

# **Merseyside Police**

## **Operation Loop Line**

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# *Merseyside Police Operation Loop Line Summary*

In early 2003 it became apparent that levels of crime and disorder on the Loop Line were increasing. With the 6 week summer school holiday break approaching there was every likelihood that the numbers of crimes and the levels of disorder would increase seriously affecting those that use the Loop Line or lived close to it.

The Loop Line is a disused railway track used by people walking and cycling and is an access point for people that live close by. The unique point about the Loop Line is that it cuts through three police Areas of Merseyside (Knowsley, Liverpool North and South Liverpool).

During the scanning, data was collected from police sources supported by information from partners, and the community.

The three police Areas have a Joint Agency Group (JAG) structure that enables them to deliver multi agency responses to jointly agreed problems.

The scanning identified the main crime and disorder problems and a set of objectives were agreed with partner agencies.

The analysis showed higher levels of criminality than anticipated, resulting in the parameters reducing to enable the initiative to have an impact on the problems on or close to the line.

The analysis identified specific types of crime and disorder enabling the response element to be focussed rather than try to address all of the problems of the area.

The response element consisted of multi agency approach that addressed the analysis under four headings: -

- Education
- Environment
- Enforcement
- Crime reduction

Many of the responses were addressed through the JAG system, but were principally delivered by a team of 10 police officers patrolling the Loop Line on bicycles.

As a result of continuing analysis the response from police officers changed regularly.

The assessment reviewed the number of offenders prosecuted and reductions in crime and disorder. This was supported by an independent survey examining levels of awareness and satisfaction of people that used or lived close to the Loop Line.

The outcome was that it had been very successful. Crime and disorder reduced satisfaction of the public increased and relationships between the agencies involved were enhanced.

The success of the Loop Line initiative resulted in successful operations being run in late 2003 and early 2004. Easter and summer 2004 will see further operations and plans are underway to employ Police Community Support Officers on the line in summer 2004.

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## Introduction

The Loop Line is a linear attraction operated by the charity Sustrans. Sustrans is responsible for a network of over a thousand miles of track throughout the United Kingdom, there are no vehicles allowed on these routes apart from maintenance vehicles. The Loop Line is part of the Pennine Trail connecting Southport, Liverpool, Leeds, York, Sheffield, Hull and other places in the north of England. Please see picture at Appendix A.

The Loop Line subject of this operation is an old railway track which was shut down in 1966, it was initially built in the mid 1800's to alleviate Liverpool main line railway stations by providing a bypass for trains destined from the south to North West holiday destinations. Once shut down it lay derelict until the early 1990's. Sustrans and other agencies lifted tracks and re surfaced all but the Knowsley end of the line, which is a gravel track. The total distance policed is 12 miles; 1.1 miles in the Knowsley area, 3 miles are in South Liverpool and the remainder in the North Liverpool area.

The area became very popular with walkers, cyclists and families who enjoyed leisure time along the leafy area. As a result of the fact that this is a linear track that does not allow vehicle access, the Loop Line was not subject of concentrated policing.

As a result, there was a noticeable rise in crime, anti social behaviour, drinking and drug taking in the lead up to summer 2003. Officers from Liverpool North and Knowsley Area determined that if the trend continued throughout the summer holidays, then the continued rise in crime would become a major problem to all of the Areas that cover the Loop Line.

As a result, a joint initiative was proposed using resources from all of the respective police Areas as well as other police resources. It was acknowledged that the police could not address the issue alone, so resources from other agencies were also invited to participate in the operation.

## Scanning

Three separate police area's identified, through crime pattern analysis that during the warmer months there was an increase in crime on or very near to the Loop Line, as already stated, the most concerning crime was child on child thefts and robberies, mainly of mobile telephones and pedal cycles. A corporate **Robbery Reduction Team** was already in place to deal with 'street crime' across the County of Merseyside. In order to monitor performance in relation to 'street crime' a fortnightly meeting chaired by the Assistant Chief Constable Operations was established. Each Area would send a representative to discuss issues in relation to the reduction of 'street crime' and associated offences. The **Robbery Reduction Team** co-ordinated a meeting to examine ways of tackling the problems identified on the Loop Line. This was the first time that crime on the Loop Line was recognised as a cross border problem and discussed at a strategic level.

Further analysis and discussions with local officers identified that there was also a problem with youth disorder/anti-social behaviour and alcohol and class B drug abuse on the line. A lot of the latter was anecdotal, and came from local residents meetings and liaison with other agencies and 'friends of the loop line.'

Perhaps one of the most worrying issues in relation to crime on the Loop Line was the number of times that young people were the victims. Knowsley in particular has a high percentage of people under 17 years especially in the Halewood area that the Loop Line passes through.

Not wishing to rely solely on computerised police data, officers from each Area began to research information held by other agencies. All of the Areas have a multi agency problem-

solving forum known as a Joint Agency Group (JAG). The JAG within each police Area began to support the police supposition with regard to increases in crime and disorder levels with their own information, some of which was anecdotal, and some of which related to increases in work within their own area of work. For example Local Authorities had more reports of graffiti and damage, youth outreach workers had information relating to youths congregating and being involved in anti social behaviour. As a result of this supporting information a bigger picture began to emerge.

Crime and anti social behaviour was a problem that covered the whole length of the Loop Line and could only be addressed if the various agencies worked together to develop a long-term solution.

In order to give the Operation a focus a series of objectives were developed.

They were: -

- To reduce levels of crime and anti social behaviour
- To increase levels of public satisfaction and confidence of those that used the Loop Line of live near to it
- To develop a partnership approach to address the issue over a long term

The above objectives fitted in with the force ethos of reducing levels of crime and disorder and increasing levels of public satisfaction and confidence

Sergeant (now Inspector) Jerry Harris was identified as the officer to lead the cross border team to deal with this issue. Although cross border initiatives were common throughout the force area this was the first time that the Loop Line was subjected to such attention.

## Analysis

The scanning process showed evidence of increased anti-social behaviour crime and drug/alcohol abuse on the Loop Line over recent years.

Detailed analysis of raw data was required in order to:

- Identify the resources necessary to deal with the problems
- Identify the agency best equipped to lead on the problem
- Identify times and dates to accurately deploy resources

The first attempt to obtain relevant data was carried out using the resources of the Liverpool City Council City Safe Project.

The initial data looked at incidents of crime and disorder at a distance of 100 metres either side of the Loop Line, comparing 2002 to 2003.

The crime data was broken down into headings such as:

- Violence against the person
- Sexual offences
- Robbery
- Criminal Damage
- Theft and Handling

The data showed a total of 1175 crimes in 2002 and 1211 crimes in 2003 – a 3.1% increase.

Details of the crimes were broken down further in order to ascertain the exact types of crimes that were being committed.

The breakdown produced findings that would have skewed response activity due to the wide range of offences that were committed.

Amongst the offences that were identified were:

- 1 - Murder (2002)
- 2 - Attempt Murders (2003)
- 16 -Threats to Kill (2002/2003 combined)
- 2 - Causing Death by Reckless Driving (2002/2003 combined)
- 38 - Obtaining Property by Deception (2002/2003 combined)
- 116 - Making off Without Payment (2002/2003 combined)

The wealth of data served to confirm that the area surrounding the Loop Line was a hotbed of criminality and that serious crime was a major issue.

However, it was accepted that there was only so much that the projected operation could have an impact on. The original plan was to tackle crime and disorder along the Loop Line itself and not 100 metres either side of the track. A decision was made to re-define the parameters and look to prevent or detect those offences that were being committed on the Loop Line itself.

The advantage of utilising data from City Safe was that it crossed the borders of the three policing Areas and gave a picture of activity as a whole. In order to narrow the data to a more manageable size, the parameters were reduced to 50 metres either side of the Line. Although the data was more manageable in terms of numbers, the wide range of offences was still prevalent. The same headings were used as before and the outcome is shown below.

The data showed a total of 469 crimes in 2002 and 569 in 2003 - a 21% increase.

To enable resources to be focused accurately, the data was broken down into type and then times of day, using the problem analysis triangle.

Again, to enable a focussed approach that was manageable it was decided to concentrate effort on the following series of crime and disorder issues: -

### Violence

- Assaults
- Racially aggravated offences
- Robbery

### Anti-Social Behaviour

- Public Order offences
- Criminal Damage
- Drug and alcohol abuse

### Theft

- Bicycles
- Vehicles

## Features of the Loop Line

- It covers three police Areas, all of which police the length within their Area in isolation
- Keeping the Loop Line clean and tidy was the responsibility of a small team of people that work for Sustrans. There is no requirement for the Local Authority or any other statutory agency to clean the Loop Line
- The Line is poorly lit apart from areas where it meets stretches of road
- Access points exist all along the 12 miles of the Loop Line
- Crime hotspots were close to roads the pass over or near to the Loop Line
- Parts of the Line were overgrown and untidy
- Broken glass and other debris could be found along the whole length of the Loop Line

### Features of the victim

- Users of the Loop Line or people living in properties adjacent to the Loop Line
- Vehicles parked adjacent to the Loop Line
- Many were young children who were subjected to robbery or theft from the person. Cellular telephones and bicycles were regular objects stolen
- Many of the victims were attacked between 1200 and 2200 hrs
- Many victims report being intimidated by large groups of youths both male and female drinking alcohol and smoking cannabis on the track. As stated this was intimidating, caused a lot of noise and also damage by way of broken glass etc.
- Some of the crime was victimless in that persons were using the line to facilitate criminality and were therefore subject of Going Equipped for Theft charges.

### Features of the offenders

- Tended to wander in groups
- Age range is from 12 to early 20's
- Lived within reasonably close proximity to the Loop Line
- Some carried weapons including baseball bats and knives
- Many were Area targets in relation to criminality
- The Loop Line was used as a transit point to get to and from other areas

- Use of drink and drugs was evident
- Offenders waited in unlit areas and targeted victims
- Many offenders rode along the Loop Line on motorcycles in a very aggressive manner

## Response

The response was based on the outcome of the analysis and for ease is split into Police and Other Agency response. It is important to remember that the response activity was a joint effort, with all agencies looking at elements of prevention and detection of offences and making the Loop Line a safe place for people to use.

It was apparent that routine patrol by officers would not impact on the issues suffered along the track. Access by vehicle to deal with calls for service was nigh on impossible. Added to this was the fact that the three Police Areas had different Control Rooms who, although complying with the corporate deployment policy did have differing working practices.

It was, therefore, agreed that a single team of one Sergeant and ten Constables would be formed for the duration of the operation. The officers were drawn from all three Areas on a proportional basis, dependent upon the length of the line within each Area.

The dedicated team was chosen, as they would not be abstracted from the initiative for reasons such as annual leave, etc. They patrolled the Loop Line primarily on mountain bikes wearing specially purchased equipment suitable for patrolling the environment. This included goggles that became essential due to the vast number of flies that were on the line.

The initiative commenced at the start of the school holidays in July 2003 and was due to end in September 2003. Initially the shifts worked 1200 to 0200 hours, however it became apparent that there was little activity on the line after midnight, so the shift was truncated to end at midnight. As the initiative continued it became necessary to end the shift at 2200 hours. This was primarily due to health and safety reasons.

The team not only patrolled the Loop Line but also the adjacent roads. Calls for service along any point were answered dependent upon proximity. Cycling 12 miles to an urgent call was not considered effective.

In order to become as self-sufficient as possible and not to have to rely on other officers the team secured the use of a marked personnel carrier equipped with a prison cage and a rack for the mountain bikes.

The team was supported throughout by officers from the Force Mounted Department and Traffic Department.

Although not heavily involved in arrests, the Mounted Section provided excellent support in terms of reassurance to people using the track. Again the Mounted Section did not confine their patrolling to the Loop Line itself.

The Traffic Department utilised a number of the Force scrambler bikes to patrol the length of the Loop Line. This was an interesting learning point that resulted in the Department being asked not to directly patrol the track. Because many of the houses backed onto the Loop Line they were unable to view the line directly due to either fencing or mounds of earth. The public, therefore, assumed that the motorcycles were either stolen, using the line for illegal purposes or were creating a noise nuisance and called for the Police to attend!



A whole range of other agencies were involved in the Response element of the initiative. Many were identified as a direct result of the analysis as being able to influence the project. Other agencies were identified during the project itself.

One of the major successes of the project was the engagement of the community and development of a 'Friends of the Loop Line' system.

This was a system that Sustrans had set up and the police continued to develop. The main character was Tim Claydon, a man in his 60's who had a keen interest in this route. The police team leader spoke with Tim on a daily basis and Tim made it his business to go onto the line and act as the eyes and ears of the partners patrolling the Loop Line. He also arranged for the Loop Line wardens to carry out work on the line and did some of this himself. Mr Claydon's enthusiasm for the Loop Line motivated all of those from the various agencies to work to support the 'Friends of the Loop Line.'

Despite the fact that the police lead the response to deal with the issues being suffered on the track it was acknowledged that they could not provide a long-term solution to this problem. Also, the fact that this was a cross border issue meant that officers from the three Areas would have to join forces and provide a joined up approach that covered the whole of the Loop Line rather than the stretch that each Area covered.

The police officers were directed to patrol the Loop Line on shifts of days and afternoons. They were directed by supervisors to deal with all calls for service along the line and address issues of crime and disorder reduction.

All activity was led by intelligence from either

- Police officers
- Local community
- Crimestoppers
- Loop Line workers

The activity fell into a number of key areas. These include

- Enforcement
- Crime reduction
- Environment
- Education

## Enforcement

Activity	Responsibility	Comment
Arrest of offenders	Police officers	Full details shown at analysis, however, during the summer 2003 initiative 114 people were arrested. Targeting known offenders was a key part of this activity
Reduce child on child robberies and thefts on the line	Police officers	There was only one reported robbery during the initiative
Reduce drug and alcohol misuse	Police officers	This included the confiscation, seizure and disposal of alcohol
Robust use of stop and search powers	Police officers	
Tenancy policy	Liverpool Housing	Arrests of tenants were subjected to the rigors of the strict housing policy
Warning sellers of petrol	Merseyside Fire Service	Reacted to information relating to the sale of petrol to youths who used it to fuel illegal motor cycles or start fires

## Crime reduction

Activity	Responsibility	Comment
Security etch bicycles and cellular phones were done?	Police	This was done on an ad-hoc basis and enhanced relationships between police officers and young persons, allowing an opportunity for dialogue as the process took about fifteen minutes for each cycle. 72 bicycles and 58 mobiles were marked
Engage members of the public that use or live near to the Loop Line	Police	This produced good dialogue with people both on and around the track, officers also attended at house's near to where disorder was occurring to gather as much information as possible and to enhance community safety. The information gleaned was fed into corporate systems and where necessary used to redirect the

		response
High visibility Patrolling at key times and identified hotspots	Police	This activity included door stepping known loop line offenders who were on bail in order to confirm they were adhering to bail conditions. All complied

## Environment

Activity	Responsibility	Comment
Clean the Loop Line	Liverpool City Council and Sustrans employees	This included repairs to the surface, removal of leaves and other vegetation, repair to damaged property and repainting bridges.
Clean the Loop Line	Youth Offending Team directed activity,	These young people were subject of Youth Reparation Orders which were handed out by Youth Offending Teams in Liverpool as they were identified first offenders and it was to prevent them coming into the court system
Removal of stolen or burnt out vehicles	Liverpool City Council	An arrangement was made for the team to deal with a single point of contact to ensure that vehicles were removed quickly

## Education

Activity	Responsibility	Comment
Drugs education delivered to schools and individuals	Drug outreach workers	A number of referrals were made to the local NHS Primary Care Trust assertive outreach workers by the operational team leader, in turn they made contact with offenders with a

		view to offering treatment for drug and alcohol addiction
Diversion activities	<p>Led by Greater Merseyside Connexions -</p> <p>Knowsley Neighbourhood Wardens</p> <p>Knowsley Ranger Service</p> <p>Lamplight Youth Service</p>	<p>Summer Splash programmes</p> <p>There was also two charity events during the summer of 2003, one being a barbecue arranged by the Knowsley Wardens</p> <p>The second being a sponsored bike ride along the line and onwards to Southport with Knowsley Rangers Service riding with young persons and raising money for charity.</p> <p>Joined police on patrol to engage with young people. The Merseyside Young Citizen of the Year – Carl McFarlane also joined this Service on patrol</p>

## Assessment

The success of the Loop Line initiative was plain to see:

- Over 114 arrests (further details below)
- Over 300 people stopped and searched
- Over 500 litres of alcohol discarded
- 72 bicycles security etched
- 58 mobile phones security marked
- 15 official warnings given under Section 59 of Police Reform Act
- Numerous positive reports in media (newspaper, radio and television)
- One robbery reported during the operation
- No reports of theft during the operation other than those detected
- No reports of anti-social behaviour on the Loop Line
- No reports of motorcycles being ridden along the Line (other than those of the Traffic Department!)

These are the stark facts. Huge reductions in crime and disorder and increases in public satisfaction and confidence.

In order to determine the level of public satisfaction and confidence an independent assessment was carried out by Mott MacDonald MIS.

The research was commissioned to evaluate the impact of the initiative on local residents and visitors/users of the Line. Specifically there were two main objectives:

- Discover people's opinion of the Loop Line initiative
- Ascertain whether the public feel the initiative affected confidence in Merseyside Police

Street interviewers from the market research company were employed to conduct a number of street and door to door interviews. The results are shown below: -

- 409 interviews conducted
- Just under 50% stated that they were aware of the Loop Line initiative
- Most who were aware had either seen an increase in police presence in the area or had read about it
- 75% of those who were aware of the initiative stated that the presence of Merseyside Police on the Loop Line had increased their feelings of safety
  
- 59.6% of respondents were satisfied with the work conducted by Merseyside Police in this area. The result compares favourably with the 2003 Community Safety survey, which showed public satisfaction Forcewide to be 36.2%
  
- Those who were aware of the Loop Line were more likely to state that they were totally satisfied with the work of Merseyside Police (10.4%) than those who were not aware of the initiative (1.9%)
  
- Those who were aware of the initiative were more likely to state that they were very confident in Merseyside Police (24.9%) than those who were not aware of the initiative (9.1%)

In conclusion it can be said that the Loop Line initiative did increase levels of public satisfaction and confidence.

### **Breakdown of key arrests: -**

• Possession of Cannabis related offences	60
• Heroin related offences	3
• Possession of Offensive Weapon	3
• UTMV	3
• Theft of pedal cycle	4
• Going equipped for Theft	4
• Possession of loaded air weapon	1
• Burglary related offences	7
• Drunk and Disorderly	1

## **CONCLUSION**

This was the first time that a cross-border, multi-agency initiative had been conducted on the Loop Line. The success of the initiative during the school holiday period of summer 2003 spurred Merseyside Police on to carry out a similar initiative at half term in October 2003.

Running the initiative in early winter presented a new set of problems, however this initiative was as successful as the summer project and plans are underway to run the initiative at Easter and summer 2004.

The positive impact on the community cannot be over-emphasised. All of those taking part were instructed to engage users of the track or those living nearby in conversation and ascertain their views on the policing initiative and see how it could be enhanced.

Due to the fact that the initiative was being run in real time, lessons learned had to be corrected quickly. This encouraged the main police team to become highly flexible in terms of their policing style and delivery. Shifts were changed, alternative agencies were included, and styles of patrol were changed.

Sub-projects were developed such as dealing with an anti-social family living in a near derelict house. The resultant imprisonment of some family members encouraged others to leave the area and the landlord subsequently boarded the property up with a view to selling it. Feedback from this community was very positive.

This was a true combined effort that has allowed this area to be used safely by many members of the community of Merseyside and visitors to the area.

The Loop Line is now a safe place for people to spend their leisure time. In order to ensure that the track and the nearby area receives the attention that it deserves it has recently been agreed that the agencies involved in the initiative will part fund the employment of Community Support Officers for the next two years. This will reduce the impact on police resources and give the Line its own security team who will become accountable for continuing the success of this project.

Appendices

Summary of Evaluation

Letters of Thanks

Media Reports (examples)

Pamphlets/Map

## Loop Line Initiative Evaluation

### **Background and Methodology**

The Loop Line is a dis-used railway line, which stretches across Knowsley, Liverpool North and Liverpool South. Crime and Anti-social behaviour has been occurring along the line affecting local residents and visitors/users of the line. A joint agency initiative was run, over a 6-week period during school summer holidays, to tackle the issues.

Research was commissioned to evaluate the impact the initiative had had on local residents and users of the Loop Line. The research had two main objectives;

- i). Discover local public's opinions of the Loop Line initiative.
- ii). Ascertain whether the public feel the initiative affected their confidence in Merseyside Police.

Street Interviewers from an independent market research company were employed to conduct a number of street and door-to-door interviews with users/visitors.

### **Results**

- 409 interviews were conducted in total
- Just under half of those interviewed stated that they were aware of the work being done by Merseyside Police on the Loop Line.
- Most of those who were aware of the Loop Line initiative had either seen an increase in police presence in the area or had read about it in a local newspaper.
- 71% of those who were aware of the initiative stated that the presence of Merseyside Police on the Loop Line had increased their feelings of safety.
- 59.6% of respondents were satisfied with the work of Merseyside police in their area. This result compares favourably with the 2003 Community Safety Survey, which showed public satisfaction Forcewide to be 36.2%.
- Those who were aware of the Loop Line initiative were more likely to state that they were totally satisfied with the work of Merseyside police (10.4%) than those who were not aware of the initiative (1.9%).
- Those who were aware of the loop Line initiative were more likely to state that they were very confident in Merseyside Police (24.9%) than those who were not aware of the initiative (9.1%).
- In conclusion it can be said that the Loop Line initiative increased public satisfaction and confidence levels.