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TRANSIT AS A WOMEN'S ISSUE:

Why Planners Should Prioritize Women in
Transit Planning, Design, and Operation

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ABSTRACT

Transportation options are important for all communities and transit in particular has a distinct role to play in providing access to jobs, healthcare, education, and services. While responsive transit services benefit the entire community, gendered differences emerge when considering issues such as poverty and earnings, how women are employed, and caretaker roles for children and aging parents. Women's life expectancy, greater years without a driver's license, and safety perceptions all point to a strong connection between women's challenges and transportation needs. This paper explores the reasons why women have much to gain from increased transit service, and therefore, should be a center point in transit planning, design, and operation based on the many ways that transit can help women meet their unique challenges.

Transportation infrastructure serves as the backbone for our cities and small towns, creating the base infrastructure that often guides the placement of employment and commercial centers, residential growth, and utilities. Historically, sea and river navigation routes, railroad corridors, and highways have served to define communities and these investments have reflected the values and interests of those at the decision-making table, to the detriment of omitted populations. As communities plan for transit, inclusive engagement is critical, as investment decisions have long-standing community implications.

The design and function of transportation can keep communities apart or bring them together. Transit is often viewed as a public service with a singular purpose: mobility for those who cannot afford or do not have the physical ability to drive a single occupancy vehicle. However, effective transit systems—those that have frequent service, well-designed routes, and significant destinations—can serve as a foundational pillar for livable communities and equitable economic growth and prosperity. Public transit, especially, has the potential to facilitate economic opportunity and social equity by increasing accessibility to life-sustaining services (e.g. preventative medical care, healthy food, prescriptions, child care, laundry services), places of employment, educational institutions, parks and recreation, cultural activities and other community services. If properly planned and implemented, public transit systems can advance inclusive growth and positively impact the physical and mental health of residents. Transit can also serve as an economic driver, especially when planned in conjunction with surrounding land uses that both support and benefit from the transit service.

Transit is an important factor in long-term upward mobility. Nationwide, household transportation expenses averaged \$8,755 per year in 2016, making transportation the second

largest household expenditure category after housing (Bureau of Transportation Statistics, 2017). Personal vehicles account for the majority of transportation expenditures, made up of car payments and operating expenses, including maintenance, gas, and insurance. Increasing access to alternative forms of transportation, including transit, can reduce household transportation costs by reducing the number of household vehicles and associated expenses. Reducing the household transportation burden is especially important to women due to a higher poverty rate and lower average wages, as seen in Figure 1 and 2.

For the purposes of this paper, transit is defined as public transportation by rail, bus, or van and does not include single occupancy vehicles, private ride-hail, bikes, or scooters. Transit mode share is not addressed, as each community system is planned and designed according to local needs. Instead this paper focuses on the intersection of transit and gender as a way to highlight the benefits of including women in all phases of community transit planning while underlining the unique issues affecting women. Key concepts explored in this paper include why transit is important to women, how transit can address women's unique challenges, and how transit planners can be instrumental in making transit successful by keeping woman in the forefront through all phases of transit planning, design, and operation.

WOMEN'S TRANSIT USE

Gender differences extend across all realms of human activity from access to resources and household roles, to income and opportunity. The social effects of gender differences translate to distinctly gendered travel patterns as well (Law 1999). In a sample of major U.S. transit systems, there are greater numbers of female riders than there are male riders (see Figure 1). Riders are defined as individuals who use public transportation to travel to work, essential

services, and recreation. Out of the twelve largest transit systems, only Seattle had a higher percentage of male riders. Women’s overrepresentation in transit statistics leads to further consideration about how transit development can become more intentionally inclusive of women, through planning, design, and operation. This overrepresentation highlights the need to ensure that transit systems are inclusive of women’s values and interests. Unfortunately, there is a gap in literature surrounding gender and transport in rural areas (Law 1999).

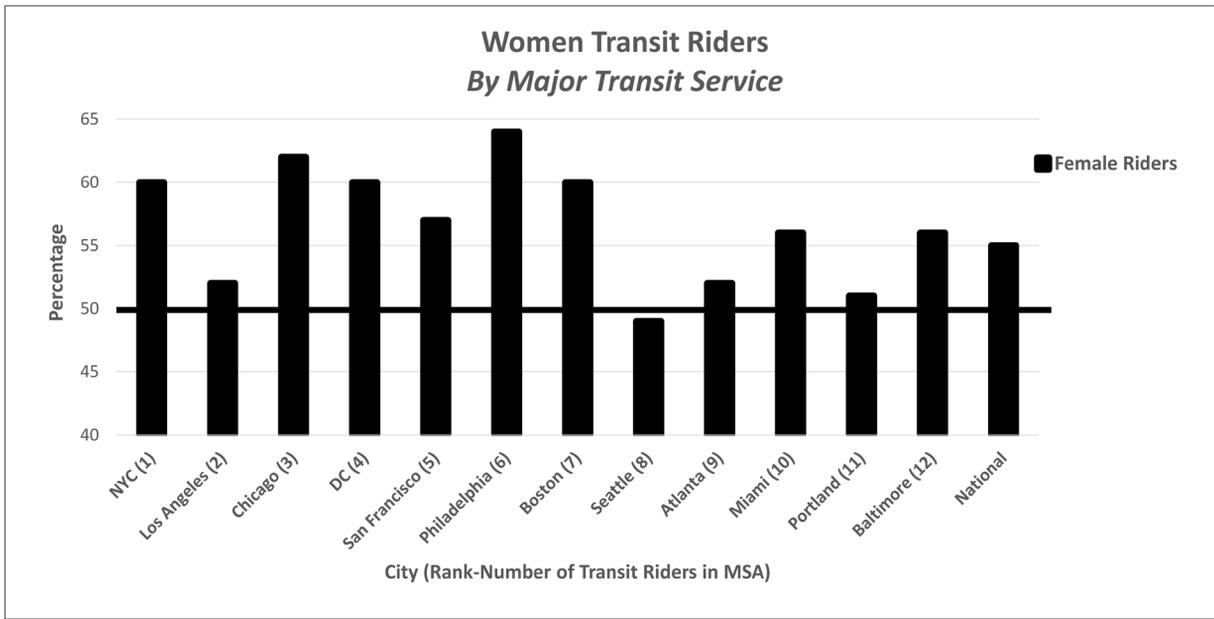


FIGURE 1 - Female Ridership in Major Cities (Saksa 2015)

Women’s daily movements are unique and based on responsibilities and challenges they face daily. Female trips through a community often crisscross and zigzag, with one trip involving multiple destinations, a characteristic often described as trip-chaining. The U.S. Department of Transportation’s Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) defines a trip chain as a sequence of trips bounded by stops of 30 minutes or less. In effect, women tend to take a greater number of shorter trips to dispersed locations at more varied times. These travel characteristics create trips that are more expensive in terms of time and money (Kunieda and Gauthier 2007). These women-centered travel patterns have implications on transit design, operation, and policy, and should remain at the forefront for transit planners.

CHALLENGES OFTEN FACED BY WOMEN

Disparity across gender becomes apparent when considering issues such as poverty and earnings, how women are employed, and caretaker roles for children and aging parents. Women's life expectancy, greater years without a driver's license, and safety perceptions all point to a strong connection between women's challenges and transportation needs. These inequalities and challenges are often interconnected. The gendered wage gap and difference in poverty rates highlight the need for affordable transit. The higher rates of women spending money on private ride-hailing (like taxis, Uber, Lyft) to compensate for safety concerns adds an additional facet to the necessity of affordable transit.

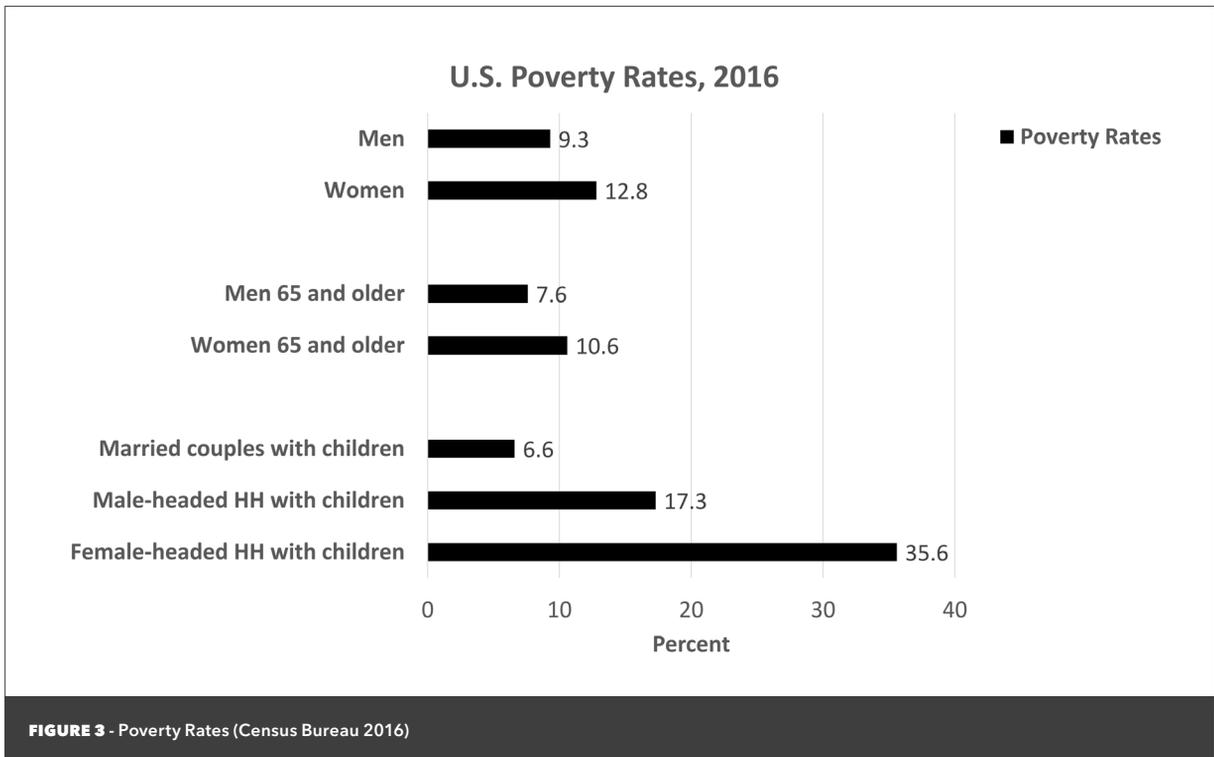
CHALLENGE: Wage Gap and Poverty

Women continue to earn, on average, considerably less than men, despite making up almost half of the workforce, serving as the sole or co-breadwinner in half of American families with children, and receiving more college and graduate degrees than men. In 2017, female full-time, year-round workers made only 81.8 cents for every dollar earned by men—a gender wage gap of 20 percent (Hegewisch 2018). The gender pay gap that exists between men and women is influenced by race. White women earn only 81.9 percent of what white men earn, and the disparity between male and female earnings grows more pronounced for black, Hispanic, and Asian women. As Figure 2 shows, black women earned a mere 67.7 percent of what white men earned, and Hispanic women earn 62.1 percent of what white men earned in 2017. The lower earnings can be attributed to numerous other factors including discrimination in hiring, recruiting, and compensation, the absence of family leave, and higher rates of women in lower-earning occupations (Blau & Kahn 2016).

Racial/Ethnic Background	Gendered Wage Gap 2017			
	Women	Men	Female Earnings as % of Male Earnings of Same Group	Female Earnings as % of White Male Earnings
All Races/Ethnicities	\$770	\$941	81.8%	--
White	\$795	\$971	81.9%	81.9%
Black	\$657	\$710	92.5%	67.7%
Hispanic	\$603	\$690	87.4%	62.1%
Asian	\$903	\$1,207	74.8%	93.0%

FIGURE 2 - Wage Differences by Sex and Race/Ethnicity (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2018)

The wage gap influences the number of women in poverty and while poverty rates in the U.S. continue to fall, being a woman increases the odds of being poor. The U.S. Census Bureau data released in September 2017 shows women were 38 percent more likely to live in poverty than men, with more than one in eight women— nearly 16.3 million— living in poverty in 2016. Women make up nearly two-thirds of all people in poverty ages 65 and older and more than half of all children living in poverty lived in families headed by women. Perhaps the most striking disparity is in the poverty rates for female-headed households with children (35.6 percent) versus male-headed households with children (17.3 percent) and households with children headed by married couples (6.6 percent) outlined in Figure 3 (Census Bureau 2016).



The implications of the gendered wage gap and female poverty rates point to the need for multiple transportation options, including transit, to lower the overall household transportation costs, freeing up resources for other household needs. Affordable, effective transit options also provide the access and stability needed to secure and retain long-term employment.

CHALLENGE: Multiple Jobs

While the share of workers holding multiple jobs has been declining since 1994, and is currently at a twenty-year low, a disparity emerges when this data is broken out by gender. Women are more likely to have multiple jobs, a trend that is even more pronounced for younger women, ages twenty to twenty-four. In the two decades between 1995 and 2015, young men have been far less likely to hold multiple jobs than young women (Wilson 2015). Nationwide, nearly 4.3 million women work more than one job and nearly 50 percent work a secondary part- or full-time job on top of a primary full-time job. More than half a million women who held multiple jobs had a primary or secondary job with hours that varied—meaning their job was not consistently part-time or full-time (Temple 2016).

These conditions impact women's travel patterns and highlight the importance of transit frequencies and headways to address inconsistent travel times. It is especially challenging for women to coordinate local transit schedules with their primary and secondary jobs, as well as child and/or elder care. As women make up a large percentage of low wage, hourly workers across all industries, they are essentially captive public transit users based on both financial necessity and the need for additional trips between workplaces. These work schedules also have implications on the need for essential services (e.g. groceries, child care, medical facilities) that are easily accessible to transit due to women's lack of extra time and money.

CHALLENGE: Caretaker for Children

Women's role as caretakers contributes to the discussion of travel patterns and transit usage. While fathers have nearly tripled the time they spend caring for children since 1965, on average eight hours a week, women spend about fourteen hours per week caring for children (Livingston 2017).

The presence of children results in increased numbers of trips and the need for transit routes that provide access to healthcare, childcare, recreation, and education (Crane 2007). Increasingly, the number of school choice options

make public transportation even more important for children who do not always attend their neighborhood school (Vincent, et al. 2014). For older children, transit is also needed for important supplements to education including internships, clubs, jobs, and recreational activities at schools or in other locations. A family's ability to take advantage of increased educational options hinges on their access to safe, reliable, and affordable transportation. Access to transit often determines which families have the opportunity to choose the most appropriate schools and development experiences for children.

CHALLENGE: Caretaker for Adults

The role that women play as caretakers also extends into elder care, as women are twice as likely to care for an aging parent as men. Of the 41.3 million eldercare providers in non-institutional, civilian population (ages fifteen and older), 56 percent were women (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2017). This creates a situation where women routinely leave the workforce for periods of time or exit the workforce early (retire) to focus on elder needs. According to the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP 2013), over 36 million Americans are age 65 or older. By 2030, this number will double, with one in five Americans 65 or older. As the senior population ages, there will be increased pressure placed on transportation systems and female caretakers (Coughlin 2009). If seniors were independent longer, with access to mobility options, such as transit, the time period devoted to elder care could be reduced.

Additionally, absence from the workforce required for eldercare produces a tremendous financial impact in the form of lost wages, sacrifice of future pay raises or promotions, and reduced contributions to retirement savings. The average income lost by caregivers each year is 33 percent. Caregivers pay for many expenses out of their own pockets, to the tune of \$10,000 per year, and roughly 11 percent of caregivers end up having to quit their job to care for someone at home around-the-clock. If a woman leaves her job due to caregiving needs, the lost wages, pensions and Social Security benefits over her lifetime total more than \$300,000 (Fahle and McGarry 2017).

CHALLENGE: Years After Driving Cessation

Women's life expectancy is five years longer than males, with 2016 life expectancies at 81.1 years and 76.1 years, respectively. Nationwide, many elderly drivers quit driving each year and must seek alternative sources of transportation, such as transit. Because of differences in life expectancy, women require more years of support for transportation, on average, than men after age seventy. On average, male drivers aged seventy to seventy-four years will be dependent on alternative sources of transportation for approximately seven years and female drivers of the same age will be dependent on alternative sources of transportation for approximately ten years (Foley, et al. 2002).

Mobility needs do not cease when age leads to driving cessation. Once mobility through single occupancy vehicles ends, there is even greater need for accessible public transportation (O'Neill 2010). More and more, seniors are turning to public transit to address mobility needs after driving is no longer an option. And, out of necessity for wheelchair accessible mobility, both fixed-route and demand response transit services are lifelines to medical, nutrition, and amenity services.

CHALLENGE: Safety

Women's safety is an important challenge that must be considered along with the additional money spent by women on transportation based on safety threats. Long-term discrimination and oppression that women face—especially in public spaces, has discouraged women from traveling alone, especially at night. This lack of safety is perpetuated and almost sanctioned through its normalization. Safety perceptions must be recognized in order to understand the disadvantages that women face when it comes to transit experiences.

In a first of its kind study on gender-based price discrimination in public transportation conducted by the NYU Rudin Center for Transportation, researchers found that because of harassment and safety perceptions, over 58 percent of females used for-hire vehicles or taxis (over public transportation) for late night travel. Ultimately, the median extra cost per month for men, due to safety reasons, is \$0, while the median extra cost per month for women is up to \$50, amounting to \$600

per year. This cost is higher for female caregivers, who are responsible for transporting children and elderly family members who face logistical challenges as well as perceived safety risks. The study estimated female caregivers can spend an extra \$100 per month, or \$1,200 a year, on travel (Kaufman 2018).

In addition, it should be recognized that women's unique travel patterns (trip-chaining) lead to increased transfers. If these travel patterns are not taken into consideration when developing fare policies, the cost of transit can be inequitably skewed based on gender.

CHALLENGE: Land Use

Dispersed land uses create issues that transit alone cannot address. Often, affordable housing is not evenly distributed meaning that women are forced to move further away from employment opportunities, child care, grocery stores, medical facilities, and educational institutions. This creates a need to travel great distances to meet daily needs for women in affordable housing. In smaller towns and rural areas, distance can be a prohibitive factor, and limited transit resources cannot bridge the gap, leaving mobility needs unaddressed.

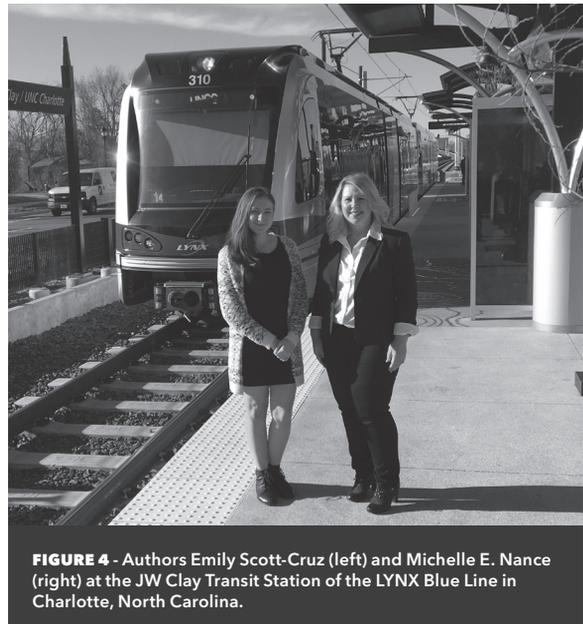


FIGURE 4 - Authors Emily Scott-Cruz (left) and Michelle E. Nance (right) at the JW Clay Transit Station of the LYNX Blue Line in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Transit Oriented Development (TOD) describes the practice of mixed-use development including “commercial, residential, office, and entertainment centered around or located near a transit station” (Federal Transit Administration 2018). TOD’s strives to lower public infrastructure and service costs, increase access to mobility, reduce household transportation costs, catalyze economic development, and expand affordable housing through higher density zoning (EPA 2017). These TOD goals work together to address many of the challenges noted above. By placing access and mobility at the forefront of discussions surrounding transit and development, TOD also emphasizes equity.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Inequitable public transit disproportionately burdens women. Looking at transit through a lens of gender differences when applying transit practices, can carry immense implications for improvement in equitable access and treatment of women using public transit. Based on the challenges outlined herein, there are select recommendations that may prove beneficial for planners.

Transit Policy

- Establish family friendly policies for public transportation, including clear messaging on priority seating, seats for breastfeeding mothers or the elderly.
- Establish and highly publicize an easy process for accommodating unexpected and emergency rides that may occur during the day (outside of transit schedules).
- Ensure that transit frequencies and headways consider the typical trip patterns and trips taken daily by women.
- Establish rider focused coordination policies between transit systems and across political jurisdictions to support medical, and other trips, frequently needed by seniors and to reduce the additive costs of layered fares.
- Provide methods to report bad behavior to authorities and highly publicize zero tolerance for harassment.
- Train law enforcement and first responders in harassment and assault so that victims reporting violence receive the appropriate support.

- In keeping with the principles of representative bureaucracy, hire more female drivers, especially in rural demand response systems, to reduce negative safety perceptions in transit.

Transit Access and Affordability

- Target houses of worship, social services, and community crisis centers for education on transit availability and travel training.
- Evaluate fare systems and transfer policies to ensure better accommodation of female travel patterns, which include trip-chaining, with multiple destinations per trip.
- Public participation on future transit expansions and surveys to assess transit rider experience should be gender balanced.
- Conduct gender focused audits to better understand women’s travel patterns in order to evaluate bias and determine if transit is meeting women’s needs. Use results to inform future transit and land use planning.
- Advertise transit in terms specifically tailored to women’s mobility issues. Marketing and Transportation Demand Management (TDM) programs should frame advertisements to show transit readiness for families, seniors, and female riders.

Built Environment

- Plan transit stops near healthcare and childcare facilities, grocery stores and public services, and parks and schools in order to facilitate caretaker roles by making frequent destinations more accessible.
- Analyze transit infrastructure with a “crime prevention through environmental design” (CPTED) lens; which includes planning transit stations and stops that increase visibility and safety, and incorporate well-lit, clearly visible, emergency service-equipped sidewalks.
- Use TOD to create density and a mixture of uses conducive to transit, including affordable housing, employment, services, and community amenities.
- Involve women in the design of transit facilities.

- Transit design should consider that women often have strollers and bags, necessitating ramps, wider aisles and gates.
- Consider the needs of older adults and provide travel training for seniors allowing them to be independent longer, assisting women as caretakers and as older adults after driving cessation (Currie and Delbrose 2010; Oxley and Charlton 2011).

Other Considerations

- Ensure women are represented at all levels of transit planning, design, and implementation, including transit agency leadership, consultant teams hired to design transit components, and on standing transit stakeholder groups.
- Expose girls to career pathways in transit through targeted outreach, scholarships, and mentoring.
- Support non-profit and community groups whose mission advocates for women transit riders and first-mile/last-mile solutions important to women.
- Create and/or support forums where women can advocate locally for transit safety, fare policy, and routes.

Transportation planners need to take into account women's disproportionate use of transit, and revise transit practices based on women's needs. Women have much to gain from increased transit service, and therefore, should be a center point in transit planning, design, and operation. Understanding women's unique transit challenges and including women in the process to address those challenges will lead to a more equitable, inclusive system and improved access and mobility for the broader community.



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