

Operation Furze

**Ticket Touts
Brixton Underground Station**

The Tilley Award 2001

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OPERATION FURZE

SUMMARY

The Problem

Brixton Underground Station has suffered considerably from the problem of ticket touts, who collect used travelcards from people leaving the station and resell them to others. The touts often intimidate people into giving them their travelcards. Many of the ticket touts are drug addicts using the proceeds of the sale to buy drugs.

The touts are responsible for other forms of anti-social behaviour, such as aggressive begging and disorderly conduct. They would often become threatening, and in some cases violent, when station staff asked them to leave.

Defining the Problem

During the latter part of 1999, the problem became such that BTP officers were spending an increasing amount of time responding to tout related calls at Brixton. Between 1st October and 31st December 1999, police responded to 89 calls concerning touts at the station, in addition to other routine calls. The touts were causing such a nuisance that the perception of station staff and the public was that the station was becoming unsafe. Despite regular police attention, the situation was deteriorating. It was evident that we needed to deal with the root causes, rather than just the symptoms of the problem.

Response

One individual in particular was a persistent nuisance. Despite the fact that he had been arrested on several occasions, this had little effect. We therefore joined forces with London Underground, asking station staff to note all incidents concerning him, however minor, in their station log. Similarly, police officers recorded all information, with a view to pursuing an Anti-Social Behaviour Order against him.

In August 2000, after much work by ourselves, London Underground and Lambeth Council, an ASBO was granted against the individual, this being the first time one had been used in such circumstances. To follow on from this, a joint operation was conducted by BTP officers and London Underground revenue inspectors, targeting both the touts and the people buying tickets from them.

Assessment

The ASBO, together with the joint follow-up operation between BTP officers and London Underground, resulted in 47 people being arrested or reported for touting and other nuisance offences. The number of calls to police was reduced from 89 to 39 compared to the corresponding period last year. Overall, we have been successful in significantly reducing the scale of the problem at Brixton and improving the quality of life for station staff and travelling public alike.

OPERATION FURZE BRIXTON

INTRODUCTION

Scanning – The Background

For a number of years now, the 'One Day Travelcard' has been in use on the London Underground system. One Day Travelcards allow unlimited travel on the system within certain zones, on the day of purchase.

One Day Travelcards have become very popular, particularly amongst people working in Central London, who use the tube on a daily basis. Typically, people purchase their travelcards at their local station on the way to work and then discard them as they pass through the station, usually in the early evening period, on their way home. In some cases this can leave a further six or seven hours travelling time on the discarded travelcard, since they remain valid until close of traffic on that day.

A number of years ago certain individuals realised that there was an opportunity for them to exploit London Underground's One Day Travelcard system. By collecting the discarded travelcards and then re-selling them at less than face value to people coming into the station, an opportunity existed for the sellers of the cards, known as 'ticket touts', to make money, as they pocketed the proceeds of the sale.

Typically, people purchasing travelcards from the touts might be students and other such groups travelling into Central London for an evening out. The person purchasing the travelcard from the tout has the advantage of being able to travel on the already used travelcard in and out of Central London at a reduced cost, usually £1. This practice is common throughout the London Underground system.

The practice of both selling and buying the travelcards in these circumstances is, of course, illegal, since resale and purchase of tickets by or from unauthorised persons is contrary to London Underground Byelaws.

ANALYSIS

Defining the Problem

Brixton underground station, situated at the south end of the Victoria line, has suffered more than most from the problem of ticket touts. Repeated complaints were received from both members of the public and station staff alike. At times, in the evening rush hour, up to 7 or 8 touts would congregate in the booking hall of the station. The touts often lined up in front of the automatic exit barriers and hassled people for their travelcards as they left the station. Many of the touts were aggressive and abusive to members of the public if they refused to give them their travelcards, and station staff at Brixton became the target of abuse when they asked the touts to leave. In some cases the touts would even become violent towards station staff and consequently they became wary of approaching them. The situation had become unacceptable, and in some cases the perception of the public and station staff was that the underground station had become an unsafe environment.

Policing Brixton Tube

British Transport Police at Stockwell have the responsibility for policing the underground system in South London and, in particular, Brixton tube. The police station consists of a small unit of officers, one inspector, three sergeants and twelve constables, who are divided into three teams. Despite regular attention by officers from Stockwell, it became apparent that although we were responding to calls at Brixton as they arose and regularly patrolled the station, the situation with regard to ticket touting and other related anti-social behaviour was deteriorating. In many cases police officers responding to calls would report offenders for prosecution or eject them from the station. It was clear, however, that this was having little or no impact. A different approach was called for.

Drugs and Brixton

The underground station in Brixton is situated in the Town Centre, and for its size is one of the busiest on the London Underground network. For some years now there has been a drug problem within Brixton itself, which local Metropolitan Police have been working to combat. Nevertheless, the perception amongst some was that in certain areas of the Town Centre the situation was worsening.

As we began to research the issue in depth, it soon became apparent that there was a link between ticket touting and the problem of drugs in the Town Centre. Put simply, many of the ticket touts were drug addicts, and they saw the opportunity of selling travelcards as a means of raising funds to buy drugs and feed their habit. This was principally why our previous strategy of reporting the touts for summons was having little effect. In many cases, offenders were receiving summonses months after the offence, if at all, and this did little to discourage their behaviour. Additionally, the touts were responsible for many other anti-social acts in and around the tube station, not just touting, and this compounded the problem.

RESPONSE

Given the nature of the problem, it was decided that we should adopt a broad approach to the issue. Firstly, we needed to deal with the people who were selling the One Day Travelcards in a positive manner, which would discourage them from repeating their behaviour. In particular, we needed to deal effectively with one particular ticket tout, who was the source of many of the problems at Brixton and was encouraging other ticket touts on to the station.

It was also essential that we educate the public about the link between ticket touting and drugs. There is no doubt that many people gave their travelcards away thinking they were helping others, they had no idea that their travelcards were being sold to raise money for drugs. At the same time we decided to embark upon a new approach and deal with those people who were buying travelcards from the touts. Traditionally, our response to this issue had been to concentrate our efforts against the touts themselves, but to be successful we needed to impact on both the touts and the people buying the tickets from them.

Anti-Social Behaviour Order

It became apparent that amongst the regular ticket touts there was one offender, Stavros Anastasi, who was particularly prolific and troublesome at Brixton. He was responsible for a good percentage of the total tout related calls at the station, and if we were to be successful in combating the problem, we had to deal with him.

We realised, however, that in order for us to be effective in dealing with Anastasi, we would need to work in partnership with London Underground. It was decided, therefore, that we would approach the station management at Brixton to ask for the support of their staff in compiling evidence against him. It had been the practice of station staff to record all incidents of note during their tour of duty on Incident Report Forms (IRFs). However, many of the minor incidents that were recorded were never passed on to police because station staff did not want, as they thought, to bother police unnecessarily. It was the case, however, that these minor incidents, if taken together rather than in isolation, formed a pattern of behaviour which consistently disrupted the workings of the station and seriously affected the quality of life for station staff and members of the public at Brixton.

We decided, therefore, through our contacts with the Crime & Disorder Partnership at Lambeth Borough, that we would approach the Borough Solicitors with a view to gaining their help in seeking an Anti-Social Behaviour Order against Anastasi. With this in mind, between March and May 2000, we asked station staff at Brixton to complete IRFs in respect of all ticket touting incidents, and in particular, those relating to Anastasi, with the intention that we would use this documentation as evidence. At the same time, all video footage from the station CCTV system showing activities of the touts, and in particular, Anastasi, was retained as evidence. This was then cross-referenced with the relevant IRFs that had been created by the station staff. Additionally, officers were asked to complete statements for all incidents concerning Anastasi.

After much work by both ourselves and station staff at Brixton in compiling evidence, in August 2000 we successfully obtained an Anti-Social Behaviour Order against Anastasi. The Order prevented him from continuing his ticket touting and any other anti-social behaviour on all London Underground stations within the London Borough of Lambeth.

Maintaining the Momentum

Whilst we had been successful in obtaining the ASBO, and as a result, significantly reducing the touting problem at Brixton, we were well aware that the other touts had not gone away. Indeed, it was crucial that there was an effective follow-up operation to ensure that we built on the success we had achieved. A decision was made that we would target the period from the 1st October to 31st December 2000 with a special operation at Brixton to continue our problem orientated approach to the issue.

The Next Step – Our Strategy

We decided that we would mount the operation, known as 'Operation Furze' and we would seek to deal positively and arrest, where appropriate, our active ticket touts. This would be done in the form of several 'Sting' operations where police officers were deployed in plain clothes with the specific intention of arresting ticket touts. A total of 5 days was set aside for these operations during the period.

Due to a lack of resources and other operational commitments, it was recognised that we were unable to deal with the touts themselves and at the same time those people buying travelcards from them. With this in mind, we approached London Underground Revenue Control Department, to see if they could assist us. They agreed to support us by supplying ten to fifteen revenue inspectors to assist with the operation on certain days.

The intention was for revenue control inspectors to be deployed primarily in plain clothes and to obtain names and addresses of those people buying tickets from the touts, with a view to reporting them for summons. In support of this, we agreed to provide discreet police support, with officers in the near vicinity of the station while the operation was carried out. This would be principally to deal with any breaches of the peace, prevent violence and support the revenue inspectors. This part of the operation would take place during the evening period between 6 p.m. and 10 p.m. when the ticket touting problem was at its worst.

Educating the Public

Again, we asked London Underground staff to help us in getting the message across to regular users of Brixton station. We wanted to educate the public not to give their travelcards away to the ticket touts. In order to do so, we asked the station staff to display posters on the station and also to make announcements over the public address system, warning people not to give their travel cards away. Also, train operators were asked to make announcements over the PA system on trains coming into Brixton. Additionally, newspaper articles were placed in the local media, highlighting the link between ticket touting and drugs. We felt sure that if we could communicate this message successfully, we could 'dry up' the supply of travelcards to the touts.

Regular liaison meetings were held between ourselves and London Underground Revenue Departments and Brixton Station Management, in order to review the progress of the operation and ensure effective communication and flow of information.

How would we measure it?

To measure the success of our approach, we decided to use as performance indicators the number of calls for police assistance recorded on the Force Command & Control System, RAIL (Appendix A), for the period 1st October to 31st December 2000. Additionally, we would measure the number of persons reported and arrested for offences at Brixton during the operation (Appendix B). We would then make a direct comparison with the corresponding period in 1999.

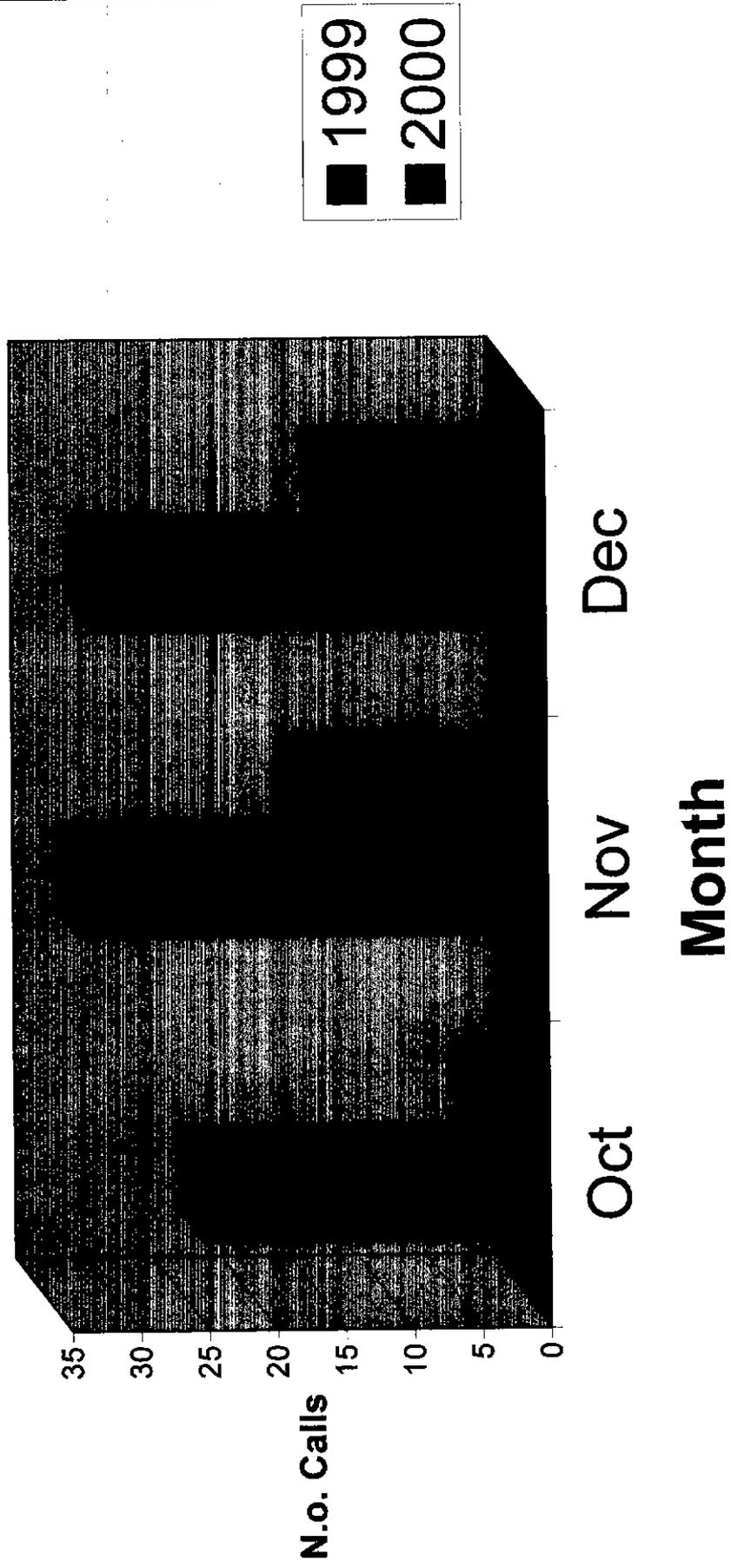
ASSESSMENT

We assessed the operation as having been very successful. It resulted in a fall in the number of incidences of ticket touting at Brixton tube (Appendix A). At the same time, a total of 47 people were arrested or reported for ticket touting and other nuisance offences at Brixton. The number of arrests increased by 32% during the period. Additionally, London Underground revenue inspectors dealt with 20 people for receiving transferred tickets.

Conclusion

Overall the operation was judged a great success. It was well appreciated by all concerned, with many favourable comments made by station staff and members of the public alike. All in all, the operation has impacted markedly upon the quality of life for regular users of Brixton underground station. This partnership approach has proved a useful model for further inter-agency operations to combat nuisance offences on the London Underground system.

Appendix A Calls to Police



Appendix B Offenders at Brixton

