Unite the Union's response to the Transport Select Committee Call for evidence on: *Safer journeys for women and girls*

1. Introduction

This response is submitted by Unite the Union, the UK's largest trade union with 1.2 million members across the private and public sectors. The union's members work in a range of industries including transport, manufacturing, financial services, print, media, construction, energy generation, chemicals, local government, education, health and not for profit sectors.

In the arena of transport Unite represents over a quarter of a million members in all transport modes, making it the largest transport union in the UK.

In writing this submission, Unite has obtained the views of our members in the bus, tram and taxi sectors, through our lay member structures and we represent views that form part of agreed Unite industrial policy. Therefore Unite is in a unique position to submit a response to the Transport Committee call for evidence on Safer Journeys for Women and Girls.

Executive Summary

Unite the Union represents over 250,000 transport workers across the UK. Drawing on the experiences of our members and our *Get Me Home Safely* and *Violent and Aggressive Passengers* campaigns, Unite calls for a coordinated, preventative approach to improving the safety of women and girls on public transport.

Unite's key recommendations are:

i. **Improve national data collection and monitoring**: Establish a standardised national framework for recording violence, sexual harassment, hate crime and aggression affecting passengers and transport workers, enabling Government to identify risks, target interventions and measure outcomes.

ii. **Strengthen Government accountability and trade union engagement**: Ensure the Department for Transport meaningfully involves Unite and other recognised trade unions in developing, implementing and evaluating transport safety policies, with clear responsibilities, timescales and measurable outcomes.

iii. **Prioritise prevention across the whole journey:** Improve the safety, accessibility and frequency of public transport, particularly during late-night and unsocial hours. Through *Get Me Home Safely*, Unite calls for employers to provide safe, free and accessible transport home where safe public transport is unavailable, alongside individual risk assessments covering journeys to and from work.

iv. **Strengthen safeguarding and workforce training:** Introduce robust, dedicated VAWG training for transport workers, with a minimum of one full day's training, appropriate wellbeing support and meaningful involvement of trade union representatives. Strengthen national taxi and PHV licensing standards and address the safeguarding risks associated with out-of-area working.

v. **Protect transport workers from violence and aggression:** Introduce a specific criminal offence for assaulting bus and tram workers, supported by meaningful penalties, and establish national minimum standards based on Unite's Model Assault and Harassment Policy.

vi. **Ensure inclusive and accessible safety measures:** Recognise the intersecting risks faced by disabled women, Black and minority ethnic women, LGBT+ people and other minority groups. Reporting and support mechanisms must be accessible, multilingual and capable of recognising overlapping forms of violence, harassment and hate crime.

vii. **Improve reporting, enforcement and inter-agency cooperation:** Establish accessible and trusted reporting systems, strengthen responses to victim-survivors and support intelligence sharing between police, transport authorities, operators and trade unions. Unite calls for local safeguarding partnerships to be embedded in bus franchising contracts and equivalent arrangements for non-franchised services.

viii. **Ensure technology improves safety without compromising privacy:** Strengthen CCTV standards and discreet reporting options while protecting personal data, preventing discriminatory surveillance and ensuring that autonomous transport services provide effective safeguarding and human assistance.

ix. **Adopt genuine zero tolerance towards perpetrators:** Take meaningful action from the first incident of violence or harassment, rather than waiting for repeat offending. Consider proportionate exclusion measures for perpetrators who pose an ongoing risk, supported by appropriate legal safeguards.

Above all, Unite believes that **women and girls should not have to change their journeys, restrict their opportunities or live in fear to stay safe**. Government must move beyond commitments towards consistent implementation, stronger enforcement and demonstrable improvements in passenger and worker safety.

The Department for Transport's role in ensuring safe journeys for women and girls

Q1. How well do Government and transport providers understand how safe women and girls' journeys are, and what impact perceptions of safety have on travel patterns? Is there a need to improve how data is gathered and used to identify and address risks?

2. Unite believes there is now a substantial body of evidence demonstrating that women and girls experience public transport differently because of concerns about their personal safety. The Department for Transport's (DfT) *Personal Safety on Transport* research, published in February 2026, represents an important improvement in the national evidence base[1]. Based on a representative survey of approximately 4,900 adults in Great Britain, the research examines experiences of anti-social behaviour, violence, verbal abuse, theft, sexual harassment and other unwanted behaviours, as well as perceptions of safety when getting to, waiting for and travelling on public transport. It also considers differences according to journey stage, time of day, transport mode and demographic group. The DfT has stated that the findings will be used to shape transport policy and operational activity.

3. The findings demonstrate why perceptions of safety cannot be separated from actual safety. Women may respond to fear of harassment or violence by changing routes, avoiding particular stations or stops, travelling at different times, using more expensive forms of transport, relying on others for lifts or deciding not to make a journey at all. Unite believes the journeys women do not make, and the opportunities they consequently cannot access, are an important measure of whether the transport system is providing women and girls with equal freedom of movement.

4. Improved research into women's experiences does not mean the Government yet possesses the data infrastructure necessary to understand the prevalence to consistently identify emerging risks or determine whether interventions are making women safer. Recorded crime, in particular, must not be treated as a proxy for the prevalence of violence and harassment on public transport. The substantial underreporting identified by the DfT's own research means that police

[1] DfT Research and Analysis: *Personal Safety on Public Transport.* 2026. This is a representative survey of 4,903 adults, which revealed 54% of female public-transport users aged 18–34 experienced sexual harassment or other unwanted behaviours in previous 12 months; of these only 11% of most recent sexual-harassment incidents were reported. Link: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/personal-safety-on-transport

and operator incident data will inevitably capture only part of women's lived experience.

5. This requires a whole-*journey* approach to data and safety. Risk does not begin when a passenger boards a train or bus and end when they alight. Women's experiences of getting to and from stations and stops, waiting for services, interchanging between modes and completing the final stage of their journey must be understood alongside incidents occurring on vehicles themselves. This is particularly important during late-night and early-morning travel, when reduced service frequency, isolated waiting environments, poor lighting and fewer visible staff can heighten both vulnerability and perceptions of risk.

Government commitments must now translate into measurable outcomes

6. Unite welcomes the Government's recognition of transport within its December 2025 *Freedom from Violence and Abuse* strategy and its ambition to halve violence against women and girls within a decade. The accompanying Action Plan contains nine DfT commitments, including reviewing the Secure Stations Scheme; improving CCTV connectivity at railway stations; exploring increased CCTV provision on buses; mandatory training for bus staff on VAWG and anti-social behaviour; statutory guidance on the safety and accessibility of bus stations and stops; and scoping the feasibility of a single national reporting mechanism across all forms of public transport.

7. However, Unite is concerned about the gap between the Government's ambition and the pace and scope of implementation. Several commitments remain commitments to review, explore, scope or develop future guidance rather than measures which have already established consistent national standards. For example, statutory guidance on bus stations and stops is not due until the end of 2027, while a single national reporting mechanism remains at the feasibility stage.

8. The February 2026 DfT research should therefore represent a turning point from further identification of the problem towards measurable intervention. Government should be able to determine not simply whether CCTV has been installed, staff have undertaken training or reporting mechanisms exist, but whether those interventions have reduced incidents, increased confidence in reporting, improved responses to victims and ultimately enabled more women and girls to travel when and where they choose without modifying their behaviour because of fear.

The bus sector demonstrates the weakness of the current data system

9. The absence of consistent national data in the bus sector provides a particularly clear example of why further reform is necessary.
   During passage of the Bus Services Act 2025, an amendment promoted by Lord Woodley would have required bus operators participating in franchising schemes or enhanced partnerships to record data about assaults and violent behaviour on their buses and share that information with their Local Transport Authority. It would also have required LTAs to consult relevant trade unions regarding staff safety issues identified through the data. The amendment was agreed by the House of Lords but subsequently removed during Commons Committee stage.

10. In opposing the provision, the Government argued that many operators, alongside the police and Home Office, already collected data about assaults and that the proposed requirement risked duplicating existing work. Subsequent evidence exposes a significant weakness in that argument. In June 2026, the DfT was asked what data it held on reported incidents of physical assault and verbal abuse against bus drivers in England over the previous five years. The Department responded*: **"The Department does not hold this data."***

11. For Unite, this illustrates a fundamental problem with the existing approach. The fact that data may be collected somewhere within the transport, policing or criminal justice system is not the same as the Government possessing a coherent national evidence base capable of identifying trends, comparing regions and operators, targeting interventions and determining whether those interventions are working.

12. The same problem arises in relation to VAWG. When the Government was asked in May 2026 what monitoring the DfT was undertaking of rates of sexual harassment and assault in bus companies and on bus services, its response principally referred to incidents reported to the police under Home Office Crime Recording Rules and to measures being taken under the Bus Services Act and VAWG Action Plan. This does not overcome the fundamental problem of underreporting, nor does it provide the comprehensive national prevalence data necessary to assess the effectiveness of those interventions. Violence, harassment and anti-social behaviour affecting passengers and workers occur within the same transport environment. Understanding where and when incidents occur, and whether particular routes, stops, stations, times or operating conditions present heightened risks, can therefore inform preventative interventions which make the system safer for everyone.

Transport providers also have a responsibility to understand risk

13. The quality of understanding among transport providers is uneven because operators differ considerably in the data they collect and the systems used to record and analyse incidents. This is supported by Unite's own research. Unite submitted Freedom of Information requests seeking data on reported assaults against bus drivers and found significant gaps in the information available: many operators did not hold or were unable to provide the requested data and, among those that did record incidents, there was no consistent or standardised approach to categorising and recording them. This makes meaningful comparison between operators difficult, and further inhibits the development of a reliable national picture of violence and abuse across the bus network.

14. Unite considers these findings particularly concerning because information about violence and intimidation affecting transport workers can also provide important intelligence about the wider safety of the transport environment. However, the implications for the prevention of violence and intimidation against transport staff are addressed in greater detail later in this response. Transport providers should not rely solely on recorded crimes or formal complaints to determine whether their networks are safe for women and girls. Operators should actively examine passenger and workforce incident reports, reports of anti-social behaviour and harassment, customer complaints, survey evidence, perceptions of safety, location and time-based patterns and changes in travel behaviour. This should include identifying locations where women report feeling unsafe even where relatively few crimes have been formally recorded.

15. Transport for London provides an important example of what a more evidence-led approach can look like. Its work on ending VAWG examines women's experiences of unwanted sexual behaviour, perceptions of safety and how lived experience and fear of harm shape women's travel behaviour, confidence and willingness to use public transport. TfL has also moved towards integrating incident reporting into a single system using common definitions and processes to enable more consistent analysis of safety information.

16. Unite believes that this type of evidence-led and transparent approach should be replicated more consistently across the country. Women's safety should not depend upon whether they happen to use a transport network or operator with sophisticated data and reporting systems.

A national transport safety data framework is required. Unite therefore recommends:

- The establishment of a standardised national transport safety data and monitoring framework, based on common definitions and minimum reporting standards across transport modes, operators and relevant public authorities.
- The framework should distinguish incidents affecting passengers from those affecting transport workers, while allowing the two datasets to be analysed together to identify shared risks within the transport environment. It should record the type and severity of incident, including physical violence, sexual offences and harassment, verbal abuse, threats, hate crime and relevant anti-social behaviour, alongside transport mode, route or location, time and stage of journey.
- Where lawfully and appropriately collected, anonymised data should also enable analysis by sex, age, ethnicity, disability and other relevant characteristics so that Government and transport providers can identify groups facing disproportionate risks and develop targeted interventions.
- Crucially, the framework must not rely exclusively upon police-recorded crime. It should bring together police data, operator incident reports, workforce reporting, passenger surveys and qualitative evidence about women's experiences and perceptions of safety. This should be complemented by regular nationally representative research capable of identifying changes in prevalence, reporting and travel behaviour over time.

17. Government should judge safety measures by their results: whether violence and harassment fall, reporting confidence improves and fewer women feel forced to alter or abandon journeys.

Q2. How effectively does the Department for Transport work with other departments, local authorities, transport providers and wider stakeholders to improve the safety of women and girls?

18. Unite recognises that improving the safety of women and girls on transport requires effective coordination between the DfT, other government departments, local and transport authorities, transport providers, policing bodies, trade unions and organisations representing women and victims and survivors of violence and abuse.

19. The Government's *Freedom from Violence and Abuse* Strategy recognises this, describing tackling VAWG as requiring a *"whole-of-government"* and *"whole-of-society"* approach. It establishes cross-government ministerial oversight and

commits the Government to ongoing engagement with experts and organisations working on the frontline.

20. Unite welcomes this approach in principle. However, **our own experience of engagement with the DfT raises serious concerns about whether these principles are being consistently translated into practice.**

Engagement with trade unions

21. Unite is extremely disappointed with the level of engagement from the DfT and the Secretary of State for Transport in response to concerns we have raised about the safety of transport workers and passengers.

22. Over the past 12 months, Unite has written to the Secretary of State on a number of occasions raising concerns about passenger and worker safety across the bus, tram and the taxi and private hire vehicle (PHV) industries. Within this correspondence, Unite has repeatedly highlighted the implications of the issues raised for the safety of women and girls and requested opportunities to engage directly with the Department. Despite Unite's expertise as a major trade union representing transport workers, alongside workers across all sectors, who depend on public transport to travel to and from work, our concerns and requests for meaningful engagement have largely gone unanswered.

23. This represents a missed opportunity. **Transport workers and their trade unions are not simply stakeholders to be informed once policy has been developed; they are an important source of intelligence that should inform policy development from the outset.** Frontline transport workers witness and experience violence, sexual harassment, anti-social behaviour and safeguarding concerns. They understand where risks arise on particular routes, at particular locations and times, and can identify where policies designed at the national level may encounter problems in their practical implementation. Trade unions can also provide evidence that may not be visible through police-recorded crime or operator reporting systems. As outlined in our response to Question 1, Unite's own research has identified significant inconsistencies in the collection and recording of assaults and abuse within the bus sector.

24. Unite therefore recommends that the DfT establishes structured and ongoing engagement with Unite and recognised transport trade unions on VAWG, personal safety and safeguarding, rather than relying predominantly upon ad hoc correspondence or public consultations. Unite and all relevant trade unions should be represented within appropriate DfT stakeholder structures and engaged

at an early stage where policies have foreseeable implications for passenger or worker safety.

Unite has repeatedly sought to raise emerging safety concerns

25. Our concern about the quality of engagement is particularly significant because Unite has sought to raise emerging safety and safeguarding issues proactively. Following the publication of Baroness Casey's audit of group-based child sexual exploitation and abuse, Unite urged the DfT to implement its recommendations relevant to taxi and PHV licensing and safeguarding, including the recommendation to address **out-of-area, or cross-border, working**[2]. The Casey Audit identified a significant weakness in the existing licensing system whereby drivers can obtain a licence from one local authority and operate predominantly in another, potentially undermining the ability of local authorities to enforce higher local licensing and safeguarding standards. Casey concluded that local authorities which had introduced more rigorous safeguards were being undermined by less stringent standards elsewhere and recommended that the DfT take immediate action to put a stop to out-of-area working and introduce more rigorous statutory standards for taxi and PHV licensing.

26. Unite supports the principle that passengers should receive the same high level of safeguarding regardless of where a driver or vehicle is licensed. We have therefore called for stronger national minimum standards alongside reform of cross-border hiring arrangements, so that the authority responsible for an area has meaningful oversight of the vehicles and drivers operating within it. This is particularly important for the protection of women, girls and children and for ensuring that safeguarding requirements cannot effectively be circumvented by obtaining a licence from an authority operating different or less stringent standards.

27. Unite welcomes the Government's recognition that inconsistent licensing standards can create safeguarding concerns. However, drivers and the trade unions representing them should be involved in developing and implementing reforms. Effective passenger protection and fair, enforceable licensing standards are complementary objectives and require an understanding of how licensing and enforcement operate in practice, and Unite, through its members' experiences is best placed to provide those insights to the Government and the DfT .

[2] Home Office Independent report: **National Audit on Group-based Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.** Updated 15 January 2026. Link: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-audit-on-group-based-child-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse/national-audit-on-group-based-child-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse-accessible?

28. Similarly, ahead of the Government's free bus travel scheme for children during summer 2026, Unite raised concerns about safeguarding and the potential risks facing children and young people travelling independently, including child criminal exploitation and sexual harassment.

29. While Unite supports measures which make public transport affordable and accessible to young people. Our concern was that a policy specifically intended to increase children's independent use of the bus network should also have been accompanied by appropriate consideration of safeguarding, staffing, reporting mechanisms and the ability of frontline workers to identify and respond to incidents. We shared that concern to the Secretary of State for Transport, who again refused to engage in meaningful dialogue with Unite or provide a platform for Unite to share our concerns and introduce solutions which could have delivered a safer implementation of the scheme. Resultantly, our members working on buses during this summer reported increased levels of youth violence and anti-social behaviour on their buses.

30. This illustrates a wider principle. VAWG and safeguarding considerations should be embedded within transport policy at the design stage rather than considered separately after policies have been developed or announced. This is consistent with the preventative approach set out within the Government's own VAWG Strategy.

Cross-government working

31. Unite welcomes the Government's recognition in the 2025 VAWG Strategy that violence against women and girls cannot be addressed by one department acting alone. This is particularly important for transport. Women's safety on journeys intersects with responsibilities for policing and criminal justice, local government, planning and the design of public spaces, safeguarding, education, employment and the night-time economy. The DfT's own transport commitments also require cooperation with other organisations, including British Transport Police, local authorities and transport providers.

32. There is therefore a framework through which effective cross-government working can take place. However, the existence of cross-government structures is not, in itself, evidence of effective cross-government delivery. The appropriate test is whether Government policies across departments consistently reflect its VAWG commitments and whether this coordination results in measurable improvements in women's safety.

33. The Government's VAWG Strategy itself recognises that tackling VAWG should become a mainstream responsibility across Government rather than an "add on". Unite strongly supports this principle. In practice, it means that the DfT should be able to demonstrate how VAWG considerations are systematically incorporated into mainstream transport policy. Unite therefore recommends that the Government's cross-departmental VAWG governance arrangements include clear accountability for transport-related commitments, with identifiable milestones, responsible departments and measurable outcomes. The Government's reporting on implementation of the VAWG Strategy should enable Parliament and stakeholders to determine what progress has been made against individual transport commitments, where delivery has been delayed and what action is being taken in response.

Local authorities and transport providers

34. Unite recognises that local authorities, transport authorities and providers have an essential role in improving the safety of women and girls. They are often best placed to identify local patterns of risk and implement practical interventions relating to routes, infrastructure, staffing, lighting, bus stops and stations, reporting and responses to incidents.

35. However, as outlined in our response to Question 1, the absence of consistent national data and reporting standards limits the ability to compare performance, identify good practice and determine where further intervention is required. National and local responsibilities should therefore reinforce, rather than substitute for one another, and as such central Government should establish clear national standards accompanied by guidance, while local authorities and transport providers should retain the ability to respond to risks specific to their networks and communities.

36. Partnership arrangements at local level should also include the workforce. Where local authorities and transport providers are assessing safety risks, reviewing incident data, developing safety strategies or designing interventions, Unite and recognised trade unions representing affected workers should have a meaningful opportunity to contribute.

37. Unite therefore recommends that DfT guidance to local authorities and transport providers establishes an expectation of meaningful consultation with recognised trade unions and frontline workers when developing, implementing and evaluating measures relating to VAWG, personal safety and safeguarding.

38. Unite is clear that effective partnership working cannot be measured simply by the number of departments, authorities or stakeholders involved. Rather, it must be judged by whether those with relevant expertise are engaged early enough to influence policy, whether evidence and intelligence are shared effectively, whether frontline experience informs decision-making and, ultimately, whether that collaboration produces demonstrably safer journeys for women and girls. Unite's experience of engagement with the DfT to date suggests that there remains considerable room for improvement.

39. Unite calls for structured, ongoing DfT engagement with Unite, including early consultation on policy, a formal route for frontline safety intelligence and clear accountability for delivery of transport-related VAWG commitments.

Q3. Are the transport-related actions set out in the Government's Strategy to reduce violence against women and girls adequate to improve women's safety, and is the Department making progress in implementing them?

40. As already mentioned in our response, Unite welcomes the inclusion of specific transport commitments within the Government's *Freedom from Violence and Abuse* Strategy. The measures represent an important recognition that women and girls must both be safe and feel safe when travelling and that transport policy has an important role in achieving the Government's ambition to halve VAWG within a decade. In particular, Unite supports commitments to mandatory VAWG and anti-social behaviour training for bus staff; improved CCTV connectivity on the rail network; statutory guidance on the safety and accessibility of bus stations and stops; reform of taxi and PHV licensing standards; and consideration of a single national reporting mechanism across public transport.

41. However, the adequacy of the Action Plan will ultimately depend upon how these commitments are implemented and whether they result in measurable improvements in women's safety. As outlined in our responses to Questions 1 and 2, Unite is concerned that several measures remain at the stage of reviewing, exploring or scoping future action. For example, the commitment to a single national reporting mechanism is currently to *scope its feasibility*, while statutory guidance on safe and accessible bus stations and stops is not due until the end of 2027.

42. Unite welcomes the Labour Government's progress in mandating training for relevant bus workers on VAWG through **Section 34 of the Bus Services Act 2025**. This reflects a core demand of Unite's ***Get Me Home Safely campaign*** and

represents an important recognition that frontline transport workers have a vital role in identifying, preventing and responding appropriately to violence, harassment and anti-social behaviour.

43. Unite participated in the Confederation of Passenger Transport's (CPT) stakeholder working group, established to support the commissioning and development of the industry training, which CPT subsequently launched in 2026. We were in contact with Understood UK, who developed the training and are aware that their training package includes 2 options for train-to-train (2 days) and lead trainer (3 days). However, Unite is extremely disappointed that key recommendations we made to ensure the training was robust and effective have not been reflected in its implementation.

44. Unite understands that VAWG training for bus workers has been incorporated within a seven-hour Driver Certificate of Professional Competence (CPC) training module, with approximately 4.5 hours allocated specifically to VAWG. Unite does not consider this sufficient for an issue of this seriousness and complexity. VAWG training should not simply be incorporated into an already crowded training programme**.** Effective training needs sufficient time to address different forms of VAWG, including sexual harassment, stalking and domestic abuse; intersectional experiences; recognising warning signs; responding appropriately to disclosures and incidents; bystander intervention; safeguarding; reporting procedures; and the practical responsibilities of frontline transport workers.

45. Unite therefore recommended **dedicated, standalone VAWG training**, rather than an approach which risks compressing a complex subject into a wider training module. Given the sensitive and potentially triggering nature of discussions about sexual violence, domestic abuse and harassment, Unite also recommended that appropriate wellbeing support should be available during training, including access to a trained Mental Health First Aider.

46. Unite further requested that workplace representatives, including equality representatives, be involved in the piloting, evaluation and rollout of the training. Workplace and equality representatives bring practical knowledge of the risks workers and passengers experience, understand workplace reporting and safety procedures, and can provide valuable feedback on whether training translates effectively into practice. These requests were not taken forward by CPT and operators.

47. This illustrates a broader Unite concern raised throughout this response: introducing a statutory requirement is only the first step; the quality of

implementation determines whether it improves women's safety in practice. Unite is concerned that, without sufficient training time, meaningful workforce involvement and robust evaluation, an important Government commitment risks becoming a compliance or "tick-box" exercise rather than equipping workers with the confidence, knowledge and practical skills needed to respond effectively to VAWG.

48. Unite therefore recommends that the DfT establishes **minimum quality standards for VAWG training delivered under Section 34**, including sufficient dedicated training time, with a minimum of 1 day for training, appropriate support for participants, meaningful involvement of trade unions and equality representatives, and mechanisms for evaluating whether training improves workers' knowledge, confidence and ability to respond effectively to incidents. Refresher training should also respond to emerging evidence and lessons from workers' and passengers' experiences rather than simply repeat the original course.

49. The commitment to train all bus workers on VAWG, and improve detection and reporting of VAWG are positive developments, but they cannot fully demonstrate that women and girls are safer. Government should also measure whether incidents decrease, reporting and confidence in reporting improve, perceptions of safety change, and fewer women alter or abandon journeys because they feel unsafe.

50. There are also important gaps. The Action Plan is heavily focused on responding to risks within particular parts of the transport network. Unite believes greater emphasis is required on the whole journey, including the journey to and from public transport, waiting and interchange, and the particular risks associated with late-night and early-morning travel. Safety should also be embedded systematically across mainstream transport policy rather than treated as a discrete set of VAWG interventions.

51. The effectiveness of measures such as mandatory training, reporting mechanisms and infrastructure improvements will depend substantially upon how they operate in practice. Workers and their representatives should therefore be involved in their design, implementation and evaluation.

52. Unite recommends that the DfT publishes a clear implementation framework for its transport-related VAWG commitments, identifying timescales, responsible bodies and measurable outcomes for each action, with progress reported publicly as part of the Government's wider reporting on the VAWG Strategy.

Preventing and addressing risks to women and girls' safety

Q4. What preventative measures are most effective in reducing risk to women using transport?

53. Unite believes that the most effective approach is one which prevents women from being placed at risk in the first place.

54. Since launching the ***Get Me Home Safely*** (GMHS) campaign in 2022, Unite has called for a coordinated national approach to women's safety on journeys. The campaign developed from the experiences of Unite members across different sectors and recognises that women's travelling safety cannot be separated into isolated questions of policing, public transport, employment or licensing. Preventing VAWG requires Government, transport providers, local authorities and employers to address the conditions which create or increase risk.

Safe, reliable and accessible public transport

55. A fundamental preventative measure is the provision of safe, reliable and frequent public transport, including during evenings and other off-peak periods. Long waits, missed connections, isolated stations and bus stops, and the absence of viable late-night services can increase vulnerability and leave women with limited alternatives for completing their journeys.

56. Service provision must therefore be understood as a safety issue as well as a question of transport accessibility. Decisions concerning routes, frequency and operating hours should include an assessment of their potential effect on women's safety and ability to travel independently.

CCTV, reporting and visible intervention

57. The GMHS campaign calls for clear, operational CCTV across public transport, supported by effective systems for retaining, accessing and sharing footage at the time of incidents. CCTV can contribute to deterrence, investigation and enforcement, but should not be treated as a substitute for staffing, effective reporting mechanisms or intervention.

58. There should be zero tolerance of sexual harassment and gender-based violence across public transport, accompanied by reporting systems which are simple, visible and accessible. Passengers must know how to report an incident, and have confidence that reporting will lead to an appropriate response.

59. As outlined elsewhere in this response, Unite also supports a standardised national approach to recording violence, harassment and abuse. Prevention depends on Government and operators understanding where incidents are occurring, identifying patterns and using that intelligence to target interventions.

A trained and supported workforce

60. The transport workforce is itself an important preventative safety measure. Frontline workers can identify inappropriate behaviour, support passengers, report incidents and intervene where it is safe and appropriate to do so.
Unite therefore welcomes the requirement introduced through section 34 of the Bus Services Act 2025 for relevant bus workers to receive training covering crime and anti-social behaviour, including VAWG. However, as explained in our response to Question 3, the effectiveness of this measure depends on the quality of the training. Unite continues to advocate robust, dedicated VAWG training developed and evaluated with meaningful involvement from trade unions, workplace representatives and equality representatives.

61. Prevention also requires transport providers to protect their own workers from violence and aggression. Violence against workers and violence against passengers should not be viewed as entirely separate safety problems: both can be indicators of unsafe transport environments. Operators should therefore use passenger and workforce incident data together to identify routes, locations and times where preventative intervention is required.

Taxi and private hire vehicle licensing

62. Taxi and PHV journeys require particular attention because passengers may be travelling alone, at night or in circumstances where they are especially vulnerable. Unite supports national safety and licensing standards and an end to the current problems created by out-of-area working, so that local authorities can effectively oversee and enforce standards applying to vehicles and drivers operating in their areas. This has acquired additional urgency following Baroness Casey's National Audit on group-based child sexual exploitation and abuse. Recommendation 11 called for immediate action to stop "*out of area taxis*" and for more rigorous statutory standards for local authority licensing and regulation. The Government accepted the recommendation and has subsequently consulted on reforms intended to reduce out-of-area working and improve consistency in licensing.

63. Unite welcomes progress towards national standards but believes the Government must ensure that reform genuinely resolves the safeguarding and enforcement problems associated with out-of-area working. Passenger safety

should not depend on the standards of the authority from which a driver happens to obtain a licence.

Prevention must extend across the whole journey

64. Finally, preventative policy must recognise that risk does not begin and end on the vehicle. Government, local authorities and transport providers should assess the whole journey: routes to stations and stops; lighting and visibility; waiting environments; interchange; service frequency; staffing; the journey itself; and the final stage between public transport and a passenger's destination. This is particularly important for women travelling during late and unsocial hours. The central principle of Get Me Home Safely is straightforward: **no woman should have to choose between earning a living and getting home safely.**

65. For workers required to finish late at night or during unsocial hours when safe public transport is unavailable, Unite believes employers also have an important role in prevention. GMHS calls for employers to provide safe, free and accessible transport home and for employers to consider commuting risks when assessing the safety of workers whose working hours or location expose them to foreseeable risks on their journey to and from work.
    This is particularly important in the hospitality and night-time economy, where workers may finish shifts late at night, when public transport is less frequent or unavailable, and where women workers may also face heightened risks of sexual harassment, violence and stalking. The GMHS campaign therefore calls on local authorities to adopt the **Get Me Home Safely council motion**, including using their licensing powers to require venues seeking late-night alcohol licences to demonstrate how they will support workers to travel home safely. This should include the provision of safe transport home and individual risk assessments which consider the journey to and from work, particularly for workers finishing late at night or working alone.

66. This approach recognises that prevention should not stop at the workplace door. Where working arrangements create foreseeable risks associated with travelling to or from work, employers, local authorities and Government should consider what practical measures can be taken to reduce those risks rather than leaving individual workers to manage them alone.

67. Unite believes the most effective preventative approach is therefore not a single intervention. It is a layered system of prevention, combining reliable services, safe infrastructure, trained and supported workers, effective CCTV and reporting, robust taxi and PHV regulation, enforcement against perpetrators, meaningful workforce involvement and recognition of the entire journey women make.

Q5. How can transport systems be designed or adapted to make women and girls feel safer while travelling?

68. Unite believes that women's safety should be treated as a core design requirement of transport systems, rather than an adaptation made after infrastructure, services or new technologies have already been introduced.

69. As outlined in our response to Question 4, safety must be considered across the whole journey. This means designing stations, bus stops, interchanges and surrounding routes with appropriate lighting, visibility, accessibility, clear sightlines, working CCTV, easily identifiable help points and safe waiting areas. Service design is equally important: a well-lit bus stop offers limited protection if a woman is required to wait there alone for a prolonged period because evening services are infrequent or unreliable.

70. Transport providers and local authorities should therefore undertake safety assessments which consider how women actually experience and use the network, including differences between daytime and night-time travel. Women and girls, disabled passengers, frontline transport workers and their trade unions should be involved in the design, testing and evaluation of transport infrastructure and services.

Human presence is part of transport design

71. Unite considers the availability of trained staff to be an important element of both actual and perceived safety. Technology can support safety through CCTV, communications, reporting and monitoring, but it should not automatically be assumed that technology provides an equivalent substitute for a trained worker who can recognise a developing situation, reassure a passenger, summon assistance or respond to an incident.

72. This principle is becoming increasingly important as passenger transport moves towards greater automation. The Automated Vehicles Act 2024 establishes a regulatory framework which expressly anticipates vehicles operating on "no-user-in-charge" journeys, including vehicles carrying passengers without an individual inside the vehicle responsible for exercising control. Such journeys would instead be overseen by a licensed no-user-in-charge operator, which would have general responsibility for detecting and responding to problems arising during the journey.
73. Unite has participated in forums concerning the development of autonomous passenger transport and is concerned that discussion about safety has

predominantly focused on the vehicle's ability to navigate roads safely. Passenger safety inside the vehicle must be treated as equally fundamental.

Before approving the widespread use of fully automated buses, taxis or other passenger services without an onboard worker, Government should require clear evidence demonstrating how operators will prevent, detect and respond to sexual harassment, assault, intimidation, safeguarding incidents and medical emergencies.

74. This raises practical questions which must be answered before deployment: How quickly can a remote operator identify that a passenger is being threatened or assaulted? How does a passenger discreetly request assistance**? What happens if communications fail? Can a remote operator safely intervene beyond contacting the police or stopping the vehicle? How many vehicles may one remote operator supervise simultaneously? What happens when several incidents occur at once? How will children, disabled passengers and other potentially vulnerable users be safeguarded**?

    These should not be treated as secondary operational questions to be resolved after deployment. They should form part of the safety case required before no-user-in-charge passenger services are authorised.

75. Unite therefore recommends that the regulatory framework for autonomous passenger transport includes explicit personal-safety and safeguarding standards, developed in consultation with passenger groups, VAWG organisations, disabled people's organisations and transport trade unions. Equality impact assessments and VAWG risk assessments should be undertaken before deployment, and autonomous passenger services should not be permitted to remove an onboard human presence unless the operator can demonstrate an equivalent or higher level of passenger protection.

Designing for freedom rather than fear

76. Ultimately, a transport system should not be considered successfully designed for women simply because women are technically able to use it. The appropriate test is whether women and girls can use it independently, confidently and without having to organise their lives around avoiding perceived danger.

77. Women should not routinely have to sit close to the driver, telephone somebody throughout a journey, avoid particular stops, pay for a taxi because the bus service ends too early, change routes to avoid isolated locations or decide against travelling altogether. Designing safer transport, therefore, requires the Government to consider infrastructure, service provision, staffing, and technology together. The objective should not be to teach women how to navigate

an unsafe system more effectively, but to design a transport system in which the risks that produce fear are identified and reduced at source.

Q6. How can Government ensure that transport systems effectively prevent and address violence and intimidation against all women and girls—including transport staff, disabled people, LGBT+ people, and people of colour and those from minority groups?

78. As outlined in our responses to Questions 4 and 5, Unite believes that preventing violence and intimidation requires a combination of safe and reliable transport services, effective reporting and enforcement, appropriately trained and supported staff, safe infrastructure and meaningful involvement of workers and passengers in the development of interventions.

79. Women and girls are not a homogeneous group, and their experiences of violence, harassment and transport safety are not uniform. An effective national approach must be intersectional and able to identify and respond to the distinct and overlapping risks faced by disabled women, Black and minority ethnic women, LGBT+ people and other minority groups, as well as the risks faced by women working within the transport system itself.

Preventing and addressing violence and harassment for passengers with protected characteristics

80. Government and transport providers should ensure that equality considerations are embedded in transport safety policy from design through implementation to evaluation. Women may experience violence and harassment which is simultaneously gendered, racist, homophobic, transphobic or disability-related. A Black woman subjected to both racist and sexual harassment, for example, should not be required to navigate different reporting or support systems depending upon how an incident is categorised. Reporting, enforcement and support systems must be capable of recognising multiple and intersecting forms of abuse, including hate-related incidents.

81. This reinforces Unite's recommendation in Question 1 for a standardised national approach to transport safety data. Where lawful and appropriate, anonymised data should be sufficiently disaggregated to identify whether particular groups experience disproportionate levels or forms of violence, harassment and intimidation. Without this, inequalities can remain hidden within overall incident figures, and Government cannot determine whether interventions are improving safety equally across groups.

82. Accessibility must equally be understood as a safety issue. Reporting mechanisms, emergency communications, help points, and information on obtaining assistance must be accessible to disabled passengers, including those with sensory, learning, cognitive, and communication impairments. Safety interventions which cannot be independently accessed by all passengers risk creating additional vulnerability for those already facing barriers within the transport system.

83. Government should also ensure that Equality Impact Assessments are carried out when considering new policy and guidance, and meaningful consultation with affected groups forms part of the development of major transport safety policies, infrastructure and emerging technologies. This should include engagement with equality organisations, disabled people's organisations, LGBT+ organisations, organisations representing Black and minority ethnic communities, and trade union equality structures. The objective should not simply be a transport system which is safer on average. Government should be able to demonstrate that safety improvements are being experienced across different groups of women and girls and that interventions are reducing, rather than reproducing, existing inequalities.

Addressing and preventing violence and aggression towards transport staff

84. Government must also recognise transport workers as an integral part of its strategy for tackling violence and intimidation on the transport network. **Transport workers have a right to be safe at work, but their safety is also intrinsically connected to passenger safety.** A transport environment in which drivers and other frontline workers routinely experience threats, abuse, harassment or assault cannot reasonably be regarded as a safe environment for passengers.

Unite is particularly concerned about the scale of violence and aggression towards bus and tram workers.

85. London provides some of the clearest available evidence. In 2023/24, **10,493 incidents of work-related violence and aggression towards transport workers were reported in London, equivalent to approximately 200 incidents every week**[3]. Reported incidents against bus drivers increased by **18.5% between 2020/21 and 2023/24**, from 3,734 to 4,428 incidents[4].

[3] Mayor of London. London.Gov press release: **200 violent incidents a week against transport workers.** 23 February 2026. Link: https://www.london.gov.uk/200-violent-incidents-week-against-transport-workers?

[4]Transport for London: Safety, health and environment annual report 2023/24. Link: https://content.tfl.gov.uk/safety-health-and-environment-annual-report-2023-24-acc.pdf?

86. TfL's own 2023/24 safety reporting provides further evidence of the disproportionate impact on the bus network. TfL recorded 10,568 reported incidents of work-related violence and aggression across its workforce, of which **44% were reported by colleagues working on the bus network**[5]. These figures are unlikely to represent the full scale of the problem. TfL has previously acknowledged that work-related violence and aggression is under-reported, particularly verbal abuse, and in March 2026 the London Assembly Transport Committee concluded that official figures almost certainly under-report the true scale because many incidents go unreported[6].

87. For Unite, this raises an important issue about the normalisation of violence and aggression in public-facing transport work. Verbal abuse, threats and intimidation should not be dismissed as an inevitable part of the job. Lower-level incidents may also provide important safety intelligence about routes, locations and services where there is an increased risk of more serious violence.

The national data gap

88. Despite the seriousness of the problem, there remains no equivalent national dataset providing a comprehensive picture of violence, aggression and harassment against bus and tram workers. The fragmented nature of existing information is itself significant. British Transport Police records violence and abuse affecting rail workers; TfL maintains detailed information relating to its network; individual police forces hold crime data; and individual bus operators maintain their own incident and assault records. However, these sources do not provide a consistent national picture.

89. This has been acknowledged by Government. In October 2025, the Department for Transport confirmed that while British Transport Police records incidents of violence and abuse against rail workers, **the Department did not hold equivalent data for other modes of transport**[7]. When subsequently asked in June 2026 what data it held on reported physical assaults and verbal abuse against bus drivers in England over the previous five years, the Department again confirmed that **it did not hold this data**[8].

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[5] Ibid.

[6] London Assembly: **Reported violence against transport workers may just be 'tip of the iceberg'.** 26th March 2026. Link: https://www.london.gov.uk/who-we-are/what-london-assembly-does/london-assembly-press-releases/reported-violence-against-transport-workers-may-just-be-tip-iceberg?

[7] UK Parliament Written Questions: **Public Transport: Crimes of Violence Question for Department for Transport.** UIN 84787, tabled on 23 October 2025. Show full question

[8] UK Parliament Written Questions: **Bus Services: Crimes against the Person Question for Department for Transport.** UIN 3456, tabled on 20 May 2026. Show full question

90. This prevents Government from establishing the true national scale of violence and aggression, comparing operators and regions, identifying dangerous routes and locations, understanding patterns of sexual harassment and hate-related abuse, or determining whether preventative interventions are working. It also presents a significant equality problem. Without consistent and appropriately disaggregated information, Government cannot adequately establish whether women transport workers, Black and minority ethnic workers, LGBT+ workers or disabled workers experience disproportionate levels or particular forms of violence and harassment.

91. As recommended in our response to Question 1, Unite believes Government should introduce a **standardised national framework for recording violence, aggression and harassment affecting transport workers**, including bus and tram workers. This should distinguish between physical assault, threats and intimidation, verbal abuse, sexual harassment and violence, hate-related incidents and other relevant forms of aggression, with data capable of identifying equality trends where lawful and appropriate. However, better recording must be accompanied by stronger prevention, enforcement and employer accountability.

Unite's Violent and Aggressive Passenger campaign

92. Through our ***Violent and Aggressive Passenger* campaign**, Unite is calling for stronger legal protection for bus workers, including new legislation carrying specific criminal penalties for those who abuse or assault bus workers.

93. Violence, threats and abuse must never be regarded as an inevitable occupational hazard or simply "part of the job" for workers providing an essential public service. Legislation must be accompanied by clear responsibilities for bus operators to prevent violence and properly support workers when incidents occur. Unite has therefore developed a **Model Assault and Harassment Policy**, which we believe should form the basis of minimum standards adopted across the bus industry.
94. The policy places a firm commitment on operators to prevent and address violence, harassment and aggression; establish safe and trusted routes for workers to report incidents; respond appropriately to reports; and work with Unite to develop and implement workplace arrangements.

95. A central principle of Unite's model policy is that **no bus and tram worker should come to work expecting to be assaulted and violence must never be accepted as part of the job**. It requires operators to work constructively with the

police, local authorities and recognised trade unions to create a zero-tolerance approach to workplace violence and anti-social behaviour.

Importantly, the policy recognises that the impact of violence is different for every worker and that support following an incident cannot be one-size-fits-all. Workers should have access to individually tailored support, including immediate assistance following an assault, support when reporting to the police or receiving medical treatment and, where appropriate, phased returns, reduced hours or alternative duties without loss of pay. Workers must be able to report violence, harassment and abuse without fear of reprisal, victimisation or detriment.

96. The policy also explicitly recognises that women, Black and minority ethnic workers, LGBT+ workers, disabled workers and neurodivergent workers may experience disproportionate violence or additional barriers to reporting. This directly reinforces the need for an intersectional approach to worker safety.

Turning incident data into prevention

97. Crucially, Unite's approach does not treat reporting simply as an administrative exercise undertaken after somebody has been assaulted. **Incident data must become preventative safety intelligence.**

98. Under ***Unite's Model Assault and Harassment Policy***, reported assaults would be routinely reviewed through workplace health and safety structures. Trends in the type of assault, geographical location and route should be identified, and reporting information should be broken down by relevant demographic characteristics to identify equality and diversity trends.

99. Where a particular route experiences increasing or consistently high levels of violence, or where a serious individual incident occurs, this should trigger a reassessment of risk and consideration of additional preventative measures. Where there is credible intelligence of serious disorder or another significant threat, operators should work with police, local authorities and Unite to assess the risk and, where necessary, consider temporary diversion, curtailment or suspension of affected services until appropriate controls have been implemented.

100. Route-specific risk assessments should therefore be informed and updated by incident data, with Unite health and safety representatives involved in reviewing those assessments. Workers returning following an assault should also receive an individual risk assessment, with appropriate consideration given to concerns about returning to particular routes or duties.

101. Unite believes Government should consider how these principles can be translated into national standards for bus operators, so that the protection and support available to a driver does not depend upon which company employs them or where in the country they work. This should include stronger legal protection and appropriate criminal penalties for those who assault or abuse bus and tram workers, as already mentioned in the sections above.

102. Government should therefore adopt a worker-centred and preventative approach to violence on transport, in which violence and aggression are treated as foreseeable and preventable occupational safety risks rather than an inevitable consequence of public-facing work.

103. **A transport system cannot be considered safe for women and girls if the workers responsible for operating it are routinely exposed to violence, harassment and intimidation. Protecting transport workers must therefore be part of the Government's wider strategy to create a safer public transport environment for everyone.**

Q7. What additional interventions are needed to ensure that women and girls feel and remain safe when making journeys?

104. Throughout this response, Unite has outlined a range of additional interventions which we believe are necessary to ensure that women and girls both feel and remain safe when making journeys. In particular, our responses to Questions 1–6 set out recommendations relating to improved data collection and monitoring, preventative measures, safer transport design and service provision, the **Get Me Home Safely campaign**, **taxi and private hire vehicle reform**, **protection of transport workers**, and the need for an **intersectional approach to passenger and worker safety**.

105. Rather than repeat those recommendations here, Unite would emphasise that no single intervention will make women and girls safe. What is required is a coordinated national approach which brings these measures together, establishes clear responsibility for their implementation and measures whether they are producing demonstrable improvements in both actual and perceived safety.

106. The priority now is coordinated implementation, clear accountability and evidence that these measures improve women's actual and perceived safety."

Q8. How should the Government make the most effective use of technology to ensure the safety of women and girls journeys, while protecting privacy?

107. Used appropriately, technology should only be used to improve the safety of women and girls, but technology should be regarded as a tool to support prevention and human intervention, rather than a substitute for adequately staffed and safe transport services.

108. As outlined elsewhere in this response, Unite's Get Me Home Safely campaign calls for clear and operational CCTV across public transport. CCTV can play an important role in deterring offending, identifying perpetrators, providing evidence following incidents and supporting enforcement. However, its effectiveness depends on cameras being operational, footage being of sufficient quality, appropriate retention arrangements being in place and passengers and workers having confidence that footage can be accessed promptly when an incident is reported.

109. Government should therefore work towards greater consistency in CCTV standards across transport modes and ensure that operators have clear procedures governing the retention, retrieval and disclosure of footage following reports of violence, sexual harassment, hate crime or other serious incidents.

110. Technology can also improve reporting and access to assistance. Passengers should have simple and accessible ways to report incidents or summon help, including where it would be unsafe to make a telephone call. Any national reporting mechanism should be accessible to disabled passengers as well as those with cognitive difficulties, and should enable information to be passed quickly to the organisation best placed to respond.

111. The Get Me Home Safely campaign encourages bus operators to display prominent information on buses which both deters perpetrators by making clear that violence and harassment will not be tolerated, and provides passengers with discreet and accessible ways to report incidents and seek support. This should include QR codes linking passengers directly to reporting mechanisms, and information about relevant support organisations. This recognises that victim-survivors of gender-based violence, sexual harassment or other forms of assault may not feel safe or able to report an incident while it is happening or immediately afterwards. Some may only feel ready to disclose what has happened once they have reached a place of safety or had time to process their experience. Providing a QR code allows passengers to discreetly access and save reporting and support information on their own device, giving them the option to report when they feel

safe and ready to do so. This demonstrates how technology can go beyond simply detecting incidents or gathering evidence: it can help remove barriers to reporting and give victim-survivors greater choice and control over when and how they seek help and support.

112. Reporting mechanisms must also be accessible to passengers who do not speak English as their first language. Digital reporting systems should provide information in multiple languages and make appropriate use of translation tools so that language is not a barrier to reporting an incident, explaining what has happened or accessing support. This is particularly important in recognising the intersection between gender-based violence and hate crime, where women may experience abuse that is simultaneously misogynistic, racist, religiously motivated or targeted at another aspect of their identity. Reporting systems should allow these overlapping forms of abuse to be identified and recorded rather than forcing victim-survivors to categorise their experience as one form of violence or another.

113. Fundamentally, Government should avoid assuming that introducing an app, CCTV system or other technological intervention in itself makes passengers safer. Technology must be connected to an effective human response. A passenger who reports that she is being followed, sexually harassed or threatened needs confidence that somebody will receive that information, assess the risk and take appropriate action.

Privacy, equality and surveillance

114. The expansion of safety technology must also be accompanied by appropriate safeguards for privacy and equality. The collection and processing of CCTV, biometric or other personal data should be necessary, proportionate and transparent, with clear limits on how information is collected, retained, accessed and shared. Passengers and workers should understand what information is being collected and for what purpose, and safety should not become a justification for unnecessary or disproportionate surveillance.

115. Particular caution is required where artificial intelligence, facial recognition, behavioural analytics or other forms of automated monitoring are proposed. Government and transport providers should assess not only whether these technologies are effective, but whether they introduce risks of bias or discriminatory outcomes for particular groups, including Black and minority ethnic passengers, disabled people and LGBT+ people.

116. Equality and data-protection impact assessments should therefore form part of the development and procurement of new safety technologies, with workers, recognised trade unions and affected passenger groups consulted before significant systems are introduced.
Technology used to protect workers should similarly not be repurposed as a means of disproportionately monitoring or disciplining them. For example, CCTV or other monitoring introduced for safety purposes should not subsequently be used to apportion blame to a worker who has been the victim of an assault. This principle is reflected in Unite's Model Assault and Harassment Policy.

Emerging technology and autonomous transport

117. Autonomous passenger transport must also meet the safeguarding standards outlined in Question 5. The increasing automation of passenger transport, including the potential introduction of no-user-in-charge services, must not result in the removal of human support.

118. Unite believes that Government should adopt a "safety by design" approach to transport technology: privacy, equality, accessibility, worker involvement and VAWG prevention should be considered from the outset rather than addressed after a system has already been developed or deployed.

Dealing with the perpetrators of violence and supporting victims

Q9. Are current reporting, response and enforcement processes (and resources) sufficient to tackle harassment and violence across public transport systems quickly and appropriately?

119. Unite does not believe that current reporting, response and enforcement arrangements are sufficient. The level of under-reporting identified by the Government's own research demonstrates a significant lack of confidence in existing systems.

120. The DfT's 2026 research found that, across different forms of negative experience, fewer than one in seven victims reported their most recent experience to the police, transport staff or transport provider[9]. For sexual harassment specifically, only 11% reported their most recent incident. Around half of those who did not report various incidents said they believed nobody would do anything

[9] DfT Research and Analysis: Personal Safety on Public Transport (2026). Link: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/personal-safety-on-transport

about it, while among those who did report an incident, only 28% were satisfied with how their report was handled[10].

These findings are particularly concerning. A reporting system cannot be considered effective if victims do not believe that reporting will lead to meaningful action. Increasing reporting therefore requires more than simply telling women and girls to come forward. They need accessible and discreet ways to report, confidence that their experience will be taken seriously, a timely response and clear information about what happens after a report is made.

121. However, better reporting without an effective response risks further undermining confidence. Transport providers, police and other responsible agencies must have sufficient resources and clear procedures to respond quickly and appropriately, and victims should not be left repeatedly explaining what happened to different organisations or uncertain about who is responsible for dealing with their report.

122. Government should therefore measure the effectiveness of reporting systems not simply by the number of reports received, but by victim-survivor confidence, response times, outcomes and satisfaction with how reports are handled. The objective must be to create a system in which women and girls know how to report, feel safe doing so and, crucially, believe that reporting will make a difference.

Q10. How can agencies better identify patterns of offending behaviour or high-risk services and times of day within transport environments?

123. Unite believes that stronger inter-agency working and intelligence sharing is essential to identifying patterns of offending and high-risk services, routes, locations and times of day.

124. As highlighted throughout this response, relevant information is currently held across different organisations, including transport operators, local and transport authorities, police forces, British Transport Police and other agencies. No single organisation will necessarily see the full picture. An incident that appears isolated to one operator may form part of a wider pattern of offending when information from neighbouring services, the police, and other transport providers is considered together.

[10] Ibid.

125. Government should therefore establish clearer arrangements for agencies and transport providers to share and analyse safety intelligence, while maintaining appropriate data-protection safeguards. Analysis should look beyond the overall number of incidents and identify patterns according to route, location, time of day, type of offence and repeat offending. It should also identify whether particular groups of passengers or workers are being disproportionately targeted, including through sexual harassment, racist, homophobic, transphobic or disability-related abuse.

126. Transport workers and their trade unions should also form part of this intelligence picture. Frontline workers will often be aware of recurring problems on particular routes, stops or services before they appear in recorded crime statistics. Unite's Model Assault and Harassment Policy therefore calls for reported incidents to be routinely reviewed through workplace health and safety structures, identifying trends by geographical area and route, and triggering preventative action where particular services experience consistently high or increasing levels of violence.

127. This is a key priority of ***Unite's Violent and Aggressive Passengers*** campaign, which calls for the establishment of local safeguarding groups bringing together transport authorities, bus operators, the police and Unite to review incidents, identify emerging risks and coordinate preventative action. **Unite calls on the Government to support this approach and ensure that requirements for these safeguarding partnerships are embedded within bus franchising contracts**, and equivalent arrangements for non-franchised services, making joint working and accountability an integral part of improving passenger and worker safety.

128. The purpose of better intelligence sharing must ultimately be prevention. Where a high-risk route, location or time is identified, this should trigger a coordinated response from the relevant operator, police, local or transport authority and trade unions to determine what action is needed and whether that intervention has reduced the risk.

Q11. What interventions or sanctions should be prioritised to deter repeat perpetrators on public transport?

Zero tolerance should begin with the first incident, not the second.

129. Unite supports a clear zero-tolerance approach to violence, sexual harassment, intimidation and abuse on public transport. However, zero tolerance must mean taking action from the first incident, not waiting until someone becomes a repeat offender. How many times must a woman or young girl be sexually harassed, threatened or assaulted before meaningful action is taken? One incident is already one too many.

130. While repeat offending should attract stronger sanctions, the priority must be to prevent perpetrators from offending again in the first place. This requires effective enforcement, meaningful consequences and legislation that makes clear that violence, sexual harassment, intimidation and abuse are not an acceptable part of travelling or working on public transport.

131. Through Unite's Violent and Aggressive Passengers campaign, we are calling for a specific criminal offence for assaulting bus and tram workers, backed by meaningful penalties. **Bus workers should not have to endure repeated abuse or violence before the law offers them effective protection, just as women and girls should not have to experience repeated harassment before authorities intervene.**

132. Unite also calls on Government to consider **proportionate exclusion measures for perpetrators who pose a continuing risk to passengers or workers, supported by appropriate legal safeguards**. The focus must be on preventing further harm, not waiting for violence or harassment to escalate.

133. While Unite understands that any exclusion scheme would require appropriate legal safeguards and enforcement arrangements, perpetrators should not simply be allowed to return to the same services, routes or locations and continue to place passengers and workers at risk.

134. Unite also believes operators must take greater responsibility for supporting workers through the criminal justice process. Our *Model Assault and Harassment Policy* calls on operators to work closely with the police and, where the police and Crown Prosecution Service do not pursue a criminal prosecution, to consider private prosecution against those who assault their workers. Workers should be fully supported throughout any police investigation, prosecution or court proceedings.

135. However, sanctions should form part of a wider preventative approach. As outlined in Question 10, lawful and proportionate intelligence sharing between police, transport authorities and operators is essential to identifying repeat perpetrators and preventing further incidents of violence and harassment.

Contact: This document is submitted on behalf of Unite the Union and is approved by Wayne King (Acting National Officer for Unite Passenger Sector).

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