



Market Research Services

**Perceptions of Public Transport in  
London among Equality and Inclusion  
Groups**

**Summary of Existing Research about  
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and  
Transgender People**

**February 2006**

## Executive Summary

This report summarises perceptions of public transport in London among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people. It draws upon existing market research reports held by TfL Group Customer Research.

Only three reports were found in which the views of LGBT people were identified. This does not mean that TfL's market research excludes LGBT people, only that surveys do not generally analyse responses by sexual orientation.

The public transport needs, expectations, usage and opinions of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people are broadly the same as those for any other member of the population.

The key needs are: safety (personal security and safe vehicles/infrastructure), reliability, respect, customer service and information.

Concern for personal safety is particularly important for LGBT communities. Factors that impact on perceptions of safety and security are:

- Role and attitude (helpfulness/rudeness) of staff
- Overcrowding
- Lack of lighting and poor visibility, at bus stops, stations, car parks
- Uncertain and unreliable services, especially at night - people can feel vulnerable and exposed when services are cancelled or delayed.
- Lack of accurate, up-to-date information about services, especially in isolated locations
- Off-putting physical environments, such as long subways, isolated bus stops, dirt and graffiti.

- Disorderly or threatening behaviour from other passengers/the public

The main security barriers to making journeys using public transport are as above plus:

- A lack of authority figures such as TfL staff or police officers, especially at interchanges
- Security concerns travelling from stations and bus stops particularly at night.

Safety concerns may cause people to avoid using certain stops or stations, or travelling at certain times. A feeling of lack of safety can discourage travelling beyond known territories to socialise and visit pubs and clubs in other parts of the city.

LGBT people feel homophobia has declined in recent years, but they have suffered abuse on public transport from other customers and staff. They feel their sexual orientation means they are sometimes especially vulnerable when travelling alone.

Walking to/from the bus stop or tube station can be the most insecure part of the journey. If people live in an area considered unsafe after dark they prefer to take a taxi or get a lift.

Gay and lesbian people who are “out” and socialise on the “gay scene” are more likely to socialise in Central London and areas perceived as “gay friendly”. The men in particular frequently travel late at night and are therefore heavy users of night buses and minicabs. But night buses are sometimes seen as unreliable and not entirely safe.

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## Introduction

This report summarises perceptions of public transport in London among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people.

Information is drawn from existing market research reports held by TfL Group Customer Research. Numbers in brackets in the text refer to the source report in the bibliography.

Only three reports were found in which the views of LGBT people were identified. This does not mean that TfL's market research excludes LGBT people, only that surveys do not generally analyse responses by sexual orientation.

For example, in the 2002 London Survey conducted for TfL by MORI, questions were asked about the risk of attack on LGBT people, but the survey did not classify LGBT, so their responses cannot be isolated from those of the total population.

## **Public Transport Needs**

The public transport needs, expectations, usage and opinions of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people are broadly the same as those for any other member of the population. (1)

For most people on most journeys the key needs are the same: safety (personal security and safe vehicles/infrastructure), reliability, respect, customer service and information. (1)

### **Safety and Security**

Concern for personal safety and security<sup>1</sup> is particularly important for LGBT communities. (1)

However, their safety and security issues are the same as for the general population. (3)

The vast majority of journeys run smoothly without any hitches, so safety and security are not always top of mind. But if something does not run smoothly, then fears about potential lack of safety can arise. (1)

Factors that impact on perceptions of safety and security are:

- Role and attitude (helpfulness/rudeness) of staff
- Overcrowding
- Lack of lighting and poor visibility, at bus stops, stations, car parks
- Uncertain and unreliable services, especially at night - people can feel vulnerable and exposed when services are cancelled or delayed.

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<sup>1</sup> In this source report, safety is a combination of personal security and safe vehicles and infrastructure.

- Lack of accurate, up-to-date information about services, especially in isolated locations
- Off-putting physical environments, such as long subways, isolated bus stops, dirt and graffiti.
- Disorderly or threatening behaviour from other passengers/the public (3)

The main security barriers to making journeys using public transport are as above plus:

- A lack of authority figures such as TfL staff or police officers, especially at interchanges
- Security concerns travelling from stations and bus stops particularly at night. (3)

Safety concerns may cause people to avoid using certain stops or stations, or travelling at certain times. (3)

People feel nervous in isolated or deserted areas because of the lack of ability to seek help. They need to feel that help can be sought readily when there is an emergency or when they require assistance or information. (3)

Walking to/from the bus stop or tube station can be the most insecure part of the journey for some people. If people live in an area considered unsafe after dark they prefer to take a taxi or get a lift. (3)

*I'll find at night I will definitely not walk down the Holloway Rd on my own. When I get to Archway station I will go and catch the bus down. Once I've caught the bus I still have to walk a little way up and quite far down my road. What I do is I sprint – I actually sprint and by the time I get home, my heart is fluttering. Because I'm scared – I think there are quite a few unstable people walking around the streets of London.*  
[Lesbians and bisexual women, aged 36 - 55, London] (3)

A feeling of lack of safety can discourage travelling beyond known territories to socialise and visit pubs and clubs in other parts of the city. This is

particularly the case around the time of major gay events and festivals, such as Mardi Gras, London Pride etc. (1)

Travelling alone engenders higher awareness of potential lack of personal safety amongst all customers, but gay men and lesbian women feel their sexual orientation means they are sometimes especially vulnerable. (1)

“Community feel” is important for LGBT people, because it helps to alleviate safety concerns and adds a sense of connection with each other and with London. ‘Community feel’ is a key need on public transport. (1)

### **Safety Perceptions of Modes**

The Underground is perceived as a more regulated environment than the bus system. It is more difficult to get to the platform without a ticket, people do not hang around on platforms as they might near bus stops, there is usually better lighting and more staff at an Underground station than at a bus stop. The service is seen as more reliable so passengers were unlikely to be waiting very long. (3)

People also feel there are more CCTV cameras in Underground stations which deter anti-social behaviour. (3)

CCTV cameras give people the impression that the system is under surveillance, that someone knew they were there and was looking out for them, and help could be summoned if an incident occurred. But they wonder if the cameras are turned on and if anyone was monitoring them. They point out that CCTV cameras might help catch a criminal after a crime was committed, but not stop a crime in progress. (3)

Quiet Underground platforms or suburban stations where there is no visible staff presence or few other passengers can feel intimidating. (3)

Over ground trains are seen as less frequent than the Underground and, if delayed or cancelled, people are more likely to feel “stranded.” Travelling at night is a key concern, with some people commenting that many stations were not staffed in the evenings and appeared “deserted.” They are often accessed by dark side roads or alleyways and back onto poorly lit car parks. (3)

## **Respect**

Lack of respect can quickly engender feelings of not being accepted and therefore unsafe. (1)

LGBT people feel London is a cosmopolitan city and therefore in many parts of the city they face little discrimination. (3)

They feel homophobia has declined in recent years, but many gay men feel vulnerable to homophobic abuse while waiting at bus stops. (3)

*The homophobia, if you're in somewhere like South London and waiting at a bus stop late at night, that's where you're the target, rather than when you get on the bus. And that's before the bus company comes into the equation. The last time I had it was at a bus stop. I was being picked on at bus stops, rather than actually being on the train. I'm just paranoid about bus stops, I always feel safer on the Tube and I never like hanging around bus stops.*

[Gay and bisexual men, aged 18 - 35, London] (3)

LGBT men and women say they have suffered abuse on public transport from other customers, and in some cases, from staff. (1)

Some lesbian women who had experienced abuse on public transport feel they were victimised because of the way that they looked. Some have since been on self-defence courses and others now refuse to travel alone at night. (1)

*“I won’t go into the centre of town, ‘cos I got bashed there once, and I feel more confident around here. But I was on the bus here last week, and I got spat at”*  
*Lesbian, Hackney (1)*

People wearing clothing considered overtly “gay” or “butch”, feel more likely to be subjected to abuse. (3)

Tolerance of gay lifestyles varies from area to area. In Islington or Central London a gay couple might hold hands and kiss in the street, but lesbians and gay men say that if they were out with their partner, they might avoid affectionate behaviour when coming home at night to avoid drawing attention to themselves. (3)

## **Communications**

Lesbians and gay men are aware there are areas of London that are particularly tolerant and often look out for new leisure venues, which are either gay friendly or dedicated to the gay community. They would welcome information from TfL to help them to make the most of places and events of interest to the gay world. For example, at the time of Mardi Gras they would like to see more leaflets about how to get there. (1)

They suggest a TfL backed and branded map of transport access to gay pubs and clubs, distributed in gay outlets. They would also welcome acknowledgement of gay events (e.g. Pride) via appropriately themed posters at relevant transport sites along the route, for example “Happy Mardi Gras – this tube stop for the start of the procession”. (1)

Advertising to publicise security initiatives can make people feel more secure, if done in a sensitive and credible fashion. People want to know that the transport system is taking action to enhance their security. (3)

Customers of late night gay venues in the West End are more likely to be aware of safe travel communication than customers of equivalent non-gay venues (35% vs 24%). It is not known if this is because gay venue customers are more receptive to safe travel messages, or more effectively targeted by them, or simply because of the greater frequency with which they go out to late night venues in London. (2)

## **Staff**

Friendly and helpful staff enhance passengers' feelings of security:

- By challenging aggressive or disruptive behaviour, which causes alarm to other passengers.
- By discouraging anti-social behaviour at station exits and car park, on trains and buses;
- A uniformed presence reassures those travelling at night or during quiet periods.
- By dealing with problems such as faulty ticket machines or when services are disrupted. (3)

*Liverpool Street Station has helpful staff. There is quite a few staff there so you can actually ask them questions and there's an information booth as well, which is quite useful.*

[Lesbians and bisexual women, aged 18 - 35, London] (3)

Bus drivers can be surly and unhelpful when passengers found themselves in difficult situations. (3)

Occasionally they were ignorant or had an unhelpful attitude to passengers requiring information to continue their journey. (3)

Some customers experienced buses failing to stop for them at bus stops when it clearly had capacity for more passengers. One female passenger

recalled when a night bus she was on 'terminated' prior to its designated stop with no apparent warning. This left her feeling scared and vulnerable when she had to walk further to get to her final destination. (3)

*The bus drivers are really, really inconsiderate and rude, especially night bus drivers. They don't care and they won't stop.*

[Lesbians and bisexual women, aged 18 - 35, London] (3)

Gay men say TfL staff – bus drivers, conductors and Underground staff – can be homophobic. One gay man said he heard staff at an Underground station abusing him and his partner as they walked out at night. And another felt the unfriendly attitude of some bus drivers derived from homophobia. Thus, although gay men are just as keen as other passengers to see more staff on the buses and Underground, they do not feel these staff would necessarily be helpful in combating specific homophobic abuse. (3)

*Me and a mate were a bit one over the eight, and really we just linked arms just to keep each other upright, and then there's, I could hear them [the station staff] joking loud enough for us to hear, 'oh you fucking queers' and that.*

*Sometimes when there are bus drivers, some of the bus drivers actually live in my street, which is unfortunate. I've had them not letting me on, or trying to overcharge me or saying my pound wasn't, (sic) it was counterfeit, that kind of thing. Yeah, just nonsense.*

[Gay and bisexual men, aged 18 - 35, London]

Most people appreciate that TfL staff are not trained to deal with violent incidents or serious crimes and that in many cases the staff might be just as intimidated as the passengers. However, they expect staff to intervene if they can, and to call for police help. They feel staff frequently ignore incidents, appearing to hope that the perpetrators would simply get off the bus or leave the station. (3)

Lesbian and gay people hope that staff would control and remedy any situation in which they were threatened or abused – as in the example of the woman being spat at on the bus. (1)

*It happens, I'm the only gay person in my street where I live, everybody else is Asian [speaker is white gay male]. And I get quite a lot of hassle from Asian kids and stuff. And it happens a lot on the bus.*  
[Gay and bisexual men, aged 18 - 35, London] (3)

*Groups of schoolchildren are noisy. They are sometimes insolent. They're generally on the edge of misbehaving. And there's nobody, I mean, if there were a conductor on the bus there would be some possible discipline or something, possible authority, but the drivers aren't going to pay any attention to them whatsoever, so you're completely, it's a completely unregulated social situation. You can feel by the way they're talking if it's a bunch of kids. The tone of their voice, the level of their voice, the kind of conversation they're having, how much they're moving, if there's any starting to move around on the bus. You can begin to feel them noticing people who are vulnerable. So there's a real edginess in that situation.*  
[Gay and bisexual men, aged 36 - 55, London]

## Women

Although lesbians also suffer from homophobic abuse, their main concerns relate more to being women than to being lesbian. (3)

They receive unwanted attention from men trying to “chat them up.” They say bus drivers and Underground staff can behave in a lecherous manner and they develop strategies to avoid drawing attention themselves. For example, one reports that she and her partner listen to their walkmans when travelling home at night on the bus, as a barrier against men trying to talk to them. (3)

*A lot of the time we don't interact with each other. We put walkmans on. Because if they see two girls, they're on it. If you're laughing and giggling they want to interact with us so we pretend we don't know each other and put our walkmans on*

Lesbians and bisexual women, aged 18 - 35, London (3)

*It's worse if you're sat by yourself. If you are sat by yourself and there are a group of guys, especially if they are young, about 16 – and you just look slightly out of place for the area then they will just sit around you. I hate that. I get stuck so often wishing I could disappear and you can't just say 'excuse me' and sit somewhere else because that just makes it worse. They're like at front, behind and at the side of you. What they do is try and intimidate you. It's mostly at night, but other times of the day as well – but generally at night.*

[Lesbians and bisexual women, aged 18 - 35, London] (3)

Women feel an increased sense of vulnerability when travelling after dark. This is particularly true of relatively isolated areas, such as some bus stops, empty train carriages and over ground stations at night. (3)

Lone female travellers feel very conscious and wary of being the only woman on a carriage or bus even if there is no sense of imminent threat. They feel more confident when there are staff or other women about. (3)

One female respondent travelling on the Underground late in the evening said she often preferred to travel back in the opposite direction to a busy interchange to give her more options for keeping on the move, rather than having to stand and wait for long periods at a quieter station. (3)

It is particularly important for women travelling alone during quiet periods to be seen as well as to be able to see around them on public transport. They check who is sitting in carriages before choosing to enter and dislike walking down curving station corridors where they cannot see ahead. (3)

When exiting stations, women are concerned about dark alleyways and car parks, as well as being put off by groups of young men or boys who “hang around”. They are often concerned about their walk home from a station in the evening or at night, especially if this passes through relatively quiet or isolated streets. (3)

## Late Night Travel

Gay and lesbian people who are “out” and socialise on the “gay scene” are more likely to socialise in Central London and areas they perceive as “gay friendly”, such as Islington, Vauxhall, Kings Cross and Soho. The men in particular visit gay bars, clubs and venues, and frequently travel late at night or in the small hours of the morning. They are therefore heavy users of night buses and mini-cabs. (3)

Customers of two West End gay venues were interviewed as part of a study into illegal minicab touting. (2)

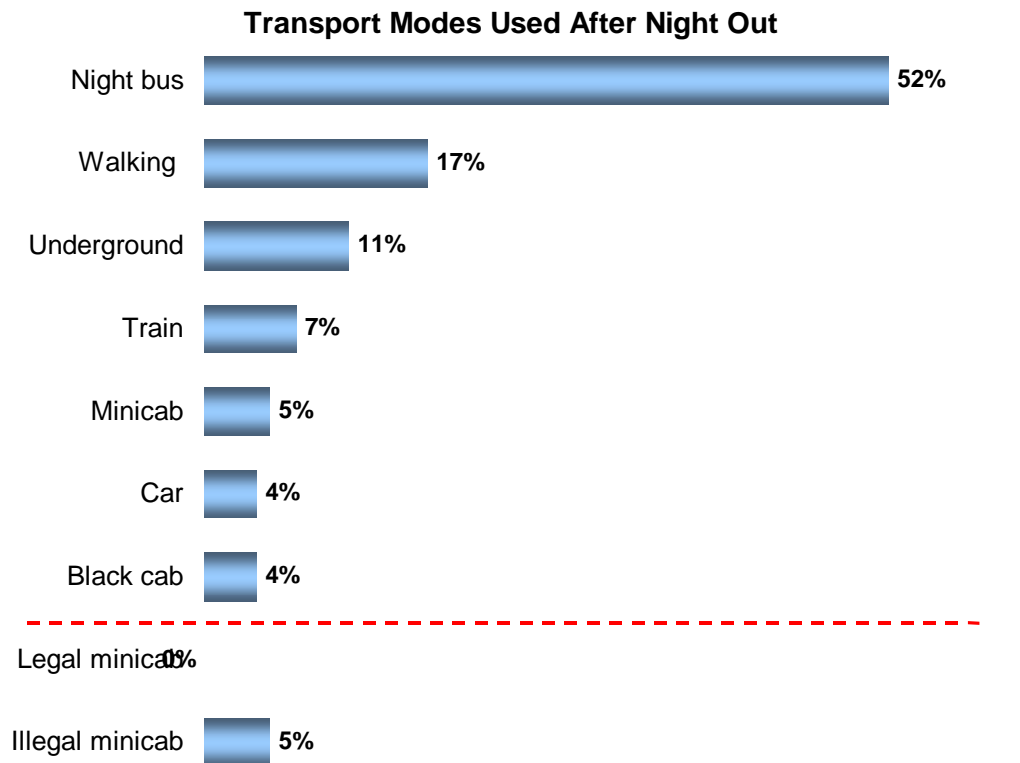
Night buses were the most widely used form of transport after leaving West End gay venues: 52% of gay venue customers opted for this mode (compared to 30% of customers on non-gay West End venues). (2)

Gay venue customers were more likely than non-gay venue customers to be travelling alone, which possibly makes the night bus a more economically attractive proposition. (2)

But night buses are sometimes seen as unreliable and not entirely safe, and young people often express the desire for later running Underground services. (3)

*If I come out of work, if I'm just a bit too tired, like working on a Thursday night and getting out at four or five o'clock in the morning, don't want to be bothered with catching a night bus. And when I happen to know the local cabs they hang out at the club, as far as taking customers home and stuff, so I feel quite safe in using one of them. But I just can't be bothered with getting on a bus at quarter to five in the morning.*

[Gay and bisexual men, aged 18 - 35, London] (3)



**Base: All respondents (101)**

Most of those who walked to their next destination were travelling to somewhere within Central London. (2)

Only 5% of gay venue customers used an illegal minicab compared to 13% of customers at non-gay venues, although the proportion of gay venue customers being approached by a minicab tout after leaving the venue was the same as that among non-gay venue customers (56% and 55% respectively). (2)

People do not always make a clear distinction between legitimate operators and illegal minicab 'touts'. Rather, they see minicabs in general as being unreliable and potentially dangerous, although many people are still prepared to use them. (3)

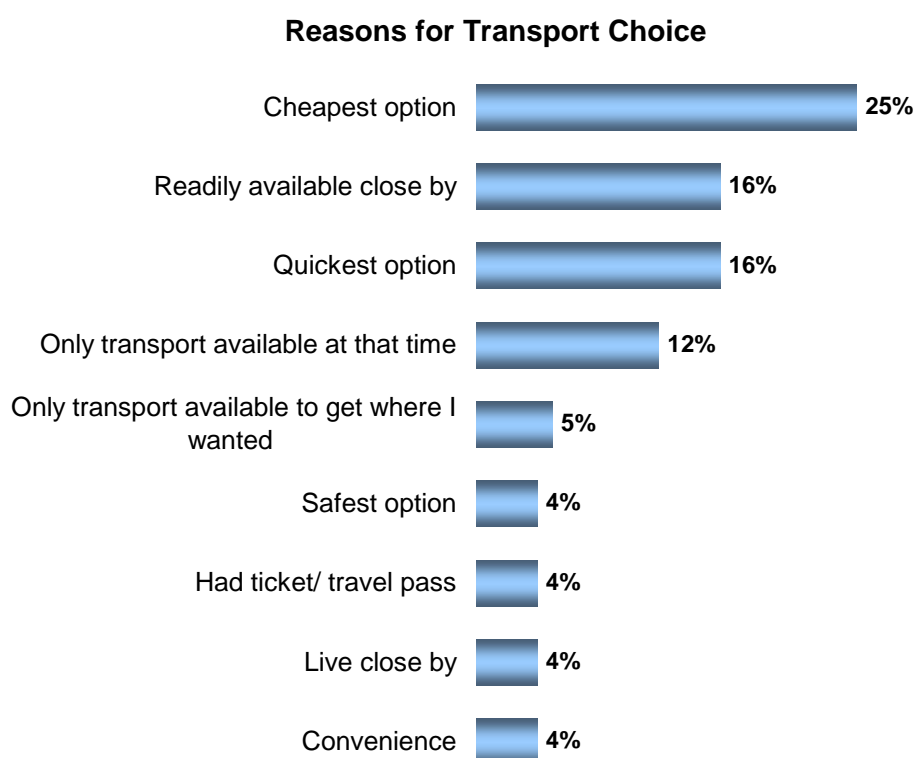
*If I'm absolutely desperate I'll get one. Where I live there's a lot of Iranian cab drivers, minicab drivers and they drive like they're suicidal on the road. Where my local cab office is, it's on a main road, and they'll literally come straight out, won't indicate and just do a U turn in the road. And sometimes you feel like you're going to bring your food up. (3)*

*Yeah, every now and then you read the local paper and somebody's been stabbed to death in a minicab. It just seems to be a regular thing, that somebody's died just after getting out of a minicab, or a minicab driver's been murdered.*

[Gay and bisexual men, aged 18 - 35, London] (3)

Women associate minicabs with sexual assault and rape. Thus, women might take a minicab if they are with friends, but not alone. (3)

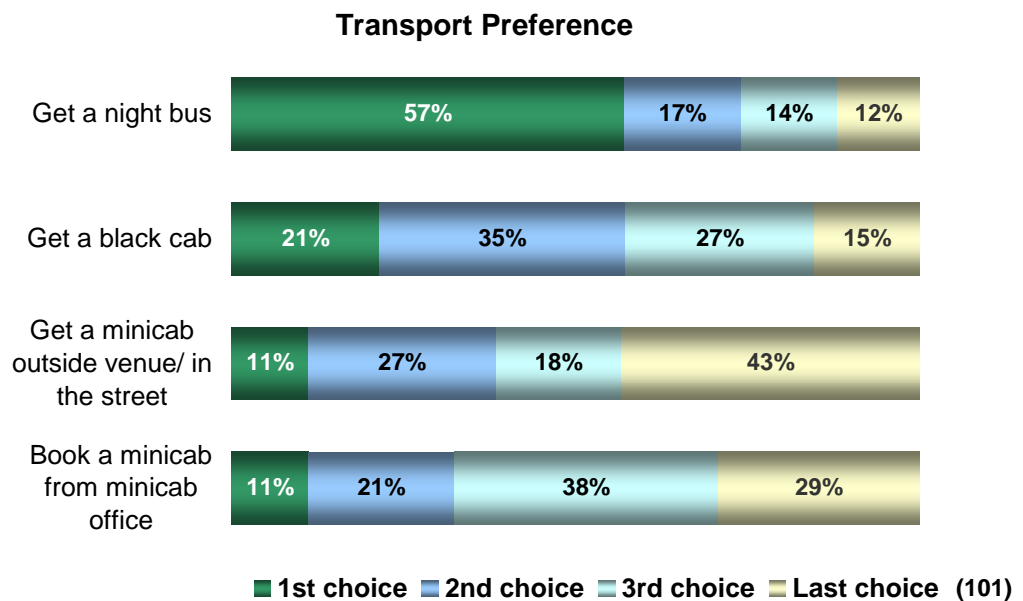
Despite customers of West End gay venues being more aware of safe travel communications, only 4% gave safety as their primary reason for choosing transport modes when leaving the venue late at night. The key drivers of transport choice were price, availability and journey speed.



**Base: All respondents (101) – 4%+ mentions**

West End gay venue customers were given a hypothetical situation whereby they left a venue late at night and had to choose between four transport modes. (2)

Most favoured the night bus, with the illegal minicab picked up outside the venue the least preferred option. This was consistent with the preferences of non-gay West End venue customers. (2)



The night bus was chosen due to its low price, black cabs and minicabs from the office were chosen for safety reasons, and illegal minicabs for reasons of price, speed and convenience. (2)

If the night bus or the minicab booked from an office was seen as least preferred, it was because of their poor availability. If black cabs were the least preferred it was because they were too expensive. Where illegal minicabs were rejected it was because they were felt to be unsafe. However, gay venue customers were not influenced by safety to any greater extent than non-gay venue customers. (2)

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2. Late Night Travel Options - Gay Venues, Synovate, April 2004 (quantitative survey)
3. Security Barriers for Equalities Groups, Turnstone Research and Consultancy Ltd, June 2004 (qualitative research)