Policy Brief: Making public transport and urban spaces safer and inclusive for women

A policy brief based on the ‘Toolkit for Enabling Gender Responsive Urban Mobility and Public Spaces’

India
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Contents

04 Introduction
05 Why view through a gender lens?
06 Barriers across public transport
07 Key elements
08 Pillar I
09 Pillar II
10 Pillar III
11 Pillar IV
12 Concluding remarks
INTRODUCTION

Cities are engines of growth, job-creation, and innovation. As workers and firms interact closely, cities generate increases in labor productivity through agglomeration economies. Evidence shows a clear, positive correlation between urbanization and real gross domestic product (GDP) per capita for the world as a whole and in developing Asia and in India in particular.

Globally, lack of consideration for diverse population needs in urban planning and design has constrained women’s access to socio-economic opportunities. Women are under-represented in urban planning and design institutions, often excluded from decision-making, and often denied a seat at the table to voice their concerns.

Indian cities need gender-responsive urban mobility and public spaces so that benefits of city-led economic growth can be more equitably distributed. India has amongst the lowest female labor force participation rates (FLFPR) globally, at 22.8% in 2019-20\(^1\). Barriers in accessing public transport, lack of safety during travel, and social norms restricting mobility, severely limit women’s work, education, and life choices.

This toolkit is intended to bridge the knowledge gaps between policy making and program implementation for gender-responsive urban mobility and public space in India. It is a guide towards introducing gender equality and women’s empowerment principles into designing urban mobility systems and public spaces, so that they mitigate rather than reinforce gender inequalities.

Central themes of the toolkit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inclusion</th>
<th>Safety</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understanding mobility patterns</td>
<td>Reducing the threat perception</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhancing representation in decision making</td>
<td>Enabling effective grievance redressal mechanisms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving infrastructure and service designs</td>
<td>Empowering bystanders</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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WHY VIEW THROUGH A GENDER LENS?

Women are active users of public transport across Indian cities. 84% of their trips are by public, intermediate public, and non-motorized modes of transport. A meta-analysis of literature and surveys globally and in India shows some clear patterns of public transport usage for women and men.

Urban mobility systems are often not designed to account for gender-based differences in mobility patterns. Despite women forming a significant user-group, little gender disaggregated analysis of mobility patterns at city level in India is available. When such analysis is available, it is seldom used to design tailored urban mobility solutions that suit differential needs of women and other genders.

Differences in mobility patterns between men and women

- **Travel shorter distances and are limited to a more restricted geographical area**
  - Women tend to
  - Men tend to

- **Engage in more non-work-related travel such as house-hold and care related work**
  - Women tend to
  - Men tend to

- **Travel with dependents**
  - Women tend to
  - Men tend to

- **Cover shorter distances to go to the work place**
  - Women tend to
  - Men tend to

- **Undertake chained trips**
  - Women tend to
  - Men tend to

- **Travel during off-peak hours**
  - Women tend to
  - Men tend to

- **Pay additional travel costs for trip-chaining, safety and other reasons known as ‘Pink Tax’**
  - Women tend to
  - Men tend to

- **Use public transportation and NMT as the main modes of transport**
  - Women tend to
  - Men tend to

- **Undertake more frequent changes in mode**
  - Women tend to
  - Men tend to

- **Value flexibility, convenience and safety very highly**
  - Women tend to
  - Men tend to

- **Travel longer distances**
  - Women tend to
  - Men tend to

- **Travel mostly for paid work activities**
  - Women tend to
  - Men tend to

- **Travel solo**
  - Women tend to
  - Men tend to

- **Cover longer distances to get to the work place**
  - Women tend to
  - Men tend to

- **Take more point to point transport from home to workplace**
  - Women tend to
  - Men tend to

- **Travel during peak hours**
  - Women tend to
  - Men tend to

- **Spend less on transport**
  - Women tend to
  - Men tend to

- **Have access and use personal modes of transport**
  - Women tend to
  - Men tend to

- **Use fewer modes to get to their destination**
  - Women tend to
  - Men tend to

- **Consider saving time highly and see safety as a lesser issue**
  - Women tend to
  - Men tend to
BARRIERS ACROSS A PUBLIC TRANSPORT JOURNEY

Despite being major users of public transport, women’s concerns around safety, affordability, accessibility, connectivity and over-crowding are often neglected by policy-makers and technical staff who design urban mobility systems, in favor of a system that benefits a “neutral” male user.

Women face barriers to using public transport owing to gender-blind design elements, during access and egress, waiting at stops and transfers, boarding and alighting, and inside the vehicle.

Four stages of public transport journey and their challenges for women

**FIRST AND LAST MILE CONNECTIVITY**
- Deserted and lonely streets
- Broken, obstructed and unshaded footpaths
- High compound walls
- Absence of consistent lighting
- Absence of safe cycling infrastructure
- Ad-hoc fare charges by auto drivers
- Limited access to real-time information of vehicles to pre-plan a journey

**WAITING AT STOPS AND STATIONS**
- Bus-stops located in footpaths and isolated areas
- Inaccessible and obstructed bus-stops with inadequate lighting
- Limited visibility at and around bus-stops due to opaque back panels
- Absence of human activity at and around bus-stops and stations
- Absence of real-time information, route maps and help-line number
- Absence of clean toilets for women and transgenders near bus-stops and stations
- Inadequate signage

**BOARDING AND ALIGHTING**
- High floor of buses
- Obstruction of bus-stops by on-street 2-wheeler parking
- Crowded boarding which increases probability of sexual harassment
- Large vertical gaps between the platform and coaches of sub-urban and metro rail

**INSIDE THE VEHICLE**
- Crowded buses
- Harassment inside the vehicle
- Absence of signage on help-lines and seat reservations for women
KEY ELEMENTS OF A GENDER-RESPONSIVE URBAN MOBILITY PROGRAM

Pillar I - Assess the ground situation to understand gender-disaggregated mobility patterns, safety concerns and expectations of women commuters, policies, mindsets of duty bearers and right holders and level of gender inclusivity in the built infrastructure and transport services.

Pillar II - Strengthen policies, supporting legislations, regulations, guidelines, plan documents and other manuals, by suitably incorporating a gender-lens.

Pillar III - Build the capacity of duty-bearers responsible for implementing policies, plans, programs, and projects and raise awareness for duty-bearers and right holders alike at the community level.

Pillar IV - Improve the design of infrastructure and introduce gender-responsive services to improve the inclusion and safety of public transport and public spaces.

ASSESS THE GROUND SITUATION
- Understand gender differences in mobility patterns
- Understand safety concerns and threat perception of public transport and public spaces
- Identify gaps in current policies, regulations, and legal frameworks
- Identify gaps in institutional capacity and assess prevailing mindsets to deliver gender-responsive programs

STRENGTHEN PLANNING AND POLICIES
- Integrate a gender-lens in new and existing policies and plans
- Introduce gender inclusivity in decision making and key institutions

BUILD CAPACITY AND RAISE AWARENESS
- Mandate training and capacity building of duty bearers
- Forge partnerships for raising awareness and enabling community action through campaigns

IMPROVE INFRASTRUCTURE & SERVICES
- Enhance women’s safety on public transport and spaces
- Apply a gender lens on infrastructure design and public transport services
Pillar I - Assess the ground situation

The design of inclusive public transport services and public spaces, begins with an on-ground baseline gender gap assessment. The ground assessment aim to understand the barriers to women’s use of public transport services and public spaces, as well as the underlying causes, thus providing data to help bridge the gaps be at the planning, policy, mindset level or the project implementation level.

- Undertake regular collection and analysis of gender-disaggregated mobility data to understand differentiated patterns to improve the transport services.
- Review existing transport sector policies, regulations, plan documents, legal frameworks, and guidelines to identify gaps for gender inclusion and responsiveness.
- Complement data collection surveys by qualitative focus group discussions with women to understand the drivers behind preferences and their expectations.
- Benchmark technical capacity, gender representation, and understand prevailing mindsets across stakeholders and implementing agencies.
- Undertake regular safety audits of public transport and public spaces.
- Assess the robustness of the grievance redressal mechanisms by regularly surveying users to reduce the under-reporting of sexual harassment.
Pillar II - Strengthen Policies

Existing policies, plans, laws, and institutions can be made more inclusive by incorporating a gender-lens and ensuring diverse representation at key institutions. Following the review undertaken during the previous stage of assessment, a way forward can be charted to address the identified gap. The two key elements include integrating a gender-lens in new and existing policies and promoting gender inclusivity at key institutions, particularly in leadership and decision making.

- Mainstream gender-disaggregated concerns and incorporate **gender action plans** within the comprehensive mobility plans (CMP) developed at the city-level.
- Devise fare policies to **lower cost of travel** for women to boost their ridership.
- Devise special policies / schemes to **include women in the mobility field**.
- Devise **preferential procurement** policies to prioritize purchases from gender-responsive suppliers.
- Diversify **representation** in urban local bodies, public transport authorities, especially at senior leadership and decision-making level.
- Establish a **dedicated team** to implement and monitor the gender action plan.
- Strengthen **grievance redressal** to fast-track sexual harassment complaints.
Pillar III - Build Capacity & Raise Awareness

Whether women are able to exercise their “rights to a city” depends on the delivery of public services by duty bearers and attitude change in the community, making gender sensitization, capacity building and awareness creation critical. The ‘right to the city’ framework advocates building safe cities such that women have equal rights to enjoy the city and claim space in anyway they wish to, without experiencing violence or the threat of violence.

- Arrange for **capacity building** and gender-sensitization of management at ULBs, PTAs and implementing agencies to ensure gender responsive planning, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of public transport services.

- Arrange for **gender sensitization** training for drivers, conductors, police and other people facing staff in public spaces and transport services

- Raise awareness at individual and community level for shifting mindsets through **social and behavioral change campaigns**

- Partner with **community-based organizations** for accelerating the awareness spread through advocacy efforts

- Arrange for large scale **by-stander intervention trainings**
Pillar IV - Improve Infrastructure & Services

Barriers to use of public transport and public spaces can be reduced by placing a gender-lens on the infrastructure design of streets, stations and public transport vehicles, and introducing gender-responsive services can diminish these barriers.

- Install adequate **lighting** in streets, public spaces, at stations and in public transport vehicles.
- Increase the **proportion of women frontline staff** – bus drivers, conductors, security officials.
- Establish **emergency services**, including emergency buttons, helplines, mobile based service for emergency complaints, marshals and rapid response teams.
- Steamline **intermediate public transport** (IPT) services to increase safety.
- Plan urban mobility systems to simplify **modal changes** and ensure **service on routes frequented by women**.
- Introduce gender-sensitive guidelines and infrastructure design to **ease boarding, alighting and transfers**.
- Introduce **gender-informed design** of public transport vehicles.
- Provide **gender-responsive infrastructure** at stations, terminals, and depots.
CONCLUDING REMARKS

For women, girls, sexual and gender minorities, and people with disabilities (PWDs) to experience safe and inclusive, gender-informed public spaces and transport services that address their unique requirements, concerted and long-term commitment is required across stakeholders, including policymakers, duty bearers and citizens.

Gender-responsive interventions for urban mobility and public spaces can be designed around four key pillars: (i) assess the ground situation; (ii) strengthen planning and policies; (iii) Build capacity and raise awareness; and (iv) improve infrastructure and services. While interventions suggested under each of the four pillars can be introduced even as stand-alone initiatives, a coordinated program at state or city level can unlock synergies and amplify the impact of each intervention.

To understand more about what needs to be done to tread towards gender-inclusive urban mobility click here for Volume I of the toolkit - Enabling Gender Responsive Urban Mobility and Public Spaces.

To understand how to plan, design and implement a participatory, inclusive urban mobility program refer to the Volume II of the toolkit.