

# Disability hate crimes on railways continue to rise

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As record numbers of disability hate crimes were reported to police forces in England and Wales in 2021/2022, Britain's transport networks were no exception, with reports to [British Transport Police \(BTP\)](#) more than doubling in the last year.

New research from charities Leonard Cheshire and United Response found that despite a rise in reports, alleged perpetrators continue to evade justice. Only five (7%) of the 75 reports to BTP were referred to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) or charged. This is in line with low rates across England and Wales, where just 1% of total reports of disability hate crimes to 36 police forces were referred to the CPS or resulted in charges.

BTP says tackling hate crime is a priority. Each report helps it to build an intelligence picture, providing it with valuable information that can be acted on.

Last year the two charities conducted in-depth consultations with a range of disabled people to find out more about individual experiences of disability hate crime. One respondent, who has osteoarthritis and experiences symptoms of vertigo, which can result in a loss of balance, spoke about their experiences on

transport.

"I was really struggling to get my balance. I'd fallen on my knees, people had helped me up and I was saying, 'I'm okay, I'm okay.' They explained that a few people helped them up and off the train, but as they were walking on the platform, they were physically assaulted by another passenger.

"A man came up to me, he was really nasty, and said, 'What the hell are you about?' He said, 'How much have you had to drink? You must have had more to drink than me.' And he was abusive about me being overweight. He was abusive for the fact that I was trying to stay upright and he punched me, very, very hard in the stomach."

Worryingly, this is not an isolated experience. Over a quarter of the disability hate crime reports made to BTP in 2021/22 involved an element of violence.

A report by the two charities, 'Say No to Disability Hate Crime', launching during Hate Crime Awareness Week (8-16 October), will examine trends and make vital recommendations for police forces and the government to help curb these crimes.

Leonard Cheshire and United Response said: "These disgusting crimes must be tackled, with perpetrators brought to justice. No one should have to fear having to face a barrage of vile abuse or be assaulted when taking a journey," as they call for greater urgency from the Government in publishing its hate crime action plan.

"Disability hate crime on railways is still thankfully relatively rare, but when it happens the consequences can be devastating. Staff across transport networks must receive disability hate crime awareness, and specialist disability liaison officers need to be deployed across rail networks to offer crucial support when hate crimes like this take place."

Disability charities Leonard Cheshire and United Response received Freedom of Information (FOI) responses from the British Transport Police as well as 36 police forces across England and Wales. Over three quarters of forces said reports of disability hate crime increased in 2021/2022.

Karen Wiesenekker, Head of Strategic Inclusion and Diversity at British Transport Police (BTP), said: "A hate crime is any criminal offence that is motivated by hate and hostility towards a person because of their disability, transgender identity, race, sexual orientation, religion or any other actual or perceived difference. Preventing and tackling this crime type is a BTP priority – no one should be subjected to violence or harassment because of who they are.

"Every day we conduct highly visible patrols and dedicated operations across the railway to ensure the safety and security of passengers and staff. We're proud that our officers and staff come from all walks of life and our diverse teams are ready to respond to incidents of hate crime immediately. With access to more than 150,000 CCTV cameras across the rail network we can quickly identify offenders, make arrests and put them before the courts.

"No report is insignificant. Each one helps us to build an intelligence picture, providing us with valuable

information that we can act on. If you're a victim of, or witness to, a hate crime, I urge you to report it to us. You can do this by texting 61016 or calling 0800 40 50 40."

All percentages in this release are rounded to the nearest whole number.

**Total reports of disability hate crime to the BTP:**

2020/21: 37

2021/22: 75

**Number of reports involving an element of violence:**

2020/21: 5

2021/22: 20

**Number of reports referred to CPS or charged:**

2020/21: 1

2021/22: 5

**Intersectional crimes (crimes involving disability and at least one other protected characteristic)**

2020/21: 3

2021/22: 12

*Photo credit: British Transport Police*