



Policy Briefing

November 2023

Violence against women and girls on public transport

Sexual harassment, abusive and violent behaviour towards women and girls is prevalent and is perpetrated in various settings, including on public transport. To mark International Day for the Eradication of Violence Against Women 2023, RMT surveyed our women members working in public transport (rail, bus, metro, passenger ferry) to ask about their experiences of these behaviours at work.

Sexual harassment encompasses a wide range of behaviours which can be verbal, physical or non-verbal including sexual assault, cat-calling, flashing, up-skirting, touching.

In our survey:

- 4 in 10 women public transport worker said they had been sexually harassed at work in the last year. Yet nearly 70% of those affected did not report the incident/s.
- When asked why they did not report, the most common response was that they did not think their complaint would be taken seriously.
- More than 80% of women said that sexual harassment on public transport is becoming more of a problem.

The comments from our members about their experiences include:

"I have been followed touched and been asked out several times"

"I have had numerous men stroke my bum as they pass by and that's in the day. Of a night when they are drunk it's worse I've had a group of men grab me and say come on love sit on my knee"

"Pressing about sexual activities, being started at, degrading comments made."

"Cat-calling, touching, staring, unwanted uncomfortable conversation, unwanted 'compliments' and people taking pictures of me without my permission."

"Sexually aggressive and explicit language as a form of intimidation is a frequent thing."

"I have had many comments made to me, one of the comments that was made to me which stuck with me was "you look amazing in that uniform but I think you would look out of it ""

"There are fewer staff and perpetrators become emboldened by this."

"Trains are busier. Less staff onboard at one time. People have more opportunities to do this"

"People think they can just say what they want, especially if a group of them and single staff member"

"More and more people are starting to cat call and make sexual advances and nothing is done about it to prevent or deter it"

Workplace violence encompasses a wide range of behaviour including verbal abuse, racial abuse, physical assaults, threats, being spat at.

In our survey:

- 70% of women public transport workers said they had experienced workplace violence in the last year and two-thirds of those were lone working at the time.
- 98% said that more action needs to be taken against perpetrators of violence and abuse towards public transport workers.
- Just 40% of members said they feel safe at work.

Measures to tackle violence against public transport workers

We need properly staffed public transport networks. The continued de-staffing of trains, stations and other forms of transport must be halted and reversed. As our survey highlights, lone working is becoming more common and puts staff more at risk of abusive and violent behaviour. Increasing the presence of staff deters perpetrators, improves the safety of both passengers and staff and also means that there are more people able to respond if an incident does occur.

It is also clear that the lack of action taken against perpetrators is exacerbating the problem and leading to underreporting. RMT believes that transport employers must have a robust, zero-tolerance approach to perpetrators of violence, sexual harassment and abuse of transport workers. This involves properly supporting staff who are victims, having accessible reporting procedures in place, and policies on tackling sexual harassment and violence. RMT is also campaigning for the creation of a specific offence of abuse or assault of public transport workers (mirroring legislation which already exists for some other public facing sectors) to afford additional protections to our members.