

October 2026



Personal security on public transport

Improving the reporting journey

Introduction

Hate crime on public transport can take many forms, from staring, name-calling and verbal abuse to harassment, threats and even physical violence. These experiences can have a serious impact on victims, creating feelings of fear and anxiety and, for some people, can affect their confidence and sense of safety, leading them to change their routines or avoid public transport altogether.

We also know from our previous research that certain groups are far more likely to be victims of hate crimes and unwanted behaviour, most specifically young people, women and disabled transport users, as well as people from the LGBTQ+ community and those from religious and/or ethnic minority groups. If a person is in two or more of these groups, this can make experiencing a crime even more likely.

The problem is widespread but difficult to measure because many incidents go unreported. In 2025, 1,724 hate crime offences were recorded across the Transport for London (TfL) network, but research suggests this represents only a fraction of the incidents experienced.

Crucially, our research has also identified serious issues with the reporting journey. Many victims don't know how to report an incident, may feel that some incidents are not worth reporting, or may lack confidence that action will be taken. This leads to underreporting, meaning victims don't get the support they need, but also makes it impossible to understand the true scale of hate crime and can hinder more effective prevention strategies. Attendees at our 2024 Personal Security Summit, hosted alongside TfL, agreed that the current reporting journey isn't working as it needs to.



Our new research

We wanted to find out more about why people might choose not to report a crime, and what happens when they do. We surveyed 1,000 Londoners from diverse backgrounds and carried out 30 interviews with people with lived experience of hate crimes and/or harassment on public transport in London. The research identified two key issues:

Lack of confidence and/or understanding

Victims of crime do not feel confident in the reporting process, lack trust in authorities, and also might not know how to make a report as there isn't one clear pathway or journey

A poor experience of reporting

If victims do report a crime, the process often does not work as expected, with victims not receiving adequate support, empathy, updates or feedback

What are the issues?

In the past three years, **41 percent of Londoners have experienced unwanted behaviour on the transport system**, most commonly involving general antisocial and threatening behaviour, and verbal harassment.

The people most affected by these incidents include:

- LGBTQ+
- 18-34 year olds
- Women
- Disabled people.



Experiencing hate crime on the transport network is a deeply unsettling and unpleasant experience, both for victims and witnesses, who may feel helpless and in danger themselves. As well as the negative effects of the incident itself, people can also experience long term issues – for example, they may become reluctant to use public transport at all in the future.

Transport also creates a uniquely difficult environment in which to experience and respond to harm. The transient nature of public transport shapes not just where incidents happen, but what victims can realistically do in the moments that follow. Perpetrators can disappear instantly and victims can be physically trapped. Victims might also be in a rush to get somewhere and feel unable in that moment to halt their journey.

I'll try not to be on public transport past 10 o'clock. I'll always try and think of another way to get home or make sure I leave early

I remember feeling so shocked [after being a victim of a crime] ... I was definitely second guessing myself. Like it's not real. Did that actually happen? But I could still like feel when someone grabs you ... so I know that actually happened

After that incident, it's made me more wary. When I go in a tube now, I always go where there are lots of people in the carriage rather than one that is empty

Sometimes when I come home there's no staff, there's no one to talk to ... so even if something had happened and you got off the train, there's literally no staff

The problem with reporting

When asked in the survey hypothetically, around 4 in 5 people said they would report an incident of hate or sexual harassment on London transport. But only 2 in 5 people who experience it actually do.

4 in 5

Number of people who say they would report an incident

2 in 5

Number of people who actually report an incident

There are a range of reasons for underreporting. Firstly **the perceived severity of the incident** has a critical impact on the victim's likelihood to report an incident, even if it has deeply affected them. For example, staring and intimidation are rarely reported as people feel no action would be taken, and might doubt their own perception of threat. Similarly verbal abuse feels difficult to prove. Marginalised minority groups can also be less likely to report incidents as experiences of prejudice can feel normalised for them.

There are then a range of **barriers to making a report, even if the victim believes the incident they have experienced is severe enough to do so**. There might be a lack of trust in authorities that deal with reports, and a strong feeling that there is no point as nothing will get done anyway. Bystander inaction and staff indifference can contribute to the feeling that the incident wasn't serious enough to be reported. They are often unsure what to do – does the victim speak to staff, call 999 or 101, or go online? Many people might be aware of the 61016 number but don't know when to call it. And they might consider the whole reporting process to be risky, onerous and emotionally draining.

This confusion, lack of trust and high personal cost – and the perception that there's no benefit in reporting – leads people to decide it isn't worth reporting at all



What happens when people report – or try to report – incidents?

For those who do report, the experience can be fragmented and impersonal, and often lacks closure. This validates the perception that the effort is futile, which can reinforce the decision not to engage.

Issues encountered as part of the current reporting journey include the following:

- Station staff can be absent, inaccessible or physically separated from passengers. Where present, if their response is dismissive or unhelpful, this can close the pathway entirely before it has begun
- Victims can often be redirected and told to "go somewhere else" or "call another number". This adds a practical burden at a moment of high distress
- Victims often receive only generic, automated responses instead of personal updates. This lack of human engagement makes them feel like a case number, not a person
- Instead of a clear outcome, many people hear nothing, leaving victims without a sense of justice or closure.

The reporting journey needs to change, starting with the victim's most basic needs and ending with a satisfactory conclusion, with the victim being sensitively and appropriately supported throughout the process

I don't actually know what you're supposed to do ... I'd say if it was pushed on me more, I'd think about it more, but I'm not gonna research it if I don't know

I looked at [station staff], they looked at me and I just knew by their faces ... they're just gonna be disinterested ... There was eye contact, but there was no smile or 'you okay? are you lost?'

I think homophobia is the one that makes you feel a little bit more self-conscious about who and where you're going to report that to, because you don't know people's beliefs

I had an incident ... a guy had a knife to my throat ... nothing ever came of that. So I kind of had a feeling that it was definitely not going to be taken seriously [this time]

What do victims want to see?

- In the immediate aftermath of an incident, victims need to feel safe and emotionally seen
- Victims require clear validation that what they've experienced is reportable, especially for non-physical incidents
- Awareness and accessibility of different reporting routes is essential
- Once a report is made, victims want to feel taken care of and kept up to date
- Irrespective of the outcome, meaningful feedback is needed to close the loop and provide closure.



The end goal of reporting should be to prevent future incidents and make the network safer. Victims ultimately want their report to help improve security across the transport network and prevent incidents before they occur.

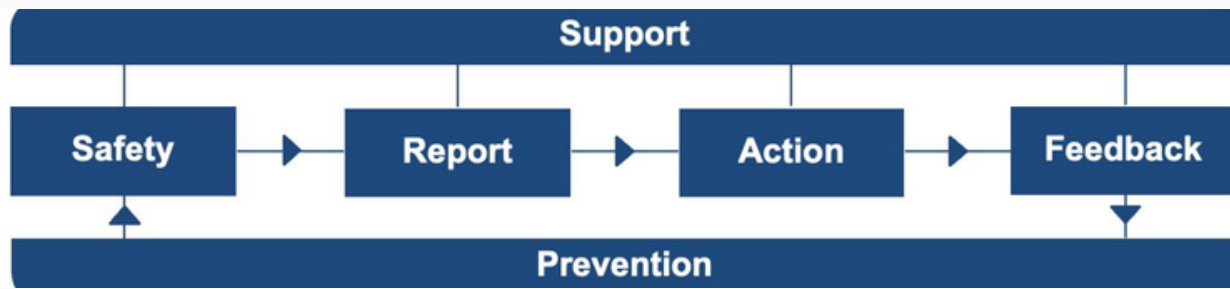
It would be worthwhile just for me personally ... it would be a way of me processing the fact that the incident happened, a way of me explaining it and getting it out there and away

I hear on the speakers they always say if I see anything suspicious, call this number. But that's if it's bags because of bomb threats ... I've never once heard them say if you're experiencing any hate or sexual assault, call this number

There is no follow-up support with anything. You're kind of left just to deal with everything ... that's not going to help long-term anxiety

The whole ordeal was just draining because I had to go through that procedure of speaking to the transport police and just hanging around waiting for them ... it just took it all out of me

The ideal reporting journey



Our recommended framework prioritises immediate Safety, with the victim being offered Support throughout, and closes the loop with Prevention to give every report a clear purpose.

To create the ideal reporting journey, transport operators and policing authorities need to focus on making these changes:

Embed a human-first ethos of support across the journey

The issue: Support for victims can be inconsistent and dismissive, leaving victims feeling abandoned and powerless.

What does industry need to do? Create a 'wrap-around' approach where victims feel cared for, believed and emotionally supported. Transform the role of staff so they can act as compassionate guides throughout the victim experience, creating a more caring system that is human-centred.

Establish immediate safety and human contact

The issue: In the immediate aftermath, victims feel exposed, vulnerable and alone.

What does industry need to do? Take steps to make sure victims feel physically safe and emotionally seen. Make sure staff are trained to deal with victims with warmth and empathy, showing that they understand that what happened to them was real and wrong.

Create a simple, supportive and trusted reporting pathway

The issue: Reporting routes can be unknown, burdensome and unclear.

What does industry need to do? Re-engineer the reporting process so it's easy to find, simple to use and accessible. This should include a 'Single Front Door' that leads to an empathetic 'Tell Us Once' process that feels seamless, supportive and safe. This needs to be backed up by sustained awareness campaigns to make sure people know it exists.

Make action feel meaningful and transparent

The issue: Action can feel impersonal and focused on a criminal justice outcome that may never happen.

What does industry need to do? Send out a strong and convincing message that every report helps prevent future incidents. Crucially, this promise must be backed by a genuinely improved and supportive experience on the ground.

Feedback: Close the loop via communicating prevention

Victims can feel their report vanishes into a 'black hole', making the effort feel pointless.

What does industry need to do? Provide meaningful feedback on both their individual case and the collective impact, and to see visible proof that their report contributes to prevention.

Next steps - our recommendations

Our research clearly shows that the current fragmented reporting process – across multiple operators, public authorities and police forces – can be too complex and confusing for victims of crime to engage with, and a single streamlined system would be by far the best approach

But while such fundamental change will take time, we want to see immediate action on the following issues:

Staff empowerment and training

Staff are an important part of the experience across the whole journey, and should be trained to provide a proactive and compassionate first response (Safety), making supportive referrals (Reporting), and delivering compassionate updates and case closure information with empathy (Action and Feedback).

More public campaigns

More needs to be done to raise awareness of why and how to report a crime, alongside further campaigns on safe bystander intervention. This should highlight the collective impact of reporting and how it can support the prevention of future incidents to help make reporting feel worthwhile and have meaningful outcomes.

Monitoring and improving the current reporting system

There are a range of issues with the existing reporting process, but small changes and more consistent delivery of existing policies could lead to an improved experience. This could include:

- Integrating consistent promotion of and referrals to third-party support systems for people reporting an incident
- Reviewing all touchpoints, human or automated, to make sure they are empathetic and compassionate
- Prioritise providing channel choice and accessibility for all updates
- Make sure transparent, regular updates are provided, including compassionate closure of cases, even when there is no criminal case
- Independent monitoring of reporting to identify inconsistency and failures in delivery, and inform targeted action to improve performance.

We would also like transport operators and policing authorities to commit to a wider review of the reporting process so that in the future we will see a simple, supportive, accessible and trusted pathway with a single front door. This should include a seamless 'Tell Us Once' process with 'Warm Handovers' to tackle jurisdictional complexity, so the reporting journey itself is not a barrier.