



SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL OF SOUTH EAST ENGLAND

Rail Safety and Sorooptimist International

Sorooptimist International is a major women's voluntary organisation with consultative status at the UN and with clubs throughout Britain. It carries out projects to serve the community and contribute to decision-making. Though it looks at issues through women's eyes, its recommendations are intended to benefit all members of the community, men as well as women. Details of its work worldwide can be found on www.sorop.org and its linked web-sites.

The South East England Rail Safety Task Force carried out its first investigation of factors influencing how people felt about rail travel in 1997 (*Rail travellers and personal safety: Women's perspectives*, May 1997). There was some useful activity at national level following that report. However, when the Task Force revisited the topic last year, it found that many of the fundamental problems – in 1997 attributed by some to settling-down of the recently privatised railway – still had not been addressed properly. Indeed some aspects had got worse.

The attached executive summary of the 2002 report sets out the main findings. We urge you to read the full document, which sets out details of what we saw and what young people told us. It can be viewed on, or downloaded in pdf format from, www.soroptimist-gbi-see.org.uk

9th October 2003

Agenda for action

- **Clear leadership:** The Government should make clear that fostering a system-wide approach to passengers' personal safety forms part of the Strategic Rail Authority's leadership role on safer and better railways. National measures to create a safer and more inclusive society should not stop at the station entrance. The role of the Railway Inspectorate and other rail regulatory bodies on personal security standards generally, and in particular for coach interiors, should be clarified urgently.
- **National quality management:** Rail company managers should adopt a collective approach to deliver a system-wide and instantly recognisable "national product" on personal security and information. This should embrace all the matters discussed in this report. Commitment to a safe and friendly environment should be set out in National Rail Standards and Passenger Charters.
- **Station safety and access to help:** Effective staffing should be a key item in franchise awards. The valuable Secure Stations scheme should develop a range of levels of provision as stepping stones to full accreditation. All stations should have good lighting, a telephone and/or help-points with standard markings, and regular inspections. The British Transport Police/Railtrack "Crime Watch" number should be clearly displayed on platforms, coaches and literature. CCTV provision should be coordinated and standards set.
- **Cleaning up track litter:** The Rail Regulator should require urgently from Railtrack[#] and train operating companies an action plan to meet their statutory obligations on track and platform litter. Research to secure speedy development of cleaning equipment and processes, and retrofitting of train sewage collection tanks, should be put in hand.
- **Standard signage and information:** The Railtrack model of standard passenger signage and international pictograms should be adopted throughout the whole railway system on stations, rolling-stock and travel literature. This would assist confident navigation, and reduce stress and vulnerability. Information should be better categorised, advice given on its location and better maps provided. Ground rules should ensure commercial advertising and facilities are not at the expense of stations' function as gateways to the railway system.
- **Coach safety:** Emergency alarm points should be as accessible and visible to all passengers as the communication cords formerly in use. Regulatory bodies should ensure their requirements to display items of safety information do not interact in ways that create a situation of confusion and risk for train passengers. Coach interior designs should be required to meet basic standards that give full weight to personal security and to the differing needs of the elderly, the infirm and those with young children and luggage.

Chapter 8 sets out a full list of our 78 recommendations. These have been discussed over the past few months with a wide range of railway leaders, gurus, regulators, grant-providers and users. Some of them pick up ideas offered by local railway staff. Inevitably in a report such as this we have highlighted things needing attention. But we have been much encouraged by the many initiatives we have seen, and the energy going into further improvement. As enthusiasts for the future of Britain's railways, we welcome the help we received from all, and the further action already begun to carry forward some of our ideas.

[#] *Railtrack plc* has now been acquired by *Network Rail*.

Extract from *Safe and Sure: A quick wins agenda for Britain's Railways* prepared by a Rail Safety Task Force. It was published by Soroptimist International of South East England on 28th October 2002. The full illustrated report can be downloaded in "pdf" format (488k) from www.soroptimist-gbi-see.org.uk,

SAFE AND SURE

A "quick wins" agenda for Britain's railways

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

People want to feel safe and be safe when they travel. Our report looks through women's eyes at some aspects of rail journeys that put passengers at risk and under stress. What most people want is staff on the spot and good information. They also want clean and well-lit surroundings. They are particularly fearful of using some stations after dark.

The report uses grass roots surveys of over 60 stations and of rolling-stock, comparing them with five years ago. It also looks at young people's frightening experiences. Much investment and effort is going into improving the system. Following discussion with a wide range of railway interests and passengers, we suggest both "quick wins" and longer-term action that could without vast expense improve matters and deliver safer and better rail travel for all.

Main weaknesses

- Two thirds of stations inspected showed little or no general improvement compared with 5 years ago although there were welcome and impressive improvements to some.
- CCTV provision on stations and coaches has significantly increased, but remains uncoordinated and of varying quality. It mostly operates as a passive recording device, rather than using its full potential to reduce assaults and disorder.
- Track litter is appalling even at otherwise well-kept stations. No well-run commercial organisation should offer its waiting customers a vista of garbage, weeds and excrement.
- Over half of stations inspected did not display required information items adequately. Basic signage was often poor and general information incoherently presented. Different styles, locations, and presentation across the system, and distracting advertisements, are confusing for travellers.
- Coach safety defects noted in 1997 have still not been put right. Many are being repeated in new stock, in particular poor access to the communication cord and awkward seating.
- Young people who have been victims or have observed frightening incidents on train journeys generally do not report it, but they make less use of rail travel thereafter.
- Responsibility for tackling personal security across the system falls between many stools. Fragmentation of the railways has meant that no central body sees itself in the lead on this basic aspect of passenger safety.