

SIPTU CAMPAIGNS FOR ACTION AGAINST ABUSERS ON PUBLIC TRANSPORT



SIPTU's TEAC Divisional Organiser, Adrian Kane, Shop Steward Suzanne Armstrong and NEC member Stephen Millane pictured at the launch of the campaign at Dublin's Liberty Hall in February.

SIPTU recently met with Minister for Transport, Eamon Ryan to discuss the trade union's ongoing 'Respect Transport Workers' campaign, and to demand greater protection for staff on bus, rail and Luas networks against anti-social behaviour and abuse.

Report by Grace Heneghan

More than 80% of public transport workers suffer regular incidents of abuse, according to the findings of SIPTU's survey, which were announced following the launch of the 'Respect Transport Workers' campaign in Dublin's Liberty Hall.

SIPTU's campaign has outlined three key priorities. The union is proposing the immediate establishment of the National Transport Advisory Council which has been part of legislation since 2008; the development of a unit dedicated to policing the public transport system, and a 'Transport Charter' to outline what is unacceptable behaviour towards staff.

"We had a productive meeting with the Minister and his team. We shared the results of our survey highlighting the rise in anti-social

behaviour and the need for a strong government response," according to Adrian Kane, SIPTU Transport, Energy, Aviation and Construction Divisional Organiser.

John Murphy, SIPTU Transport Sector Organiser, added, "The Minister committed to continued engagement on this issue. He will consider our proposals for a dedicated transport police force and a user charter for public transport."

SIPTU also commended the increased Garda presence on Dublin's central public transport network and plans to meet with Garda representatives to discuss the Respect Transport Workers campaign further.

The findings of a second survey will focus on the union's concerning rise of drug use and racialised abuse on public transport, noted



Kane. He said that the campaign will continue until effective solutions are implemented to address the security concerns of transport workers.

"We believe a new transport policing structure and a national forum involving public representatives, Gardaí, unions, community groups, and passengers are crucial steps towards achieving this goal," he added.

ONGOING ABUSE ISSUES

At the campaign launch in February Adrian Kane noted that members employed within public transport should never be the subject of abuse during the course of their work.

"Unfortunately, the survey of members employed in the transport sector revealed the grim reality that in excess of 80% felt that abuse and anti-social behaviour was an issue for them at work."

In total 615 SIPTU members responded to the survey; the respondents were spread across Dublin Bus, Iarnród Éireann, Luas, Bus Éireann, Aircoach and Go-Ahead Ireland. The survey involved all grades of transport staff represented by SIPTU including drivers, ticket staff and customer assurance agents.

The majority of those who have



endured abuse at their job believes that the problem has got worse in the last 12 months. Issues reported by respondents included verbal abuse, physical assaults and anti-social behaviour.

One in five of the survey respondents said they experienced these issues daily, with a further one third saying that incidents occurred at least once every working week. John Murphy pointed out that the issue has been a long-time concern for their members.

"However, since the pandemic our members report a serious increase in the number and severity of incidents on the public transport system. We need action on this issue immediately."

At the campaign launch some SIPTU members described the incidents of anti-social behaviour and abuse they have endured at work. Dublin Bus driver Suzanne Armstrong (pictured with Adrian Kane and John Murphy) says that drivers experience "quite a bit of abuse" on the bus.

"I've actually had a pedestrian bike thrown out in front of me one time," she said. Armstrong also outlined a time a brick was thrown through one of her vehicle's windows. "We'd also get abused from passengers and we could have drug dealing or using going on upstairs on the bus."

RESPONSE FROM TRANSPORT PROVIDERS

A spokesperson for Iarnród Éireann said it has significantly increased security resources and proactive partnerships with An Garda Síochána in recent years to ensure as safe a travelling and working environment as possible for customers and staff.

"We will continue to work with staff and representative trade unions to address and reduce our incidents of anti-social behaviour on board our services and in our stations," the spokesperson said.

Luas operator Transdev said it works with employees, unions, An Garda Síochána, schools and community representatives to put measures in place that best address anti-social behaviour. "Luas and the Gardaí have greatly increased the number of joint operations on trams,"



a spokesperson said.

Bus Éireann said it is continuing to invest significantly in providing a safe and secure environment for employees and customers with all its road passenger fleet fitted with enhanced CCTV cameras onboard. "Customer research shows that 96% of our customers feel safe and secure during their journey with Bus Éireann," a spokesperson said.

Dublin Bus has said that it takes incidents of anti-social behaviour extremely seriously. "The entire Dublin Bus fleet is fully fitted with CCTV cameras with up to 11 internal cameras and three external cameras fitted on the more modern vehicles in the fleet," a spokesperson said.

"Dublin Bus has a strong and close working relationship with An Garda Síochána and has set up a number of community forums in different areas across the city. All Dublin Bus employees are fully trained on the comprehensive procedures for dealing with specific challenging situations including anti-social behaviour," the spokesperson said.

For more information about the campaign visit www.siptu.ie/respect-transport-workers

