



Which Loo?

*A document from Aurora. Croydon's LGBT Police Focus Group,
in consultation with transsexual organisations*

What's all the fuss about?

Some personal stories from Croydon and local support groups

Well, most transsexual people don't have this problem, but, if you don't pass well, then get some help from friends and your local support group.

So what's the problem?

Northamptonshire 2003

On 14th August 2003, Judge Charles Harris of Oxford County Court ruled that a landlord, who threw five transgendered women out of the Red Lion pub in Thornby after one had used the women's lavatory, had every right to treat them as men. (This is not a precedent, similar cases may be decided differently even by the same judge.)

Croydon 2003

Sara and Rita were two of the first people to attend Aurora. They had been staying in a hotel on holiday. When they emerged from the ladies they were humiliated by loud and extended protests. They came to Aurora to address this issue.

Croydon 2004

Months later Sara was driving back to Croydon with Caroline. Caroline wanted the loo, but Sara drove some considerable distance to a pub she knew was trans-friendly, to avoid any trouble.

Caroline got out and went into the pub while Sara parked. To her horror it was full of "skinheads", but by then she had no option. She passed quite well, so she followed the signs to the Ladies with hardly a head turning.

Then Sara followed. Once in the pub she was rather shocked, but it was too late at that point, so, passing less well, she made a bee line for the Ladies, with a few heads now turning.

Next Caroline had to leave the loo, and now, with several eyes following, made her way out.

Finally Sara emerged and as she made for the door someone shouted abuse at her. Others began to join in. She didn't look back, but the disturbance grew increasingly terrifying. As she made her way to the car drinkers began to spill out of the pub and some followed her down the street still shouting. She managed to reach the car, get in and drive away but was seriously shaken at the prospect that the verbal abuse could have turned to physical attack.

The fear of violence is an important aspect of such cases and this is something that the Police are concerned to prevent.

I'm mtf, what's your advice?

Well — it's not "advice".

This situation is different for everyone. What's good advice for others can be exactly the wrong advice for you.

People and circumstances are very different.

So be aware of your surroundings and be prepared to adapt the following points, with lots of common sense as circumstances change.

How to avoid trouble

Before you use the loo

- Most MtFs in the early stages of transitioning, know intuitively that they can't go into the Gents when they're dressed as a women — it's too dangerous.
- It can be unwise to hang on until you reach that "safe" pub or unisex loo. If you arrive and the pub is full of skin heads, or the unisex loo is closed, you may be bursting and have no options to play with.
- So think ahead (e.g.) if you're on a train, use the (unisex) loo — don't wait till your journey is over.
- If you go into a pub to use the loo, consider buying a drink first to avoid attracting the staff's attention. If you don't "pass" well, you can always leave it on the bar and then make for the loo immediately.
- Consider using disabled or unisex loos when possible.
- Motorway service stations encourage you to park and go straight to the eating place to find its loo. If you do this, when you leave the loo, and queue up at the food counter, other travellers are more likely to call the police. As it's a service station there are usually police at hand, and you will be sitting over your tea and scones when they arrive. You can sometimes avoid this situation:
 - Re-fuel and use the disabled or unisex loo in the petrol station.
 - If there's more than one eating place use the loo in one, then eat in the other.
 - Sometimes you can use the loo on one side of the motorway and eat on the other.

When you're in the loo

- Go in confidently, do your business, wash your hands and leave. If you look as if you are going immediately to an appointment you are less likely to be challenged.
- Many MTFs find that in the Gents loos you avoid eye contact: Ladies loos are more social and have a communal girls-together feel — you do tend to make eye contact. This may help to blend in — but loos differ, so notice how other women behave.

When you leave the loo — if you are the object of protest

- If you are challenged, don't get involved in a conversation or argument. Stay calm, use the facilities, then leave.
- Whether you have a certificate of gender recognition or not, carry some documentation showing your acquired gender: (passport is too valuable generally to carry with you) eg:
 - driving licence
 - AA membership
 - a medical certificate from your local GP or other appropriate person or body
- You now have the opportunity to get a certificate of gender recognition. (See www.pfc.org.uk or the Gender Recognition Panel's own site at www.grp.gov.uk) This can help sort things out.
- Carry your mobile, be prepared to phone 999 or 112.

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Scotland Yard endorses Aurora's pages on the "Which Loo?" issue for transgender people



The Diversity and Citizen Focus Directorate are pleased to support this partnership initiative between Aurora and Croydon Borough Police, which supports the Metropolitan Police Service vision of making London safer for all our communities.

The MPS recognises that this particular issue is of concern to the transgender community, and is certain that "Which Loo?" will provide practical suggestions that will give confidence and support based on the experiences and learning of other transpeople.

By working closely with community groups such as Aurora and the LGBT Advisory Group to the MPS, we make clear our commitment to making places safer for everyone, and will investigate incidents or crimes motivated by transphobia when they are reported to us.

We also recognise that there are many reasons why victims of such incidents do not have the confidence to report directly to the police, and we would therefore encourage victims to report, anonymously if necessary, using one of the third party reporting options outlined on the Aurora website.