

Railway Guardian – British Transport Police

A mobile app to address violence and intimidation against women and girls on the rail network.

First published
2 October 2023

Key details

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Does it work? | Smarter practice |
| Topic | Violence against women and girls |
| Organisation | British Transport Police |
| Region | London |
| Target group | General public |

Smarter practice

Overview

This is a [smarter practice example](#).

The Railway Guardian app is part of the British Transport Police's (BTP) response to violence and intimidation against women and girls on the rail network. It is a free mobile application that members of the public can use to report incidents and to access relevant information and services. The app has been accompanied by extensive promotion and media campaigns to promote its purpose and the importance of bystander behaviour. The outcomes that BTP hopes to achieve through the app include:

- increased awareness of how to be a bystander
- increased reporting of incidents
- improved public confidence in using both the rail network and police services

Problem

BTP identified research highlighting the presence and underreporting of sexual offences and harassment on the rail network.

- The Transport for London (TfL) [Attitudes to safety and security](#) survey reported that 10% of Londoners experienced unwanted sexual behaviour on public transport in 2017-18. Only 27% of these incidents were reported.
- A [rapid evidence assessment](#) commissioned by BTP and TfL identified that the rail network provided unique opportunities for offenders. Offenders can commit discreet offences on crowded trains, such as touching, or more obvious offences on quieter carriages, such as exposure. It can be difficult for victims to exit safely or quickly when the train is moving.

In 2013, BTP implemented Project Guardian. Project Guardian is a joint initiative between BTP, TfL, the Metropolitan Police Service and the City of London Police. It aims to reduce the prevalence of sexual offending and unwanted sexual behaviour on the transport network across London.

However, BTP identified a need for a nationwide initiative to tackle violence and intimidation of women and girls on the rail network across England, Wales and Scotland.

Response

In response to these issues, BTP designed the Railway Guardian mobile app.

Aims

The Railway Guardian app aimed to:

- improve public perceptions of safety on the rail network
- improve public confidence and willingness to use the rail network
- increase public trust and confidence in policing
- increase public knowledge and awareness of:
 - how to report both crimes and environmental factors
 - what constitutes different offences, such as sexual harassment, spiking, wolf whistling and staring
 - services and support available

Features of the app

Railway Guardian is a free app available to the public in both English and Welsh languages. It brings the following existing services and functions into one place.

Reporting

Users are directed to BTP text and online reporting tools for crimes or incidents, such as unwanted sexual behaviour. Users can also report station issues online to a train operator and feelings of unsafety in public areas through the Home Office StreetSafe tool. The app also allows users to upload videos and pictures as evidence, which are sent directly to the control room.

Geolocation

The app allows users to share their location with pre-determined contacts, who can track their journey and can be notified by the user when they arrive at their destination. BTP does not monitor or track the location service. In the future, BTP would like to introduce automatic notifying of the allocated contacts when users of the geolocation services arrive at their destination, replacing manual notification from the user.

Guides

Users can access information on a range of subjects, such as ‘What is sexual harassment?’ and ‘What can I report on the Railway Guardian app?’.

Support

The app provides links to national charities, such as Women’s Aid, Shelter and ChildLine.

Messaging

The app includes a one-way messaging service, allowing BTP to provide updates to users, covering new features and campaigns, upcoming public events and relevant news stories (often incidents involving violence against women and girls that achieved a positive outcome).

Surveys

The app allows BTP to collect feedback from users. Previous surveys included questions on perceptions of safety and feedback on the app.

Other information

The app links to travel advice and resources, such as TfL and the National Rail Journey Planner.

While the app was initially designed with a focus on offences relating to violence against women and girls, it is expected to also encourage reporting and bystander behaviour relating to other crime types, including anti-social behaviour and acquisitive crime.

No user information is stored on the app, as all features capturing personal data divert users out of the app.

Promotional campaigns

The app has been accompanied by two main promotional campaigns.

- The ‘Speak up, interrupt’ bystander campaign, which took place in summer 2022. This campaign had two main aims:
 - to encourage those who witness sexual harassment on the railway to report it to BTP and intervene in the incident if possible
 - to increase downloads of the Railway Guardian app
- An awareness campaign that aimed to promote Railway Guardian and the ability to report incidents and crimes by texting 61016, including physical handouts and posters, social media posts and toolkits for stakeholders.

Logic model

Problem

- Violence against women and girls taking place on the rail network.
- The underreporting of sexual harassment and other offences.
- Unique opportunities for offending on the rail network.

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| Response | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The development and launch of an app that brings together BTP reporting and information tools.• A social media and railway network poster campaign promoting bystander behaviour.• An extensive app promotion campaign, using social media, stakeholder toolkits, posters and handouts, public events and internal competitions. |
| Outputs | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Number of downloads of the app.• Number of crimes and incidents reported through the reporting functions.• Number of environmental concerns submitted through the app. |

Outcomes

- Increased public trust and confidence in the police.
- Improved public perceptions of safety on the rail network.
- Increased confidence and willingness to use the railway.
- Increased confidence in being a bystander.
- Increased reporting, particularly in terms of sexual offences and harassment.
- Increased public knowledge and awareness of:
 - how to report both crimes and environmental factors
 - what constitutes different offences, such as sexual harassment, spiking, wolf whistling and staring
 - the services and support available

Implementation

App development

Initially funded by the [Home Office Safer Streets fund](#), Railway Guardian was launched in July 2022. To save costs and time, BTP worked with an app developer to adapt an existing product to create Railway Guardian. Additions and changes are paid for by BTP.

BTP conducted extensive stakeholder consultation during the development phase to inform the look and feel of the app and how it would operate. Stakeholders were identified from the following areas:

- app developers (for example, What3words, StreetSafe, HollieGuard, Safe & the City)
- industry partners (for example, TfL, the Rail Delivery Group)
- charities (for example, White Ribbon, the Suzy Lamplugh Trust)

- public sector partners (for example, the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime, Operation Soteria Bluestone, the Department for Transport)

BTP also carried out product testing prior to launch.

Resourcing

The core team dedicated to Railway Guardian consists of the following. All these people worked on Railway Guardian in addition to their existing responsibilities.

- A detective superintendent.
- A detective chief inspector.
- A detective inspector.
- A project manager.
- A social media and digital creator.

The team has emphasised the importance of recruiting a project manager from the beginning of the project to assist with funding, scheduling and planning.

The team works closely with colleagues from various BTP internal teams, including:

- IT
- commercial and legal services
- campaigns and marketing
- cyber and information management
- the control room

Media campaigns

BTP has invested considerably in the promotion of Railway Guardian. During the design and implementation phases of the app, the team held fortnightly meetings with the media team to discuss marketing, internal and external media and communications across all VAWG topics, including the app. These meetings are still ongoing but are now held monthly. A social media and digital creator has been funded through the project, who assists with the bystander and awareness campaigns.

Bystander campaign

BTP launched a bystander campaign to accompany the app, informed by research stating that women are more likely than men to intervene if they witness sexual harassment (Government Equalities Office, 2020).

Influencer marketing and social media

This campaign mainly focused on influencer marketing and social media content on TikTok, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Four male influencers with between 30,000 to 60,000 followers were paid to promote bystander messages on their social media channels, hired using a specialist influencer agency that guarantees a minimum audience reach. Content included an Instagram reel describing experiences of being an active bystander and Instagram stories, including polls and question prompts, to engage with viewers.

Poster campaign and press

This was accompanied by a poster campaign across the rail network in England, Scotland and Wales, as well as the London Underground network. The posters provided prompts and examples of questions that can be used to intervene. A press release led to approximately 25 pieces of media coverage. Bath Rugby Club also showed this bystander content on their match days.

Although it is not possible to measure the direct impact of the media campaign, BTP used a public perception tracker of 2,000 train, tram and tube users in England, Scotland and Wales. Awareness of the ability to report sexual harassment that takes place on the railway network to BTP increased consistently across the months when the campaign ran – with awareness at 81% for June 2022, rising to 87% in July 2022 and 89% in August 2022.

Railway Guardian awareness campaign

The campaign to raise awareness of Railway Guardian and reporting using the BTP text number (61016) consisted of the following.

- Toolkits for use by key stakeholders (for example, poster templates to create co-branded Railway Guardian advertisements).
- Physical advertising tools (for example, train wraps, Oyster card wallets, contact cards and QR codes directing the public to download the app),

- Frequent posting on social media, including videos promoting the app using current trends and music, with BTP social media accounts having around 165,400 followers and 2.1 million likes on TikTok, 56,000 followers and 1,100 posts on Instagram, and 181,600 followers on Twitter.
- A competition inviting BTP officers and staff to submit ideas for the name of the app, with a £250 voucher prize for the winner decided by the core Railway Guardian team. This was run to raise awareness of the app internally.
- Presenting at large corporate events.

Barriers

BTP notes that there are some barriers to usage of the app.

1. There are areas of poor or no Wi-Fi or signal on certain London Underground lines and in rural areas. Users can still write a report offline, which is then automatically sent when the user gains internet access.
2. The geolocation feature is draining on mobile battery. To mitigate this risk, BTP has implemented Operation Charge – the rollout of phone charging points at major rail hub stations across England, Scotland and Wales.

Enablers for implementation

Chief constable buy-in

Senior staff support for the development of the app and for tackling violence against women and girls as a force priority was critical. Early in the process, the team engaged with the chief constable directly to secure buy-in, making them aware of their aims and the possible risks.

Working with partners

Relationships with stakeholders were seen as important in app development and implementation – particularly collaborating with rail providers who have helped to embed the app in the rail network.

Working with high profile campaigners

Women's safety activist Zan Moon has helped to raise the profile of the bystander campaign and the Railway Guardian app, through active involvement in the development of the campaign and promoting the app.

Outcomes and impact

There has been no formal evaluation of Railway Guardian.

As of June 2023, there had been over 50,000 downloads of the app. Approximately 35,000 of these were by the public, and the rest by BTP and train operating companies.

There have also been:

- 288 text reports since the app's launch in July 2022
- 87 reports of environmental concerns submitted through the app as of February 2023

The app has been featured in several media outlets, including Metro, Evening Standard, Manchester Evening Standard, Police Oracle and Glamour Magazine.

Learning and recommendations

BTP emphasises the importance of the following.

- Promotion of the app through digital channels, as this is where they have seen the most engagement.
- The additional value of officers being able to distribute physical advertisements, as this allows them to engage with the public proactively.
- Having an internal communications strategy to ensure that officers and staff are knowledgeable and enthusiastic about the app. This has included internal briefings and a staff toolkit.
- Ensuring that all relevant teams across the force – such as procurement, legal and IT – have been involved from the beginning of the project and that a single point of contact is allocated for each area.

Copyright

The copyright in this shared practice example is not owned or managed by the College of Policing and is therefore not available for re-use under the terms of the Non-Commercial College Licence. You will need to seek permission from the copyright owner to reproduce their works.

Legal disclaimer

Disclaimer: The views, information or opinions expressed in this shared practice example are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or views of the College of Policing or

the organisations involved.

Tags

Violence against women and girls Information communication technology (ICT) Public safety