

**Metropolitan Police Hillingdon Safer Transport Team
Goldstein POP Awards entry**

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INTRODUCTION

The bus routes 697 and 698 which are run by London United Buses from Hounslow garage are primarily school buses which serve a number of schools on their route through Hillingdon Borough. There are currently 8 of these buses that begin their route at The Douay Martyrs School on Long Lane Hillingdon and from here pick up pupils at Swakeleys, Abbottsfield and Hewens College before travelling through Hayes Town and then onto West Drayton.

Historically there had been problems with the behaviour of pupils on these buses including acts of criminal damage and anti social behavior as well as minor assaults. These problems were aggravated as there was tensions between pupils from differing schools as they boarded the buses at various stages.

Drivers too had reported that they felt vulnerable and ineffective in being able to deal with the poor behavior of the pupils.

The buses were also available for members of the public to use and consequently there had been complaints from these passengers concerning the behavior of pupils.

The challenge for Hillingdon STT was to come up with an effective and sustainable solution to what had almost become an acceptable, unacceptable level of misbehaviour on the buses.

SCANNING

This problem was initially recognised in early 2010 following complaints from drivers through their managers at London Utd Buses and members of the public who use the bus transport network at transport user groups. Managers had attended the Hillingdon STT Transport Users Group meeting and aired their concerns regarding the level of misbehavior on the buses. At this time there was very little data to back up the claims either from crime reporting or Driver Incident Reports. However, the bus company felt strongly about this and therefore STT supervisors initiated further research to ascertain if there actually was an issue. Officers initially made contact with Douay Martyrs School to see if they had any concerns about their pupils on the buses and it became apparent that incidents were reported to the school but they were dealt with internally as they were unsure of the responsibilities of the STT. This raised the issue of under reporting of offences by the drivers and lack of reporting to police by the school. The school raised issues particularly around the state of the area the buses stopped outside the school and felt this led to agitated pupils boarding the buses.

The school also raised the issue of the fact that pupils from other schools boarded the buses at various stages on the route. This had led to incidents between pupils from the opposing schools and in particular Douays, Abbottsfield and Hewens College. Officers also identified that there were ten (10) drivers who regularly drove the school bus route.

Research of Police indices showed that there were indeed CAD related incidents to school bus routes and one in particular stood out as there had been a fight on the Uxbridge Rd near Park Rd, between pupils who had spilled of a route 698 bus and who it transpired had come from local schools. 2 arrests were made for assault and one pupil was temporarily hospitalised.

Driver Incident Reports were surprisingly low on the routes. However, this was clarified by the drivers who stated they were reluctant to Code red incidents as they felt that because they were driving school buses the calls would not be taken seriously. Following research, Hillingdon STT focused on Youth ASB on the buses but specifically route 698 as this was causing the drivers public and police most concern.

The STT were aware they needed more information to get a clearer picture of the issues and so officers were posted to Douay Martyrs on a daily basis and reported their findings.

They noticed that there was something of a mêlée at 3pm when pupils left school. Teachers were on hand to direct pupils; however, there were no restrictions on the numbers of pupils that boarded each bus which caused overcrowding and agitation among the pupils. The area outside the school where the buses stopped had been a grassed area, but since pupils boarded the bus at this location it had become a muddy area which again was causing the pupils to be in a less than generous frame of mind as they boarded the buses. Officers spoke with pupils about their experiences on their way to and from school many of whom expressed concerns about bullying, shouting, swearing, and minor damage being caused to the buses and tension between them and pupils from other schools

ANALYSIS

Increased reporting from drivers and use of Code Red, Driver Incident Reports and improved communications with the schools enable the STT to increase their knowledge of the extent of the offences. It appeared to officers that these high levels of ASB criminality had gone unchecked and had now become the norm and accepted way of behaving on the routes.

The victims of this ASB were mainly other school pupils and members of the public traveling on the bus network, who got caught up in the ASB by virtue of being in the wrong place at the wrong time - i.e. school leaving time. Drivers were also victims by virtue of being exposed to this ASB on a daily basis. However, we managed this issue in a positive manner as they were a main source of information. Officers also noticed that parents of younger children who were pupils at local Primary schools, including St Bernadette's and Oak Farm Junior school in Long Lane boarded the bus and were reluctant to pass down the bus. When spoken to most stated that they felt intimidated by the volume and behavior of the older pupils

The offenders were not known at the start of this process but as officers became familiar with names and faces of school pupils using and abusing the bus system, they were able to identify ring leaders and those causing trouble. It appeared to officers that some pupils felt as if they were invincible in this environment, viewing it as their own in which they could do as they please, using the crowds of other passengers to hide their identity.

The location of the main source of ASB appeared to be the points along the route where pupils of Douay's Martyrs School, Abbotsfield and Hewens college all came together on the bus. The area outside Douay's school was also a point of conflict as it turned into a mud patch during the autumn and winter months encouraging the pupils to not use it resulting in them spilling onto the road.

The times that these incidents were occurring was made clear by analysis of previous DIR's as well as officers own observations. Offences were taking place mainly after school on the way home when pupils were high spirited.

It was now clear that to achieve success in this matter we would have to substantially increase the confidence of the 8 drivers who regularly drove the buses. This was to be measured by surveying them some time later in the year. Pupil confidence would also have to have been raised as well as an acceptance by pupils that the current levels of ASB and criminality were unacceptable and they needed to moderate their behavior. Analysis of ASB letters and TfL referrals would give a clear indication of whether the responses to the issues were working.

RESPONSE

The initial response to deal with the issues was to post the same officers to police the route every day. This was an ice breaker and calculated to build relationships with the teachers, the drivers and the pupils. It was also to build the officers awareness of the problem and to recognize names and faces of ring leaders. During this initial period until February 2011 approximately 60 ASB First Instance warning letters were issued to pupils on these routes as well as two 2nd warning and referrals. One of the referrals was for a pupil who had been arrested and dealt with through the Criminal Justice system for assault and Public order offences after he set alight a female pupils' hair whilst traveling to school on the bus. It had now become clear that to achieve success in this matter we would have to substantially increase the confidence of the 8 drivers who regularly drove the buses. This was to be measured by surveying them some time later in the year. Pupil confidence would also have to have been raised as well as an acceptance by pupils that the current levels of ASB and criminality were unacceptable and they needed to moderate their behavior. Analysis of ASB letters and TfL referrals would give a clear indication of whether the responses to the issues were working. They will inevitably lead to a respect that will induce behavior between the two parties that is acceptable to both. Other perceived "Quick wins" were investigated. The removal of the bus stop in Long lane outside a parade of shops was sought. Following consultation however, this was decided against after it was identified that members of the public had used this bus stop to catch the bus, if only on an ad hoc basis.

Pupils from Douay's constantly got off the bus at this parade to go to the shops and then attempted to catch later buses. This meant that early buses were travelling light after only 1 stop and later buses were becoming overcrowded after only 1 stop. An increase in the bus numbers was sought in order to relieve some of the overcrowding but this was initially refused on a financial basis.

Once officers had started to build solid links with the school and bus company they started to try and tackle the underlying problems to the ASB. Officers started to staff the bus doorways as pupils got on and count the number of pupils getting on, insisting, after agreement with the drivers that the numbers should be limited to 88, the capacity of the bus. There was some initial resistance from school staff who saw this as obstructive in their mission to move the children away from the school and onto the buses as soon as possible. A meeting with senior staff remedied this position when it was pointed out that overloading the buses was not only dangerous but illegal.

We next looked at poor state of the grassed area outside the school. An alternative stopping area was sought but this was dismissed due to the design of Long Lane in the immediate vicinity of the school. In the winter months pupils were being forced into the road in front and behind the buses whilst boarding due to the mud. This produced an obvious risk to pupils and although not related to the sighting of the buses there had been 2 RTC's involving pupils in Long Lane in recent months. The London Borough of Hillingdon School Travel Plan and Road Safety Team (STP and RST) were approached with a view to having the area outside the school paved. The area was surveyed and the council agreed to pay for paving the area to provide a suitable bus stand for the school. This work was carried out in early 2011 and has proved a major success. Pupils no longer need to stand in the roadway in the winter months to avoid the muddy conditions.

Officers dealing with the pupils on a day to day basis had made significant inroads into their relationship with the pupils. However, they felt that more education on the consequences of Zip card removal because of breaches of the Behavior Code, together with input on Road Safety Awareness, would benefit the overall aim of reducing ASB. A meeting was called with senior school staff and involving LBH STP and RST, TfL's Safety and Citizenship team (S &C team) and Hillingdon STT. A presentation during assemblies for years 7, 8 and 9, (11 - 13 years old), was proposed by the STT. This was to include a Zip removal message and Road safety strand. Initial concerns from the TfL S &C team were allayed when it was explained that the content would only support the message being delivered by them as they had done a year earlier at Douay's. LBH RST came up with the idea of using the "Ghost street" video as the main thrust of the road safety strand. London Fire Brigade were approached about incorporating an Arson awareness section to the presentation and they agreed to deliver on the dangers of fire's on buses.

It was agreed that presentation would go ahead in the autumn 2011 term for years 7, 8 and 9 who had previously been identified as the main protagonists.

STT officers then put together a comprehensive presentation. They decided they wanted it to have an inclusive element for the pupils, so they sought the assistance of a make up artist from a local theatre as well as drama pupils from Douay's school. A fee was negotiated and the Local authority agreed to pick up the bill for the first 3 presentations. During the Road safety element, pupils made up as road collision victims appeared in front of the audience to great effect. Reassurance around the role of the STT on the buses was also pressed home offering those who were victims a friendly face to confide in should they subjected to ASB or be a victim of crime on the buses.

The presentations were then offered to Abbotsfield school who readily accepted and in November 2011 again years 7, 8 and 9 were presented to. Abbotsfield were keen to reinforce the learning, especially around the Zip Removal issues and suggested a poster competition. This was deemed an excellent way to back up the work done and so the school organized this over the Christmas break. An application to the TfL STIG fund was made to assist with prizes for the competition as well as further payments to the make up artist for future presentations in the Borough. This was agreed and £500 was awarded.

The competition was judged by the Hillingdon Borough Mayor and the winning entry incorporated the slogan "A Bus is NOT a youth club". LBH have agreed that this will now be displayed on over 70 borough public notice boards as well as being printed in the free "Hillingdon People" which is delivered to every home in the borough.

In Douay's school the pupils are reinforcing their learning by designing and producing a suggestion/complaint box in the shape of a bus that will let pupils anonymously raise concerns they have about bus travel with the local STT. It has also been agreed to hold an interactive computer based quiz for pupils at Douay's focusing on the content of the presentations. This is due to take place during the Summer Term.

ASSESSMENT

At the outset, success in this project probably looked a little different from what success was to look like a couple of months ago. Initially, we were certainly looking for a significant reduction in the number of reported criminal acts relating to the bus routes along with feedback from drivers about their perceptions of how safe they felt on the route.

As officers started to patrol the routes on a regular basis the number of first instance ASB warning letters began to rise and therefore it was obvious that a reduction in the number of letters issued due to an improvement in the behavior was required. This would then lead to an increase in driver confidence.

The increase and then steady output of warning letters confirmed the growing belief that the behavior of the pupils was at this point only being reacted to and the underlying reasons were not at this stage being tackled effectively. There was a realisation that re education of the pupils was needed to stem the levels of ASB.

Following the presentations there was a marked improvement in the behaviour. From September 2011 till Feb 2012 there had been only 6 warning letters issued compared to 33 over the same period the previous year and 27 over the 5 month school period prior to Sept 2011. Also there has only been 1 reported crime on these routes during this period. During this time Policing tactics had remained the same as previous, therefore this reduction was due to the increased awareness of pupils of STT's, their role and the consequences of breaches of the behaviour code.

Feedback was also sought from drivers during regular "Bus stand briefings" outside the school as they waited for the pupils to emerge. Drivers were briefed on the work being carried out by the STT and "Good news" regarding reduced levels of criminality as well as lower levels of ASB. All drivers on the routes reported a marked improvement in the behaviour. One remarked "Since your work the kids don't stand up and fight upstairs and they are all now carrying their oyster cards".

Feedback was also sought after each of the presentations in the form of feedback sheets. It was obvious from the comments that the vast majority of pupils had benefited from them. Comments such as "There is less messing about now", "I am now aware of the consequences" and "I am more aware of the surroundings when I am on the bus now" were common and showed the positive impact of the work. Similar comments were also received from Abbottsfield school.

The poster campaign was seen as a massive success and in itself was positive feedback for the work carried out and an article in the local newspaper supported the positive aspects of not only the work of the STT but also of the pupils in embracing the message being delivered.

It is now envisaged that the presentation should be carried forward and delivered to more schools on the Borough especially those schools that have an impact on the STT JTAG priorities. It is adaptable and can easily be tweaked with more emphasis on whichever area of bus travel is relevant for any particular school. With this in mind we have now instigated meetings with Barnhill school, on Yeading Lane, Hayes with a view to presenting to their years 7, 8 and 9 in the near future. This will be in support of a Hillingdon JTAG priority, ABS on the route 140, which services the school.