Understanding and managing anti-social behaviour on public transport through value change: The considerate travel campaign ☆

Stephen Moore *

Department of Social Work and Social Policy, Anglia Ruskin University, East Rd., Cambridge CB1 1PT, UK

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

This article explores anti-social behaviour on public transport, regarded as a major problem by most transport authorities in Britain. It has been estimated that a passenger increase of more than 11.5% in Britain could be achieved if public concerns over anti-social behaviour could be allayed. The article starts by noting that combating anti-social behaviour has generally been seen as the remit of police and enforcement officers. However, research carried out for Transport for London indicates that for the majority of the travelling public, the forms of anti-social behaviour, which concerns them is more likely to be low-level behaviour, ranging from groups of young people behaving boisterously to people eating food or talking loudly on mobile phones.

Using the 'problem solving approach' structure, the article then examines the process by which Transport for London has partially 'uncoupled' anti-social behaviour from criminal activities and then treated the two issues as related but distinct. As a result, a series of policing and enforcement initiatives have been introduced to prevent crime, but a different, unique approach has been taken towards controlling anti-social behaviour. Rather than being tackled as a form of low level criminality, anti-social behaviour is viewed as the outcome of clashing values about appropriate behaviour on public transport. Therefore, the answer to anti-social behaviour lies in minimising these values clashes, rather than concentrating on enforcement against perpetrators. The article describes the resulting large-scale media campaign—the Considerate Traveller Campaign, which was launched in 2008 with the aim of increasing tolerance and consideration for others.

The article concludes with a summary of the early evaluation of the campaign, which suggests that it is having some positive effect in changing values and argues that in the longer run, it may be possible to amend the behaviour on public transport without relying so heavily on enforcement measures.

1. Introduction: public transport and anti-social behaviour

Studies in both England (DfT 2008) and Scotland (Granville and Campbell-Jack, 2005) indicate that the second biggest concern to travellers after over-crowding, is anti-social behaviour.

In England over 32% of respondents expressed concern over the behaviour of young people on buses and 20% on trains, with 22% of travellers claiming to have been the victim of one or more incident of "anti-social behaviour or crime" in the previous 12 months and a further 76% claim to have witnessed examples of "anti-social behaviour or crime" on public transport. Although the statistics are not directly comparable, it is noticeable that these levels of concern over anti-social behaviour on public transport are considerably higher than the figures given in the British Crime Survey for anti-social behaviour in general. The BCS found that 16% of people over 16 expressed concerns about high levels of anti-social behaviour (Kershaw et al., 2008)

This concern over anti-social behaviour carries considerable importance for public transport, as according to the Department for Transport, there could be an increase of 11.5% in public transport use in England if potential passengers felt more secure (Department for Transport (DfT), 2008a) and a 13% increase in Scotland (Granville and Campbell-Jack, 2005). Given the economic and environmental advantages of such an increase in public transport use (Quinet and Vickerman, 2004) and the associated decrease in private car use, it is not surprising that Passenger Transport Executives and Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships[1] in urban areas have seen anti-social behaviour

[1] Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships are multi-agency organisations, which have the responsibility for coordinating crime reduction initiatives in England.

and crime on public transport as an important issue and one which deserves considerable policy focus.

The article starts by noting that combating anti-social behaviour has generally been seen as the remit of police and enforcement officers. However, research carried out for Transport for London indicates that for the majority of the travelling public, the forms of anti-social behaviour, which concerns them is more likely to be low-level behaviour, ranging from groups of young people behaving boisterously to people eating food or talking loudly on mobile phones.

Using the 'problem solving approach' structure, the article then examines the process by which Transport for London has partially 'uncoupled' anti-social behaviour from criminal activities and then treated the two issues as related but distinct. As a result, a series of policing and enforcement initiatives have been introduced to prevent crime, but a different, unique approach has been taken towards controlling anti-social behaviour. Rather than being tackled as a form of low level criminality, anti-social behaviour is viewed as the outcome of clashing values about appropriate behaviour on public transport. Therefore, the answer to anti-social behaviour lies in minimising these values clashes, rather than concentrating on enforcement against perpetrators. The article describes the resulting large-scale media campaign – the Considerate Traveller Campaign, which was launched in 2008 with the aim of increasing tolerance and consideration for others.

The article concludes with a summary of the early evaluation of the campaign, which suggests that it is having some positive effect in changing values and argues that in the longer run, it may be possible to amend behaviour on public transport without relying so heavily on enforcement measures.

Although this paper discusses means of combating anti-social behaviour on public transport in England, it is worth noting that problems of crime and anti-social behaviour, and how to combat them have been widely discussed in countries with advanced public transport systems. Examples of published research in the area include the Kooi (2007), Welsh et al. (2009), Loukaitou-Sideris et al. (2002), Levine et al. (1986), LaVigne (1997), Benjamin et al. (1994), Clarke (1996,1997)—all in the USA; Van Andel (1989) in The Netherlands; Oliver Page and Moeketsi (2000), Kruger and Landman (2007) in South Africa; Gaylord and Galliher (1991) in Hong Kong; Easteal and Wilson (1991) in Australia.

2. What is anti-social behaviour?

The Crime and Disorder Act (1998) provides the legal definition of anti-social behaviour in England and Wales, defining it as acting "in a manner that caused or was likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to one or more persons not of the same household" (CDA, 1998, Section 1 (1a)).

This definition is slightly problematic in that it does not actually define any specific act as illegal, rather it states that the offence lies in the way that the 'victim' perceives particular actions and what consequences these actions hold for the victim. Thus whatever behaviour is perceived to cause alarm or distress to a person is potentially anti-social behaviour. This flexible definition has led to considerable debate in England as to how best to decide what particular actions can be considered anti-social (Chakrabarti, 2006) and a number of different definitions have been suggested or used (Burney, 2009; Millie and Jacobson, 2005; Flint, 2006; Millie, 2008)

This has led to various attempts to categorise the sorts of actions which might be considered as anti-social. Probably the best known is that suggested by Harradine et al. (2004) which was devised as guidance for local government authorities in England and Wales.

This groups anti-social behaviour into four categories—(i) misuse of public space, (ii) disregard for community/personal well-being (iii) acts directed at people and (iv) environmental damage, and then within these four categories a further 17 sub-categories of anti-social actions which contain 65 specific actions are considered as 'anti-social behaviour'.

It is not the intention here to engage in an exhaustive discussion on the definition of anti-social behaviour, merely to indicate that there is some flexibility or, at worst, confusion over exactly what anti-social behaviour is and that anti-social behaviour can be considered a generic term to cover a wide range of behaviour which creates different levels of concern for different groups in varying circumstances. Indeed, the British government's own Respect Website (which gives advice on combating anti-social behaviour) states that:

> "*The term anti-social behaviour covers a wide range of selfish and unacceptable activity that can blight the quality of community life. Terms such as 'nuisance', 'disorder' and 'harassment' are also used to describe some of this behaviour.*"
> (*Home Office Respect Website*)

What academics do agree on is that what is considered as anti-social will vary by individual or group and that the perception of these actions can only be understood within the framework of the particular set of values of the group or neighbourhood in which the acts are performed (Flatley et al., 2008).

Somewhat surprisingly, given the high profile of anti-social behaviour on public transport, there have been very few attempts to explore the meaning for travellers within the specific context of public transport (Department for Transport (DfT), 2008b; Granville and Campbell-Jack, 2005).

3. Anti-social behaviour on London transport

Transport for London regularly carries out research on passenger concerns, employing market research companies to engage in a range of surveys using both quantitative and qualitative methodology. These include telephone surveys, online panel surveys, focus groups, in-depth interviews and observational studies. This research suggests that anti-social behaviour in general is regarded as a significant problem by 65% of all Londoners and that a substantial amount of this anti-social behaviour is experienced on, or accessing, public transport, with 29% of this anti-social behaviour experienced on buses, 14% on the London Underground System and a further 13% at bus stops (Transport for London, 2008).

This high level of perceived anti-social behaviour reflects similar problems experienced throughout England and Wales. A Department for Transport study in 2008 concluded that 22% of travellers in England and Wales claim to have been a victim of one or more incidents of "anti-social behaviour or crime" on public transport in the previous year and a further 76% claim to have witnessed "anti-social behaviour or crime" (Department for Transport, 2008b). In Scotland, approximately 77% of travellers claimed to have experienced at least one example of anti-social behaviour ever. Perhaps, more usefully, approximately 26% claimed to have experienced some form of anti-social behaviour in the previous four weeks (Granville and Campbell-Jack, 2005).

3.1. Tackling anti-social behaviour and crime on public transport in London

It was within this context that Transport for London set out to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour on public transport.