



Perceptions of Safety: Enhancing Rider Safety in Transit

APTA EMERGING LEADERS PROGRAM
CLASS OF 2026

*Safe on paper. Unsafe in experience. That gap is
what we're here to close.*

MEET THE TEAM - GROUP 5



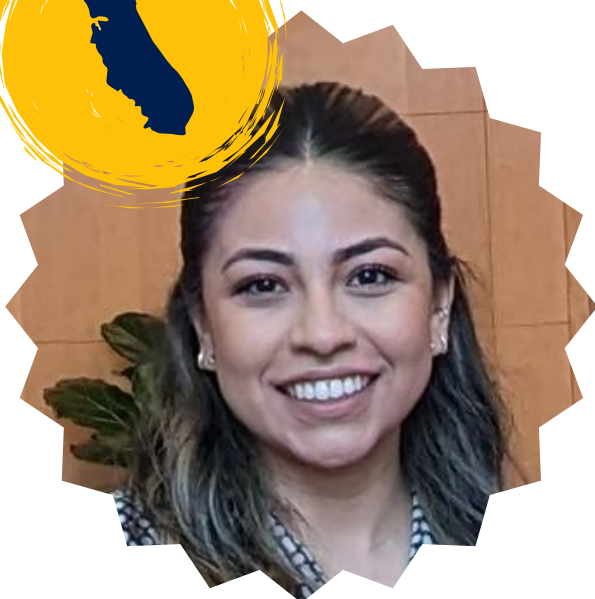
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Perceptions of Safety:

Enhancing Rider Safety in Transit

Yet transit is statistically...

50×

safer per mile than driving a car

National Safety Council

45%

of female bus riders reduced transit use
due to fear of harassment

SJSU / MTI Study

WHY IT MATTERS

Safety Isn't Just About Statistics.

63%

Of transit riders experienced harassment – but only 23% recognized it as such

— SJSU/MTI 2020

54%

of women are concerned about harassment vs. 20% of men

— NYU Rudin Center

45%

of female bus riders reduced transit use due to fear of harassment, compared to only 7% male riders

— SJSU/MTI 2020

Only 32%

of Muni riders feel safe at night — down from 50% pre-pandemic

— SFMTA 2023

The "Pink Tax": Women spend extra time, money, and energy to feel safe on transit that should already protect them.

AGENCY INTERVIEWS

18

agencies contacted

14

responded via
Zoom/Teams/email

4

roles represented

FIFA



host cities
prioritized

Interview Questions

- What are the key safety messages and campaigns?
- What standard operating procedures exist?
- What data is collected — and what's missing?
- What challenges are agencies facing?

Interviewee Roles



Communication
Officers



Police
Department
Representatives

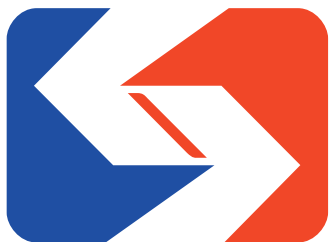


Safety
Coordinators



Data Specialists

AGENCY INTERVIEWS



AUDIENCE TARGETING: WHO IS THE MESSAGE FOR?

A central question for every campaign: who are you trying to reach? The answer shapes everything about tone, imagery, and placement.

**Victims /
Potential Victims**

Bystanders

**General
Audience**

**Offenders /
Deterrents**



Universal finding: agencies were apprehensive about targeting specific demographics for fear of exclusion or bias perception.

DISCREET REPORTING: THE UNIVERSAL STANDARD

Discreet reporting is the closest thing to a universal standard among the agencies we interviewed. Nearly every agency has some method to text or contact security without speaking aloud — because speaking aloud can make you a target.

SEPTA	LA Metro	MBTA	Metro Transit (Minneapolis)	WMATA (DC Metro)
Transit Watch App	Transit Watch App	See & Say App	Text for Safety	Police Text Line



The power is in your pocket

Download the Transit Watch App to discreetly share safety and security issues.



MBTA SEE SAY



Call if you can,
text if you can't.

TEXT FOR SAFETY





Alert SacRT

Download the free Alert SacRT app

- Receive rider alerts
- Report safety and security concerns
- Send anonymous text, photo or video

Available on the App Store | Get it on Google play

add us to your contacts



Add Metro Transit Police to your phone, so you can text us if you need help.

Text: **696-873**
Or call: 202-962-2121



Scan to add contact



NAMING IT: DEFINING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Level 1 — Bare Minimum

General Awareness

A campaign raises awareness but doesn't name or define the harm.

Level 2 — Better Practice

Defining Harassment

Campaigns that define sexual harassment, assault, and gender-based violence.

Level 3 — Best Practice

Trauma-Informed, Community-Sourced

Campaigns developed with or by affected communities.

GROPING

Inappropriate touching, indecent exposure, rubbing up against someone in a sexually motivated way.

They're all sexual assault and a crime. You can stop it by reporting it.

Text or call 911.



TOUCHING

Inappropriate touching, indecent exposure, rubbing up against someone in a sexually motivated way.

They're all sexual assault and a crime. You can stop it by reporting it.

Text or call 911.



INDECENT EXPOSURE

Inappropriate touching, indecent exposure, rubbing up against someone in a sexually motivated way. They're all sexual assault and a crime. **You can stop it by reporting it.**

Text or call 911.



INCIDENT RESPONSE: LEGAL & MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Legal Support

Agencies are expanding legal frameworks to make transit violence prosecutable and visible.

Example:
SEPTA
partners with District Attorneys for prosecution support.



Mental Health Support

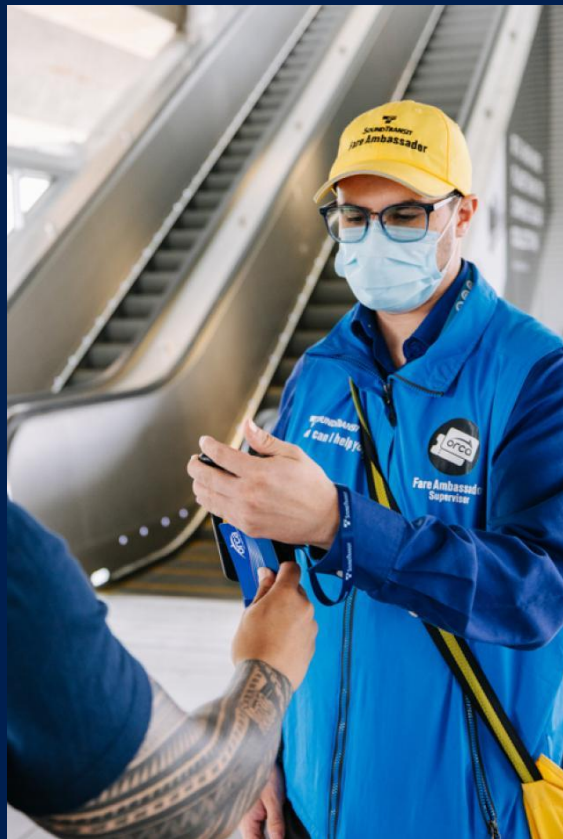
Mental health responses range widely — from basic training to full multi-disciplinary teams.

Example:
DART CARES / Minneapolis TRIP —
proactive mental health deployed on system.



INTERVENTION SPECTRUM

Passenger Communications and Intervention Spectrum



INTERVENTION SPECTRUM AND DATA COLLECTION

Data Collection & Monitoring

Improving on NTD safety metrics:

- Rider surveys that capture perception of safety and incident detail
- Demographic breakdowns by gender, race, and sexual orientation
- Specific incident type tracking (verbal, non-verbal, physical)
- Post-incident follow-up reports to close the feedback loop

The agencies that collected disaggregated data by gender, race, and incident type were better equipped to advocate for resources.

FOUR PRIORITY AREAS FOR ACTION

Grounded directly in what we heard across 14 agencies — here's where investment will have the greatest impact:

01 Discreet Reporting Infrastructure

02 Targeted, Trauma-Informed Campaigns

03 Workforce Training & Support Systems

04 Data Systems & Intentional Design

MOVING SAFETY FROM PROGRAMS TO SYSTEM-WIDE COMMITMENT

Mandate Gender-Disaggregated Data

- Require reporting by gender, race, incident type
- Align with NTD reforms

Expand Codes of Conduct

- Include non-criminal harassment
- Enable earlier intervention

Formalize Interagency Coordination

- Standardize protocols
- Align transit, law enforcement, and partners

Institutionalize Aftercare for Victims

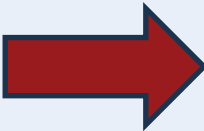
- Ensure access to:
 - Mental health support
 - Legal guidance
 - Follow-up outreach

Key Takeaways

Action Items

01

Transit is safe. The experience often isn't.



01

Build aftercare into your safety infrastructure – not a webpage, a system.

02

What you don't measure by gender, you cannot fix by design.

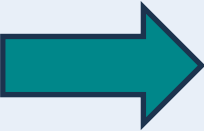


02

Collect data by gender. Make the invisible visible.

03

Victims of transit violence deserve more than a pamphlet.



03

Protect your gender-based safety campaigns. The riders who need them are counting on you.

THANK YOU!



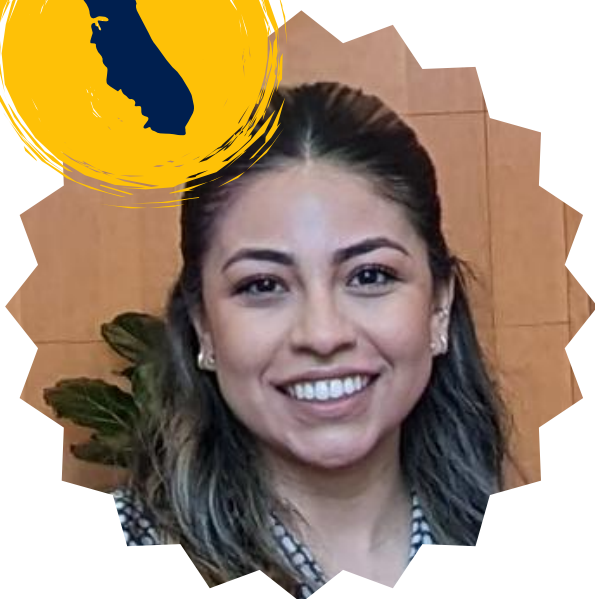
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