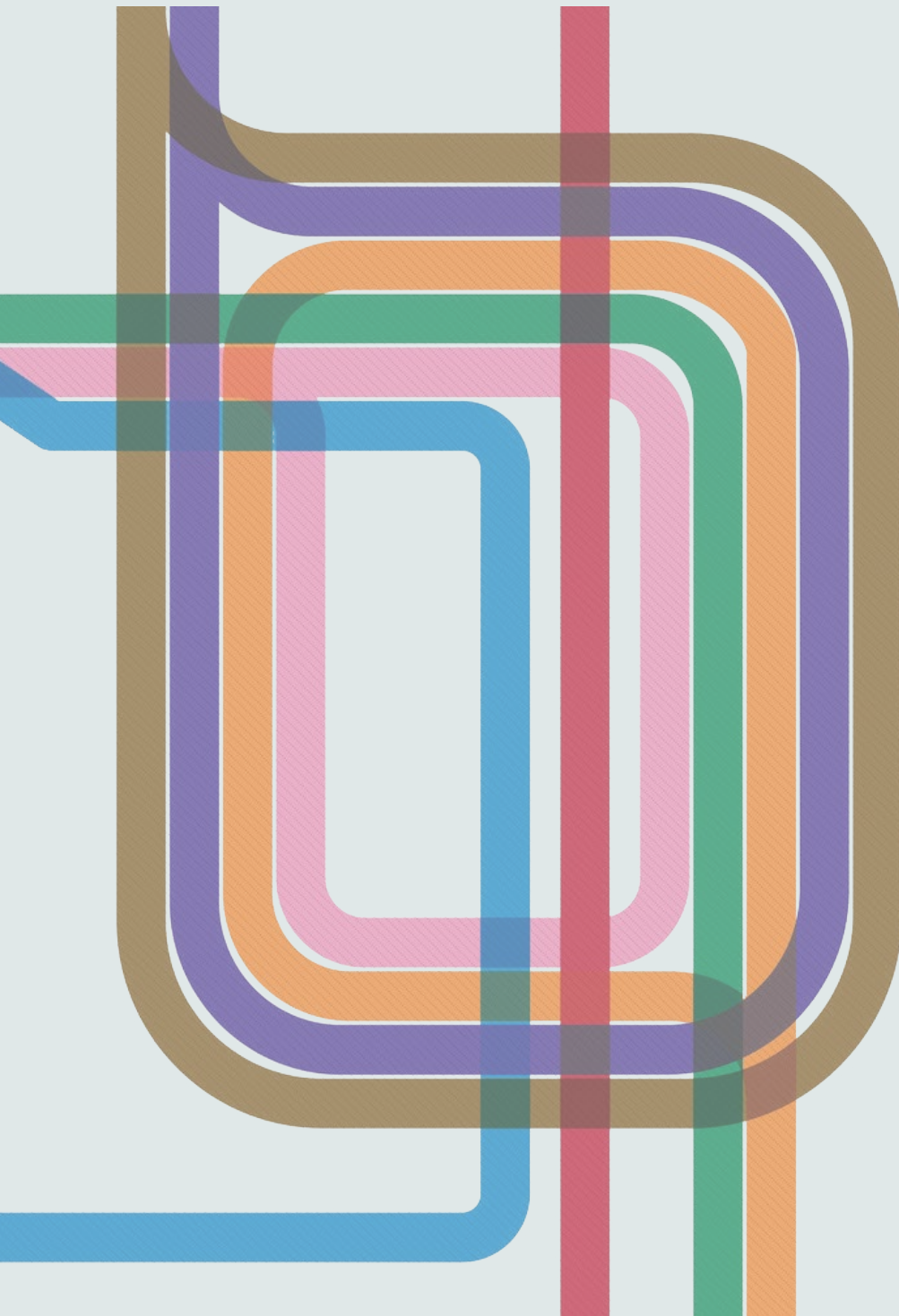


Gendered Experiences on Chicago's Public Transit

University of Illinois Urbana Champaign
Department of Urban and Regional Planning
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Pride Action Tank

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Authors

Erin Hernandez, Master of Urban Planning
Tushar Kokitkar, Master of Urban Planning

Client

AIDS Foundation Chicago's Pride Action Tank

Capstone Advisor

Prof. Magdalena Novoa

The report is prepared by Master of Urban Planning Students at University of Illinois Urbana Champaign as a part of their Masters Capstone project under the guidance of Prof. Magdalena Novoa for AIDS Foundation Chicago's Pride Action Tank.

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Executive Summary

This report examines the experiences of women and gender minorities on Chicago's public transit system, focusing on safety, harassment, and systemic inequities. This project was carried out as a University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign Master's of Urban and Regional Planning capstone project and was conducted for AIDS Foundation Chicago's Pride Action Tank. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, including surveys (57 respondents) and interviews (8 participants), to highlight the challenges faced by these marginalized groups and propose actionable recommendations. Please note that for the purpose of this study the term gender minorities is used to describe individuals whose gender identity/expression differs from their sex assigned at birth.

Public transit is integral to urban mobility, yet women and gender minorities navigate it under constant threats of harassment and violence. This study draws on the mobility justice framework to examine how structural inequities such as sexism, transphobia, and racism shape transit experiences in Chicago. Chicago, being home to the second largest transit system in the US and a growing LGBTQ+ population, serves as a critical case study for understanding these dynamics.

Key Findings

1. Perception of Safety
 - 88.9% of respondents reported they have felt unsafe or uncomfortable due to others behavior on transit. Respondents feel more unsafe on transit at night, with only 7.4% stating they feel unsafe during the day and 50% stating they feel unsafe on transit at night.
2. Experiences of Harassment and Threats
 - 86% of survey respondents had experienced harassment on transit, including hostile comments (89%) and stalking (41%).
 - Gender identity and race were identified as primary factors in targeted harassment with 96% attributing incidents to gender/gender expression.
3. Reporting and Seeking Support
 - 91.2% of survey respondents did not report harassment incidents after they occurred.
4. Adaptive Behaviors for Personal Safety
 - Respondents adopted strategies like avoiding transit at night (72%), traveling with companions (65%), and carrying self-defense tools (58%).
5. Safety Measures and Infrastructure Improvements
 - Respondents called for an increase in transit agency staff presence (68%), improved lighting at stations/stops (66%), and discrete panic buttons to improve safety.

Our findings and analysis have led us to conclude that first and foremost it is imperative that perspectives of women and gender minorities should be taken into consideration at all levels of transit planning. Secondly, we found that one cannot look at the experiences of women and gender minorities without taking into consideration additional urban issues including homelessness, substance abuse, and mental health crises. All issues which impact the city are reverberated into public transit. These insights played a critical role in shaping our recommendations, which are broken down into the following sections:

- **Improvements and additions to rider feedback survey**
- **Increase collaboration with government agencies and third-party services to address issues of safety on transit**
- **Creation of awareness and behavior campaigns**
- **Improvements and transparency on reporting**
- **Infrastructure improvement to enhance safety**

This report demonstrates how Chicago's public transit system reflects broader social inequities. While immediate measures can help mitigate risks, lasting change requires intersectional approaches that address root causes. This report urges transit agencies, policymakers, and advocates to work collaboratively to prioritize inclusivity and safety of all riders.

1.0 Introduction

Public transit has long been a key component to urban mobility, especially within the city of Chicago which boasts having the second largest public transportation system within the United State. However, there have been ongoing concerns regarding rider safety on public transit systems across the US in the post-COVID era, and Chicago is not an exception. Women and gender minorities, meaning individuals whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth, often navigate public transit with heightened concerns about safety, accessibility, and discrimination.

The mobility justice framework served as a guide for this study's creation. Mobility justice extends beyond creating equitable access to transit, though that is also a very important issue in the city of Chicago, the framework instead asks us to analyze the structural inequalities that impact the way marginalized communities exist, interact with, and are treated in public spaces. This study uses the mobility justice definition as described by the advocacy group, The Untokening (<https://www.untokening.org/>), who state that mobility justice includes "policing against Black bodies; persecution and incarceration of undocumented families; gender-based violence and harassment; racism, ableism, and tokenism in transportation planning, policy, and advocacy" and believe that mobility justice can be achieved through "targeted investment in and innovation by these groups that frees us to move easily, fairly and unafraid" (2025).

This report examines findings from a research study focusing on the unique challenges faced by women and gender minorities on Chicago transit. Using the mobility justice framework in the context of this project, the project will not only document the experiences of our participants but also questions what are the underlying systems which influence the experiences of women and gender minorities on public transit, as it is a realm of public space. This study was conducted by a team of researchers from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign for our client, AIDS Foundation Chicago's Pride Action Tank, a think tank and project incubator dedicated to enhancing outcomes and opportunities for LGBTQ+ communities in the Chicago area. By conducting a survey and interviews with women and gender minorities we aim to validate and amplify the experiences of these groups and identify ways in which public transit can become a more inclusive and safe space for all riders. This report provides a background on this area of research and its application to the city of Chicago, and it outlines our methodology, findings, analysis and recommendations for transit agencies, policy makers, and community advocates.

In our study we found that women and gender minorities are experiencing harassment on Chicago's public transit at alarming rates. Our research participants described incidents of sexual harassment and violence while on transit and waiting for transit. We found that our participants have had to adopt adaptive behaviors such as avoiding transit at night or carrying self defense tools. Our findings have led us to understand the violence experienced by women and gender minorities to be symptoms of larger societal and urban issues. This report will detail how our research led to the conclusion that it is imperative we center the experiences of marginalized riders, especially women and gender minorities, in order to create an overall safer environment for all those who choose to take Chicago public transit.

2.0 Background Study

2.1 A Gendered Look at Mobility

Mobility, defined as the ability to move freely and safely from one place to another, is essential for accessing urban amenities and economic opportunities. However, this freedom of movement is not equally accessible to everyone. Gender has a huge influence on mobility experiences, affecting travel behaviors, safety perceptions, and overall access to urban infrastructure. Feminist scholars affirm that mobility patterns often reinforce existing gender hierarchies, reflecting deeply embedded societal norms (Loukaitou-Sideris, 2020). Historically, mobility has been tied to privilege and power and has frequently been restricted for women due to numerous factors such as inadequate infrastructure design, economic disparities, entrenched cultural norms, and psychological barriers, including fear of harassment and violence (Loukaitou-Sideris, 2020).

Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris succinctly captures this dynamic, stating: "Restriction of movement (because of rules, social norms or lack of resources) signifies exclusion, oppression, and subordination for those excluded."

Gender also significantly shapes the experiences of individuals in public transit environments. Women disproportionately encounter heightened anxiety and fear of crime, limiting their mobility. Research consistently highlights that women report greater perceived insecurity when utilizing public transit, particularly during nighttime and at isolated transit stations or stops (Yavuz & Welch, 2010). As a result, many women avoid certain routes or transit modes altogether, which restricts their access to social life and economic participation. Fear of harassment and sexual assault thus deeply influences women's mobility, perpetuating gender inequalities in public transit spaces (Loukaitou-Sideris, 2020).

Yavuz and Welch in their paper present a theoretical model of perceived safety that frames it as a function of perceived vulnerability. They propose that elements such as effects of safety measures (lighting, cleanliness, presence of guards and staff members, CCTV cameras), service attributes (frequent service, on-time service and knowing what time the next train or bus arrives), negative experiences with safety (harassment, cat calling, assault), and individual demographics (age, race) do not directly influence how safe someone feels on public transit. Instead, these factors first influence their sense of vulnerability which then shapes their overall perception of safety on transit. The model also highlights gender as a moderating factor, suggesting how strong or weak these factors influence perceived vulnerability which in turn shapes the perception of safety.

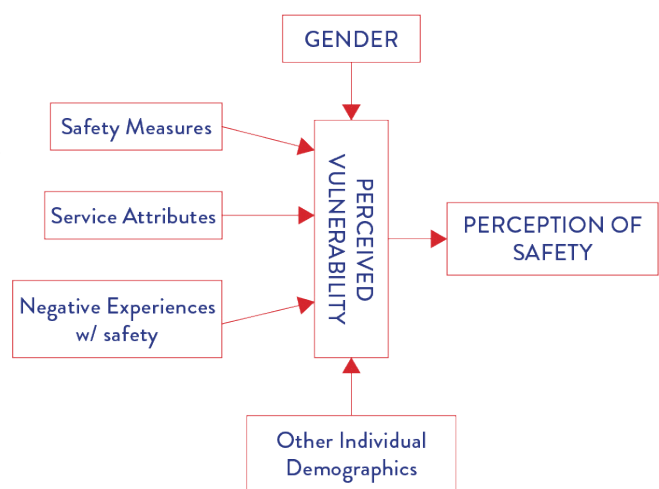


Figure 1: General model of perceived safety

2.2 Mobility for Gender Minorities

Research on the experience of gender minorities on public transit is even more scarce than that of cis-women. Research specifically on gender minorities experience in the city of Chicago, is practically non-existent. However, from current research we know that transgender individuals and other gender minorities are more likely to be low-income and therefore more likely to be transit dependent. We also know that transgender individuals and other gender minorities experience disproportionately high rates of violence and harassment.

In the 2015 US Trans Survey, 34% of respondents reported experiencing discrimination, harassment, or assault on public transit. Incidents such as these were experienced more by nonbinary individuals,

transgender women, and transgender individuals working in the informal economy. Unfortunately, the prevalence of violence against transgender and gender non-conforming individuals is not solely relegated to public transit, however, researchers Lubitow et al. (2020) have made the important observation that “the captured nature of transit vehicles and time waiting at transit stops makes for prolonged exposure to threats”. Despite the fact that the respondents seem to view harassment and discrimination on public transit as routine occurrence, many are restricted from other options. They further argue for a broader research perspective that moves beyond binary gender frameworks, highlighting the diverse and complex experiences of gender minorities who frequently encounter discrimination, harassment, and violence while using public transit. This specific form of harassment has been conceptualized as “transmobilities,” which describes a unique mobility experience shaped by societal normalization of violence against gender minorities (Lubitow et al., 2020). Lubitow et al. (2020) underscores this issue by stating, “Without the ability to safely utilize public transit, gender minorities find their mobility constrained by cissexism in ways that cisgender women do not experience.”

Research conducted in Portland, Oregon, further illustrates these points, revealing that transgender and gender nonconforming transit users often face harassment from fellow passengers and transit staff, significantly influencing their transit behaviors and severely limiting their mobility (Lubitow et al., 2020). These negative interactions lead to emotional and psychological stress, leading individuals to adopt coping mechanisms such as traveling only at specific times, altering their appearance, or avoiding certain transit routes altogether. Such coping mechanisms restrict their overall accessibility and reinforce social exclusion and marginalization. Additionally, Lubitow’s research in Portland highlights the significance of the “transmobilities” concept, advocating not only for safer transit experiences for gender minorities but also emphasizing the intersectional relationship between gender and mobility.

Importantly, these mobility constraints intersect with other social disadvantages, including race, socioeconomic status, and ability. Transgender individuals who are economically disadvantaged or belong to racial minorities face compounded vulnerabilities, often depending more heavily on public transit due to limited alternatives. This underscores the necessity for inclusive transit policies and practices explicitly designed to address the unique safety and accessibility needs of gender minorities (Lubitow et al., 2020).

2.3 Chicago Overview

Chicago is the third most populous city in the U.S. and serves as a critical social, political, cultural hub for the midwest region of the country. Home to approximately 2.66 million people with women comprising 51.5% of the population, It is necessary to evaluate women’s experience and safety within urban environments primarily designed by men. The recent CTA customer satisfaction survey identified 60% of the riders as females, 3% riders as gender non-binary, and 37% of the riders as male. These figures further emphasize the importance of centering the experiences of women and gender minorities in conversations around transit safety.

According to a press release by Illinois Policy Institute in December 2024, over 1 in every 100,000 CTA rides resulted in a crime which is about 1 crime every 3 hours, considering 765,566 rides per weekday on average. The release also indicated that Green Line passengers were most frequently victimized by crimes, closely followed by riders of the Red Line. These alarming statistics highlight significant safety concerns among daily commuters, emphasizing an urgent need for the CTA to implement improved safety and security measures for riders.

According to a 2018 Chicago Department of Public Health report, roughly 146,000 adults in Chicago identify as LGBT, representing about 7.5% of the adult population. Within this group, around 138,000 individuals identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (7.1%), and approximately 10,500 identify as transgender (0.5%), with some overlap between categories. Additionally, a recent Williams Institute study from UCLA conducted in 2021 identifies Chicago as the third-largest Metropolitan Statistical Area in the U.S. for the

1 Crime every 3 Hours on CTA

Press release by Illinois Policy Institute, December 2024

11.2% of Chicago's population identified as LGBTQ in 2021
Community needs assessment report, LGBT community fund

17% Survey respondents rated CTA, Pace or other public transportation as fair or poor
Community needs assessment report, LGBT community fund

20.5% Participants who identify as gay feel unsafe on public transportation
Community needs assessment report, LGBT community fund

52% Black LGBTQ participants feel unsafe on public transportation
Community needs assessment report, LGBT community fund

LGBTQ population, with around 298,000 individuals, more than 50% increase in LGBTQ population from 2018. These statistics underscore the importance of incorporating the experiences of LGBTQ residents into urban planning and policymaking.

While research on women's travel behaviors is extensive, studies focusing explicitly on women's experiences using city-level public transit are notably sparse. A community needs assessment by the LGBT Community Fund and the Chicago Community Trust (2019) which surveyed 1,600 individuals from diverse backgrounds found significant disparities in feelings of safety. 79.5% of survey takers who identify as gay feel safe when taking public transportation, and 52% of the Black LGBTQ riders do not feel safe when using train or bus services. While assessing the quality of key services in Chicago, 17% of survey respondents rated CTA, Pace or other public transportation as fair or poor. This indicates the critical role race and gender play in perceived safety and highlights the vulnerability of gender minorities.

In 2008 a local community organization named Rogers Park Young Women's Action Team surveyed 639 Chicagoans on their experience on public transit after repeatedly hearing concerns from young women in Chicago over safety on transit. The majority of their survey respondents identified as female, and the findings painted a concerning image of their transit experience.

42% Respondents reported feeling UNSAFE on the CTA.

52% Respondents reported having been sexually harassed on the CTA.

13% Respondents reported having been sexually harassed on the CTA.

91% Respondents who were sexually harassed and did not file a complaint.

Despite the alarming findings, minimal additional research has been conducted to further address the issue of women's experiences on Chicago public transit. A local journalist for the StreetsBlog Chicago, Olivia Grenzebach, in their article titled "Should the CTA adopt women-only transit? Interviews with Chicago women suggest yes" asked about specific strategies implemented by cities across the world to address the issue of women's safety, including the solution of women's only transit cars. Although 6 out of the 7 interviewees thought the women's only transit could be a viable option, they acknowledged the complexity of the issue and the need for multifaceted approaches

Marissa Nelson in her article, "Sexual Assault on the CTA appears more common than reports suggest" reveals the discrepancy between reported incidents and actual occurrences, noting that many victims of harassment remain silent. She critiques the anti-harassment campaign "If its unwanted, its harassment" launched by CTA in 2015, noting only a gradual rise in reporting from 67 harassment incidents reported in 2015 to 102 incidents reported in 2018, significantly lower than the crimes committed on public transit.

Further highlighting transit safety concerns, Roshni Zar and Andrea Torres in their article titled “Rising Violent Crime Rates in the CTA Blue Line Raise Safety Concerns” published in December 2024, vividly portrays increased violent crimes experienced by UIC students on CTA and makes a compelling case to take actions for safety of riders on transit. They interviewed Joe Schwieterman, a DePaul University professor and director of the Chaddick Institute for Metropolitan Development, who suggests that the increase in crime on CTA’s Blue line reflects a broader societal problem and is a part of the issue of safety on public transit. In his interview he also said, “We need a balanced approach that includes increased security measures and more investment in addressing the social factors that contribute to crime.” His interview for the article emphasizes the intersectional relationship between transit safety, gender, crime and urban environment shaping the overall transit rider experience.

2.4 CTA’s Efforts

CTA acknowledges rider safety and security as significant concerns and has undertaken several initiatives aimed at improving the situation. Campaigns such as ‘The electrified third rail is dangerous’ provide crucial safety messages, highlighting risks such as attempting to recover personal items dropped onto the tracks, standing too close to platform edges, or trespassing on tracks. It reminds riders that going onto the tracks for any reason is trespassing and can lead to serious, life-changing injury or death. Another initiative, ‘Now you see it. Now you don’t.’ campaign provides some valuable tips for traveling smart, regardless of whether you’re traveling on a CTA bus or train or in any other public setting. The anti-harassment campaign ‘If its unwanted, It’s Harassment’ displays warnings for potential offenders and offers safety tips for bus and train riders. Despite these proactive campaigns to raise awareness, crime incidents on the CTA have unfortunately continued to rise, indicating a disconnect between awareness efforts and tangible safety improvements.

Moreover, CTA works with Chicago Police Department (CPD) who provides law enforcement for the CTA, primarily through the Public Transportation Section, a unit of officers dedicated solely for safety and security on buses and trains. CPD also operates a Strategic Decision Support Center (SDSC) with detectives focusing on transit-related crime. CPD also deploys unarmed security guards through the CPD Transit Rider Interaction Program (TRIP) Pilot program to increase visibility and awareness of ongoing safety and security efforts on the system.

In April 2024, CTA introduced ‘Chat with CTA chatbot’, a new real-time communication tool on transitchicago.com enabling riders to report issues, provide feedback, and receive answers in real-time. The information on reporting and evacuation in cases of emergency is provided by the CTA on its website. While these measures represent commendable efforts toward improved transit safety, ongoing safety concerns highlighted by various reports, studies, and statistical analyses suggest otherwise. As multiple sources have indicated, riders continue to feel unsafe on public transit. Issues related to accessibility of reporting mechanisms and effective communication of safety information persist, hindering CTA and CPD’s ability to effectively mitigate crime on the transit system.

2.5 Need for further research

Though the CTA has acknowledged issues of harassment in the past, such as the deployment of anti-harassment and awareness campaigns, there remains a need for further research focusing on women and gender minorities and their safety on Chicago’s transit. It is crucial to understand that harassment on transit is not an isolated issue but part of broader systemic challenges which requires change to ensure safety for women and gender minorities. However, considering the CTA’s commitment to safety and security and Chicago’s unique position as the urban center, and therefore locus of queer culture, within the midwest, it is essential to thoroughly understand these populations’ experiences and assure that the city and transit agencies are providing an equitable and safe environment for all.

3.0 Methods

This project took a mixed-methods approach to gaining insight on the experience of women and gender minorities on Chicago public transit. The purpose of taking a mixed methods approach was to allow for both breadth and depth of analysis. The methods used included the distribution of an online survey, and one-on-one interviews with cisgender and transgender women. Both the survey and interview sign-ups were distributed through sign-up links and flyers with QR codes by the research team, Pride Action Tank, and distributed to various organizations and departments such as UIUC Student Planning Organization, UIUC Gender & Sexuality Resource Center, UIC Department of Urban Planning and Policy, Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), Center on Halsted, the Brave Space Alliance, etc.

3.1. Survey

The survey (found in Appendix A) received a total of 74 responses, 57 met the recruitment criteria. The recruitment criteria included: is 18 years old or older, identifies as a cisgender woman or any other gender minority identity (transgender woman/transfem, transgender man/transmasc, genderfluid/gender queer, Two-spirit, non-binary, other), and has a history of use of Chicago public transit (CTA and/or Metra). Our research team reviewed safety surveys put out by other transit agencies, such as the survey template created by the Mineta Transportation Institute for California transit agencies (<https://transweb.sjsu.edu/Street-Harassment-Transit-Survey-California>), to create our survey questions. As the survey aimed at understanding the experience of historically marginalized individuals, before the survey was launched our research team consulted with our client, Pride Action Tank, to ensure questions were sensitive to the experience of women, queer, and transgender individuals. The survey was launched online using the survey platform, Qualtrics. The total survey recruitment period lasted from December 16, 2024 to March 9, 2025. Survey participation was completely voluntary and anonymous. No identifying information was asked of the survey participants, however participants had an opportunity to enter a raffle for a \$50 gift card, by clicking a link to a separate Qualtrics form at the end of the survey. This meant to serve as an incentive for survey participation.

The information gathered by the survey was split into 6 sections;

- **Demographic/Commuting Information**
- **Perception of Safety in Public Transportation**
- **Experience of Harassment or Threats**
- **Safety Measures, Infrastructure and Preferences**
- **Suggestions and Additional Comments**
- **Interview Signup & Raffle Entry**

Once the survey closed, the research team conducted descriptive analysis of aggregated responses for all those who met the recruitment criteria, and descriptive analysis broken down by subgroups (cisgender women, queer identifying cisgender women, and all gender minority identifying individuals).

3.2. Interviews

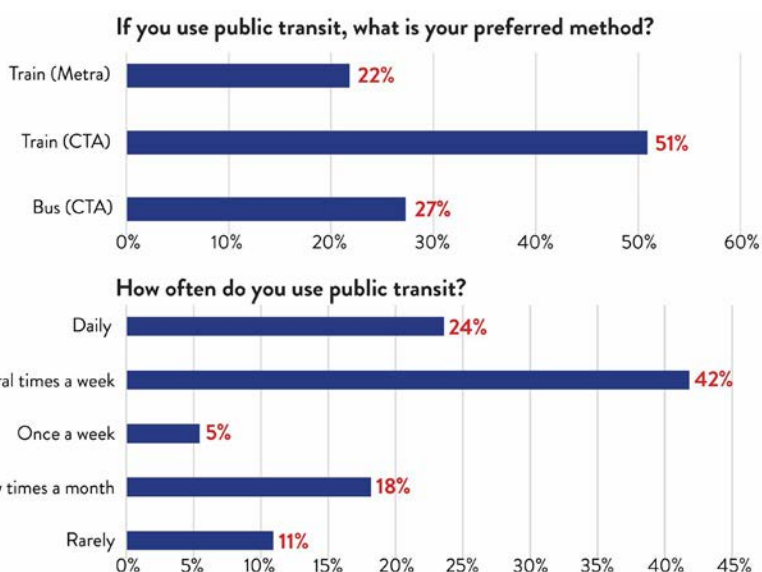
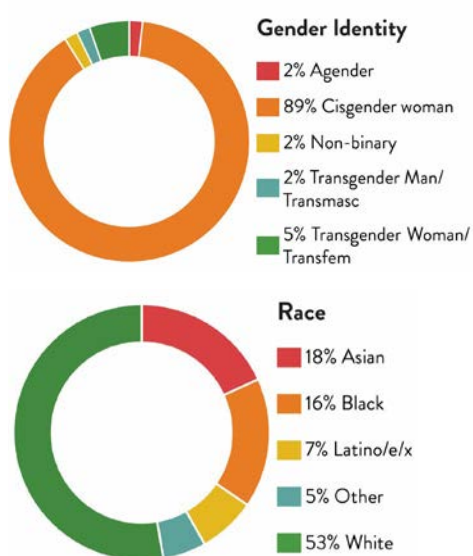
Interview participants were able to sign up through a Qualtrics form. Interview participants were recruited through QR code flyers and links which were distributed online or by clicking the sign up link at the end of the online survey. Interview participants' recruitment criteria included being older than 18, identifying as a cis-gender woman or gender diverse individual, and were prioritized based on frequency of transit use. The interview sign up form received 22 responses, and a total of 8 people were interviewed. Interviews took place online using Microsoft Teams. The interviews lasted between 30 minutes to 1 hour. The interviews were held individually with one interview participant and one or two members of the research team. Each interview was recorded and transcribed using Microsoft Teams. At the beginning of the interviews, participants were informed that participation was completely voluntary, they were not obligated to answer a question if they felt uncomfortable doing so, and the interview could be stopped at any time. Before the interview began, participants were sent an online consent form (Appendix C) assuring participants of their anonymity in the

final report. Interviews took place from February 19th 2025 to March 12th 2025.

Interviews were used to give greater insight into the topic and create a space for individuals to share their stories and suggestions. The interviews were meant to expand on the questions asked in the survey. Because of this, the interview guide (seen in Appendix B) was developed and split into the similar sections as the survey; 1) General Experience on Transit, 2) Perception of Safety, 3) Experience of Harassments and Threats, 4) Reporting and Seeking Support, 5) Suggestions for Improvement, 6) Closing Questions. Similar to the process of creating the survey questions, the interview guide was written by the research team and then reviewed by Pride Action Tank, to ensure sensitivity. Once all the interview transcriptions were edited, the research team conducted a thematic analysis of responses.

3.3 Participant Demographics

The target population for both the survey and interviews was cis-gender women and gender minorities (transgender woman/transfem, transgender man/transmasc, genderfluid/gender queer, Two-spirit, non-binary, other). Of the survey respondents who met our target population criteria, 89.3% identified as cis-gender female, 5.4% identified as transgender women/transfem, 1.8% as transgender men/transmas, and 1.8% as non-binary, and 1.8% as agender. 52.7% of survey respondents identified their race as White, 18.2% Asian, 16.4% Black, 7.2% Latino/e/x (non-White), and 5.5% as another race not listed. The age range of survey respondents was also wide, however the majority (69.6%) were within 18-34 years old. In addition to demographic information, we also asked respondents about their public transit use. 66.1% of survey respondents use public transit as their primary mode of transportation, 25% use a personal vehicle and 5.4% walk, and 3.6% use bike as their primary mode of transportation. Of those that use public transportation, 50.9% identified CTA train as their preferred method of getting around, 27.3% prefer CTA bus, and 21.9% prefer Metra train. When asked about their frequency of use, 21.6% stated that they used public transit daily, 41.8% use transit several times a week, 5.5% use transit once a week, 18.2% use transit a few times a month, and 10.9% stated that they use transit rarely. The research team interviewed a total of 8 individuals, 2 identified as transgender women/transfem and 6 identified as cisgender women. 5 of our interview participants identified their race as Black and 3 participants identified their race as White. The age range of our interview participants was similar to the survey respondents, with all interview participants falling within the age range of 23-37 years old.



4.0 Findings & Analysis

The survey and interviews explored similar themes in different mediums. For analysis purposes, the survey responses and interviews will be analyzed using the following themes;

- Perception of Safety
- Experiences of Harassment and Threats
- Reporting and Seeking Support
- Adaptive Behaviors for Personal Safety
- Safety Measures and Infrastructure Improvements

This section will be divided into three levels of analysis; 1) all respondents who fit our main participation criteria, 2) a comparison of cis-gender straight respondents and cis-gender queer respondents, 3) focused analysis of transgender participants.

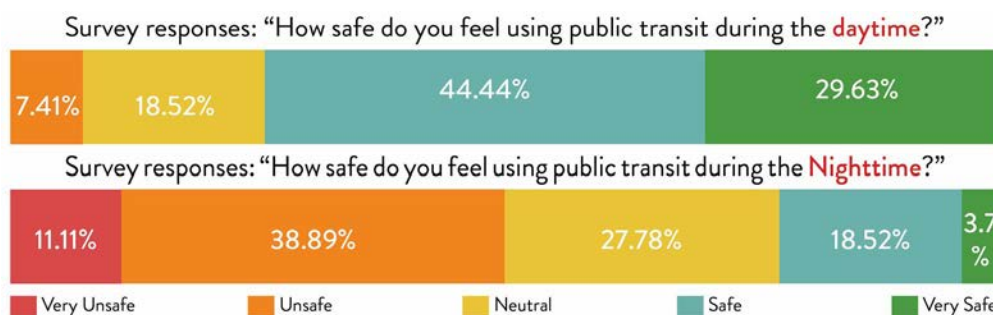
4.1 Target Population

Before beginning data analysis, the research team cleaned the survey data to only include those who were part of the target population (18 years old or older, identifies as a cisgender woman or any other gender minority identity). The below sections for 4.1 are an analysis of the 57 responses which fit our participation criteria and the 8 interview participants.

4.1.1 Perception of Safety

The term “perception of safety” is used in this study to describe how safe individuals feel in their physical environment, in this case waiting for and on public transit, regardless of victimization experience (Zhang, et al., 2021). However, we do understand that for many women, queer, and transgender individuals, the way they experience public spaces, such as transit, is informed by past interactions. Considering the already high rates of harassment and danger posed to women, queer, and transgender individuals in public spaces, we had assumed we would see similar trends when focusing specifically on public transit. It was no surprise when we asked survey respondents “Have you ever felt uncomfortable or unsafe due to the behavior of others while using public transit?”, 88.9% responded “Yes”. However, we also found that the perception of safety is heavily impacted by the time of day. As can be seen in Figure 1 below, the majority of respondents felt either safe or very safe taking transit during the day, with only 7.4% stating they feel unsafe and 0 respondents stating they felt very unsafe. Once we asked the survey respondents “How safe do you feel using public transit during the nighttime?”, there was a dramatic shift, with 38.9% stating they felt unsafe and 11.1% staying they felt very unsafe.

The observations from the survey were also affirmed in our interviews, as all of our survey participants noted that they have felt unsafe or uncomfortable while using transit and the majority also observed that the feelings of being unsafe increase during the nighttime. In fact many noted that they would go out



of their way to avoid taking public transit at night by either changing or cancelling plans or opting for alternative modes of transportation such as rideshare.

4.1.2 Experiences of Harassment and Threats

It was important for this research study to not only solicit the perception of safety of women and gender minorities, but to also document the incidents they experience. We understood that marginalized communities typically experience higher rates of harassment and assault in both private and public spaces. As public transit is an arena of public space, it is disappointing yet unsurprising that when we asked our survey respondents if they had ever witnessed or experienced harassment on Chicago public transit in the past year, 86% stated that they had. For the purposes of our research, we chose to define harassment as; Hostile comments, sounds, or gestures; Sexual comments, sounds, looks, or gestures (asking you to have sex, calling you “babe,” whistling, kissing noises, leering, etc.); Following or stalking; Unwanted groping, kissing, or other inappropriate touching; Pushing, spitting, coughing on you, or other physical assault; Personal property damaged or stolen; Showing pornographic or offensive pictures or words; Exposing private body parts; Sexual assault or rape. We thought it was important to give explicit definitions of what harassment looks like for our respondents to ensure we were getting accurate data but also for educational purposes so individuals can identify what they are experiencing. One interview participant stated,

“I’ve had people whip out their genitals in front of me. And it’s like, well, that’s unpleasant. [Also] stalking, stalking behaviour. You know, I was talking to a Gen Z colleague about this, and she’s like [Participant Name], that’s assault.”

As can be seen in Table 1 below, from the 86% who had experienced harassment on Chicago public transit in the past year, the top 3 forms of harassment experienced are,

1. Hostile comments, sounds, or gestures (89%)
2. Sexual comments, sounds, looks, or gestures (asking you to have sex, calling you “babe,” whistling, kissing noises, leering, etc.) (49%)
3. Following or stalking (41%)

One survey respondent identified an alternative form of sexual harassment which was not part of our definitions, they stated that they “once saw a man touching himself while staring at me and my friends”. Another survey respondent stated that uncomfortable/unsafe experiences on the train are characterized as “threatening language for the most part” and also “showing weapons on the train”.

Most of the experiences shared through both the survey and interviews can be characterized as forms of sexual harassment and assault, with many describing the incidents of “sexual harassments (catcalling) at bus stop”, seeing “people exposing their genitals/masturbating in a populated train”, and making non-consensual sexual advances. When asked about the frequency at which they experience these incidents of harassment, the majority (51%) stated that it would happen sometimes. Our interview participants cited similar levels of frequency with some stating it would happen once or twice a month, however, one interview participant said that they’ve even experienced up to two or three incidents of harassment in a week. One interview participant noted that the frequency of experiencing harassment changed as she got older. This interview participant had grown up in Chicago and frequently took transit to and from school. She stated that she felt she was more likely to be targeted for harassment as a young girl, noting that when she was younger incidents, which she mostly described as sexual comments, would take place every 2 weeks. She said “That never happens now, and I think it’s because I’m older and I look older so people don’t want to approach you”.

Following and stalking was also a big concern mentioned by both survey respondents and interview participants. Interview participants identified following and stalking as taking place inside the train, stating that when they would try to change to a different train car they were often. Some interview participants even talked about being followed from the train station or bus stop into the street. One survey participant described their experience,

“Two times in the past year or so, while riding the Blue Line CTA train home from work (Clinton to Oak Park), two separate men exposed their genitals to me while lurking around me in a threatening way. One time I changed train cars and the man followed me. The other time, there was one other person in the train car and we both were visibly freaked out. The train unexpectedly stopped between stations for a few minutes and I was very scared...Now I try to sit in the first car to be near the conductor. I reported both incidents of genital exposure (assault) to CTA.”

An interview participant also commented that once they were followed after being yelled at on the train car and had gone to a CTA worker to deescalate the situation, they said “the time we got followed, we intentionally went past the desk and, like, stopped and talked to them”.

As our research study focuses on the experience of women and gender minorities who live in a diverse metropolitan area, we felt it was extremely important to recognize the potential for targeted/biased harassment based on identity. We asked survey participants if they had experienced possible targeted/biased harassment or witnessed possible targeted/biased harassment due to the following identities or characteristics: gender/gender expression, race or ethnicity, age, weight, sexual orientation, or language spoken (Table 2). 79% of survey respondents reported they experienced or witnessed someone experience targeted/biased harassment due to an identity or characteristic. Of those who experienced or witnessed target/biased harassment, 96% attributed it to gender identity/expression. Interview participants corroborated this experience with one participant stating,

“Yeah, I think as a femme presenting person that’s definitely the main reason why I feel like things happen like that...I think people perceive you as someone that they can take advantage of or someone that they can intimidate.”

Another observed “Seems pretty targeted [referring to experiences of harassment]. It was not happening to like men on the train car so..”. One interview participant also noted that after rejecting advances from a fellow passenger “...he started calling me a bitch and like he used a lot of gendered language after I rejected him..”. These observations further demonstrate that transit is not an exception or refuge from the gender-based violence women and gender minorities face in public spaces. In fact, we found that survey respondents and interview participants noted that public transit is a main location where they experience harassment and the nature of being in a train car or on a bus means that they are often unable to effectively evade or escape. This is seen in the accounts of following and stalking, one survey respondent even noted that at least out on the street they are able to quickly bypass or cross the street away from their harasser, but on transit they are essentially trapped.

It is also important to not ignore the role race plays in the experiences of individuals on transit, especially in the racially diverse city of Chicago. 20% of our survey participants felt that they may have been targeted for harassment due to their race. One of our interview participants also shared a difficult story where they felt targeted because of their race. This participant described being the only Black person on a bus in a predominantly White area, they said,

“It was very difficult because I had a lot of people staring at me and I was wondering if there was something wrong with me or my outfit or my looks. I was so worried. I did not know what to do...the murmurs were just too much and I wasn’t comfortable. I felt like they could do anything to me at that point. And you know, I would have no one to rescue me or speak up for me.”

This interview participant had recently immigrated to Chicago from their home country. They stated that they knew they were being stared at because of their race, because they were not with their partner so the other riders had no way of knowing their sexuality. They became so uncomfortable that they chose to get

off the bus even though they were far from their destination. During the conversation with the interview participants it became apparent that nearly all were aware of how race played a role in their experiences on transit, whether it made them more or less vulnerable not only to being harassed by other riders but also influencing their decision to report incidents out of hesitancy to interact with police.

Many respondents and participants also brought up the topic of the ongoing mental health crisis and its role in their experiences. This topic came up frequently in our interviews, with participants wanting to emphasize that they understand that a lot of the negative experiences on transit are attributed to individuals being in a mental health episode and transit being a shelter of last resort for many who are unhoused. Participants wanted to emphasize that they feel empathetic towards those in mental health crisis, many saying that the presence of unhoused people does not inherently make them uncomfortable nor do they attribute being unhoused to making a person inherently violent. However, participants mentioned that transit agencies and the city of Chicago can do more to help those in crisis. This topic will be further discussed in section 4.1.5 and section 5.3.

Have you experienced any of the following yourself or seen them happen to others while using Chicago’s public transit in the past year? (Check all that apply)								
Hostile comments, sounds, or gestures	Sexual comments, sounds, looks, or gestures (asking you to have sex, calling you “babe,” whistling, kissing noises, leering, etc.)	Following or stalking	Unwanted groping, kissing, or other inappropriate touching	Pushing, spitting, coughing on you, or other physical assault	Personal property damaged or stolen	Showing pornographic or offensive pictures or words	Exposing private body parts	Sexual Assault or Rape
89%	49%	41%	14%	14%	16%	3%	22%	0%

Table 1: Breakdown of Types Harassment Experienced on Chicago Transit

Do you believe you or the person you saw being targeted because of...						
Gender/gender expression	Race or Ethnicity	Age	Weight	Sexual Orientation	Language Spoken	
96%	20%	28%	12%	4%	8%	

Table 2: Breakdown of Identities/Characteristics attributed to Possible Targeted/Biased Harassment

4.1.3 Reporting and Seeking Support

Despite 86% of total survey respondents stating that they have experienced or witnessed some form of harassment on Chicago public transit, 91.2% stated that they have not reported any incidents of harassment. Similarly, in our interviews only two out of eight interview participants mentioned reporting incidents to a CTA worker and only one interview participant had formally reported incidents. When survey respondents were asked to supply reasons for why they did not report incidents of harassment, many stated that they felt like the incident was not large or extreme enough to report. In addition to the incident not feeling extreme enough to report, many were concerned about the results of reporting the incident, especially if it meant involving the police. Survey respondents stated “Don’t want to call the police on someone that more likely needs mental health services, food, shelter, etc.” and “I knew that the person was likely having a mental health crisis, and I did not want to involve the police”. One interview participant stated that if they witnessed someone having a mental health crisis in a train car, they also did not feel that it would be safe to involve the police so instead they would choose to simply move cars.

Other reasons respondents cited include the general lack of information they had to report, for example a respondent said that not knowing the offender’s name discouraged them from reporting an incident of

harassment. Another common reason for not reporting is respondents not even knowing how to report an incident formally with the transit agency. One survey respondent stated, "I didn't even think there was a way to report it to the CTA...If there is a way to report it to CTA, it would be great to post the website or phone # inside the bus/train". In fact, when we asked interview participants if they had seen any type of signage inside the bus or train cars educating riders how to report incidents, each participant said they had not seen any signage. The singular interview participant who had reported the incident searched how to do so online. Both survey respondents and interview participants suggested making it clear to riders how they can report incidents and also increasing transparency around how reports are addressed. The overwhelming response from all participants was that they felt that nothing will ultimately be done with the reports made. It became clear reading through responses and in our interviews that reporting transparency is an area in which transit agencies can heavily improve.

4.1.4 Adaptive Behaviors for Personal Safety

It became very clear in the survey and in our interviews that women and gender minorities are extremely aware of their own personal safety in public spaces and on public transit. All research participants described some type of adaptive behavior to keep themselves safe. In the survey we listed common adaptive behaviors and asked respondents to select all behaviors they use (Table 3). The majority of respondents stated that they have adopted the following behaviors to keep themselves safe on public transit,

- **Avoiding transit at night (72%)**
- **Use crowded train compartments (65%)**
- **Travel with someone (65%)**
- **Carry self-defense tools (58%)**

Avoiding transit at night appeared to be almost a type of common sense amongst the interview participants and survey respondents. One interview participant stated "If it's too late at night or it's too dark, I'm gonna lyft it", referring to their use of rideshare services in place of public transit if it's late at night. However, it is important to acknowledge that for those who are dependent on public transit as their main mode of transportation, this rule is not always easy to abide by. Circumstances such as work schedules that end late into the night and the high and fluctuating costs of rideshare services can also lead individuals to having no choice but to take public transit at night.

Choice of train compartment was also frequently mentioned in both the surveys and interviews with 65% of survey respondents stating they prefer to use crowded train compartments and 37% use train compartments closer to the driver. The interview participants echoed similar sentiments stating that they felt safer if there were more people around and they would actively avoid empty or sparsely populated train compartments. One interview participant stated that they even noticed that the first and second train cars tend to be the most crowded as though most riders seem to have a preference for compartments closest to the conductor. The participant affectionately recalled that their former colleague who happens to be transgender would say "I always ride in the teacher's car", referring to the compartment with the conductor. Nearly all the interview participants credited this to feeling safer when they are closer to someone who has some type of authority. For example, most of the interview participants stated that they felt safer on the bus because the driver was closer to all the riders. Two interview participants noted the difference between Metra and CTA, stating that Metra often has someone walking through the carts to check tickets and monitor behavior. They stated that having additional staff on the CTA to walk through the train cars could also help riders feel safer and might alleviate the need to sit in the first or second train car.

Though many survey respondents stated that traveling with someone is an adaptive behavior they use, interview participants noted that this is not always possible. It is easier to coordinate traveling with someone for transportation to recreational activities such as running errands or going out with friends, however,

when it comes to work commutes it is likely that riders will be traveling alone. In such cases, interview participants would often talk about the differing uses of headphones. The use of headphones on transit appeared to be split, as interview participants would either say they did not use headphones to appear aware of their surroundings and other stating that they would put on headphones to look less approachable. One interview participant said,

If you have on headphones, you can turn it all the way down and you can hear what’s going on. If someone wants to approach you, you can easily ignore them compared to if you don’t have on the headphones, it looks like you can hear them.

Another adaptive behavior to deter any unwanted attention which came up in the interviews is wardrobe choice. One participant stated “It feels like I kind of changed the way I’ve dressed over time just to stay away from being called or someone trying to approach me”. This participant expressed sadness that they had to monitor their own self expression due to the actions of others. Our research team would like to note here, that this adaptive behavior discussed by the interview participants is not mentioned in any way to be used as material for victim blaming but rather to demonstrate the impacts of gender-based violence and harassment on the participants and the way in which they express themselves.

The previously mentioned adaptive behaviors were largely preventative methods, however, it is interesting to see that the majority of survey respondents (58%) also choose to carry some form of self-defense tool. Though this did not come up often in the interviews, one participant felt very strongly about carrying self-defense tools, especially pepper spray. The participant stated enthusiastically, “I feel like everyone should have pepper spray with them just in case”. The participant mentioned that though they have not used the spray, it does bring them peace of mind to know that if an incident were to occur they would have a way of being able to get away.

Travel with someone	Talking on the phone while commuting	Carry self-defense tools	Use transit only during peak hours	Use transit only during non-rush hours	Use train compartments closer to the driver	Use crowded train compartments	Use empty train compartments	Avoiding transit at night
65%	33%	58%	40%	5%	37%	65%	2%	72%

Table 3: Adaptive behaviors used by survey respondents

4.1.5 Safety Measures and Infrastructure Improvements

Finally, we were interested to know if there were specific safety measures or infrastructure improvements that currently make participants feel safe or could potentially make participants feel safer. In the survey we asked respondents to identify from a list which measures and improvements would make them feel safer. The list included common safety measures such as increased security presence, more CCTV cameras, improved lighting at stops/stations, etc. The results of that question can be found in Table 4 below. Interestingly, the most popular measure from survey respondents was to increase CTA staff presence at stations (68%). This measure also came up frequently in interviews, with participants expanding that not only would staff presence be appreciated at stations, but participants also expressed that increasing staff presence on train cars could also improve safety. Interview and survey participants both mentioned their apprehension to increase any sort of police presence, as they did not trust the police’s ability to effectively deescalate situations without violence. Instead, interview participants felt that CTA staff walking through train cars and at stations would serve as a signal to all riders that behavior is being monitored. One interview participant stated “it’s nice to just have someone that, like, has a uniform on that looks official that’s sitting in the car”.

Additional measure which was not asked in the survey but was mentioned frequently by interview participants is the incorporation of some sort of panic button that would not stop the train car and an easy to access method of reporting. Interview participants noted that there is a mechanism which can be pulled in CTA train cars, however, it would result in the train car stopping. One interview participant explained,

“I wish there was a discrete real time way to like report a problem you’re experiencing in real time ‘cause they have like the red ball you can pull but, like in that one time where it was me and another woman [referring to an incident where the participant and one other woman were in a train car with a man exposing himself], with this like unpredictable stuff going on with this man, I’m not gonna take the risk to get up and pull that thing and then then the train stops and you’re stuck there with someone who’s, you know, behaving erratically... that’s not a safe choice in that moment.”

The hesitation to pull on the safety mechanism was echoed in other interviews, as it felt like they would then be trapped with the person who is either experiencing a crisis or targeting them. It was also stated that moving to pull the mechanism would then call attention to themselves and perhaps could trigger someone to act more violently. Instead participants advocated for a more discrete method in the form of a panic button or some form of live reporting in which they can indicate their location.

Additional highly favored safety infrastructure includes improved lighting at stops/stations and more CCTV cameras. Each of these methods are commonly used in transit stations and inside transit vehicles, however, interview participants noted that there are differences in the presence and abundance of such infrastructure depending on which stations or stops you are at. Many interview participants even had particular locations in mind for where they noticed a lack of such infrastructure or where the built environment heavily played into their feelings of safety. For example, two interview participants brought up the tunnel used to transfer from the CTA Blue Line to the CTA Red Line at Jackson station as an area where they feel extremely unsafe. One participant even noted that there is a heavy police presence at the top of the stairs to the tunnel but nobody is stationed within the tunnel. As we continued our conversations with interview participants, it became increasingly clear that the participants all knew of locations where they feel unsafe and ways in which they think safety infrastructure can be improved.

Our research team also chose to include designated women-only or gender safe areas in the survey, which 41% of respondents stated is a measure that would make them feel safer on transit. This measure is not used within the US, but has been implemented in other countries’ transit such as Mexico and Japan. However, when we brought up this measure in interviews, though the participants liked the measure, they thought of it as more of a far-fetched idea which would be nearly impossible to implement in the Chicago transit system.

Increased security presence	More CCTV cameras	Improved lighting at stops/stations	Designated women-only or gender safe areas	Anonymous reporting options	Educational safety campaigns for commuters	Increased presence of CTA staff at station
55%	43%	66%	41%	23%	16%	68%

Table 4: Preferred safety measure and infrastructure survey respondents would like to see on Chicago public transit

4.2 Comparison of Straight Cis-Gender Women and Queer Cis-Gender Women

This section categorizes the analysis based on gender identity, highlighting similarities and differences in the experiences of cisgender heterosexual women and cisgender queer women. For this analysis, data from 33 survey responses and four interviews with cisgender heterosexual women, as well as 18 survey responses and one interview with cisgender queer women, were examined.

4.2.1 Perception of Safety

As established in Section 4.1.1, the majority of women and gender minorities experience discomfort and a lack of safety while using public transit. Figures 3 and 4 reveal that 94.12% of queer cisgender women report feeling uncomfortable on public transit, compared to 87.10% of their straight cisgender counterparts.

Have you ever felt uncomfortable or unsafe due to the behavior of others while using public transit?



Perception of safety for straight cis-gender women

Have you ever felt uncomfortable or unsafe due to the behavior of others while using public transit?



Perception of safety on public transit for queer cis-gender women

Insights from interviews further support these findings, with both straight and queer cisgender women expressing heightened concerns about safety, particularly at night. None of the interviewees reported feeling comfortable traveling alone after dark. To mitigate risks, they employ various precautionary measures, such as avoiding transit at night whenever possible, traveling with friends, or choosing to board the first two train cars to remain closer to the conductor.

Survey responses, illustrated in Figures 5 and 6, reinforce these trends, highlighting significant differences in how safety is perceived between straight and queer cisgender women. Notably, 23.53% of queer cisgender women rated public transit as “very unsafe,” compared to only 6.45% of straight cisgender women. Additionally, variations of 2-7% were observed in perceptions of transit as “neutral,” “safe,” or “very safe” across both groups.

How safe do you feel using public transit during the nighttime?



Perception of safety during nighttime for straight cis-gender women

How safe do you feel using public transit during the nighttime?



Perception of safety during nighttime for queer cis-gender women



4.2.2 Experiences of Harassment and Threats

An analysis of harassment types encountered by cisgender women on transit reveals notable disparities between straight and queer individuals. Approximately 37% of straight cisgender women reported experiencing hostile or sexual comments, as well as intrusive looks or gestures. In contrast, 60% of queer cisgender women reported facing sexual comments, looks, or gestures, while all queer cisgender women surveyed experienced some form of hostile comments, sounds, or gestures. These patterns were further echoed in interviews, where every cisgender woman interviewed shared personal accounts of being catcalled, followed, or persistently approached by strangers.

One interviewee recounted a distressing experience in which she was repeatedly approached by an unfamiliar individual. When asked why they believed they were targeted, all interviewees pointed to their feminine presentation, including the way they dressed, as a possible factor. This insight underscores the reality that feminine-presenting individuals are often subjected to unwanted attention and harassment. As one participant noted:

“I knew exactly why—because my legs were out. It felt like an invitation, not that I intended it that way, but you know... Over time, I’ve changed the way I dress just to avoid being called out or approached.”

A particularly striking finding from the survey responses (Table 5) is that while all queer cisgender women reported experiencing hostile comments, sounds, or gestures, only 60% reported being subjected to sexual comments, looks, or gestures. This pattern highlights the presence of queerphobia in transit spaces, with queer women facing more hostility compared to their straight counterparts. Conversely, straight cisgender women reported higher instances of sexual harassment, including comments and gestures, rather than overtly hostile interactions.

Which of the following describes the harassment you’ve seen/experienced while using Chicago transit?									
Category	Hostile comments, sounds, or gestures	Sexual comments, sounds, looks, or gestures (asking you to have sex, calling you “babe,” whistling, kissing noises, leering, etc.)	Following or stalking	Unwanted groping, kissing, or other inappropriate touching	Pushing, spitting, coughing on you, or other physical assault	Personal property damaged or stolen	Showing pornographic or offensive pictures or words	Exposing private body parts	Sexual Assault or Rape
Straight cis-gender women	34%	37%	11%	13%	16%	3%	21%	0%	0%
Queer cis-gender women	100%	60%	70%	30%	20%	30%	10%	20%	0%

Table 5: Breakdown of Types Harassment Experienced on Chicago Transit

4.2.3 Reporting and Seeking Support

The observations regarding reporting and seeking support are the same as explained in section 4.1.3. No differences in reporting were identified based on gender sexuality.

4.2.4. Adaptive Measure for Personal Safety

As outlined in Section 4.1.4, women, regardless of their sexual orientation, tend to adopt similar adaptive responses when navigating public transit. However, queer cisgender women are more likely to travel with someone and carry self-defense tools than their straight counterparts. This heightened caution may stem from the pervasive queerphobia they experience in the form of hostile or sexual comments and gestures. Queer individuals are often more vulnerable to harassment and threats, making proactive safety strategies such as talking on the phone while commuting, carrying self-defense tools, traveling in groups, and avoiding transit at night a priority over other measures like choosing peak or non-peak travel hours.

A notable trend from the survey reveals that 66% of straight cisgender women prefer traveling in crowded trains, compared to only 58% of queer cisgender women. This slight discrepancy underscores the heightened risk queer individuals face in public spaces, suggesting that they may actively avoid crowded environments where the likelihood of physical harassment is greater. One interviewee recounted witnessing a gay couple being harassed by a man on a crowded bus, while fellow passengers and the gay couple remained passive observers. She said,

“They seem to want to just ignore him, which like seemed to kind of work and after a while he like got off. It was also interesting that, like no one else said anything.”

The choice of both the couple and bystanders to remain silent highlights the urgent need for transit agencies to implement comprehensive safety measures. There must be clear protocols in place to prevent such incidents and ensure that all passengers feel protected while using public transportation.

What measures do you take to make yourself feel safer on transit? (Check all that apply) - Selected Choice									
Category	Travel with someone	Talking on the phone while commuting	Carry self-defense tools	Use transit only during peak hours	Use transit only during non-rush hours	Use train compartments closer to the driver	Use crowded train compartments	Use empty train compartments	Avoiding transit at night
Straight cis-gender women	61%	32%	55%	45%	5%	39%	66%	3%	74%
Queer cis-gender women	75%	50%	67%	42%	8%	42%	58%	0%	83%

Table 6: Adaptive measures for personal safety by gender sexuality

4.2.5 Safety Measures and Infrastructure Improvements

When considering safety measures and infrastructure improvements to create a more secure transit environment, survey responses and interview insights align with the analysis in Section 4.1.5. One notable finding is that 59% of straight cisgender women prefer an increased security presence, compared to only 50% of queer cisgender women. This discrepancy suggests a level of hesitancy among queer cisgender women regarding police presence, implying concerns that law enforcement may exacerbate rather than alleviate safety issues.

Interview responses further support this sentiment, with several participants expressing discomfort with police presence on train cars or platforms. One interviewee explicitly stated that she would feel safer with more CTA staff rather than police officers. This preference is echoed in survey responses, where a higher number of respondents favored an increased presence of CTA personnel over security forces.

“I think more CTA staff presence on train platforms as opposed to like police or like private security, just like you know, just like to have like visible Presence of like staff.”

Beyond security personnel, the overall environment within transit spaces plays a crucial role in shaping riders’ perceptions of safety. The presence and behavior of other passengers contribute to the intangible sense of security or vulnerability experienced in train stations and cars. Given past experiences with harassment and exposure to queerphobia, queer cisgender women demonstrate a stronger preference for infrastructure improvements such as enhanced lighting, expanded CCTV coverage, and the implementation of women-only or gender-inclusive transit spaces, compared to their straight counterparts.

What measures and infrastructure would make you feel safer on public transit? (Check all that apply) - Selected Choice							
Category	Increased security presence	More CCTV cameras	Improved lighting at stops/ stations	Designated women-only or gender safe areas	Anonymous reporting options	Educational safety campaigns for commuters	Increased presence of CTA staff at station
Straight cis-gender women	59%	46%	62%	46%	26%	15%	69%
Queer cis-gender women	50%	58%	83%	58%	8%	0%	58%+

Table 7: Preferred safety measure and infrastructure survey respondents would like to see on Chicago public transit

4.3 Transgender and Non-binary Individuals

Among the survey participants, six respondents identified as transgender: three as transgender women, two as transgender men, one as non-binary, and one as agender. Additionally, three interview participants identified as transgender women. The forms of harassment they face also mirror those experienced by queer cisgender women, likely due to the pervasive presence of transphobia and queerphobia in society. This environment fosters a heightened sense of vigilance and caution among transgender individuals, driven by the fear of harassment.

Insights from interviews further highlighted the specific challenges faced by transgender individuals on public transit. Two of the three interviewees reported being harassed due to their gender expression and race. They also described feeling uncomfortable due to being stared at and overhearing murmured comments from fellow passengers. One interviewee shared:

“I had a lot of people staring at me and I was wondering if there was something wrong with me or my outfit or my looks. I was so worried. I did not know what to do.”

This experience stands out compared to those of cisgender women, emphasizing the unique challenges that gender minorities face on transit. Gender expression is a core aspect of identity, and being subjected to prolonged stares or whispered remarks can create a deeply unsettling and unsafe environment for transgender individuals.

The safety measures and infrastructure improvements suggested by transgender respondents align closely with those preferred by queer cisgender individuals, indicating that queer and gender-diverse passengers share similar transit experiences and concerns. This reinforces the need for targeted interventions that address the safety of all gender minorities on public transportation.

4.4 Study Limitations

The main limitation of this research study is the sample size. Of the 79 responses, 54 met the participation criteria. Though the intention of this research study was to include an analysis of the transgender experience on public transit, only 6 survey responses identified with a transgender identity. In order to supplement the survey, our research team anticipated using the interviews to gain insight into the transgender experience. Despite the majority of those who signed up to be interviewed identifying as transgender, only 3 individuals responded to messages to coordinate the meeting. Though we have included analysis of the transgender experience on transit, the sample size is small. We acknowledge that there are a variety of reasons for the limited responses from transgender individuals including the difficult timing of the survey launch and solicitation for interviews. The survey launched in December of 2024 and interviews began in February 2025, all taking place after the 2024 US election which catalyzed increasingly threatening discourse and legislation attacking transgender individuals. It is understandable that in these times, not only would transgender individuals be more cautious of sharing their identities and participating in research studies, but also the community organizations we had previously contacted currently have larger and more pressing issues to address. We remain committed to studying and documenting the experience of transgender individuals in public spaces and advocating for transgender individuals' right to exist and thrive in public spaces.

5.0 Discussion

It became apparent in both the survey responses and in our discussions with the interview participants that the experience of women and gender minorities on public transit, like their experience in all other forms of public space, is shaped by the systems, institutions, and cultures that are part of the public sphere. There has been excellent work done analyzing the experiences of women and gender minorities in public, and their differing experiences with men. Analysis done by legal scholar Deborah M. Thompson (1994), compared the experiences of the “woman in the street” versus the “man in the street”. Thompson described how when a woman is in the public world she is often subjected to overt observation, evaluation, and verbal commentary by male strangers. Thompson noted that street harassment is perhaps the most common harassment experienced by women globally, and attributes this in part due to the presence of an asymmetrical code of public conduct for the woman in the street compared to the man in the street. Where men are treated as strangers with relative indifference to one another, women are regarded as “open persons” in public spaces and are subjected to both nonverbal, verbal, and physical forms of street harassment. The harassment experienced by women in the street is both pervasive and frequent, and, according to Thompson, has a cumulative effect of a “slow death of the psyche, the soul and the persona”. While individual incidents might seem trivial, when multiplied daily, they profoundly affect a woman’s life and liberty. It became apparent in our study, and reading through academic literature, that the categorization of women as “open persons” for harassment in public space, is also extended to gender minorities. In a study titled “Navigating Stigma in Neighborhoods and Public Spaces Among Transgender and Nonbinary Adults in New York City” published by the American Psychological Association in 2020, a lot of the forms of street harassment described by the transgender and nonbinary adults they interviewed were similar, if not the exact same as the street harassment described by women. However, in addition to the forms of harassment also experienced by women (verbal commentary, evaluation, observation, pointing, staring, and physical actions like grabbing or winking), transgender and nonbinary adults also experienced other distressing interactions including misgendering and denial of services. Both women and gender minorities find their mobility and freedom in public spaces restricted and have to employ various strategies to anticipate, avoid, or respond to harassment and stigma. These experiences of women and gender minorities walking down the street are the same experiences they experience on or waiting for transit. The issues that a city faces in its street directly determine the issues that a transit system will also face.

When it came to the violence and harassment experienced by the participants in this research study, there appeared to be two forms of gender-based violence observed. The first was the primary gender-based violence experienced by women and gender minorities who live within a patriarchal society that actively discriminates against women and gender minorities, and the second we identify as repercussive gender-based violence due to systemic failures of the city. For our analysis, we found it useful to analyse the incidents of harassment through the above mentioned categories of violence. For example, common incidents of primary gender-based violence experienced by our participants can be described as: our participant is approached by someone while taking the train, they reject their advances, and are then yelled at by the individual who uses extremely gendered language. This sort of primary gender-based violence in public spaces has been studied by a variety of scholars. In work titled “Masculinity and its Role in Gender-based Violence in Public Spaces” by Sanjay Srivastava (2012), Srivastava talks about how the gender-based violence experienced in public spaces is impacted by the way our cultures have created our views of public and private spaces. According to Srivastava, we have masculinized public space to go along with the feminized private sphere (“the home”). This helps to explain the frequency of violence experienced by women and gender minorities in public space as it is not just about physical acts, but is part of a larger system to maintain male dominance and enforce gender norms. The gender based violence can then, in part, be explained as a form of defensive behavior by men to preserve their spaces perceived as “masculinised”. Using this lens to analyze our findings, we found that in order to decrease or get rid of incidents of primary gender-based violence, there must be changes to overall social culture and gender norms which have been established.

Two Forms of Gender Based Violence Experienced

Intrinsic gender-based
violence within a patriarchal
society



Repercussive gender-based
violence due to systemic failures

The second category of violence experienced by our participants, which we have chosen to call repercussive gender-based violence in this report, is meant to encapsulate the nuanced experiences of individuals in a city which leads to violence in public space. First, there must be an understanding of structural violence. Structural violence can be defined as “violence that occurs in the context of establishing, maintaining, extending, or reducing hierarchical relations between categories of people within a society” (Iadicola & Shupe, 2003). In a city it is very easy to find victims of structural violence. Eviction, for example, especially when it results from economic hardship, can be seen as a harm inflicted by structural violence, as it prevents individuals from meeting their basic needs for housing. People who are experiencing homelessness are repeated victims of structural violence as they are criminalized for needing to use public spaces, including public transit, to fulfill private needs like eating, sleeping, and hygiene (Taylor, 2013). The way this plays out often on transit is individuals who are undergoing a serious mental health crisis, which may include episodes of violence, are doing so at a transit station or in a train. However, when this is combined with the social culture which has culminated in women and gender minorities being categorized as “open persons”/ targets of harassment, we find that women and gender minorities are often the targets of these episodes. We have called it repercussive gender-based violence because there is first a victim of structural violence who is then perpetrating gender-based violence as they are forced into public space and operating under a cultural understanding that women and gender minorities are easy victims. One of our participants described an incident we have categorized as repercussive violence as having taken place while she was sitting in a train car with an individual who was experiencing a severe mental health crisis and was then targeted by this individual. Our participant decided to move train cars but was grabbed by the individual and was told “We’re gonna do better for you guys. Us men are going to do better for you women, I promise, I promise”. In this example, shared to us in the survey, the individual experiencing a severe mental health crisis has been let down by the social and governmental systems and is left with no place to go. However, the respondent also noted that the only people targeted by this individual were women and never men.

This study received many accounts of primary and repercussive gender-based violence experienced by women and gender minorities, and we argue that the ways of addressing the types of violences are often different. For example, to address primary gender based violence incidents our research team might recommend the transit agency create a campaign discussing topics of consent on what is appropriate behavior between riders on the train or bus. To address repercussive gender-based violence incidents our research team might suggest the transit agency become involved in government task forces focusing on issues of homelessness and mental health services. For both types of violence, our research team suggests increasing transit agency staff presence on train cars and at station platforms. It is important to take into consideration the underlying factors and issues which lead to incidents of violence. This interconnectedness of issues was brought up repeatedly from research participants across methods. This made it clear to our research team that to ensure our recommendations acknowledge and address the complexity of the issues faced by women and gender minorities in public spaces, and by extension on public transit, we must analyze the issues at the levels of the individual riders, transit agencies, and the city with both short and long term approaches.

To expand on our findings, the following sections are divided into two parts: short-term approaches, which focus on immediate actions transit agencies can take, and long-term approaches, which examine transit safety through an intersectional lens, emphasizing the need for intergovernmental collaboration.

5.1 Short-term approaches to safety on transit

For short-term approaches to enhancing safety on transit, our team found that many suggestions were largely infrastructure improvements to stations, stops, and vehicles. Many of the infrastructure improvements transit agencies can focus on align with the principles of framework Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED). The four core principles of CPTED are 1) natural surveillance, 2) natural access control, 3) territorial reinforcement, and 4) maintenance and management. The principles can be used to make infrastructural improvements to transit stations such as designing entrances to allow clear visibility before entry, giving users a sense of security. Another example of small improvements could be to select and adequately light “safe routes” to ensure that pedestrian activity through the station is concentrated in well-lit areas. The fundamental idea to CPTED and its application to transit is evaluation of how we design transit stations and stops to increase the amount of eyes on the area and to ensure that there are no areas that are both accessible and hidden. It is critical that when transit agencies are evaluating their infrastructure using CPTED principles that they are also asking for the perspectives of their diverse ridership. What may appear to be a safe corridor to one person, can look unsafe to another due to their life experiences which are often shaped by their identities. It is crucial if transit agencies want to design safe stops and stations for all riders that they consult women and gender minorities while. Our research team found that many participants had valuable short-term improvement ideas to enhance their sense of safety on transit. These insights played a crucial role in shaping the recommendations in Section 6 of this report.

5.2 Long-term approaches to safety on transit

Through our interviews, participants frequently emphasized how the issue of homelessness intersects with their transit experiences in Chicago. As a major metropolitan city, Chicago faces a persistent housing crisis, with a significant number of unhoused individuals seeking refuge in public spaces, including the transit system. The scarcity of affordable housing and inadequate shelter capacity, particularly during the city’s harsh winters, has led many unhoused individuals to rely on overnight transit lines as a means of survival. While most interviewees expressed empathy toward these individuals, their experiences also revealed moments of discomfort and distress, particularly when encountering individuals in visible mental health crises.

One interviewee encapsulated this sentiment, acknowledging the systemic failure that has led many to seek shelter on transit:

“We’ve kind of failed a huge portion of people, and Chicago is cold as hell in the winter. If you don’t have anywhere else to go, I would rather have those people be on the train than be freezing outside.”

However, while unhoused individuals are not inherently perceived as a threat, certain incidents involving erratic behavior, often linked to mental health crises or substance use, have contributed to a sense of unease among riders. One participant recounted an incident when she and her partner entered an empty train car late at night, only to encounter a woman in distress:

“She was talking to herself, screaming, and trying to pull the emergency door open while the train was moving. If I had watched someone basically plummet to their death, that would have been a deeply scarring event. We didn’t know what to do.”

Experiences like these illustrate the broader issue of safety on transit—one that extends beyond crime and into the realms of public health, social services, and housing policy. Our interviews and survey data revealed a clear correlation between perceived safety, the presence of unhoused individuals, and the intersection of mental health and substance use crises. Many of the discomforting encounters riders reported stemmed from situations where individuals were experiencing acute distress without adequate support.

In their paper titled 'A Bus Home: Homelessness in U.S. Transit Environments,' Wasserman et. al. (2022) highlights the presence of unhoused individuals within transit environments, especially post COVID 19 pandemic. Their research indicates that major bus hubs or train stations, often centrally located, are prominent locations where most people experiencing homelessness are found. The study critically examines responses by transit agencies to homelessness, noting that most strategies employed to be punitive such as enforcing anti-loitering laws, mandating all riders to exit the transit vehicle at the end of the route and paying fare to reboard, or implementing hostile architecture like arm dividers at bus stop benches. On the contrary, they found very few agencies across the country offering supportive services to riders experiencing homelessness such as discounted fares or access to social service providers. The research advocates for a fundamental shift in how transit agencies approach homelessness, emphasizing that their safety goals should focus on enhancing mobility and wellbeing for unhoused individuals rather than having fewer unhoused individuals in transit environments.

Wasserman et.al. (2022) conclude their paper saying "Indeed, transit agencies have a responsibility to ensure that their services are easily accessible to their unhoused riders and also help these riders access assistance and support. But addressing the challenge of homelessness in transit environments is a larger social issue that requires state and municipal support and resources, collaboration, and coordination of different entities."

Addressing these challenges requires a shift in perspective by moving beyond the traditional scope of transit agencies and adopting an intersectional approach to safety. Transit agencies alone cannot resolve the homelessness crisis or provide sufficient mental health and addiction services. Instead, a coordinated effort between multiple government agencies is essential. This includes partnerships between transit authorities, housing departments, social service agencies, and public health institutions to ensure that individuals in need receive the necessary support, reducing their reliance on transit as a temporary refuge.

The Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) has taken steps in this direction by acknowledging the role transit plays in the lives of unsheltered individuals. In partnership with the City's Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS), CTA has expanded outreach programs that connect unhoused riders with housing referrals, mental health resources, and substance abuse treatment. (<https://www.transitchicago.com>) After the initial success of this initiative, CTA has committed to a two-year agreement to continue providing these critical services. (<https://www.transitchicago.com/unhoused/>)

While such efforts represent a positive step forward, they must be expanded and strengthened through long-term, systemic solutions. Although the CTA acknowledges the impact of homelessness on transit rider experience, there remains a crucial need for transit and housing agencies to collaborate proactively. Instead of merely discouraging unhoused individuals from transit environments, these agencies should recognize their presence on transit vehicles and surrounding public spaces such as transit stations and nearby public libraries. Addressing these issues collectively is essential to mitigate the indirect effects of homelessness on overall rider safety. Future strategies should focus on increasing the availability of affordable housing, improving access to mental health and substance use treatment, and fostering stronger intergovernmental collaboration.

The short-term and long-term approaches were considered to come up with recommendations for CTA.

6.0 Recommendations

Our recommendations which can be found below are for changes that can be implemented by transit agencies and can also serve as talking points for advocacy groups to use. It is important to note that first and foremost we advocate for greater and more intentional inclusion of women and gender minorities in transit planning. The perspectives of women and gender minorities should be taken into consideration at all levels of transit planning. Our recommendations primarily include ways of improving the current transit systems, however we advocate for inclusion of women and gender minorities from the beginning of new transit projects. The city of Chicago has many organizations who work primarily with women and gender minorities, our client AIDS Foundation Chicago and Pride Action Tank, are one example. These organizations should be consulted and their work reviewed for transit projects. There are many organizations locally, nationally, and internationally who focus on gender inclusive city planning. One example our team wishes to highlight is Punt 6 (<https://www.punt6.org/en/>), a transnational collective of architects and urban planners who reimagine and analyze public space through a feminist lens and have taken on projects such as the creation of a safety audit from a gender perspective at railway stations in Barcelona. There is a lot of great work that has been done and will continue to be done in this area of research, and we encourage transit agencies and advocacy to continue these conversations with one another. Below is a list of recommendations created by our research team according to the findings and analysis of this particular study.

Improvements and additions to rider feedback survey

The 2024 Fall Biannual Customer Satisfaction Survey (CSS), released in March 2025 by the Regional Transit Authority (RTA), found that personal security and cleanliness on the CTA received the lowest satisfaction ratings of 51% and 47% respectively. While the CSS does gather general feedback on reasons for dissatisfaction and suggested interventions, it does not explore deeper questions around perceived safety or incorporate a gendered perspective on rider experiences. A more nuanced understanding of safety that accounts for the lived realities of diverse demographics is essential to ensuring an inclusive transit environment. One model for this is the Transit Safety Survey developed by the Mineta Transportation Institute in response to California Senate Bill 1161 (2022). This survey equips California transit agencies to better understand how riders perceive safety, document experiences of harassment, and identify where and how often such incidents occur thus offering a more comprehensive and equity-centered approach to transit safety.



Create a rider survey focusing specifically on the safety of women and gender minorities.



Work more closely with women and gender minorities to map out specific areas and stations where they feel unsafe to identify critical areas for improvement.



Add to annual customer satisfaction surveys a section focusing specifically on issues of safety and the types of behaviors that make riders feel unsafe.



Create and implement a large-scale rider survey specifically focusing on safety that is conducted by the transit agency every 5-10 years to monitor improvement and address new issues.

Increase collaboration with government agencies and third-party services to address issues of safety on transit

Many of the challenges mentioned above, such as crime and homelessness on transit, fall outside the direct jurisdiction and capacity of the CTA. Given their limited resources to address these complex social issues alone, the CTA can benefit from partnering with organizations that already have deep-rooted connections within affected communities. For instance, to more effectively understand and respond to these concerns, the CTA can continue and expand its collaboration with city departments like the Chicago Police Department and Chicago's Department of Family & Support Services. The City of Philadelphia and SEPTA have teamed up with Project Home, a local nonprofit organization, to provide on-site support at a train stop for Philadelphians experiencing homelessness, offering showers, laundry, and information about where to find stable housing. (<https://www.intueor.com/articles/designing-transit-environments-to-ensure-rider-safety>)

Additionally, the CTA could look to initiatives like BART's Not One More Girl campaign which was launched to combat gender-based harassment and violence against girls and gender-expansive youth. BART developed the campaign in partnership with several community-based organizations, including Alliance for Girls, Betti Ono Foundation, Black Girls Brilliance, and The Unity Council offering a model for collaborative responses to gendered safety concerns on transit.



Works with a third-party organization to provide training to transit staff on how to de-escalate and aid those undergoing mental health crises



Create an internal mental health taskforce for the transit agency to address issues pertaining to riders who are experiencing a mental health crisis while on the transit or at transit stations



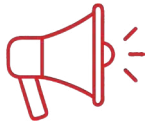
Contract a third-party organization to provide on-site staff to de-escalate or provide resources to riders who are experiencing a mental health crisis.



Transit agencies should create partnerships and become involved in government agencies, coalitions, and task forces surrounding issues of mental health, homelessness, substance abuse, and crime (such as CTA's partnership with the city of Chicago's Family & Support Services).

Creation of awareness and behavior campaigns

As highlighted in both our survey and interviews, one of the underlying drivers of violence on transit is a widespread lack of awareness around consent, as well as the normalization of gender-based violence and inappropriate behavior. These issues are not exclusive to transit but reflect broader societal norms and deeply influence how women and gender minorities perceive safety in public spaces. To address this, we recommend launching an awareness campaign modeled after BART's Not One More Girl initiative in the San Francisco Bay Area. This campaign was designed to challenge the systems that perpetuate gender-based violence and instead foster empowerment and education among riders. Through a combination of posters, awareness videos, public art, and community learning exchange (CLX) workshops, BART saw promising outcomes with 65% of respondents reporting increased awareness of harassment and gender-based violence on transit, and 36% reported feeling safer while riding. (<https://www.bart.gov/guide/safety/gbv/campaign>)



Create a campaign to spread awareness about the prevalence of gender based violence on transit.



Create a campaign on behaviors that are inappropriate for riders. The campaign should focus on topics of consent (discouraging sexual advances and listening when told no) and give explicit examples of what these inappropriate incidents look like.

Improvements and transparency on reporting

Despite the introduction of a live chatbot, the CTA has not seen a significant increase in reporting. Only 6% of respondents believe that the CTA consistently responds to complaints submitted through the chatbot. (CTA 2024 fall biannual Customer Satisfaction Survey) Our own survey and interviews echoed this concern, revealing that many participants were either unaware of the available reporting mechanisms or lacked trust in the CTA's ability to respond promptly. This points to a broader gap in outreach and communication regarding reporting options. In contrast, BART's Not One More Girl campaign successfully promoted awareness around available support, with 46% of respondents stating they knew where to seek help if they experienced sexual harassment or gender-based violence on BART. The campaign also introduced the BART Watch App, which offers a user-friendly platform for reporting not only harassment but also crime and disruptive behavior, demonstrating the importance of accessible and well-communicated tools for rider safety.



Add clear signage in train car and buses describing how riders can report incidents



Ensure it is clear to riders how reports are used and when there is follow up on an incident



Add signage with non-police helpline contact information for those experiencing a mental health crisis



Creating a real-time live chat, either online or through an app, where riders can notify CTA staff of an unsafe situation and receive guidance while waiting for assistance

Infrastructure improvement to enhance safety

Research highlights how the physical environment of transit spaces significantly impacts feelings of safety, particularly for women and gender minorities. Valentine's paper titled *Women's Fear and Design of Public Space* (1989) highlights how poorly lit, isolated, or visually obstructed spaces heighten fear and discourage transit use especially for women who often experience these spaces as unsafe. Yavuz and Welch (2010) build on this by showing that specific infrastructure and service attributes such as lighting, cleanliness, and reliable service directly influence perceived safety, particularly among women. Their study on the Chicago Transit Authority found that women report lower satisfaction with safety measures and are more affected by negative safety experiences than men. They emphasize that visible signs of disorder, like graffiti, poor lighting, or lack of staff presence, are strongly associated with fear, especially among women, and directly shape their transit behavior. These findings support the recommendations outlined below, which were also echoed by our survey and interview participants and CTA's own 2024 fall biannual customer satisfaction survey.



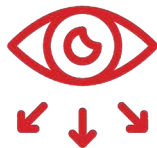
Increased lighting at transit stops and stations



Adding discrete panic buttons in bus and trains



Improving Wifi and data network connectivity in train cars



Yearly check for state of transit stations and stops, including monitoring the overall cleanliness of stations and stops



Increased non-police staff presence at stations and walking throughout the train as it's running. Staff would monitor behaviors such as smoking in vehicles and harassment.

7.0 Expansion of Project

Though the recommendations section of the report largely focuses on improvement that can and should be implemented by transit agencies, in this circumstance the CTA, we also hope the recommendations can be used as talking points for advocates. In addition to the recommendations, there are many ways for advocates and research groups to continue the work of ensuring women and gender minorities feel safe in public spaces, including public transit. For example, a follow up of this project could be additional interviews of women and gender minorities focusing specifically on the areas in which they feel unsafe. In addition to interviews conducting a walking/route tour with participants where a researcher joins the participant along their usual routes and makes note of circumstances and locations where participants feel unsafe noting any service or infrastructure changes which can be made to improve those areas. Transit stations also can be great places for outreach for organizations focused on addressing issues of homelessness, mental health, and substance abuse. Transit stations are essential areas for the city and can be better utilized in collaboration with community organizations. As has been stated consistently throughout the report, transit is influenced by other community advocates and organizations, such as our client, AIDS Foundation Chicago's Pride Action Tank, play an important role in continuing to support research, advocating for topics that impact marginalized communities, and using their visibility to change attitudes that lead to the violence experienced by women, queer, and transgender individuals.

8.0 Conclusion

Chicago, as the third most populous city in the United States with the third-largest queer population and the second-largest public transportation system, plays a crucial role in shaping transit experiences, particularly for queer individuals. With a steady growth of the queer community, many of whom rely on public transit for their essential trips, ensuring safety and security on CTA's trains and buses is important. Although CTA has acknowledged safety issues and made efforts to enhance rider security, findings from our study clearly highlight that there remains significant room for improvement, especially concerning the experiences of women and gender minorities. Increasing incidents of harassment, pervasive feelings of insecurity and inadequate reporting mechanisms demand immediate attention and proactive interventions.

Through surveys and in-depth interviews, this report illuminates the unique and disturbing vulnerabilities faced by women and gender minorities, highlighting the intersectional nature of their experiences on transit. It emphasizes that safety concerns are not confined solely to transit-related issues, but are rather reflections of broader societal challenges such as systemic inequalities, homelessness, mental health crises and insufficient policy planning.

Addressing these intertwined issues requires a holistic, multi-faceted approach. Short-term solutions such as infrastructural enhancements, improved reporting mechanisms, and increased transit staff presence can reassure and provide a safer environment for riders. However, a more impactful change demands sustained and collaborative efforts between transit agencies, government entities, social service organizations and the community.

As planners it is crucial that we continue to center the voices and experiences of marginalized populations who have historically been overlooked and underserved. The mobility justice framework, which guided this study from its inception, provides a valuable lens to analyse how structural inequalities influence the way marginalized communities move and interact with public spaces. It urges us to think beyond the goal of equity and inclusion and instead interrogate how broader social issues intersect to shape transit experiences. The framework was used to analyze the study's findings and informed the recommendations presented in this report. These recommendations serve not only as practical tools for transit agencies but also a call to planners, professionals and researchers to further the conversation around the issue of mobility justice for marginalized populations.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Survey Form

Women and Gender Minorities Experience on Chicago Public Transit This survey is being conducted by Master's students in Urban Planning from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign to explore the experiences of women and gender minorities on Chicago's public transit system. It includes questions about your daily commute, perceptions of safety, and any encounters with harassment or threats while using public transit. Additionally, the survey invites your input on infrastructure and safety improvements that could enhance the overall experience. The purpose of this research study is to understand the experience of women and gender minorities on public transit. We are doing this study because there is limited research verifying the experience of women and gender minorities in the field of transportation. This research is meant to validate the experience and provide advocacy groups with research to assist their efforts. The survey is voluntary and should take no more than 20 minutes. Your responses will be confidential and we do not collect identifying information such as your name, email address or IP address. We will only collect your name and email address if; 1) you voluntarily choose to click the link at the end of the survey to sign up to participate in a follow up interview, 2) you choose to click the link at the end of the survey to enter the raffle for a \$50 gift card. Any identifiers that can result from answers to open ended questions in the survey will not be published or presented. If you have any questions contact Erin Hernandez (erin9@illinois.edu) or Tushar Kokitkar (tushark3@illinois.edu) If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, including concerns, complaints, or to offer input, you may call the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS) at 217-333-2670 or e-mail OPRS at irb@illinois.edu. Content Warning: Some questions may ask you to reflect on incidents of harassment or threats that you have experienced or witnessed on Chicago's public transit system. IRB study number: IRB24-2052 Electronic consent form: Please select your choice below. Clicking on the "agree" button below indicates that: • you have read the above information • you voluntarily agree to participate • you are at least 18 years of age If you do not wish to participate in the research study, please decline participation by clicking on the "disagree" button.

- o Agree (1)
- o Disagree (2)

Section 1: Demographic/ commuting Information

Q1 How do you identify your gender?

- o Cisgender woman (1)
- o Cisgender man (2)
- o Transgender Woman/Transfem (3)
- o Transgender Man/Transmasc (4)
- o Gender-fluid/Genderqueer (5)
- o Two-spirit (6)
- o Non-binary (7)
- o Prefer not to say (8)
- o Other (please specify) (9) _____

Q2 How do you identify your sexuality?

- Lesbian (1)
- Gay (2)
- Bisexual (3)
- Pansexual (4)
- Asexual (5)
- Straight/Heterosexual (6)
- Other (please specify) (7) _____

Q3 What is your age range?

- Under 18 (1)
- 18-24 (2)
- 25 - 34 (3)
- 35 - 44 (4)
- 45 - 54 (5)
- 55 - 64 (6)
- 65+ (7)

Q4 How do you identify your race/ethnicity?

- White (Non-hispanic) (1)
- Black (2)
- Latino/e/x (3)
- Asian (4)
- Native American (5)
- Pacific Islander (6)
- Other (please specify) (7) _____

Q5 What is your usual mode of transportation?

- Public Transit (1)
- Personal vehicle (2)
- Carpool (3)
- Rideshare (4)
- Bike (5)
- Walk (6)

Q6 If you use public transit, what is your preferred method?

- o Bus (CTA) (1)
- o Bus (Pace) (2)
- o Train (CTA) (3)
- o Train (Metra) (4)

Q7 How often do you use public transit?

- o Daily (1)
- o Several times a week (2)
- o Once a week (3)
- o A few times a month (4)
- o Rarely (5)
- o Never (6)

Section 2: Perception of Safety in Public Transportation

Q8 How safe do you feel using public transit during the daytime?

- o Very Safe (1)
- o Safe (2)
- o Neutral (3)
- o Unsafe (4)
- o Very Unsafe (5)

Q9 How safe do you feel using public transit during the nighttime?

- o Very Safe (1)
- o Safe (2)
- o Neutral (3)
- o Unsafe (4)
- o Very Unsafe (5)

Q10 Have you ever felt uncomfortable or unsafe due to the behavior of others while using public transit?

- o Yes (1)
- o No (2)

Q11 If you answered yes to the question above, can you describe what behavior made you feel unsafe or uncomfortable?

Section 3: Experience of Harassment or Threats

Q12 Have you experienced any of the following yourself or seen them happen to others while using Chicago's public transit in the past year? Check all that apply

- Hostile comments, sounds, or gestures (1)
- Sexual comments, sounds, looks, or gestures (asking you to have sex, calling you "babe," whistling, kissing noises, leering, etc.) (2)
- Following or stalking (3)
- Unwanted groping, kissing, or other inappropriate touching (4)
- Pushing, spitting, coughing on you, or other physical assault (5)
- Personal property damaged or stolen (6)
- Showing pornographic or offensive pictures or words (7)
- Exposing private body parts (8)
- Sexual assault or rape (9)
- None (10)
- Other (please specify) (11) _____

Q13 How often have you experienced any form of harassment while using public transit?

- Always (1)
- Most of the time (2)
- About half the time (3)
- Sometimes (4)
- Never (5)

Q14 If you have experienced harassment on public transit, where did you experience harassment?

- On the train (1)
- On the bus (2)
- Train platform (3)
- Inside the station premises (including stairs/elevator to the platform) (4)
- Bus stop (5)
- Outside or near the station (6)
- Other (please specify) (7) _____

Q15 If you selected "On the train" can you please specify which line you were on?

Q16 Did you report any of the incidents of harassment?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q17 If you selected no for the question above, what prevented you from reporting it?

Q18 We want to ensure we are collecting information on hate/bias crime, so when this happened to you or you were witnessing this, do you believe that you/they were being targeted because of? (Check all that apply)

- Race or ethnicity (1)
- Religion (2)
- Language spoken (3)
- Income (4)
- Gender/gender expression (5)
- Sexual orientation (6)
- Age (7)
- Disability (8)
- Weight (9)
- None-it was random (10)
- Don't know (11)
- Other (please specify) (12) -----

Section 4: Safety Measures, Infrastructure and Preferences

Q19 How satisfied are you with the current safety measures and infrastructure on public transit in your area in Chicago?

- Very satisfied (1)
- Somewhat satisfied (2)
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (3)
- Somewhat dissatisfied (4)
- Very dissatisfied (5)

Q20 What measures and infrastructure would make you feel safer on public transit? (Check all that apply)

- Increased security presence (1)
- More CCTV cameras (2)
- Improved lighting at stops/stations (3)
- Designated women-only or gender safe areas (4)

- o Anonymous reporting options (5)
- o Educational safety campaigns for commuters (6)
- o Increased presence of CTA staff at station (7)
- o Other (please specify) (8) _____

Q21 What measures do you take to make yourself feel safer on transit? (Check all that apply)

- o Travel with someone (1)
- o Talking on the phone while commuting (2)
- o Carry self-defense tools (3)
- o Use transit only during peak hours (4)
- o Use transit only during non-rush hours (5)
- o Use train compartments closer to the driver (6)
- o Use crowded train compartments (7)
- o Use empty train compartments (8)
- o Avoiding transit at night (9)
- o Other (please specify) (10) _____

Section 5: Suggestions and Additional Comments

Q22 Do you have any suggestions to improve safety for women, transgender individuals, and other gender minorities on public transit?

Q23 Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience using public transit?

Section 6: Interview Signup & Raffle Entry

Q32 Are you interested in participating in a 45 minute interview on your experience on Chicago transit as a woman, transgender person, non-binary person, or other gender minority? If so, please click the link below to fill out your contact information. https://illinois.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3UCJEFaPkKn1410

Q33 Thank you for spending your time filling out our survey! If you are interested in entering the raffle for a chance to win a \$50 gift card, please click the link below to fill out your contact information. https://illinois.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_dha008Met8E2RVA

Appendix B: Interview signup

Women and Gender Minorities Experience on Chicago Public Transit: Interview Signup The purpose of this research study is to understand the experience of women and gender minorities on public transit. We are doing this study because there is limited research verifying the experience of women and gender minorities in the field of transportation. This research is meant to validate the experience and provide advocacy groups with research to assist their efforts. For part of our research, we will be conducting one-on-one interviews with women and gender minorities about their personal experience on public transportation in a one-on-one interview with a researcher from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. The responses will be used by the primary research team, Erin Hernandez (erin9@illinois.edu) and Tushar Kokitkar (tushark3@illinois.edu), Master of Urban Planning Students at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and our partner AIDS Foundation Chicago. The interview audio will be recorded and then transcribed. After transcription, the audio will be deleted, and all identifying information will be deleted from the transcription. Please note that some questions may ask you to reflect on incidents of harassment or threats that you have experienced or witnessed on Chicago's public transit system. You must also be 18 years or older to participate. If you are interested in participating in a one-on-one interview please fill out the following information:

Q2 Name

Q3 Email address

Q4 Phone number

Q5 How do you identify your gender?

- Cisgender Woman (1)
- Cisgender Man (2)
- Transgender Woman/Transfem (3)
- Transgender Man/Transmasc (4)
- Gender-fluid/Genderqueer (5)
- Two-spirit (6)
- Non-binary (7)
- Prefer not to say (8)
- Other (please specify) (9) -----

Q6 How do you identify your sexuality?

- Lesbian (1)
- Gay (2)

- o Bisexual (3)
- o Pansexual (4)
- o Asexual (5)
- o Straight/Heterosexual (6)
- o Other (please specify) (7) _____

Q7 How often do you use public transit?

- o Daily (1)
- o Several times a week (2)
- o Once a week (3)
- o A few times a month (4)
- o Rarely (5)
- o Never (6)

Q8 Are you above the age of 18?

- o Yes (1)
- o No (2)

Appendix C: Interview consent form

Q1 The purpose of this research study is to understand the experience of women and gender minorities on public transit. We are doing this study because there is limited research verifying the experience of women and gender minorities in the field of transportation. This research is meant to validate the experience and provide advocacy groups with research to assist their efforts. We will be asking you questions regarding your personal experience on public transportation in a one-on-one interview with a researcher from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. There are limited known risks associated with participating in this study such as risk of loss to confidentiality. The study also deals with sensitive topics which could put participants at risk of experiencing intense emotions as they share uncomfortable experiences. Participants can ask to stop the interview at any time. You may not experience any direct benefits from your participation, but we hope to learn more about how to improve our public transit service to ensure everyone, especially women and gender minorities. Data will be used by the primary research team, Erin Hernandez and Tushar Kokitkar, Master of Urban Planning Students at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and our partner AIDS Foundation Chicago. The interview audio will be recorded and then transcribed. After transcription, the audio will be deleted, and all identifying information will be deleted from the transcription. If you have any questions complaints or if you feel you have been harmed by this research, please contact Erin Hernandez, Department of Urban and Regional Planning, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign at erin9@illinois.edu If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, including concerns, complaints, or to offer input, you may call the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS) at 217-333-2670 or e-mail OPRS at irb@illinois.edu. The interview should take approximately 45 minutes. Participation in this study is voluntary. You can choose not to take part at any time. You can choose not to finish the interview or skip any questions you prefer not to answer without penalty or loss of benefits. Interview participants will be compensated once all participants have been interviewed. Please sign for consent below. By entering your name and the date below you indicates that:

- you have read the above information
- you voluntarily agree to participate
- you are at least 18 years of age

Name (1) _____

Date (2) _____

Appendix D: Survey Flyer



TRANSIT CITY Raffle

DO YOU TRAVEL BY TRANSIT?

Our research aims to understand women and gender minorities experience on Chicago's Public Transit

SCAN TO PARTICIPATE



Scan to fill out the survey and help us come up with service and design recommendations for an equitable and safe transit system

Participants can enter a raffle at the end of the survey for a chance to win a gift card!

Conducted by Master of Urban Planning students at University of Illinois Urbana Champaign

Appendix D: Interview Flyer

TRANSIT SAFETY

WOULD YOU LIKE TO SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE ON CHICAGO TRANSIT?

We are looking to interview women and gender minorities to understand their experience on Chicago's public transit.

Your input will help us come up with service and design recommendations for an equitable and safe transit system.

All the information obtained will be confidential and used solely for the purpose of our study.

Participants will receive a giftcard!

SCAN TO
SIGN UP



Conducted by Master of Urban Planning students
at University of Illinois Urbana Champaign

Gendered Experiences on Chicago's Public Transit

University of Illinois Urbana Champaign
AIDS Foundation Chicago's Pride Action Tank
August 2024 - May 2025