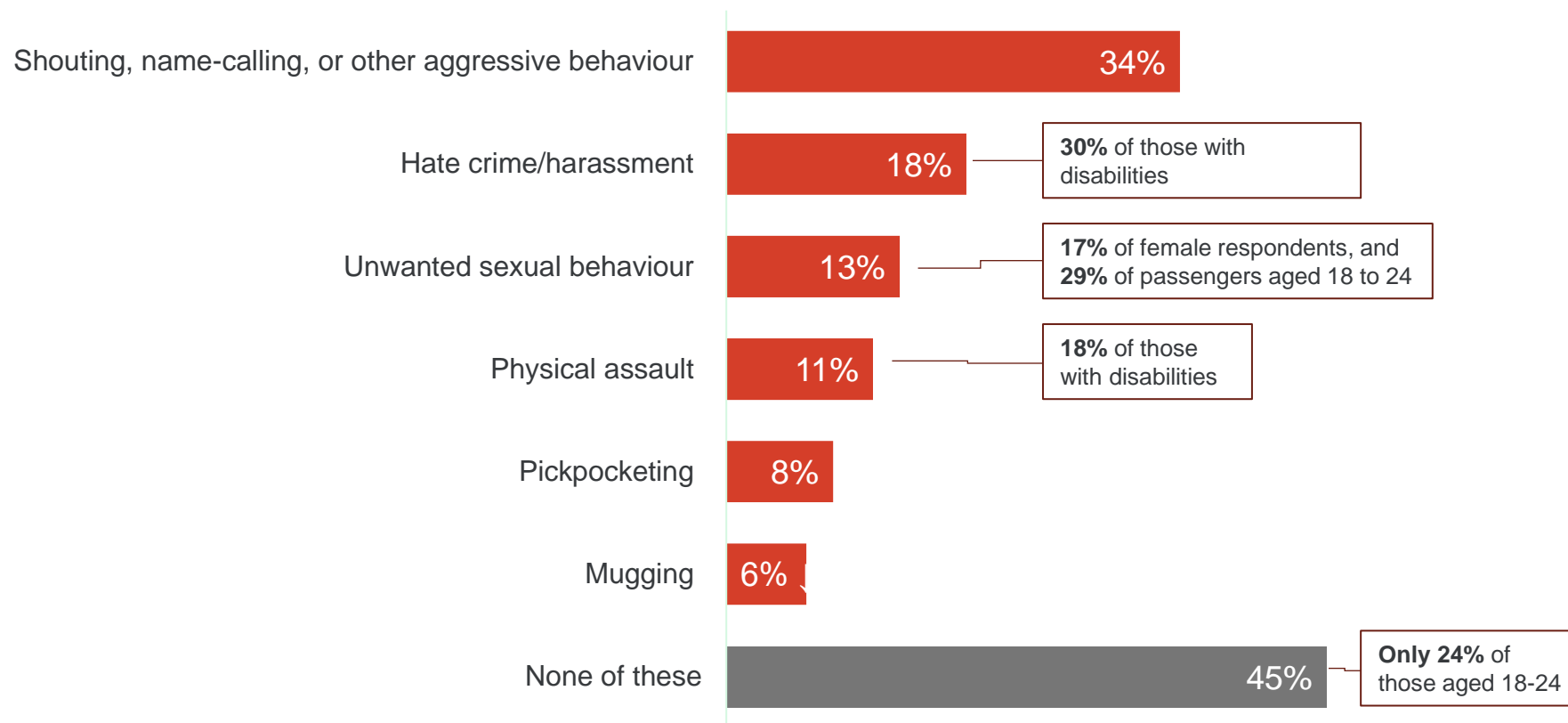
How safe do passengers feel according to their mode of transport?



QA1 - On first principles and thinking outside of the COVID-19 pandemic, how safe do you feel on each of the modes of transport you use? Base: Total (377)

Young people, women, BAME passengers and those with disabilities were all at greater risk of victimisation

Victimisation over the past three years



Different modes of transport have unique qualities that lead them to feel safe or unsafe under certain circumstances

Bus

Very little 'barrier to entry' – anyone can get on or off, perhaps even without paying for a ticket

- Few positive experiences of the driver intervening to keep passengers safe from crime
- But, easy to 'escape' in an unsafe situation
- Above-ground – easy to phone for help in an unsafe situation
- Routine, familiar journeys – very low consequences from abandoning a journey

Underground

"Reassuringly packed" - a sense (rightly or wrongly) that no one would board during the rush hour purely to commit a crime

- Lack of wi-fi or phone signal can make instant help feel unattainable
- Something of a 'free-for-all' at night. Seen as understaffed and wild
- Unwanted sexual behaviour is easily masked by the level of crowding
- CCTV is readily apparent but where does it go, and what happens to the footage?

Train

Longer-distance journeys introduce more perceived risk to the passenger. A high-commitment, high-stakes mode of transport

- Limited ability to 'escape' an unsafe situation without getting off at a highly unfamiliar stop and jeopardising a planned trip
- Expensive, focussed transport: it feels unlikely that someone would board with the purpose of committing an offense
- Stronger evidence of staff on board, but what can catering or ticketing officers do in the event of something unsafe?
- Above-ground – the police can be called, but what would you tell them? When could they board?

While anti-social behaviour is seldom understood as 'unsafe', there is a latent threat of escalation

Most passengers would simply 'keep their heads down' if they were to witness vandalism, smoking, or alcohol on a bus, train or Tube.

While virtually everyone acknowledged that these behaviours make them feel uncomfortable, the risk of the perpetrator suddenly becoming violent or erratic deters people from intervening. Most would simply move away to a different carriage.

While not unsafe in and of itself, some point out that it can be a *signifier of an unsafe service*. If the passenger was allowed to get away with vandalising a train, or smoking, what else could they get away with?

Any act of anti-social behaviour can, for the most nervous passengers, feel like a crime waiting to happen. It is an important issue to tackle, both in terms of the reputation of the transport system and for the overall comfort of passengers.

Most of these situations I'm bystander type, so I would just ignore. You don't really know people's friendship groups, you don't really know how people are, so to insert yourself you don't know how they will react.

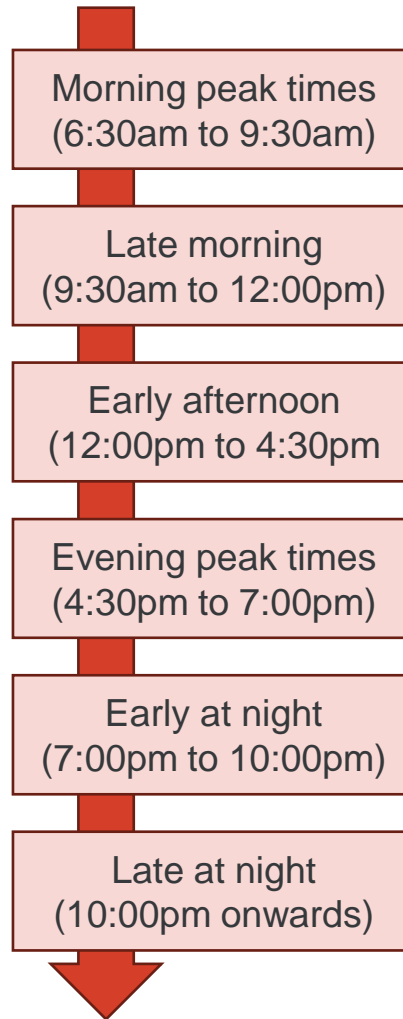
Younger, Non-Binary, BAME

It is really awkward. You have to avoid looking at them without drawing attention to yourself if the drunk person is starting to talk to people or whatever. People start talking to you, that's when I feel uncomfortable. I'd try not to rile them up but try to get them to stop talking to me.

Younger Female

Late at night is generally seen as the least safe period in which to travel

Safest



Least
safe

This guy came up and sat right next to me. I was like 'this is it, what can I do?' He was saying things like 'what's a girl like you doing on a bus by yourself? You shouldn't be out on your own, you need someone like me to protect you... People could be armed and you could get hurt. People have knives... let me show you mine.'

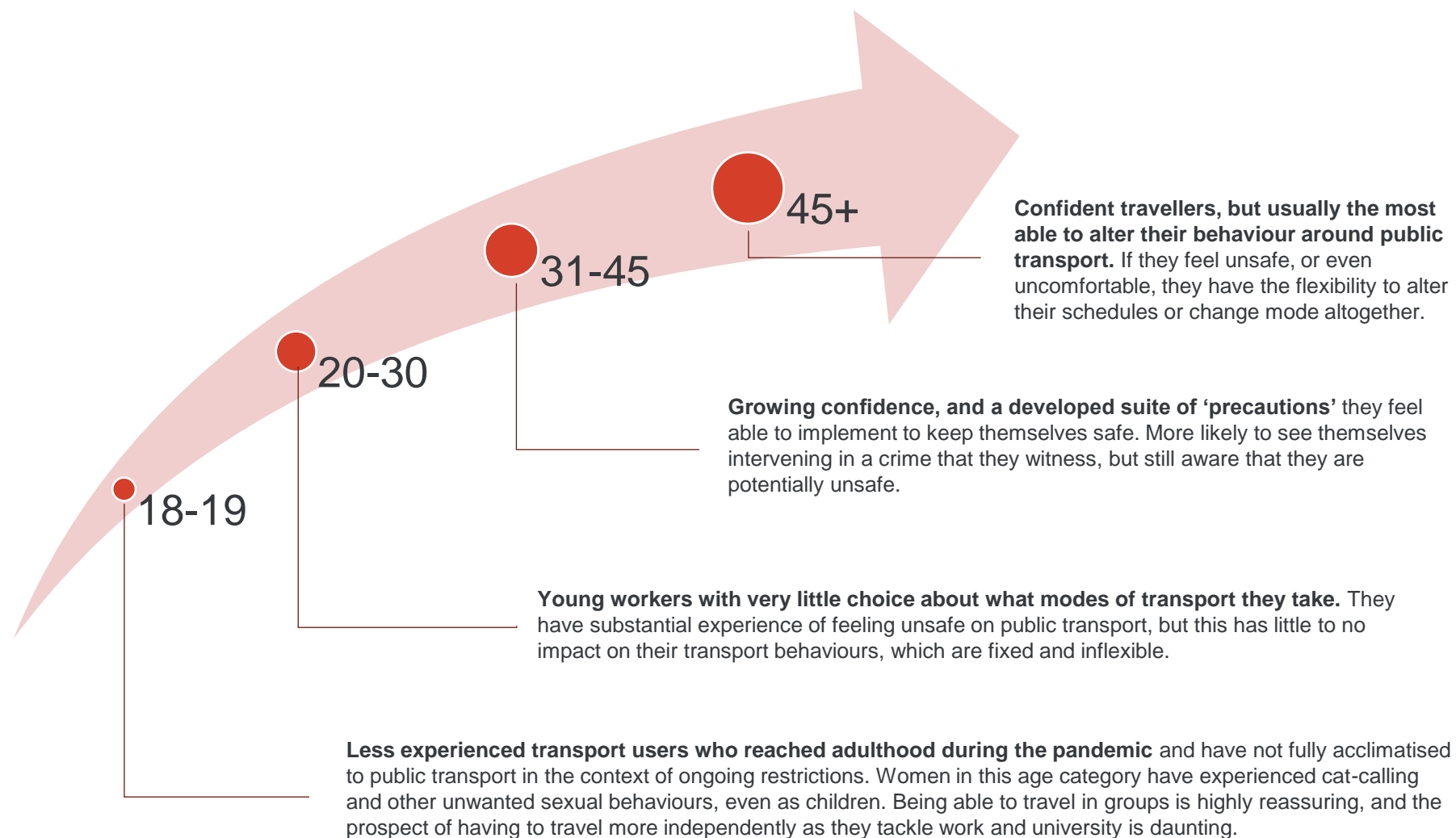
Older Female, LGBTQ+

I've seen so many fights on night busses. Whether it's early in the morning or super late at night, people are drunk and I know you can't drink on a bus but sometimes they do or they are already so drunk that they don't need to.

Younger Transgender, BAME

65% Believe that late at night
(10:00pm to early morning) is
the least safe time to travel

Age has a significant influence on passengers' perceptions of safety



Awareness of any broad measures taken in the past few years to keep Londoners safe is very low indeed

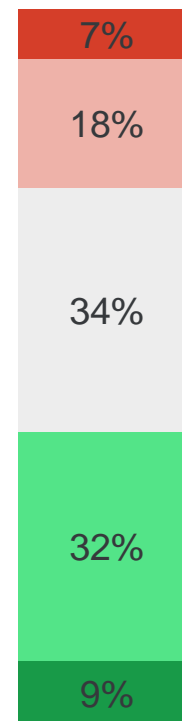
In fact, some argue that London has become less safe over time

Media stories around cuts in police funding or a decline in the number of police on the beat has led some to feel less safe than in previous years. For BAME or European respondents in particular, the impact of Brexit has led to a perceivable increase in hate crime for them personally.

Knife crime is a very hot-button issue, and those with children are genuinely fearful for their safety. It does not feel like something they are likely to fall victim to personally, however.

Older respondents, with the benefit of significant hindsight, recognise that crime as a whole has fallen in the past few decades, but still feel there is more work to be done.

Over the last five years, would you say London has become...



- Much less safe
- Somewhat less safe
- Neither/nor
- Somewhat safer
- Much safer

Awareness of un-licensed or un-booked taxis is high, but strikes many as something of an old-fashioned problem

Older transport users remember fraudulent taxis swarming outside bars and clubs in the past, but in the here-and-now, it is usually argued that apps like Uber's ride-tracking largely solve for the problem of un-booked taxis.

Passengers know in advance what taxi they will be using, and letting friends or family track their journey was a common behaviour. The combination of convenience and safety in these apps is something of an exemplar: the same technology that allows passengers to seamlessly book taxis also keeps them safe. Indeed, Uber's emergency reporting system is precisely the kind of feature that many passengers would value on public transport.

Uber or black cabs I always use. I find that Uber you can always share your journey. So when I send my daughter somewhere I watch her entire journey until she gets there.

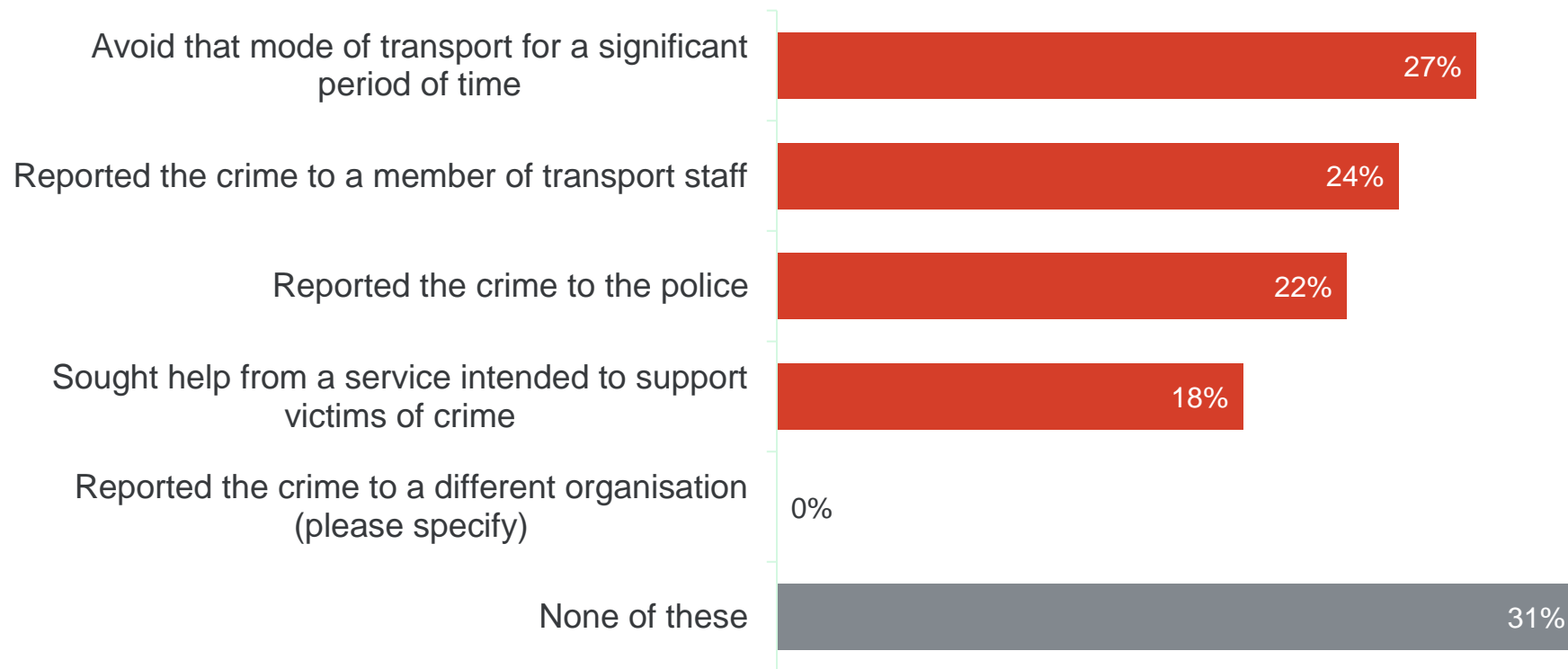
Older Female,
Disability

To me Ubers are safe. It's registered, you know the license, the name of the driver, you are given most of the information ahead of time.

Older Male, BAME

Three in ten victims of crime avoided the mode of transport in question afterwards

As a result of that incident, or incidents, did you...



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Hate crime and unwanted sexual behaviour



BAME passengers and those with visible religious dress are conscious of hate crime, and personal victimisation was common among those we spoke to

For many of these passengers, the threat comes from an escalation of a more routine argument

Relatively few are victimised 'out of the blue' – an argument over seating, queueing or other quotidian issues will escalate suddenly and shockingly into a hate crime.

This leads many to argue that a more efficient and reliable transport network would also be a safer network for protected groups. Hate crime is seen as a result of a stressful situation coupled with an ignorant individual with poor impulse-control.

Doing more to promote general consideration of each-other, as well as controlling crowding, delays and other aggravating situations would be seen as a significant improvement to tackle hate crime.

More broadly, passengers want to see hate-criminals educated and informed about their behaviour

When asked about the 'root' of hate crime as an issue, most argue that it about a lack of cultural understanding. While the "It's not just offensive; it's an offence" advert does well to remind passengers that the behaviour is criminal, it does not explicitly state why the behaviour is wrong.

I hate arguing so if I see it coming, I just take myself out of the situation. Anything can happen when you start arguing with someone. It could lead to a fight or something worse.

Older Male, BAME

So many reasons...institutional reasons, I do think there is a level of ignorance, lack of information. I think when people meet the people that they are afraid of or hate, they do bring it down a little bit...like 'oh I know so-in-so, so maybe not all black people are bad.'

Younger
Transgender, BAME

LGBTQ+ passengers have a strong, latent fear of victimisation

The threat is aggravated for those who dress in a gender non-conforming way, but many LGBT passengers fear giving public displays of affection on public transport

In an ideal world, passengers would not have to 'pass' as straight or cisgender in order to feel safe on public transport. For transgender transport users in particular, they feel let down by the lack of awareness and understanding around who they are.

They would feel safer if they saw an effort through schools or through communications on the transport network to demonstrate that their identities are valid and not to be seen as 'other.'

I've experienced hate for being gay...My girlfriend is always very wary, she doesn't want hassle whereas I'm a bit more in your face. She'd be like, 'oh no, I can't hold my partners hand or kiss them,' she'd be much more reserved about it because she'd think it would cause trouble.

Older Female, LGBTQ+

Sexual harassment was very common among female passengers

In our qualitative research, virtually every female respondent had experienced sexual harassment on public transport

They see themselves at greater risk of serious crime on public transport because of its enclosed spaces, and the sheer volume of passengers who pass through.

While many have been cat-called from a passing vehicle on the street, the threat of a sustained, intimidating and unsafe experience on bus, train or Tube feels substantial.

This is largely understood as a function of misogyny, rather than simple gratification

Victims of unwanted sexual behaviour report being deliberately made to feel uncomfortable and unwelcome on public transport. Offenders are attempting to 'put them in their place.'

This has a significant bearing on how people expect to see the issue tackled: there is a broader point around *how men think about women*, more than simply how they *treat* them.

Whether this education piece ought to come from the transport network, government or the education system is unclear. However, more communications material on the network stressing that women have a right to travel safely would provide valuable reassurance.

Oh, god, yes. I was on my regular bus home and someone touched me inappropriately. I kind of pretended it didn't happen, because I couldn't believe it had happened. You just expect to be able to travel safely, but it made me incredibly anxious, ashamed, vulnerable, dirty.

Older Female, LGBTQ+

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Witnesses and Bystanders



There are significant barriers keeping bystanders from reporting or intervening

Intervening



Fear of turning the perpetrator's attention on themselves



Uncertainty about what is 'actually happening'



Lack of vigilance – 'keeping their head down'



Knowing what to say



Assuming that the victim will ask for help when they need it

Reporting



Not knowing who to call in the event of a crime or unsafe incident



Assuming that the report must happen 'in the moment'



Lack of faith that the report will be taken seriously



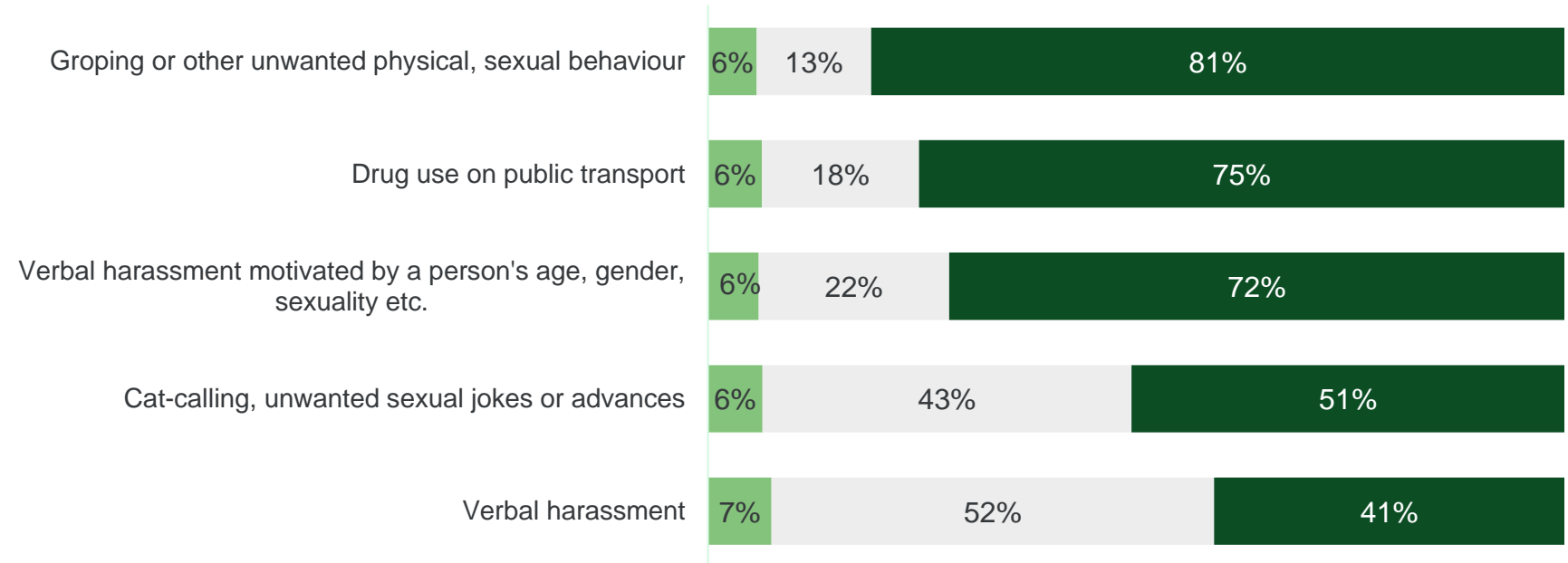
Sheer frequency of victimisation



Assuming they will fail to record the necessary information

Passengers recognise unwanted sexual touching as a crime, although verbal behaviour is read more ambiguously

How do passengers think about different unsafe behaviours on public transport?



- This behaviour is not particularly harmful
- This behaviour is harmful, but not a crime
- This behaviour is a crime, whether or not I believe it is harmful

The fear of a passenger putting themselves at risk is the most significant barrier towards taking action in the event of witnessing a crime

What could make it difficult to report a crime on public transport?



53%

Feel it is neither easy nor straightforward to report a crime on public transport

Potential bystanders lack a clear playbook for when, if, and how to intervene

The specific ‘tactics’ that bystanders have used to intervene in the past are highly varied and to some extent based on hearsay

- Humiliating the perpetrator, especially in the case of sexual offenses
- Pretending to know the victim and striking up a conversation
- Physical intimidation and name-calling against the perpetrator
- Filming the perpetrator, or letting them know that they are being filmed
- Trying to reason with and educate the perpetrator

This lack of clarity can make it difficult for many passengers to intervene: They simply don’t know where to start

That said, there is real willingness among passengers to learn. They are open to being told (in simple terms) how they should react when they see something amiss. Virtually everyone trusts themselves to know when the behaviour they see is unacceptable; the only question is, what next? Many passengers worry that the wrong kind of intervention could aggravate the situation, or worse, direct the perpetrator’s attention to themselves.

64%

Of passengers would feel more confident in responding to a crime if they had more information about ‘how to help.’

Knowing that undercover officers police unwanted sexual behaviour on public transport was reassuring, but many argued that it does not go far enough

Fundamentally, people felt that they would have to ‘get lucky’ for their harasser to be caught in this way

Seeing that only 39 arrests had been made in 2017 through the Proactive Unit of the BTP was concerning. While many recognised that those 39 individuals may have gone on to victimise dozens of people among them, it can feel like a drop in the ocean compared to how common the behaviour is.

This kind of undercover policing feels particularly under-publicised

Passengers argue that this intervention could ‘work harder’ if it were better-known. Offenders are not currently felt to be particularly fearful of an undercover officer seeing their behaviour, but stronger awareness would provide ground-cover and, in some senses, deter more criminals than are actually arrested.

Passengers are universally aware that undercover policing exists, but see it as purely terror-focussed

Again, a stronger sense of unity across the monitoring, enforcement and communication around crime would reassure passengers that *no crime is tolerated on public transport*. The perception of sexual offenders is that they slip through the net due to a singular and narrow focus on other forms of crime.

It's a really good solution because they actually catch the person whereas if they were in uniform the person might not even try it and just do it somewhere else. I do think we need more police officers because it is hard for them to be in loads of places at once but it is a really good solution.

Younger Female,
Religious Dress

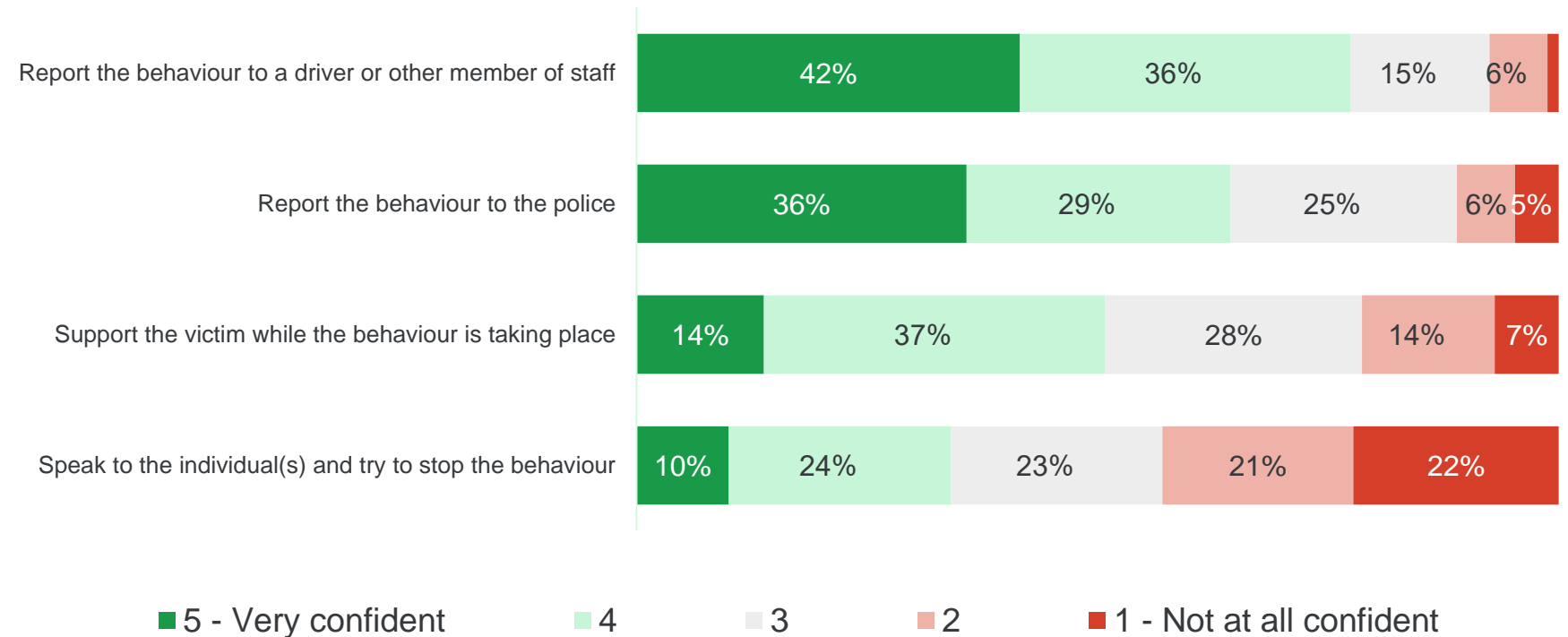
Willingness among bystanders to speak to the perpetrator in the event of unsafe behaviour is low

What would passengers do if they witnessed an unsafe situation?



In addition, passengers do not feel confident in their ability to intervene in the event of an unsafe situation

How confident would you be to...



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Support and Communications



The overall efficiency and reliability of the network has a significant bearing on how safe passengers feel

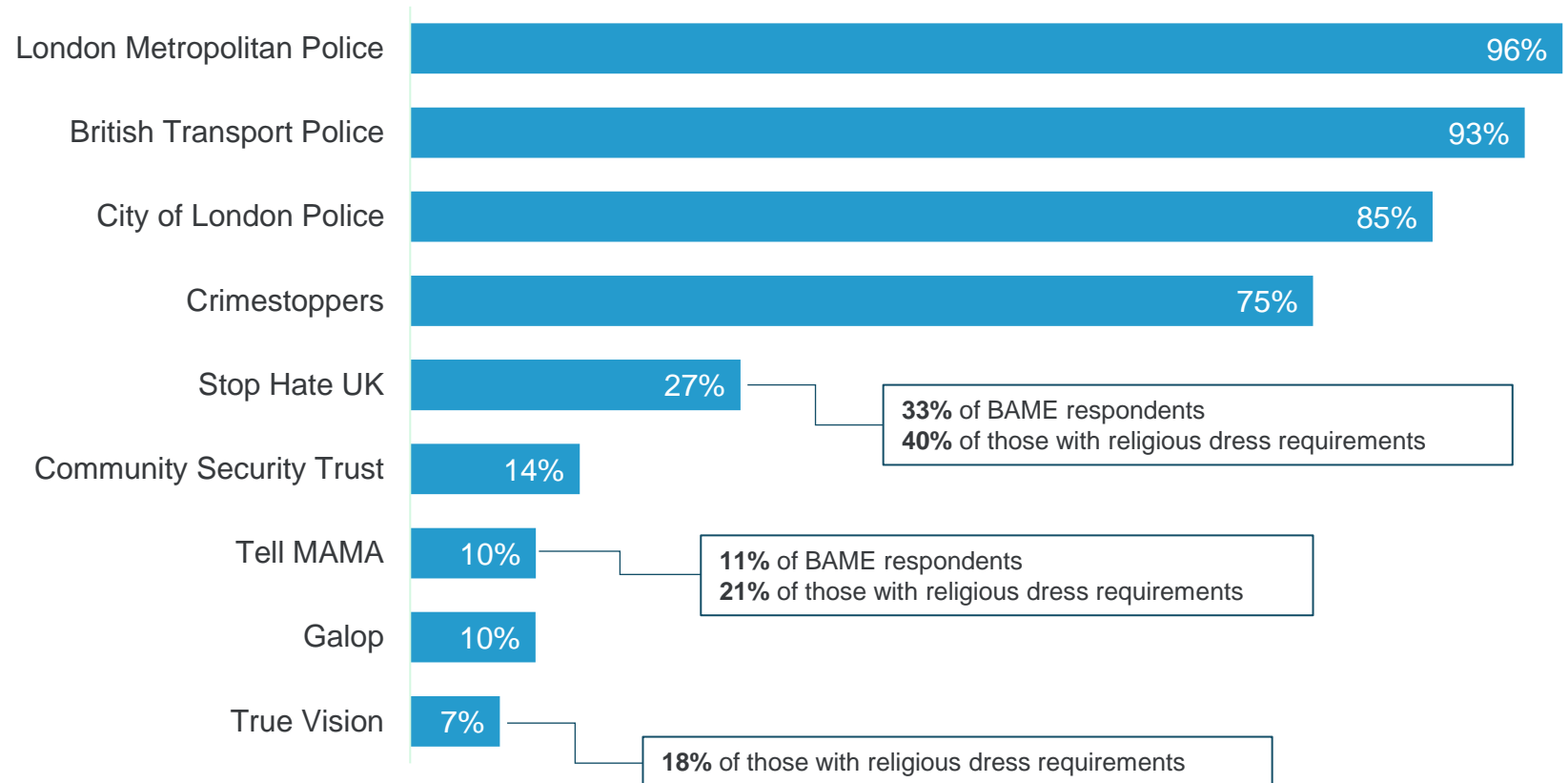
More frequent services reduces the risk of passengers being left stranded or waiting for a long time in dark, unfamiliar or unsafe stations. This is particularly relevant for Network Rail services in and around London. Passengers simply do not want to be on their own for an extended period of time, and is a particular focus for the Night Tube.

Minimising delays would lower the overall 'aggravation' on the network, leading to fewer arguments, escalations or having to wait for a long time in an unfamiliar area. During peak hours, the rush of commuters can feel like a highly fragile and febrile environment. Anything that can be done to reduce this stress will help the network feel safer.

More amenities on the train, bus, station or stop would help passengers feel that they are not alone or unsupported when they feel unsafe. Whether through more staff, better lighting, clearer help points or telephones, as facilities are upgraded, this will have a role to play in how safe passengers feel.

While awareness of policing bodies was high, awareness of organisations providing additional support was not

Which of the following organisations have you heard of?



Technology can feel under-leveraged when it comes to passenger safety on transport

There is a strong sense that technology ought to be used to enable quick, convenient and in-the-moment reporting of crime

Many passengers assume that by the time they leave the bus, train or Tube, it is already too late to effectively report a crime. This leads many to argue for a tech-led solution that enables passengers to report an unsafe situation. Passengers imagined various improvements, including *(in an ideal world)*...



A dedicated button on carriages or buses to alert the driver (or the police) to a crime taking place



Reporting functions built into the TfL app, which is well-used and well-liked by passengers



Enhanced wi-fi throughout the network (including through tunnels) to allow instant reporting anywhere



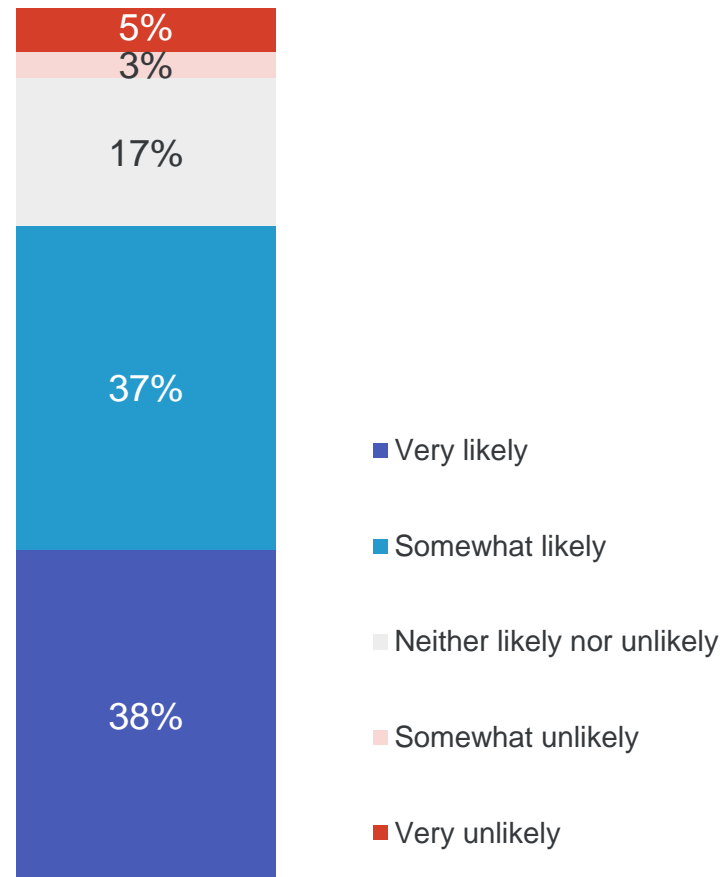
CCTV cameras that record sound and video to ensure that hate-crimes are recorded in full detail

Passengers are comfortable with the prospect of surveillance on public transport, and some argue for even more

Our respondents felt that while technology on the transport network has visibly improved, technology intended to keep passengers safe has not kept up with these other developments. Even if sound-recording CCTV or whole-of-network Wi-Fi is not feasible now, the key point is that passengers expect technology to deliver both convenience and safety. Transport operators will be expected to consider the latent safety benefits of any new technology, and ensure that they are leveraged appropriately.

Three in four passengers would likely use an app to report a crime or unsafe behaviour on public transport

If you were to experience something that made you feel unsafe on public transport, how likely would you be to use an app-based reporting feature?



The British Transport Police need a very nice app. It should be an anonymous thing or your own individual sign-in. But of course you can't access it if you're between North Dulwich and East Dulwich because there is no internet connection, even if you are on a National Rail train and of course on the Tube.

Older Female, LGBTQ+

Passengers see value in anonymous reporting, but education is needed around its proper context

Anonymity strikes many passengers as simpler, and less stressful, than being known to the police. However, when made aware that anonymity can limit the scope of a police investigation, this is often met with disappointment.

The idea of anonymously *contributing* to an existing police investigation is not obvious, but when explicitly raised as a possibility, it feels helpful. In an ideal world, passengers would anonymously report a crime and CCTV would 'do the work' to find the perpetrator without extensive victim involvement.

In the context of these **heightened expectations**, the purpose of organisations like CrimeStoppers and True Vision can feel unclear. Education, reassurance, or significant action may be required around:

- **The fact that many harassers are repeat offenders:** Multiple, anonymised reports can still add value in the long-term.
- **The process of reporting a crime:** Women and people of colour often feel they won't be taken seriously, and that the process will be traumatic.
- **What information is required/useful:** Passengers fear that they will not be able to collect or retain the necessary details.

I think sometimes, even for me, going to the police, having to fill out a formal complaint and tick off my gender or sexual orientation on there and out myself, it is going to be more uncomfortable and maybe relive trauma. It may make me second guess whether I actually want to do this.

Younger Transgender,
BAME

At present, the mechanisms for reporting crime on the transport network feel siloed and without cohesive brand discipline

The British Transport Police risks being seen as a purely terrorism-focussed organisation

A significant number assumed that the BTP do not deal with hate crime, sexual harassment or antisocial behaviour. Some felt that they may intervene in these behaviours “while they’re at it”, but there was a very limited sense that they focus on, or prioritise, these issues.

When shown, passengers are taken aback by the variety of organisations used to report crime

Telling the bus driver, ticket inspector or another member of transport staff can be seen as something of a path of least resistance. They are the most apparent, uniformed, well-known figures of authority on the network and they are likely to continue to be the first port of call unless the proper reporting channels are made more accessible and clear.

While passengers feel comfortable talking to the British Transport Police, their faith in the value of reporting a crime is lower

How far do you agree or disagree with the following...

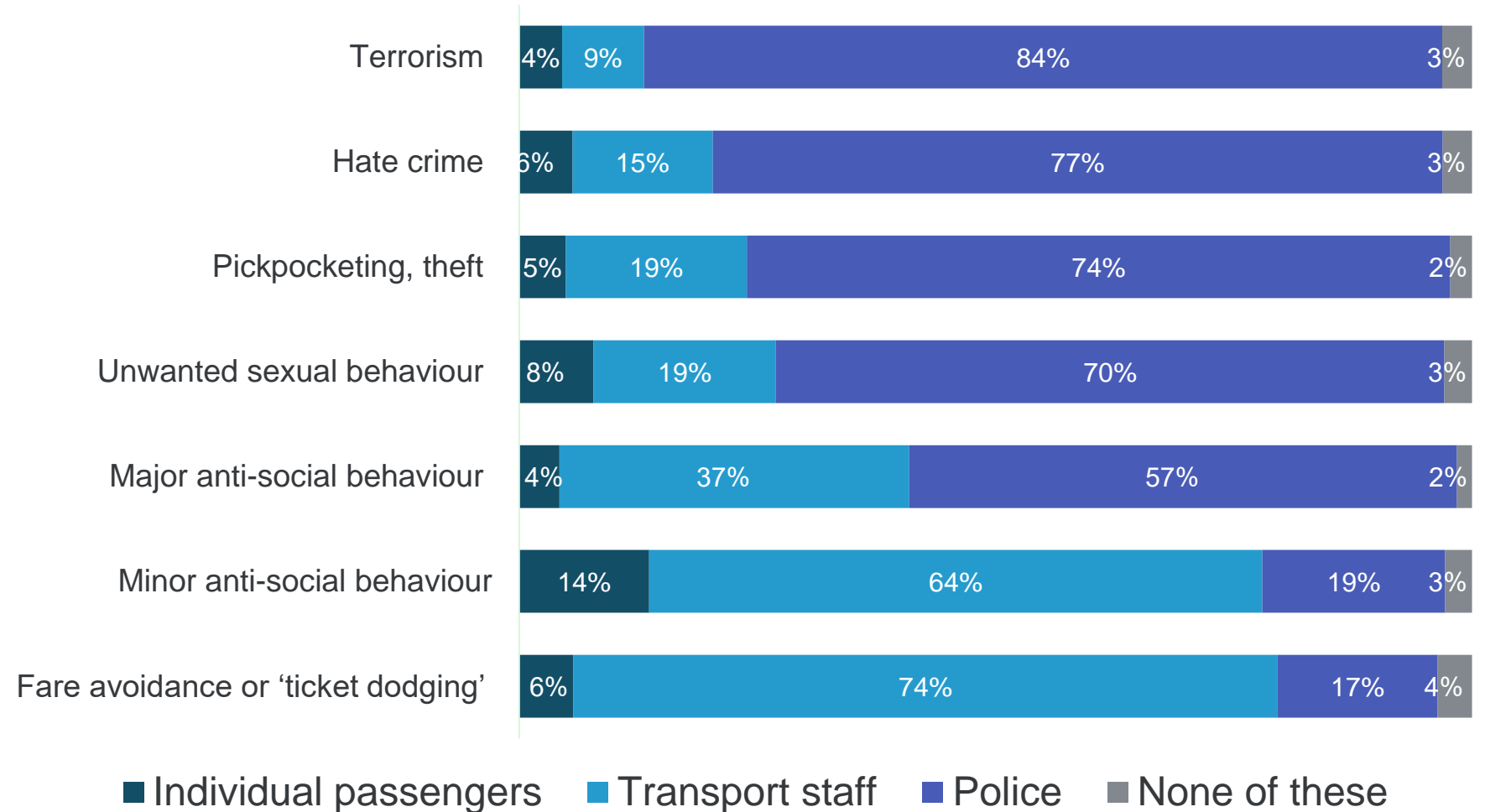


You would want the option of contacting a charity rather than the police because of how notorious the police have been in not taking these reports seriously. It's all dependent on the severity of the scenario but being able to contact a charity so they can decide how important we should make this to the police would be useful.

Working Group Member

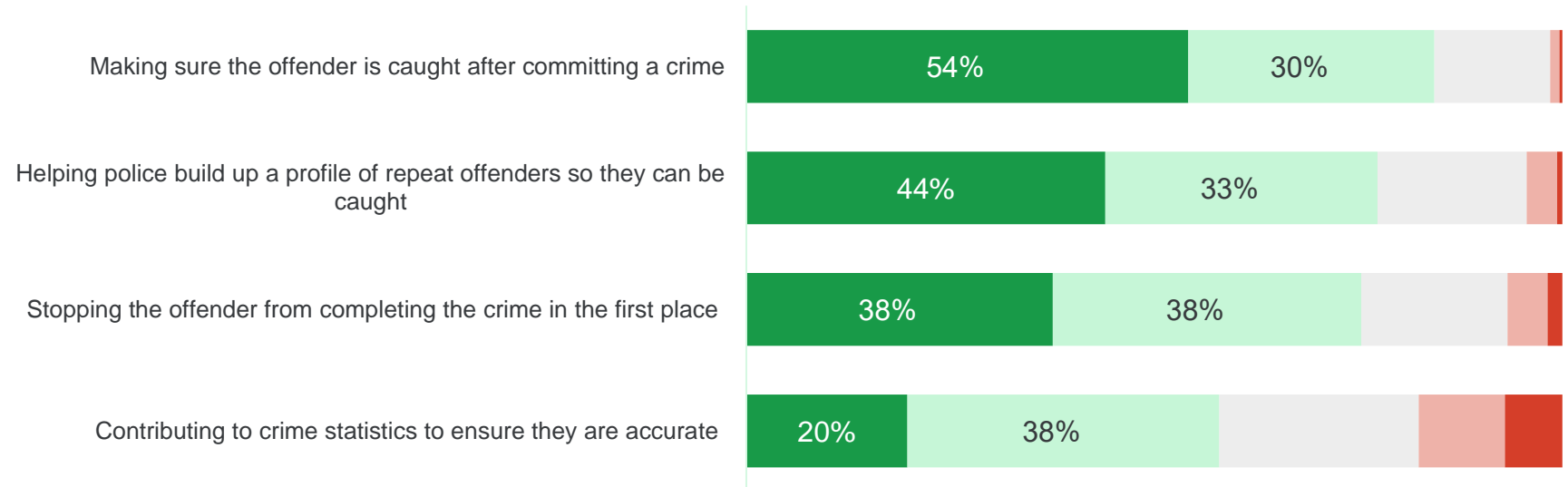
Transport staff are expected to deal with fare avoidance and anti-social behaviour

Whose primary responsibility ought it be to deal with...



While catching the offender is seen as the primary benefit, there is real warmth towards the idea of helping police build up a profile of repeat offenders

Perceived benefits of reporting a crime to the police



- 5 - This is a major benefit of reporting to the police
- 4
- 3
- 2
- 1 -This is an unimportant aspect of reporting to the police

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Conclusions



We convened a working group of 15 passengers who felt unsafe on public transport

What were their recommendations?

Tackle anti-social behaviour on public transport

On first impressions, anti-social behaviour can seem like harmless fun. However, some in our working group argued that rowdy behaviour can be highly distressing. Those with sensory disabilities will not know how to interact with drunk passengers, or what threat they may pose. More broadly, rowdy behaviour can escalate unpredictably. While many want to live and let live, there is broad recognition that many behaviours, while not strictly illegal, must be dealt with.

Standardise and lengthen CCTV retention periods on London Transport

The group was surprised to learn that CCTV retention periods are inconsistent and relatively short. They recognised that victims of sexual harassment or hate crime can take time to process what has happened and make a police report. For evidence to be deleted before this happens was unacceptable.

Enhance phone signal and Wi-Fi throughout the transport network

Ultimately, whoever a victim decides to contact, whether the police, a family member or a third-party charity, having access to signal is a crucial aspect of feeling safe 'in the moment.'

All I'll say is that feet on seats are only "not a big deal" to people who can see what they're about to sit down on.

Working Group Member
(Visually Impaired)

I just feel like there's a lot of pressure on the individual to do the reporting. I don't see the British Transport Police around. Do they only come out when there's a crime?

Working Group Member

Some people might just want to call a family member or a friend and be on the phone with them, and that's 99% of the time impossible to do on the Underground.

Working Group Member

What are our key recommendations for London transport?

Educate the public on the practicalities, importance, and value of reporting crime on public transport

The transport sector and the police must go further than explaining what incidents are and what is worth reporting, but how behaviour makes others feel and **why it is wrong**. Addressing bigotry directly reassures potential victims that the authorities 'get the message,' and that perpetrators' behaviours are being discouraged, even when it falls short of criminal behaviour.

Education about what the British Transport Police and Police in general do will be crucial, and improve trust in their ability to police all that is in their remit – not just terrorism.

Empower bystanders to act, and act effectively

The public may benefit from clear set of simple actions that they can take to support victims in the moment or after the incident takes place, without putting themselves at risk. Guidance or best practice that transport industry can unite behind would be valuable, even to reassure passengers that they can **trust their instincts** and do the right thing.

Make use of technology

Develop a reporting function in transport apps (or develop a singular app) that makes it easy, quick and straightforward to report anything unsafe, whether an incident or an outright crime. Make sure people know it is useful and will contribute to helping make things safer. Standardise CCTV retention times and make it clear to those reporting that it is one of a range of tools that can be used to take action against perpetrators

Refine the 'tone of voice' for communications across the board

Reassess the tone of communications and messaging to ensure that it is supportive and effective; that it **builds trust**, empowers people to take action, and reinforces the moral imperative for passengers to treat one another kindly.

Recognise that an efficient service is a safe service, and continue to deliver one

Ensure there are frequent services, good amenities, and well-maintained environments to minimise the potential for incidents (and the overall sense of safety for passengers). Good lighting, especially at night-time, is an essential part of feeling safe. Passengers who experience a delay or a cancellation can begin to feel unsafe, particularly in unfamiliar locations.



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E: info@londontravelwatch.org.uk

T: 020 3176 2999

W: www.londontravelwatch.org.uk

