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Security brings satisfaction and customers

Insecurity and the sense of personal insecurity in particular is a growing social concern. It is widely felt in public transport as well.

Research in Finland into the current status of security and its impact on public transport was only initiated in the 2000s. In light of the results to date, the issue is one of significant concern in larger urban areas and in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area (HMA) in particular. Social insecurity and a sense of personal insecurity impact on the willingness of both existing and potential public transport customers to use public transport. Insecurity also adversely impacts on the wellbeing at work of public transport employees, which manifests as employees changing shifts, assignments or even jobs. Insecurity on the whole causes the public transport system quite substantial damage each year in the form of higher costs and lost revenue.

Security is a fundamental right of all citizens as much as the right of freedom of religion or speech. Nonetheless, insecurity has grown into a wide-ranging social and in fact global issue that is being addressed the world over.

Insecurity and the sense of personal insecurity in particular is a familiar phenomenon also in public transport these days, one which those it concerns – public transport customers and employees – are best acquainted with. The issue has been examined also through public transport studies in the HMA in autumn 2005 and in other large and mid-sized Finnish cities in spring 2006.

These studies have examined the state of security in public transport and charted and analysed factors causing insecurity and a sense of personal insecurity throughout the journey chain. The studies have also assessed the impacts of insecurity on travel behaviour in terms of choice of transport mode, travel frequency and time of travel. In addition to passenger perspectives, the studies have also examined public transport employees' views and experiences of insecurity.

Security in public transport

The public transport experience must be pleasant for passengers, and one of the fundamental factors underlying pleasant travel is overall security. Passengers must feel secure at all stages of the journey: on the vehicles, during waits and transfers and travelling to and from stops and stations. The security of the entire journey chain is vital, as passengers perceive their journey only as safe as the least safe part of it. The various actors in the public transport system must examine possible improvements to each stage of the journey while taking into consideration that focus on one element at the expense of others is not sufficient to guarantee passengers' sense of personal security throughout the entire journey.

The effect of various factors on perceived insecurity must be identified if we are to foster security. These effects have been studied by the Department for Transport in the United Kingdom (2004a), among

others. According to studies, time of day is the greatest individual factor increasing the sense of insecurity: both men and women feel noticeably less safe in public transport after dark. The difference in the perceptions of young people is especially marked: perceived insecurity is many times higher after dark than during daylight hours. Women and older persons felt less secure and more fearful than men and younger persons.

Perceived insecurity varies between transport modes. Studies show that buses are perceived as the safest form of public transport both in travelling and while waiting at stops or stations, while the metro is perceived as the most unsafe. Perceived insecurity also varies at different stages of the journey chain; greatest insecurity is experienced when walking to and from stations and at bus stops and rail stations. The actual travel on public transport is perceived as more secure. (DfT 2004a, Alm & Lindberg 2000)

Passengers feel particularly insecure in secluded places (bus stops, train stations), where there are no passers-by, nearby shops or other potential sources of assistance, should problems arise. Travel in an unfamiliar environment causes passengers greater anxiety than travel on a familiar public transport route. Inaccurate or incorrect information at e.g. stations and stops further feeds such anxiety. Poor lighting also plays a role. The presence of litter and graffiti give the impression of a poorly maintained and unattended environment with a higher risk of crime and harassment. The same impact comes from a lack of personnel, while the presence of other passengers creates a general sense of security although e.g. groups of young people and intoxicated persons have the opposite effect (DFT 2004a)

In addition to the above mentioned factors, personal experiences also impact on personal sense of security. Persons who themselves have been subjected to violence or harassment in public transport, or who know someone who has, experience greater insecurity. (Alm & Lindberg 2000)

Sense of security is not always proportionate to actual risk, however. In recent years, the fear of violence has in fact increased more than the risk of being subjected to violence. In the current climate, the fear of crime may well be considered a factor undermining personal wellbeing and one that must be taken into consideration regardless of the link between the fear and the actual risk. Incidents and their media coverage affect the sense of insecurity. People do not assess risks based on calculations but rather on available information, which is why the media contribute to the experience of insecurity by conveying information about accidents and crime. The impact of the media on sense of insecurity

has been researched by e.g. Alm & Lindberg (2000), who discovered a link between the media and risk perceived in public transport. Respondents in the study were divided into those who recollected fewer than four incidents of accidents or violence reported in the media per transport mode and those who recollected four or more such incidents. The study concluded that respondents recalling fewer than four incidents perceived the risks experienced as smaller than the comparison group.

Several international studies highlight that attitudes towards safety vary greatly at different times, on different stretches of the journey and among different groups of passengers. People avoid travelling alone in case of crime and because of fear of crime, choose seating close to the driver or avoid certain places. Personal security is also one of the many factors impacting on choice of transport mode. Fear results in public transport being shunned at certain times and in certain areas, or not used at all. Studies show the fear of crime and harassment has a marked impact on the willingness of potential public transport customers to use public transport and also reduces public transport use among existing customers. There is thus also a financial dimension to improvements in the personal security of passengers

Insecurity in public transport in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area

A survey conducted in public transport in the HMA clearly shows that insecurity and the sense of insecurity are perceived as a real problem among public transport passengers and personnel alike. Public transport in the HMA carries some 600,000 passengers daily and approximately three percent of them have been subjected to violence either aboard a public transport vehicle or at a stop or station within the past year. This translates into nearly 20,000 customers annually suffering some degree of violence on public transport. As many as 47 percent report having been harassed on a public transport vehicle or at a stop or station. Nearly 300,000 public transport customers have thus been personally subjected to harassment.

A comparison of the results of the current passenger survey with those of a similar survey conducted on commuter trains in 2002 shows a clear increase in harassment both at stations and on trains. The proportion of those who have been harassed has risen by an average of ten percent over three years and now stands at 27 percent at stations and 39 percent on commuter trains. Passengers' personal experiences of violence
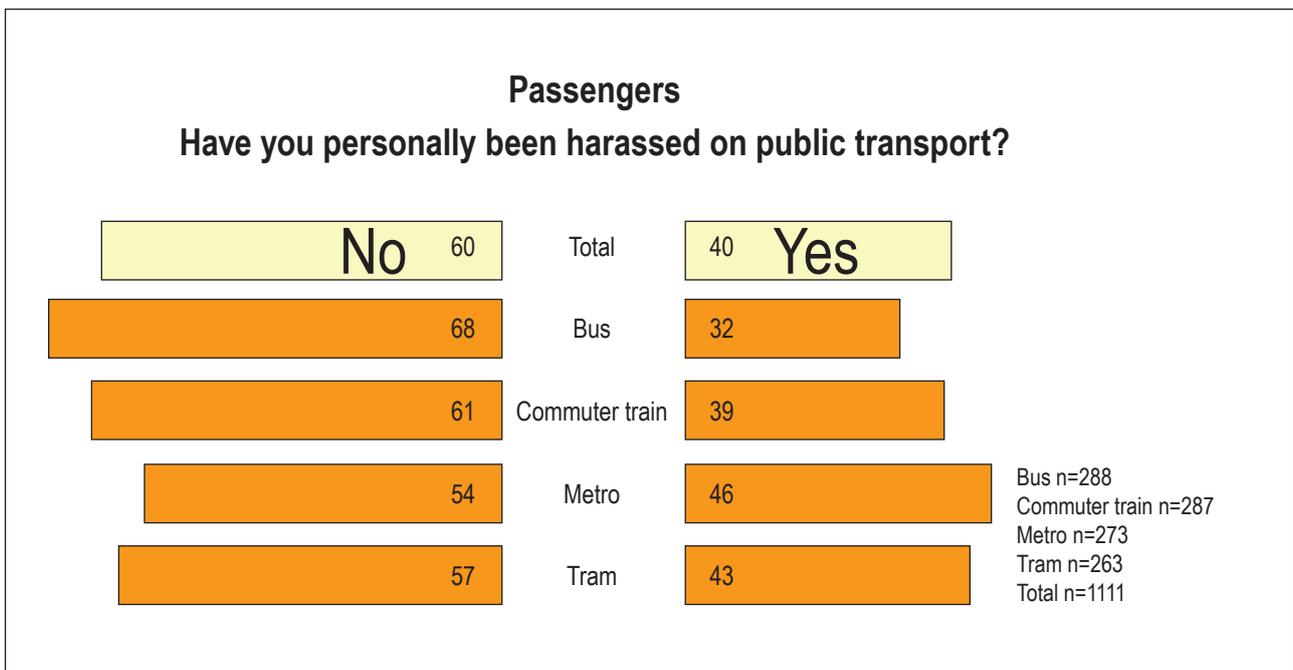
Passengers

Have you personally been harassed on public transport?

No 60	Total	40 Yes
68	Bus	32
61	Commuter train	39
54	Metro	46
57	Tram	43

Bus n=288
Commuter train n=287
Metro n=273
Tram n=263
Total n=1111

Figure 7–1. Passengers' personal experiences of harassment in public transport vehicles

have on the whole held steady at 2002 levels.

A comparison with the 2002 results with regard to commuter train personnel shows a similar yet slightly stronger trend, with the number of those having experienced violence on the rise in particular. Deteriorating security is also quite clearly manifest in the reactions of personnel. While in 2002 only 0.5 percent of employees switched from difficult shifts to more peaceful ones, the number has now risen by a factor of ten. Likewise, the proportion of those who had considered changing assignments or even jobs because of insecurity has seen a radical increase from 12 percent in 2002 to the current 29 percent. Overall, public transport employees consider insecurity to be a serious problem and hold even more critical views of the matter than public transport customers.

Despite increased insecurity in HMA public transport, the fundamentals impacting on security are in place. Passengers in daily commuter traffic in particular find the security of public transport excellent and the basic conditions for pleasant travel are in order. Concerns heighten after dark, towards the weekend and with the increased presence of alcohol and intoxicated persons in public transport. The level of perceived security falls from excellent to only fair in the evenings while on weekends security is even rated as poor. Similar views are expressed both by passengers and personnel.

Security is like putting money in the bank

Insecurity and a sense of personal insecurity impact on both travel comfort and travel behaviour, reducing the travel willingness of existing and potential customers alike. Surveys of existing public transport customers and all HMA residents differ to a surprising degree: households are clearly more concerned about security than existing customers. Of current customers, 14 percent reported having cut back on their use of public transport because of increased insecurity, while the corresponding proportion of household respondents was 27 percent. On the other hand, 24 percent of current customers report their use of public transport might increase if they were better able to rely on the security of travel. The corresponding figure for average residents was 35 percent.

The estimates of impacts derived from the empirical survey correspond rather well to results obtained in international studies. In the UK Department for Transport (DfT) survey "Personal Security on Public Transport: Guidelines for Operators", 22 percent of respondents stated they "would make more journeys if measures for enhancing personal security were introduced." Forty percent of these journeys would be for evening social or leisure purposes. Another DfT study, "Perceptions of Safety from Crime on Public
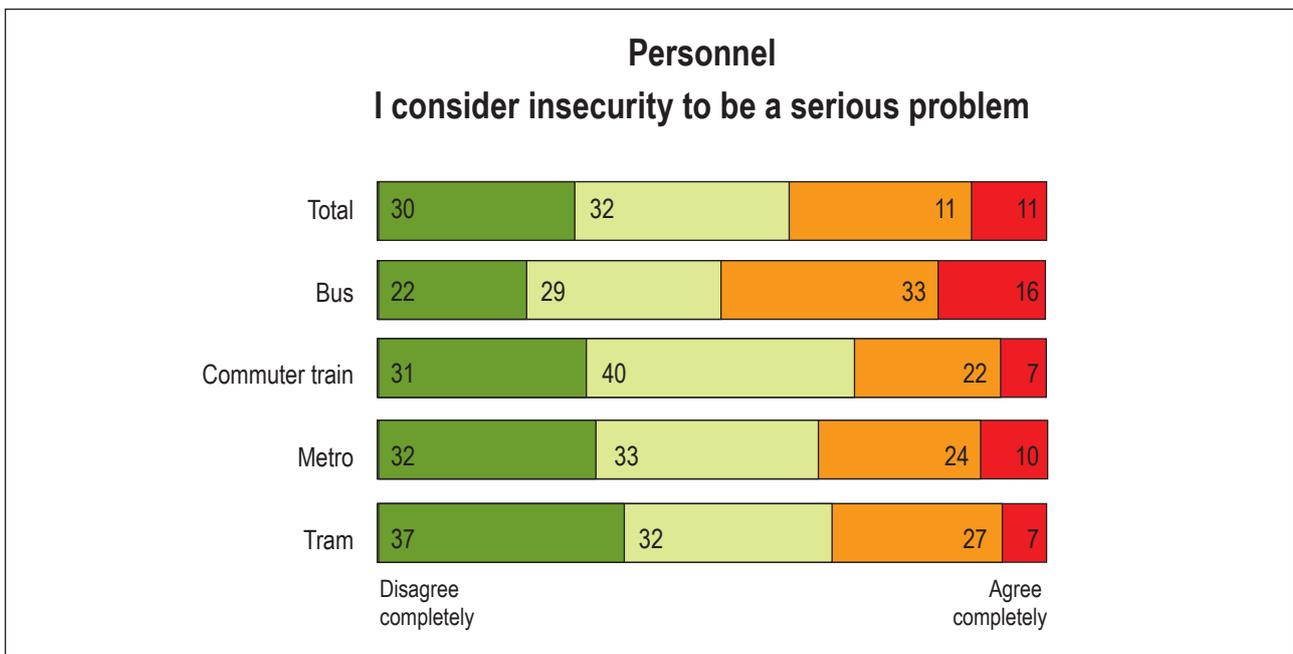
Personnel
I consider insecurity to be a serious problem

Total	30	32	11	11
Bus	22	29	33	16
Commuter train	31	40	22	7
Metro	32	33	24	10
Tram	37	32	27	7

Disagree completely — Agree completely

Figure 7–2. Views of personnel on the seriousness of the insecurity issue in public transport

Transport", suggests that measures to enhance personal security would increase trips on public transport by approximately 11 percent.

Since a total of some 360 million journeys are taken on public transport each year in the HMA, enhanced security could deliver quite substantial financial benefits. A five-percent increase in the number of journeys translates into 18 million journeys each year, while an increase of even one percent means 3.6 million journeys more per year.

The effects of insecurity on personnel largely have to do with the meaningfulness of work and their well-being at work. The mind tends to dwell on experiences of harassment and violence, which gives rise to anxiety. The majority (62%) of public transport employees consider the insecurity of public transport to be serious issue. Thirty-five percent prefer not to work on weekday evenings because of insecurity while the figure for late-night traffic at weekends climbs to 46 percent. Roughly a quarter of public transport employees have thought about changing jobs or assignments because of insecurity. On the practical level, insecurity manifests as employee churn and sick leaves, which both result in higher costs for the entire system.

Even when conservatively estimated, insecurity and the sense of personal insecurity on the whole give rise to annual expenditure of several million euros in the public transport system, which is naturally also felt by public transport customers. In addition to financial considerations, insecurity also impacts on the stand-

ard of service in public transport which in one way or another is vital to a significant proportion of urban dwellers.

Much to do but off to a promising start

The results of the personal security surveys justify characterising the situation as a problem calling for comprehensive action. International experiences have shown that any measures taken require extensive cooperation between the various actors. Action by individual players may not be sufficient to address the issue.

The development proposals put forward in the study may be described as focusing on co-operation, strategy and procedures. The sector is in sore need of common procedures and accordingly, several development proposals concern the harmonisation and standardisation of procedures. The key issue is to integrate security aspects into existing planning systems, which requires that the matter be perceived, acknowledged and cascaded down into daily operations.

The number and scope of proposed measures is already rather extensive (Forsblom M. & Happonen H. 2005 and 2006). Some have already been successfully rolled out and the feedback received on them has been quite encouraging.

A campaign of zero tolerance was initiated in HMA public transport in spring 2006 to clamp down on the drinking, smoking and fare dodging rampant especially

at weekends. Participating in the campaign were commuter train operator VR, Helsinki City Transport HKL, Helsinki Metropolitan Area Council YTV, the police, the Finnish Rail Administration and the cities of Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa. A key notion in the zero tolerance campaign was to prohibit all consumption of alcohol and harassment of other passengers in public transport vehicles and stations. Ticket inspections were stepped up for the duration of the campaign and security patrols increased.

The campaign results already on the first few weekends proved the effort was not in vain; some 300 troublemakers were removed from commuter trains and more than 200 from metro trains. The number of cautions and penalty fares issued ran into several hundreds. Over the five first months of the campaign, commuter train employees were called on to intervene on 1,800 trains. Over 1,600 of these incidents involved drinking and the remaining 200 other types of anti-social behaviour. Passengers causing incidents were removed from trains on 2,300 occasions. Intensified ticket inspections conducted over the same period resulted in over 5,400 passengers being fined for travelling without a ticket. Security personnel guarding commuter trains and stations also reported that the zero tolerance policy had a definite impact. Security patrols had removed troublemakers from trains on 1,300 occasions and in all, patrols had intervened in some 18,600 incidents of anti-social behaviour on trains and at stations over the five-month period. The zero tolerance

> *"I've personally been involved in several scuffles in my 20 years. Had a tooth knocked out with a bottle, my nose bloodied, a 7-cm gash on the top of my head with arterial bleeding, been punched in the face, not to mention being called names and having people threaten to kill me. Should have ignored the drinking, or not demanded that they pay their fare. Wouldn't have happened if I hadn't been working" –Bus driver*

campaign furthermore showed in the travel behaviour of passengers, as during it commuter train ticket sales climbed by more than 10 percent. The above figures concern only commuter trains, although the campaign also targeted metro trains and trams. All things considered, the campaign represented a remarkable step towards enhanced security. (Paikallisliikenne [Local traffic] magazine 2/2006).

Customer feedback on the campaign was 98-percent positive and ticket sales increased during the campaign. Direct feedback to personnel was also favourable. The reports of the police and security personnel bear tangible witness to the effectiveness of the clamp-down. It is indeed difficult to establish that any other measure to increase the standard of service in public transport could give such visible and immediate results.

The study has also given rise to the "Public transport security strategy in the HMA", organised by Helsinki Metropolitan Area Council YTV, which will further contribute to security in the entire public transport system. Each individual actor has also continued the concurrent review and development of their respective systems and policies.

Though the steps taken to date are a good start, their continuation and effectiveness in the longer run is also dependent on the adequacy of resources. Much remains to be accomplished, yet resources are limited. Additional resources need to be allocated to the effort if we wish to see strong advances in the direction of zero tolerance. Decision-makers and politicians also have their work cut out for them in this respect.∎

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