

# IN STEP, ON THE BEAT

To uncover more about their joint-operations as a Victoria Hub Team, **CHRIS KILVINGTON** spends an afternoon with Sergeant Andy Kemack of the British Transport Police and Sergeant Sean Doyle of the Metropolitan Police.

I find the door to British Transport Police Hub (BTP) HQ wedged into the side of Victoria station, behind a thick layer of renovation boards. There, I meet Sergeant Andy Kermack and we climb the stairs to their offices, which overlook a line of platforms on the concourse. It's early afternoon and clear that the day has already been very busy – the London riots happened two weeks ago and shift patterns are still very much affected.

“The key thing we provide is safety for the travelling public,” says Sergeant Kermack first. “Victoria station is a big interlink for the country and there are lots of vulnerable people passing through – people who might be carrying valuable goods. This is a large business community, so it does attract people who take advantage of that.”

While his radio buzzes by his right shoulder, he speaks about the team's theft-reduction programme with retailers, referring to their radio link system, which is funded by the Victoria BID's Safer Business Team. “The idea is for non-emergency crime to be called through – it's only a two-minute run for us to anywhere in the station, so we can attend quickly. The system allows us to share live information with businesses, but also with the MET team...”

A broadcast comes through on the sergeant's handset. “Excuse me,” he says, listening in. Two minutes later, with an apology, he is whisked away downstairs on duty business.

I catch up with the MET's Sergeant Sean Doyle and members of his team outside Victoria Coach Station, a quick walk across the train station concourse. Standing on the curb of a busy Buckingham Palace

Road, he tells me that their operations are bringing in crime reductions month on month. In July alone, theft was down 23 per cent.

“We run two joint operations with the transport police every month and four high-profile ones a year, all with the consent of local businesses,” he says. “As a team, our main ethos is to stop crime before it happens, because that means we don’t get a victim. There are always disputes, but we can often prevent things becoming a disorder.”

We walk into the coach station and over to European departures, where the sergeant points out the queues of people. “There are always a lot of people on this side,” he says watchfully, as we stand by the Euroline desk. “Travelling by coach is a lot cheaper than travelling by train; and if you consider you can pick up a ticket to Europe without having to give your name... in comparison, you know there will be lots of checks when you come through an airport.”

“We deploy uniformed and plain-clothed officers. If we are watching someone, we might place a uniformed officer in that area to see how that person reacts. PCSOs also engage with people regularly, advising them how to go safely on their journey – whether it’s someone sleeping with their bag on display or travelling in and out of the station.”

Following an update on his radio, we walk at pace to the other side of the station. There, two PCSOs have stopped a lady with a stolen handbag – a 79-year-old regular, apparently – and the sergeant looks a little disappointed that there isn’t something more interesting to show. “Sometimes there’s a perception of why you’re stopping someone,” he says, “but bag thieves come in all shapes and sizes.”

Stepping away, we speak about pre-planning for larger events. “We have V Festival this weekend, which means an increase of 2,500 or so passengers. Next weekend it’s the Notting Hill Carnival and we’ll have a search regime and metal detection around the arrivals area of the station to prevent violent crime travelling over there. Planned events require bigger resources and different timescales.” After a pause, he adds: “There’s phenomenal stuff going on for the Olympics.”

I ask the sergeant about less predictable events like the riots in London. “That was about public reassurance,” he says. “We were popping our

heads round the doors and letting the locals know it was business-as-usual. We had hundreds of officers in Victoria and put everyone in uniform. In those situations, you can't beat face-to-face interaction and a uniformed presence."

"Let's go up to Terminus Place," he says, and halfway up Buckingham Palace Road the sergeant tells me about 'VOLT', which stands for 'victim, offender, location, time'. By targeting those four elements, he says, they can reduce crime and make Victoria safer. Further up the road, he jokes about how often he is asked for directions to the coach station. "That's the other side of our job. We advise people on everything from hostels to fish and chips. I just happen to know a really good fish and chip shop."

At Terminus Place, we meet two more members of the team. PC Harvey has been speaking to the Victoria Ambassador outside the station and he tells me how well the different teams work together. "One of our PCSOs heard a domestic incident out here recently and the BTP were already there when we arrived. Terminus Place is technically our jurisdiction, but rather than take over, we took a statement from the Victoria Ambassador, who saw the incident. I've just been over to say thanks. Her help deserves praise – it's public-spirited and she saved a lady being beaten up."

I'm wrapping up for the afternoon and, as I fit my pad and pen into my bag, a vaguely confused-looking lady wanders over clutching an unfolded map of Central London. Sergeant Doyle and PC Harvey both smile to me as they step in to help with directions.

*Find out more about HUB Team and VBID radios at [www.insw1.com](http://www.insw1.com).*