



**Women and Equalities Committee inquiry  
into sexual harassment of women and girls in public places.**

**March 2018**

1. The Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF) is the UK's largest train driver's union representing approximately 20,000 members in train operating companies and freight companies as well as London Underground and light rail systems.
2. ASLEF takes the issue of sexual harassment of women and girls very seriously and we welcome this opportunity to contribute to the Committee's inquiry. In 2017 ASLEF carried out work aiming to build a picture of the nature and frequency of incidents of sexual harassment experienced by and / or witnessed by our female members. As a union we have a proportionately low number of female members (train operating companies recruit low numbers of women to the industry) so unfortunately we did not collect sufficient data to be able to base any conclusions on our findings. We do, however, have a lot of anecdotal evidence from our members about sexual harassment and we know from other sources that sexual harassment on public transport is a very real problem. We also can't comment with authority on who the perpetrators are, why they harass women and girls in this way, or what the impacts are on their victims. We do, however, have views about preventing and responding to sexual harassment of women and girls in public places and supporting victims, which are presented below.
3. Last year BTP released figures showing that sexual offences on trains have more than doubled in the past five years. Of course, this rise could be a result of better awareness of how to report offences among victims, rather than a suggesting that women are more at risk than a few years ago, but either way the 1,448 offences that were reported in 2016-17 are unacceptably high in number, and we assume that many more instances will undoubtedly still have gone unreported.
4. In 2013 a TfL survey revealed that 15% of women and girls had experienced unwanted sexual behaviour on the transport network but 90% had not reported it. In response, the British Transport police, Metropolitan

police, City of London police and Transport for London came together to launch Project Guardian. As part of this initiative plain-clothed and uniformed officers were trained to carry out daily patrols and were successful in identifying and arresting a large number of people in connection with sexual offences. ASLEF's Equalities Officer worked closely with the BTP to help promote Project Guardian. The Chair and Secretary of ASLEF's Women's Representative Committee also met with the BTP about the project and have spoken about the issue of sexual harassment on public transport in a number of different forums.

5. It would appear that many of the instances of sexual harassment of women and girls on public transport are opportunistic: Men and boys taking advantage of overly crowded spaces to make inappropriate personal contact, or empty carriages with few witnesses to carry out sexual acts in the presence of female passengers and staff. Having staff and police visibly to-hand on trains and platforms is proven to make passengers feel safer and to deter potential perpetrators. The findings of a 2016 YouGov survey for End Violence Against Women showed that 61% women who had gone out in the evening that year had left early to travel home with friends and 54% avoided using public transport and paid for a taxi. In the same year, research published by Transport Focus, the independent watchdog, found that a visible staff presence makes passengers feel safer at stations and on trains.
6. ASLEF believe that it is unacceptable that female passengers should feel intimidated, anxious or be deterred from using public transport at quiet times when platforms and carriages are empty, and during peak hours when they are very crowded, and we would like to see higher levels of investment in staffing and staff training. As a union ASLEF has opposed the proposed merge of BTP in Scotland and argued against the break-up of BTP in Scotland for security reasons. We also continue to fight against cuts to station staff and on-board staff, through the push for driver-only operated trains.
7. After Project Guardian, in 2015 the first 'Report it to stop it' campaign film was launched, followed by a second campaign film last year. The aim of these initiatives was to improve levels of reporting of sexual offences on public transport in order to catch perpetrators, who generally act with impunity. ASLEF has been highly supportive of these campaigns and we recognise that in addition to encouraging women to report intimidating, humiliating or offensive sexual comments and behaviour, the campaigns are also helpful in building an environment on public transport where unwanted sexual attention and behaviour are not tolerated.
8. It is very important that women feel safe and supported to report crimes, and confident that their experience will be taken seriously - whether it's touching, exposure, comments or other intimidating or offensive

behaviour. This means informing people of their rights, challenging the perception that some behaviours aren't 'serious enough' to report, and raising awareness of how to report incidents, as well as assuring victims that reports will be investigated and action will be taken. The fact that the initiatives mentioned above have been successful in improving rates of reporting crimes on public transport is a positive step in the right direction, but ASLEF also believes that more needs to be done to address the root causes of the problem. i.e. challenging attitudes and re-educating men and boys who either think their behaviour is ok, or who don't care if they can get away with it. There needs to be a strong message to perpetrators that their behaviour will be taken seriously, and measures will be implemented to stop them.

9. This is why as a union we are opposed to the idea of segregating women from men on public transport in the UK. In many countries, the response to women and girls being groped, abused and even raped on public transport has been the introduction of female-only transport services that put women out of reach of men. But seeking safety in women-only transport puts the responsibility on women to avoid harassment instead of dealing with the perpetrators. India, Japan, Indonesia and Brazil offer female-only train carriages and women-only buses can be found in Pakistan, Mexico, Thailand and Guatemala. ASLEF understands what has led to the introduction of these measures but we don't want gender apartheid on Britain's railways. We believe that women have the right to sit where they want. The introduction of women-only transport doesn't address the problem and doesn't prevent men from doing harassing women when they have the opportunity to.
10. ASLEF believe that it is the responsibility of train operating companies to make sure that passengers on trains are safe and that staff are adequately trained to deal with incidents and support victims reporting unwanted sexual attention. We know that the presence CCTV and of staff and police on trains and platforms is shown to make passengers feel safer and we regularly call on train companies to stop taking staff off trains and stations. We remain committed to our aspiration for a second person on every train who is fully trained and licensed to carry out the duties of guard, as set out in the ASLEF Charter, so that passengers can travel in safety and with peace of mind, whatever their gender and at any hour of the day or night.

Mick Whelan  
General Secretary  
ASLEF  
77 St John Street  
London  
EC1M 4NN