

Tracking crime

The recent brutal murder of London solicitor Tom ap Rhys Pryce near an unstaffed tube station late at night has sparked concern over the safety of passengers who travel on public transport. Carol Jenkins reports on a scheme to reduce fear and cut crime.



Even though Mr ap Rhys Pryce was murdered on his way home from work shortly after leaving Kensal Green tube station, Transport for London (TfL) has acknowledged the rail industry has a duty to work with local authorities and police to make sure the areas around tube and railway stations are safer for passengers to use. Research conducted by the crime reduction charity Crime Concern showed that 47 per cent of women and 21 per cent of men felt unsafe while walking home from a bus or rail/tube station.

Jeroen Weimar, director of transport policing and enforcement for TfL, told a recent conference on reducing crime on public transport: 'People regard the last minute right up until they get home to be part of their journey which means we can no longer afford to wall ourselves off behind the station gates.'

Mr Weimar told delegates that TfL was committed to improving the safety and security of the three million passengers who use the underground each day. Measures taken by the com-



Building safety and security: Sgt Phil Bennett



Credit: Andrew Carruth

pany include paying for nearly 700 British Transport Police officers to police the underground and Docklands Light Railway with another 1,200 officers deployed to the buses and road network. Over 6,000 CCTV cameras have also been installed in London Underground stations. The most contentious issue is the staffing of London Underground and mainline rail stations with a campaign launched by the *Evening Standard* to increase the number of staffed stations in the capital.

Figures released by the British Transport Police (BTP) show that while overall crime on the railway network has fallen by nearly two per cent, violent crime has increased by nearly 12 per cent. The force, which is funded by the rail industry, has implemented a number of high profile policing and targeted operations to reduce crime and it is also encouraging the rail industry to look at the importance of crime prevention through 'design out crime' principles.

The idea behind design out crime is that crime and the fear of crime can be significantly reduced by addressing security at the design stage. It can be applied to housing, schools, commercial premises and car parks as well as rail premises. It was first introduced as an idea more than 30 years ago by the American architect and criminologist Oscar Newman in his book, *Defensible*

Space: People and Design in the Violent City. His book looked in detail at crime in several housing projects in New York. Since his book was published, the idea has been explored by European countries including the UK and also North America.

The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) has established the 'Secured by Design in the UK' initiative supporting the principles of designing out crime. It encourages the building industry to adopt crime prevention measures to assist in reducing the opportunity for crime and the fear of crime, creating a safer and more secure environment. The initiative has the backing of the Home Office and has been drawn up in consultation with the Department of Transport. It gives awards to developers who build developments to Secured by Design standards, including rail operators.

Sgt Phil Bennett is the principal architectural liaison officer (ALOs) for the British Transport Police, a job which sees him liaising with builders and architects employed by the rail industry at an early stage during a rebuild or refurbishment project. His aim is to ensure safety and security is paramount to the overall design of the station. He is one of 400

ALOs based in forces across England and Wales. He explains that using design out crime principles can deter criminals from committing crime and can also help reduce the fear of crime among passengers.

'This whole issue of trying to reduce the fear of crime is an important one because travelling by train is still a very safe way to travel and if you look at the numbers of people who use public transport each day then actual crime is low,' says Sgt Bennett.

'However, the fear of crime is still high and so we need to continue to focus on ways in which we can make people feel safer, particularly during off-peak times when trains and tubes aren't as busy as they are during commuter times.'

Sgt Bennett believes reducing the fear of crime is an important issue for the police service as a whole, not just because it makes people feel safer but also because it encourages the public to come forward and report crime. It is estimated that 80 per cent of rail crime goes unreported.

'Some people don't report crimes because they feel they 'don't really want to get involved' because they are frightened something bad might happen to

them as a consequence. If we succeed in reducing the fear of crime then maybe people will feel more confident about helping us with information about incidents of crime.'

Improving the security of railways and tubes using design out crime principles begins with the exits and entrances. Sgt Bennett advises the industry that exits and entrances should be wide and well lit, with clear signage so that people who don't know the station feel confident about where they are going. It is also important for passengers to be able to see in and out of the station. CCTV at ticket barriers also contributes to an overall sense of safety and security. The two men charged with the murder of Mr Rhys Price were captured on CCTV as they were coming through Kensal Green Station - highlighting how vital it is for cameras to be installed in every station.

Lighting on station concourses and platforms is an important factor. Some of the older stations are often poorly lit, which not only causes anxiety amongst passengers but also provides criminals with opportunities to commit crime. Sgt Bennett points out that even the colour of lighting can have an impact on whether or not people feel safe,

advising the rail industry to use white lighting instead of orange which is often much darker. Platforms should be open plan and not have any corners or recesses that again could lead to crime being committed and increase anxiety among passengers.

An example of how design can influence human behaviour was illustrated recently when a refurbishment was being carried out on one railway station. A number of hoardings were put up in the station which created areas of darkness and narrow alleyways and, as a result, cycle crime rose by a hundred per cent and overall crime by 21 per cent.

Station concourses are prime areas for pickpockets to prey on passengers and so some retail outlets now place plastic clips under tables for passengers to clip their bags onto to avoid them being snatched. Despite this, Sgt Bennett says some retailers are often reluctant to advertise the presence of the clips because they are worried that if they highlight the risks then the fear of crime will increase.

Research has shown that using 'symbolic barriers' such as different coloured paving can help change behaviour and reduce crime. At Euston station, a



blue box has been painted onto the pavement around the cash points to encourage those waiting to use the machines to stand well back of the person in the front of the queue. The idea is to make them feel safer and feel less at risk of a mugging.

Sgt Bennett has recently been involved in advising the rail industry to incorporate design out crime principles into the refurbishment of tube trains to try and make them safer for passengers. As a result of his advice, the rail industry agreed to install glass panels between each carriage-way so that passengers are more visible. Again, this reduces the opportunity for criminals to commit crime and not be seen.

In London, major refurbishments to the rail infrastructure as a result of preparations for the 2012 Olympics will provide opportunities for the industry to incorporate design out crime principles in any new projects. However, Sgt Bennett is adamant that even 'minor refurbishments' provide an opportunity to make our stations safer, reassure passengers and hopefully prevent a repeat of the incident that took the life of Tom ap Rhys Pryce.



Fear of crime

Crime and the fear of crime results in the loss of 20 million bus and rail journeys in Merseyside each year because people are too afraid to travel.

This shocking statistic was revealed by Dr Julian Westwood a TravelSafe policy officer for Merseytravel. Dr Westwood told delegates attending the reducing crime on public transport conference one of the problems was that areas such as railway stations, trains and buses are not considered to be part of the community.

He said: 'There is a tendency for transport to be considered in isolation as an "other" space – the transient element between the places of importance.

'As such it can be forgotten or overlooked in terms of personal security. We need to consider public transport to be 'moving public space' which is every bit as valid and significant to the communities that use it as any other public space.'

The Department of Transport has also raised concerns that crime and disorder on public transport rarely comes to the attention of other agencies or to crime and disorder partnerships. In a review conducted by Crime Concern, crime and the fear of crime on public transport was found to be addressed in only a small number of crime and disorder audits and strategies.

The Department of Transport believes that crime on public transport impacts on the wider community, and community safety initiatives that fail to address crime on public transport aren't effective. It says that any strategy to improve town centre safety, for example, must include measures to reduce crime on public transport. This is particularly important because the nature and scale of crime on public transport reflects the neighbourhood it serves. An unstaffed railway station serving a nearby residential estate where there are few facilities for young people is likely to experience vandalism and graffiti.

The Crime Concern passenger research showed that the quality of the travelling environment has been highlighted by passengers as an important factor influencing fear of crime. Graffiti, vandalism and litter signal to the user that there is poor supervision and lack of control.

The research also reveals:

- 53 per cent of women and 23 per cent of men feel unsafe waiting on a train platform
- 44 per cent of women and 19 per cent of men feel unsafe waiting at a bus stop
- Five per cent of passengers report being threatened with violence
- Four per cent of passengers report being the victim of theft
- 11 per cent passengers report being stared at in a hostile or threatening way
- 12 per cent of passengers report being deliberately pushed

