



# Safety on Public Transportation for Girls

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**Girls' in the Bay Area expressed feeling unsafe on public transportation and walking through their communities.** Alliance for Girls in partnership with high school-aged girls led community-based research, speaking with 63 girls of color about their experiences, published in the “Together, We Rise” report. Girls in each city expressed feeling unsafe on public transportation and walking through their communities.

A Statewide Assessment of Sexual Harassment and Assault (May 2019) revealed that the majority of women (77%) experience sexual harassment in public spaces. 74% in a public space such as on the street and 29% on mass transit. This issue is holding back girls, women, non-binary people – a majority of society back from moving freely. This also contributes to a decrease in ridership and limits the full potential of public transportation. Efficient public transportation has benefits like reducing carbon emissions, reducing traffic congestion, and has financial benefits for riders and the economy. According to the American Public Transportation Association (APTA), “every \$1 invested in public transportation generates \$4 in economic returns.” APTA also stated that “87% of trips on public transit have a direct impact on the local economy.” Given the impact of the lack of safety on public transportation for girls, women, and non-binary people, systems like LA Metro are taking action to address this.

## Recommendations

- 1. Create a Gender Equity Action Plan with a commitment to enhance safety for girls.** LA Metro conducted research to identify issues that impact ridership and safety. They found that “60% of female riders feel safe riding Metro during the day, but that number plummets to 20% at night. Safety concerns are keeping women from riding Metro and exposing those who do ride Metro to fear of being victimized. The safety concerns are affecting the agency’s ability to achieve policy goals in areas ranging from the environment to economic opportunity.” LA Metro created a Gender Action Plan in August 2019 to enhance safety and other points for access for women and non binary people. Bay Area Transportation authorities can use this as a model to form a Gender Equity Action Plan across all systems, including VTA, BART, AC Transit, and SamsTrans.
  - a. Establish an intergenerational Gender Equity Committee** with local community based organizations, girls, and gender expansive youth who have a gender equity lens to oversee the process. LA Metro’s [“Women and Girls Governing Council”](#) in 2017 is a model we can learn from.
  - b. Launch a safety audit** to identify key areas the Gender Equity Action Plan should focus on such as times or stations that have higher rates of harassment.
  - c. Revise the rider code of conduct to include the prohibition of sexual harassment.**

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1 “Girls” refers to gender-expansive youth (cis girls, trans girls, non-binary youth, gender non-conforming youth, gender queer youth and any girl-identified youth).

**2. Utilize updates in tech and other features to enhance safety and gender equity.** Updates to public transportation are an opportunity to implement and enhance safety.

- a. Use new tech features to launch an awareness campaign regarding verbal and sexual harassment.** For example, the Fleet of the Future, is a great opportunity to include messaging on the tech screens.
- b. Use a future focused model to prioritize safety as public transportation transitions to self driving cars and other forms of automation/artificial intelligence.** Innovations in tech such as smart benches should be incorporated into stations. Smart Benches provide self-sustaining green solar energy to power such as cell phone charging, WiFi hotspot, and area LED lighting.
- c. Update stations to prioritize safety** including increased lighting at stations, emergency phones and buttons (that have height options for girls), and adding more signs with the line number/route. One girl who attended an AFG town hall shared that “when you are running from a dangerous situation and you see a bus, you get on it without properly reading the route number just so you can escape and then end up in an unknown or unfamiliar location.” It would help to have more signs that include route maps and information so in this kind of situation, girls know where they are and how to get to where they intended to go. Flexibility for stops, especially when it is dark so girls can get off closer to their destination and reduce their walk is another accessibility factor.
- d. Renovations and changes to stations and bus cars must include a gender equity focus.** For example, women and girls tend to use public transportation to complete tasks like commuting to work, going to school, picking up children or siblings, grocery shopping, etc. Their hours of use and travel routes are specific. An example of renovations that meet girls and women’s unique needs includes having hangers or creating space to place multiple grocery bags or strollers. Infrastructure and line updates should intentionally accommodate these needs.
- e. Ensure that there is safety and support in waiting areas.** Riders who walk to the station need safe spaces to wait for the bus, train, etc. They may also need areas to wait to get picked up by other forms of transportation like Uber/Lyft. Transportation hubs where transfers are made, should have a special focus on creating a safe environment. There should also be a special focus on stations near schools which youth are more likely to utilize. This can include having free phone lines for people to use in the case of an emergency, community ambassadors, and well lit sheltered area.
  - i.** A hotline that riders who are waiting for their ride to call for support is also advised. A youth leader from SheLectrcity, shared that “ the hotline could lead people to a safe waiting space. It could also support those who feel awkward and would like to talk to someone while waiting for rides or listen to calming music through the hotline.
- f. Invest in female and non-binary employees as drivers, station agents, etc., and train them in identifying domestic violence and sexual harassment so they can support with non-violent intervention efforts.**
  - i.** Target work development opportunities and support to female and non-binary identifying people. LA Metro hosted a girls empowerment summit to encourage girls to take an interest in public transportation career path.
  - ii.** AB 2034 mandates training for employees at transportation agencies and will be fully implemented by 2021. There is potential to amend this and add training in domestic violence and sexual harassment prevention.

**3. Provide support at stations and waiting areas to enhance safety through unarmed community de-escalators and changes in the environment.** The success of the Muni Transit Assistance Program (MTAP) is an example of how de-escalation and intervention led by unarmed community members is an effective method of enhancing safety in public transportation. “About 57,000 children attend a school in the San Francisco Unified School District; and about half of them use Muni to get back and forth. Since launching in 1996, MTAP works with and trains members of the community in conflict resolution who then ride on specific routes with the purpose of diffusing and deterring any conflicts, acts of vandalism, and who assist the bus operators as needed.”

- a. Bay Area public transportation systems such as VTA, BART, etc. should adopt a similar model to MTAP** to enhance safety in stations and on the rides themselves. This enhanced safety will increase ridership and in turn, can help pay for the role of community de-escalators. According to APTA every \$1 billion invested in public transportation supports and creates more than 50,000 jobs.

Community presence and intervention through de-escalation is more effective and equitable as people of color, specifically black people, do not find safety in the police. In fact, transit police have increased violence and resulted in the deaths of members from marginalized communities. People who hold targeted identities are more likely to feel safe approaching an unarmed ambassador for support. Studies show bystander intervention “approaches to violence prevention may increase bystander intentions, promote positive bystander behaviors, and reduce violence among college students (Coker, et al. 2017).”

**CONCLUSION:** When all girls are safe on public transportation, everyone is more likely to be safe and ridership is likely to increase. According to research presented at the annual Transportation Research Board 2019 Meeting, women who live near transit could be avoiding it because they feel unsafe. About 20% of the women interviewed for this research said they avoided public transportation due to fear for their safety walking to and from the station, the station area itself, and the bus line.

**Centering girls and uplifting the needs of girls to create safety on public transportation is a powerful approach that would increase safety for others too.** Girls' movement is often inhibited due to lack of safety or fear of sexual harassment. Girls need to move freely and safely to get to school, go to work, meet with friends, run errands, and so on. Safe public transportation is connected to access to mobility for girls. When girls thrive, we all do.

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