



**Health & Safety Commission's (HSC)  
Railway Industry Advisory Committee (RIAC)**

**REPORT OF PUBLIC MEETING - THURSDAY 9 OCTOBER 2003,  
COPTHORNE HOTEL, BIRMINGHAM**

Introduction

Stewart Francis facilitator of this meeting and Chair of the Rail Passengers Council (RPC) welcomed an audience of approx 90 people to RIAC's third public meeting. He opened the meeting by saying that safety on the railways is improving but the public perception is that the railways are not as safe as they could and should be. He posed the question of whether this was a result of media reporting or if it really was the experience of passenger's travelling on the railway?

What is RIAC?

Margaret Burns, Health and Safety Commissioner, and Chair of RIAC, explained RIAC's role was to advise the HSC on railway matters, this included ensuring the Committee represents the public's views when formulating its advice. She welcomed the opportunity the meeting provided to hear rail passenger's experiences of travelling on the railways.

Passenger security – what matters to the public?

June Bridgeman, Soroptimist International explained her organisation had carried out a lot of research to establish what was important to women when they use the railways. Despite the perceived risk of train crashes, the most important thing was passengers wanted to feel personally safe.

A Connex survey found only 1 in 10 people felt safe using their trains at night and other surveys showed 90% of women and girls who had experienced threatening behaviour or actual assault had not reported it. She felt this was a real issue for the rail industry, not only in addressing personal safety, but also in recognising the potential lost revenue represented by these statistics.

The Soroptimists' work concludes that a number of simple actions could be taken to make train stations and trains less intimidating places eg:

- Cleaner platforms and tracks (a member of the audience suggested that specific litter picks should be organised on a regular basis by the station operator) and better lighting and working phones or help points;
- Improved signage and information – passengers' pay less attention to their luggage etc when they are lost or distracted. The way information is presented needs careful thought. Signs can be lost against shop fascias and too much information on them is confusing;



- Coaches should have simple well placed information and good access to the emergency help point;
- Station staff should be visible and available as a source of advice and help; and
- Lines of accountability should be clear, for example, who is responsible for train carriage design, station security and personal security in general. In a fragmented industry with many players this was not clear to the travelling public.

### Crowding on the railways – is it a health and safety issue?

John Cartledge, RPC and London Transport Users Committee, informed the audience that accident data on crowding indicated it was a low safety risk. However, there is considerable public concern about crowding, as evidenced by correspondence and media coverage and questions about health risks were beginning to emerge, eg stress resulting from travelling in crowded trains.

The Hidden report produced following the accident at Clapham, concluded that although crowding was unlikely to be the cause of an accident, the higher the number of passengers, the higher the number of injuries. He also referred to HSE's 1998 report on crowding which concluded seated passengers would be less at risk of injury and while crowding would mitigate against standing passengers being thrown around a carriage, there was a greater risk of head injuries.

John added that the current HSE position on crowding was, while evacuation and crowd management at stations were covered as part of the Railway Safety Case regime, crowding is primarily a passenger comfort and welfare issue and therefore no health and safety justification existed for further legal requirements to deal with the issue. The Strategic Rail Authority's (SRA) view is there is no legal limit on the numbers that can travel on trains and if there was it would be impossible to police. He considered that while this might all be logically based, it did not resolve the major credibility problem with which the industry was faced.

The RPC believed this is an issue the public wants addressed and were keen that it should be researched further. The Railway Safety Standards Board (RSSB) would be leading on this work with the participation of HSE and SRA, as well as London Underground and representative train companies.



Examples of questions and comments from the audience

**Q. Bars and clubs have maximum occupancy levels why can't rail companies do the same (the use of turnstiles was suggested)?**

**Q. If crowding continues then more people will travel by car where the number of accidents is worse.**

**Q. Crowding is a health and safety issue because of the ventilation available.**

**A.** Margaret Burns said the HSE could only regulate if there was a tangible health and safety risk from crowding but at the moment the evidence for introducing law in relation to this does not exist. She also said that to regulate the numbers on trains could potentially mean more expensive and longer journeys and she wondered whether the public would tolerate such an approach. Similarly there were real issues about how passenger levels could realistically be policed. However, she acknowledged it was necessary to investigate further why the public perception was different and what action could be taken to improve passengers' personal security and therefore welcomed HSC/E involvement with the new research sponsored by RSSB.

Margaret also noted that while statistically rail travel is significantly safer than road travel this was not always the public perception.

**Q. Why didn't HSE see it as part of its brief to improve the design of trains?**

**A.** HSE's role is not to tell companies how to run their businesses. Rail companies as any other must assess and manage the risks arising from their business. HSE's role is to provide advice and guidance and take enforcement action where appropriate.

**Q. Why does it take so long to get trains running again following an accident?**

**A.** Companies work with HSE, the British Transport Police (in future the new Rail Industry Accident Board will also have a role) and others to clear accident sites and get services back to normal as quick as possible. However, it was stressed that in such circumstances the sites can potentially be crime scenes and care must be taken to preserve potential evidence.

**Q. How is crowding managed on London Underground?**

**A.** Mike Strezlecki, Safety Manager at LUL and member of RIAC, explained LUL has strict criteria for managing the flow of passengers and for ensuring safety on platforms because of the nature of the underground system. The use of CCTV is extensive throughout the underground system and it is essential in managing crowding and personal security.



## Conclusion

Stewart Francis thanked the speakers and all those attending for their contributions. He said the concerns aired at the meeting raised both big questions relating to how safety is perceived and managed in the rail industry as well as day-to-day concerns about passenger experience of using the railways eg better signage at stations.

Margaret Burns thanked those attending for their views and assured them that their views would inform RIAC's discussions at future meeting.

RIAC Secretariat  
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