A GUARD'S PERSPECTIVE

# More than checking tickets

## Safety. Judgement. Passenger care.




### Everyday safety
Safe dispatch and hazard awareness

### Emergency response
Calm judgement and coordination

### Accessible travel
Assistance and reassurance

### Passenger care
Support through disruption

Based on an account by a serving, safety-critical trained train guard.

# A guard’s perspective

A case-study summary, a serving guard’s own account, and five collections of statistics and first-hand testimony about the work of train guards.


## 03 The case study

The role, the challenges and the competencies behind it.

## 05 The role of a train guard

The practitioner account, credited to Active Train Guard.

## 07 Experiences from the railway

Statistics and first-hand testimony, organised into five themes.

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# More than checking tickets

For passengers, a train guard may be the person who checks tickets, makes announcements or offers help. A serving, safety-critical trained guard's account reveals a wider role: responding to emergencies, identifying hazards and supporting passengers when journeys become difficult.

## The challenge

A railway journey can change quickly. A train may develop a fault, a passenger may need urgent assistance, or disruption may leave people unsure how to reach their destination. Serious incidents create additional challenges, particularly where passengers are close to moving trains or electrified infrastructure.

The guard's account highlights the value of having a trained member of staff on board whose responsibilities include passenger safety and support.

## Responding when something goes wrong

The author describes responsibilities that can include helping to protect a train following a serious incident, raising the alarm and supporting evacuation. The account also identifies situations such as an incapacitated driver, a train becoming divided or a passenger door opening during a journey.

These examples show why the role requires training, judgement and clear communication. An emergency response involves coordinating with other railway staff as well as helping passengers.

## Maintaining safety during everyday journeys

The guard's work also involves preventing incidents. The author highlights safe dispatch, including attention to the risk of passengers becoming trapped in doors and dragged as a train moves.

Reporting faults, identifying infrastructure hazards and responding to antisocial behaviour are further parts of the account. Where procedures permit, taking an affected coach out of use can help manage a fault while allowing the rest of the train to remain in service.

# Skills that support passengers

## Supporting passengers through disruption

After a distressing incident, passengers may need information and reassurance while the driver and other railway staff deal with the operational response.

The author also describes assisting people in distress and raising the alarm when further help is needed. This aspect of the role depends on observation, calm communication and recognising when to seek support.

## Helping make journeys accessible

The account places particular emphasis on disabled passengers and people who need additional assistance.

A broken lift, an inaccessible station or an unexpected change can turn an ordinary journey into a difficult one. The guard describes identifying these barriers, reporting problems and helping passengers access assistance or alternative arrangements.

## The competencies behind the role

Across these responsibilities,the account illustrates five core competencies:

**Situational awareness:** noticing faults, hazards and passengers who need help.

**Safety knowledge:** understanding and applying relevant rules and procedures.

**Judgement under pressure:** assessing situations and prioritising action.

**Communication and coordination:** sharing clear information with passengers and railway colleagues.

**Passenger care:** responding to distress, disability and individual needs with patience and respect.

## The central lesson

This practitioner’s account makes visible work that passengers may rarely notice when a journey runs smoothly. The guard’s contribution lies both in routine prevention and in being ready to respond when circumstances change.

For the author, the case for retaining safety-critical guards rests on that combination: trained operational support and a human presence for passengers.

# The role of a train guard

The main role of the Train Guard in an emergency is to secure the train they're working and to stop other trains ploughing into the train that's either broken down, derailed or crashed. This role also incorporates making sure the various safety rules set out in the railways rule book are adhered to.

- Locking out coaches for various safety reasons (e.g. no lights, failed passenger communications system, no air-conditioning or heating in extreme weather conditions, broken windows, trains too long for stations, failed fire systems) can help prevent cancellations by only locking out the coach affected and not more vehicles than is needed (which is the case without a guard).
- Conduct a planned/controlled or unplanned/uncontrolled train evacuation whilst alerting the correct signalling centre, stopping other train services from entering the affected area. Plus contacting the electrical supplier to switch off overhead lines or third rail (AC or DC). Direct passengers to a point of safety and away from electrified lines or tunnels.
- Taking the necessary steps to secure a train if: 1) driver is incapacitated, 2) train divides or passenger door opens whilst in service.
- Look after the passengers whilst a driver is being replaced due to an incident (e.g. a fatality, potential signal passed at danger), vandalism like bricks thrown at trains, near misses, train hitting farm-yard equipment.
- Helping with the unusual movements of trains when the signalling system fails or planned and unplanned engineering works require trains run in a different way.
- Help talk down or monitor suicidal passengers and trespassers on the network.
- Some trains require brake tests, checks for flat tyres, hot axles which need a second person to confirm or speed the check up.
- Able to raise the alarm of any rail infrastructure issue on and off track that could endanger passengers and alert the correct authority.

# Everyday work and the case for guards

When the worst doesn't happen, the day-to-day role is to dispatch trains in a safe manner which helps prevent accidents such as trap & drag (where a passenger gets trapped in the doors potentially dragging them under, which could disable them or lead to a fatality. To assist in the prevention of anti-social behaviour onboard trains and at frequented stations and then raise the alarm if required. Conduct train safety revenue checks, report faults with trains and other railway infrastructure.

Too often on Driver Only services the overlooked passengers are the ones with disabilities or those that need reassurance/assistance. When a Train has a properly trained safety critical Guard onboard they can turn up and go, with no booking or appointment needed just like every other passenger, only with a little extra care; for example, when the lifts don't work, lights are out at stations, or the trains are too long for stations on the network we can lock out the coach, or by reporting issues early we can help to sort out alternative transport, or force a reluctant train operator to call an 24 hour maintenance firm to come out and solve the issue. Train managers are there from start of a train service to the very last train on railway services, ensuring freedom to travel and compliance with disability laws. We are the only guarantee of staff during the 20 hours of the day when trains are running.

Driver Only Operation is a 1980s era argument. Governments come and go but unfortunately arguments repeated by the same old railway management are devoid of any new ideas. They are hell bent on wanting to cut corners by de-staffing Trains & Stations. The railways always sell the dream of incorporating new technology but never see it fully though or stabilise the currently available technology. Too often, train operators will ignore practical railway issues by blaming the unions and staff. No matter how much technology advances it will take many years to get full 100% mobile & GPS coverage on the railways due to cuttings, tunnels, viaducts and the many isolated rural areas in Britain.

The questions that needs to be asked are, can 200 plus seater planes fly without a co-pilot? Maybe? But would it be safer? NO! Are late night buses safer since conductors were removed? NO! Have fares been reduced on the existing Driver Only services? NO!

TWO people are always better than one, no matter what the safety regulators that are paid for by the same people that want to implement these schemes tell you. Let the drivers drive and the Guards look after passengers.

**Active Train Guard**

# Emergency Situations

**80%**

80% of Guards have prevented an emergency situation arising and a further 80% have used their safety critical training in an actual emergency situation.

## IN GUARDS' OWN WORDS

"Resuscitate a passenger… carry out drivers protection… break up fights… emergency procedures during/after train crash… help carry a body from train to ambulance… assist a diabetic seizure… examine train after suicide… give first aid many times… treat a passenger for life threatening open abdominal wound… assist police in arrest… to mention a few!"

"Arranged air ambulance for child with heart condition and stopped train out of course."

"Train failed and I laid detonators for train protection, saved 3 lives so far from the tracks."

"Train was on fire. I evacuated the train and extinguished the fire and dealt with the aftermath."

"Passenger fell between platform and train only his head was visible at platform level if I hadn't rechecked before giving the bells or it had been driver only the old guy would be dead now."

"I have had occasion to go line side and assist an injured person who was struck by a train in the course of trying to commit suicide. The Driver was too shaken to carry out the duty of contacting the signaler and carrying out protection."

"Overheads came down on us… Driver was unable to leave cab as wires were down around the cab. Had to keep passengers calm and safe."

"I had a woman commit suicide by setting herself on fire in the toilet cubicle on my train. I evacuated my passengers, tried to tackle the fire and assisted the fire brigade."

"Providing visual sighting and confirmation of signals and hazards to my driver following a smashed windscreen due to a bird."

# Sexual Assaults

**51%**

51% of guards have prevented or deterred at least one sexual assault and 12% have dealt with more than 5 such incidents.

## IN GUARDS' OWN WORDS

"I've put myself in harm's way to protect minors from drunken sexual predators on late night services."

"Two men blocked the path of a young lady, demanding oral sex. I looked after the distraught lady for the rest of the journey."

"It was brought to my attention a man was exposing himself to a young girl, I moved the girl and called the British Transport Police."

"I have stopped a young man molesting a young woman."

"An elderly passenger had groped a school girl, had to get police to the train."

"I myself have been victim of sexual assault in my role. This was due to trying to quieten down a rowdy stag party."

"I had a young girl who approached me thinking she was being followed, I remained with her until the male left the train and reported to the British Transport Police."

"Gang of boys tried to assault a lady I got involved and prevented it. Driver had no knowledge."

"Two men touched up a youngster and I had to look after the girl and her mate and arranged a cab to their house."

# Anti-Social Behaviour

**98%**

98% of guards have dealt with anti-social behaviour with 63% having tackled it over 20 times.

## IN GUARDS' OWN WORDS

"I once had a panic on a late night service because a drunken male was wandering around with a smashed wine bottle. I had to talk him into handing over the bottle and make sure no passengers tried to intervene or get hurt."

"Dealt with flashers and youths fighting."

"A Sri Lankan lady and her 6 year old son where being racially abused and bullied by a group of youths. I made sure the train was met by British Transport Police to remove the youths"

"A travelling customer was accused of being a paedophile. I had to call the police."

"Without Guards on the trains a lot of fights, rapes, knife attacks would have happened."

"Separated rival Football fans on journey, used previous police skills to avert a hostile situation."

"Required to intervene. Violence involved. If not there, situation would have escalated, knives involved. Children and adults scared. No other point of contact for one hour between stops."

"(Passengers) Drunk and violent towards other passengers. Isolated and removed from train"

# Assisting Disabled Passengers

**85%**

85% of guards provide assistance to passengers with disabilities at least once a day.

## IN GUARDS' OWN WORDS

> "Wheelchair assistance, blind person needing a helping hand, the elderly needing a bit of help, and then there's the mums with pushchairs and prams."

> "Providing a ramp at the many unstaffed stations we call at."

> "Wheelchairs on and off trains, ringing for assistance at stations assisting with luggage many people could not travel otherwise."

> "Assisting on/off train at unmanned stations. Helping with communications, arranging onward assistance. Reassuring vulnerable adults/ children with Autism/ communications disability. Assisting blind/ deaf passengers etc."

> "I help visually impaired customers off trains. Get wheelchair ramp for customers. Help elderly people with luggage. Or more recently a customer with autism."

> "Loading wheelchairs, mobility scooters and other disabled people. Very few give advance notice of travel and so are reliant on us."

> "I always assist elderly passengers boarding trains and wheelchair users… This is an essential role… and without it passengers would be extremely vulnerable and at risk of harm."

# Security

**500+**

Over 500 examples were collected of guards describing their specific role in protecting the safety of the travelling public during periods of heightened security.

## IN GUARDS' OWN WORDS

"By regular security checks, and the ability to move passengers away from a potential threat/area quickly."

"Constantly vigilant through train. Looking for expected packages or people acting suspiciously. A driver cannot do this."

"Many of our guards are ex-service personnel. In my case I came from the police service. We bring a good knowledge of these issues to the railway."

"Constant checks throughout the train to ensure all bags are accounted for etc…"

"I am trained to know what to look for if I see anything suspicious, I would be able to secure the area quickly and contact the emergency services. I can also make sure the passengers are safe and make sure they remain calm."

"During the IRA campaign I had to evacuate a train as it had been reported that there was a device on the train. If there was no longer a guard then there would be panic and deaths, people do not know what to do or where to go, confusion would set in."

"I've had to call BTP to a train due to suspicious behaviour from 2 passengers. How would a driver see this?"

"I'm constantly looking for anything/one suspicious. No one will do this if I'm not there."