



Board Report

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EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE SEPTEMBER 19, 2019

SUBJECT: UNDERSTANDING HOW WOMEN TRAVEL

ACTION: RECEIVE AND FILE

RECOMMENDATION

RECEIVE AND FILE status report on How Women Travel Study (Attachment B).

ISSUE

Although women comprise over half of all transit ridership in Los Angeles County, their mobility needs, concerns, and preferences have not been critically accounted for in the way our transportation systems are planned. In seeking to understand how women travel, Metro is taking an important first step towards easing the disproportionate efforts women put in to making the transportation system work for them by identifying mobility barriers and challenges women face.

BACKGROUND

Metro's Women and Girls Governing Council found that Metro either does not collect or when collected, does not disaggregate its data by gender to understand the unique travel patterns and preferences of women. Metro has limited information on how women travel, which limits the consideration of women's unique needs during planning, design, and operation of our system. Historically, transportation planning is seen as gender neutral, it equally benefits both men and women and that there are no significant differences between mobility needs and patterns. In reality, women experience mobility differently.

The purpose of gathering & analyzing gender-disaggregated data (separating data by gender) is to have access to Metro/Los Angeles County-specific research and data that really reflects how women travel to make informed decisions and ensure that applicable departments at Metro are utilizing gender specific data to implement service changes and improvements. This study explored the experiences of women traveling by Metro through an analysis of existing data sources, such as on-board surveys, and innovative new data sources.

DISCUSSION

The core finding of all existing evidence is that women are responsible for a disproportionate share of the household's transportation burden while at the same time having more limited access to available means of transportation. According to a number of studies, gender differences in travel patterns are mainly accounted for by the division of roles in the labor market and in the family, which affects women's employment conditions, income levels and mobility needs. Many studies have shown that, in addition to the persistent gender wage gap, women pay more for goods and services than men. Transportation is no different. The "pink tax" does not only apply to the added cost of finding safe means of travel at night, it includes all the ways that women put in extra time and effort to make transportation work for them.

The findings from Understanding How Women Travel about women's mode choices, how likely they are to travel with others in their care, and their complex trip-chaining patterns could all inform adjustments to Metro's fare policy to make it more equitable towards women and more cost-competitive with driving and carpooling. The findings about women's trip purposes and primary responsibility for household errands could all inform the way transit vehicles, transit stations, and bus stops are designed, so that space for traveling with others and carrying bags and other belongings could be better accommodated. Findings about when women are traveling, and average trip lengths could inform new service offerings that meet a mid-day peak travel demand and provide better direct connections over long distances while minimizing transfers.

Study Methods

A comprehensive and creative approach was required to understand how and why women travel in Los Angeles County. Framed by core social justice principles and methods, the project team used both conventional and innovative data collection methods that effectively captured "hard-to-reach" populations and embodied the project's intersectional approach to gender.

Conventional methods that provide quantitative findings about women's travel behavior included:

- Analysis of nine **existing data sources** from Metro and the National Household Travel Survey revealed gendered preferences and trends in travel behavior and transit ridership
- Understanding **How Women Travel survey** completed by 2,600 respondents, oversampling women and transit riders
- Three **focus groups** allowed for open conversation around sensitive topics and added nuance to our understanding of gender differences in travel

Innovative methods that offer qualitative findings about the experience of women traveling by Metro included:

- Over 100 hours of **participant observations** on 19 Metro routes provide insight into how women are using Metro's services
- Three **participatory workshops** creatively engaged the most loyal - and most vulnerable-core Metro riders: women with disabilities, women experiencing homelessness, and women who are immigrants
- Three **pop-up engagements** at key metro rail stations expanded our data collection to catch every-day riders, in the process of using Metro's services, to hear what makes their ride easy

or difficult

Study Highlights

Overall Travel Behavior Trends - Exploring women's overall travel patterns on all modes allows Metro to have a better understanding of women's trip-making patterns. By looking at the travel choices women are making outside the Metro system, Metro can better understand existing gaps in service and increase the attractiveness of transit as an option by aiming to serve the primary travel preferences and patterns exhibited by women regardless of mode.

- Across all modes, more women are making many trips (7 or more) per day than men and more women than men are not making any trips per day. This means women may experience more exposure to travel burdens (cost, stress, or safety risks), or may be more likely to be isolated or disconnected from the opportunities that travel affords.
- Women in Los Angeles also make shorter trips than men, which is potentially driven by workforce participation rates, location of employment opportunities, and taking household-serving trips that tend to be more localized.
- Women are more likely to live in a car-free or car-light household.
- Women in Los Angeles make shorter trips than men, women's trips have more varied destinations and are more likely to serve the needs of someone else.
- Women are more likely to trip chain or make more stops along the way and have an additional travel peak at around 2pm in addition to the morning and evening peaks.

Overall Transit Travel Behavior Trends - Metro has an opportunity to improve services for women already riding the system. Currently, more than half of all bus and rail riders are women. The burdens (time and financial) and safety risks of transit travel, as well as the benefits of transit travel, are more pronounced for women, as they make up the majority of Metro's customers and as they ride transit frequently.

- Women account for a larger share of Metro bus and rail ridership now than they did in 2010, while male ridership has decreased.
- Almost 90% of all female riders who use the system, ride more than three days per week.
- 57% of women bring their children on transit.
- Women ride transit because they do not have a car, because they want to avoid traffic, or because they do not have a license. Two of these three reasons indicate that women who ride transit do so because they have fewer transportation options and may have less access to economic opportunities as a result.

- Women in Los Angeles are also more likely than men to travel mid-day, with a travel peak around 2 PM when transit service may be reduced.
- Women are more likely than men to use TNCs for trips that transit does not serve.
- Women are more likely than men to take short transit trips, with trips under 10 miles accounting for 74% of women's transit travel and 67% of men's.

These travel behavior findings point towards many opportunities to adjust the services provided by Metro to better meet the travel needs expressed by those who are using transit.

Safety - Women feel unsafe on public transit, and it is impacting how often they ride, when they ride, and if they ride at all. Among women, safety on transit is a top concern voiced across every mode of data collection, and their concerns center around harassment and personal security, as well as physical safety and design of vehicles, stations, and stops.

- Based on the How Women Travel survey, the top reason that women find it difficult to ride transit is they do not feel it is safe. While 60% of female riders who participated in the survey feel safe riding Metro during the day, that number plummets to just 20% at night. Safety perceptions for waiting and walking to the stop or station were even lower.
- Two-thirds of female riders believe there are too few transit police on board the system; however, in our conversations during focus groups, workshops, and pop-up events, it was clear that riders have a more complex view of security staffing. Some felt that police were slow to react or ineffective when issues did arise, while others felt that police were too aggressive or too quick to brandish weapons.
- 1/4 of women bus riders and 1/3 of women rail riders report experiencing sexual harassment in the past six months.
- When asked what would make them feel safer on Metro, both current and previous riders cited "lighting" and "other people nearby."

Studies have shown that transit agencies should adopt a "whole journey" approach to improve safety on transit focusing on the safety measures for riders walking to and from a bus/station stop, park and rides, bus stop locations, waiting for and riding the bus/trains. The fear of being victimized influences women's transit behavior. Over and over, participants in the workshops and pop-ups pointed to problems that could be solved by a deeper investment in lighting, more human solutions rather than technological solutions (people vs. CCTV), more frequent service to produce shorter wait times, and other solutions at stops and stations. Participants in the study asked for additional amenities, such as lighting at stops and along pedestrian access routes, and more frequent service that would shorten long wait times at dark bus stops.

Access - Access concerns voiced by women include physical design of transit spaces, physical design of sidewalks and roads used to get to transit stops or stations, financial ability to pay for transit trips for themselves and those in their care, the challenges of traveling with children, and the travel needs of women with disabilities.

- Low-income women in Los Angeles carry a disproportionate financial burden when it comes to travel. For women in poverty, transit fares comprise a greater share of disposable income than for those who have higher household incomes.
 - They are less likely to have the upfront cost of a monthly pass on hand.
 - They are more price sensitive to the cost of a single transit trip, so are less likely to buy a monthly pass unless they are certain it will be financially beneficial
- 37% of current female bus riders and 23% of current female rail riders received a discount on their fare.
- The physical design of vehicle and stop/station spaces also create access challenges for women. Women were observed in our study traveling with bags, carts, and strollers. Negotiating the space on transit vehicles and at stops and stations appeared to be a challenge.
- Only 20% of female riders with children say that taking their kids on transit is easy.
- From women with disabilities, we heard that Access Services is a critical resource, but operates in a way that devalues women's time - hours could be expended on a single trip for a single purpose.

Reliability - For women in Los Angeles who rely on Metro to get to work, go to doctor's appointments, and pick kids up from school, reliable transit service is a lifeline. When headways are long, and real time information is unreliable, women's safety concerns are amplified and women who have the financial ability to switch to a different mode, such as ridehailing, do so. Others who do not have that luxury simply endure the exposure and stress of added wait times.

- The top three complaints filed by Metro bus riders to our customer care centers are all related to reliability: pass-ups, no-shows and late buses.
- Most of the women who participated in participatory design workshops expressed frustration with late buses, expressing that they could not depend on the transit system to get them to where they needed to go on time. When a bus is late and they miss transfers, long-distance trips become even lengthier.

Women's top requested improvements are: direct service, expanded bus priority lanes, and buses at least every 15 minutes.

For women who rely on transit, an unreliable system has real consequences. A late train can mean daycare fines, a pass-up can mean a missed medical appointment, and infrequent early morning or late night service can limit employment opportunities.

Convenience & Comfort - Comfort and convenience are important considerations in order to build a system that women want to use, enjoy using, and would continue using even as they have other options available to them. Reliability issues render the system usable or not; comfort and convenience issues render the system pleasant or not.

- Fewer than 40% of female riders surveyed for this study feel that transit is comfortable or that transit vehicles have the space they need for their belongings.
- 44% - of women's transit trips are longer than an hour.
- Over half of women who were bus riders but stopped riding said their top reason for not riding was because it took too long/was too slow.
- Fewer than 40% of female riders feel that transit is comfortable or that transit vehicles have the space they need.
- Half of female riders who responded to our survey described Metro operators as courteous, and less than one-third felt that other riders were courteous.

IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS

Recommendation supports strategic plan goal #2. Goal 2 is to deliver outstanding trip experiences for all users of the transportation system.

NEXT STEPS

This report is the first step in Metro's process to better understand and better serve the needs and preferences of female riders. The research and findings from this report can serve as baseline data to inform the development of a gender action plan. A gender action plan's objective is to ensure that policy, programs and activities include a gender perspective and to promote the considerations of gender issues at all levels. Based on the findings from the study, recommended areas of action include safety, fare policy, vehicle, station and stop design and services provided by time of day. Development of a Gender Action Plan would help to articulate the immediate opportunities and long-term goals that would create a system that better serves women. Staff will work with appropriate departments to explore feasibility of next steps included in the report. Staff will be presenting study findings at industry conferences.

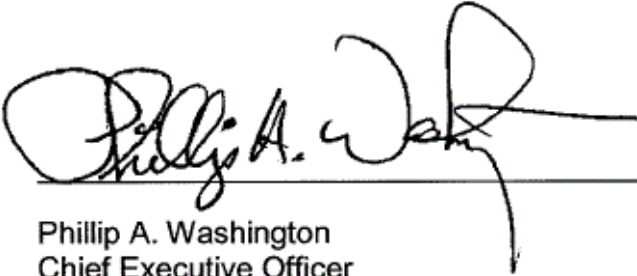
ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A - Understanding How Women Travel Report Executive Summary

Attachment B- Understanding How Women Travel Links

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