

# Gender Inclusivity in India's Public Transport



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## Preface

### Manjunath Sekhar

Project Head, SUM-ACA



### Aswathy Dilip

Managing Director, ITDP India



The journey towards sustainable and inclusive mobility in India is one that requires collaboration, innovation, and empathy. The Gender Inclusivity in India's Public Transport report reflects the collaboration between ITDP India and GIZ India under the Sustainable Urban Mobility – Access, Climate, Action (SUM-ACA) programme.

This collaboration builds on the shared commitment of both organisations to make urban mobility systems not only cleaner and more efficient but also equitable and empowering. It recognises that sustainable mobility is only possible when women are equally represented and empowered, both as employees and as users.

The report brings together field evidence from cities across India, institutional analysis, and success stories to present a comprehensive picture of women's experiences in mobility. It identifies the persistent barriers to women's participation in the public transport workforce and highlights gaps in commuter safety and comfort. The study also provides recommendations for integrating gender-responsive policies, designing inclusive workplaces, and building public transport systems that prioritise safety, dignity, and opportunity for all.

This work has been strengthened by the active participation of the **Association of State Road Transport Undertakings (ASRTU)**, **State Transport Undertakings (STUs)**, and **Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs)**, whose insights and data have helped ground this study in reality. Their contributions reflect a growing sectoral commitment to equity and transformation.

Together, GIZ India and ITDP India are proud to support this effort to mainstream gender inclusion in public transport planning and operations. We hope this report encourages agencies, operators, and policymakers to champion initiatives that ensure India's public transport systems are truly inclusive, where every woman can move, work, and thrive safely and confidently.



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## About the Report

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Women play multiple roles in India's public transport ecosystem – as commuters, employees, and decision-makers – yet remain significantly underrepresented and underserved. This report, *Gender Inclusivity in India's Public Transport*, presents a comprehensive analysis of the challenges women face in both dimensions: accessing reliable, safe, and affordable mobility, and securing dignified employment in the transport sector.

Drawing from gender-disaggregated data collected and inputs from participating STUs and SPVs, the study maps systemic barriers in recruitment, workplace conditions, and travel safety. It complements this analysis with success stories from Indian cities that have initiated reforms – from employing women bus drivers and conductors to improving depot facilities, introducing gender-sensitive training, and conducting safety audits of routes and terminals.

### Key recommendations include:

- **Policy & Regulation:** Establish gender-inclusive recruitment frameworks, equal pay and promotion opportunities, and gender-responsive procurement clauses.
- **Workplace Environment:** Upgrade depots and offices with sanitation, rest areas, and lighting; ensure grievance-redressal mechanisms and zero-tolerance policies for harassment.
- **Capacity & Representation:** Expand training and mentorship for women across operational and leadership roles; create gender focal points in STUs and SPVs.
- **Commuter Inclusion:** Implement gender-sensitive route planning, surveillance, and last-mile connectivity improvements.

By combining rigorous analysis with actionable solutions and success stories, the report demonstrates that gender inclusivity is not only an equity imperative but also a pathway to more efficient, safe, and trusted public transport systems across India.



## Executive Summary

The past few years have marked a significant shift in India's approach to public bus transport, with a strong focus on electrification through various government incentive schemes such as FAME I & II, PM e-Bus Sewa, and E Drive. These initiatives aim to modernise the public bus fleet, reduce emissions, and promote sustainable urban mobility. However, despite these advancements, gender inclusivity remains a critical gap that needs to be addressed to ensure that public transport systems are equitable and accessible for all.

Electric buses present a unique opportunity to create a more gender-inclusive workspace by employing more women and making the environment safer for passengers. This report, a collaboration between the ITDP India and GIZ India under the Indo-German Green Urban Mobility Partnership, presents a comprehensive analysis of the challenges faced by women as both employees and users of public transport in India, provides actionable recommendations, and highlights success stories to inspire further action.

The Association of State Road Transport Undertakings (ASRTU) has collected gender-disaggregated data on women drivers and conductors for the first time, marking a significant step towards understanding and addressing gender disparities in the transport sector. This report delves into the challenges faced by women working in State Transport Undertakings (STUs), Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs), and Municipal Corporations operating city-bus services, as well as the experiences of women commuters.

Key findings from the focus group discussions (FGDs) with women bus drivers, conductors, and mechanics across four major Indian cities- Delhi, Pune, Bengaluru and Chennai, and quantitative insights from a large-scale citizen survey conducted across 46 cities reveal that women in public transport face unique challenges. Safety concerns, harassment, poor infrastructure, and employment inequalities hinder their mobility and participation in the workforce. For women as public transport users, safety concerns, long waiting times, accessibility issues, overcrowding and high fares are key issues.

Complementing these broader insights, a detailed transit infrastructure audit and workplace policy review was conducted in Bhubaneswar and Hubballi Dharwad under the GIZ-implemented Sustainable Urban Mobility - Air Quality, Climate Action and Accessibility (SUM-ACA) project for Capital Region Urban Transport (CRUT) system and the North West Karnataka Road Transport Corporation (NWKRTC).

CRUT already demonstrates notable gender-inclusive features with 40% women conductors and predominantly women Mo E-Ride drivers. The study provides valuable depth to understanding how even relatively progressive transport systems face systemic challenges in safety infrastructure, gender-responsive facilities, accessibility features, and workplace policies that collectively create barriers to women's safe and comfortable participation as both commuters and employees.

This study applied identical methodologies across bus terminals, depots, and multiple bus stations in both cities, engaging with diverse stakeholder groups and surveying commuters to assess both infrastructure gaps and workplace policies. Together, these case studies underscore that gender-inclusive transport challenges are systemic across India's diverse urban contexts, requiring coordinated policy interventions and standardized approaches to create truly equitable public transport systems.

**To address these challenges, the report outlines several policy recommendations including enhancing workplace infrastructure and facilities, ensuring job security and fair employment policies, improving the safety, comfort, and reliability of buses, enhancing accessibility for women commuters, improving affordability, promoting gender-inclusive public awareness campaigns, and strengthening gender-inclusive policy and planning. Global case studies illustrate the effectiveness of gender-inclusive transport policies.**

Initiatives such as Bogota's La Rolita program and London's transport safety measures offer valuable insights for India. These examples demonstrate how gender-responsive planning can increase women's participation and improve commuter safety.

The implementation, monitoring, and evaluation framework outlined in the report provides clear timelines and indicators to ensure progress and accountability.

This report is a call to action for policymakers, transport authorities, and civil society organisations to work together to create a sustainable and gender-inclusive public transport system. By addressing the unique needs of women in public transport, STUs/SPVs/Municipal Corporations can create a safer, more inclusive, and equitable public transport system that benefits all users, particularly women.

## List of Abbreviations

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ASRTU	Association of State Road Transport Undertakings
BEST	Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport
BMTC	Bengaluru Metropolitan Transport Corporation
BRT	Bus Rapid Transit
BTP	British Transport Police
CCTV	Closed-Circuit Television
CRUT	Capital Region Urban Transport
DTC	Delhi Transport Corporation
FAME	Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Hybrid and Electric Vehicle
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GIFT	Gender-Inclusive Future Transport
HDBRTS	Hubballi Dharwad Bus Rapid Transit System
ICC	Internal Complaints Committee
ITDP India	Institute for Transportation and Development Policy
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews

## List of Abbreviations

---

LOS	Level of Service
M & E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MMRDA	Metropolitan Region Development Authority
Moo E-Ride	Mobility Electric Rides
MSRTC	Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation
MTC	Chennai Metropolitan Transport Corporation
NWKRTC	North-West Karnataka Road Transport Corporation
PM e-bus Sewa	Pradhan Mantri e-bus Sewa
POSH	Prevention of Sexual Harassment (Act)
PwD	Persons with Disabilities
SPVs	Special Purpose Vehicles
STUs	State Transport Undertakings
T4A	Transport4All Challenge
TfL	Transport for London
UK	United Kingdom
WRI	World Resources Institute





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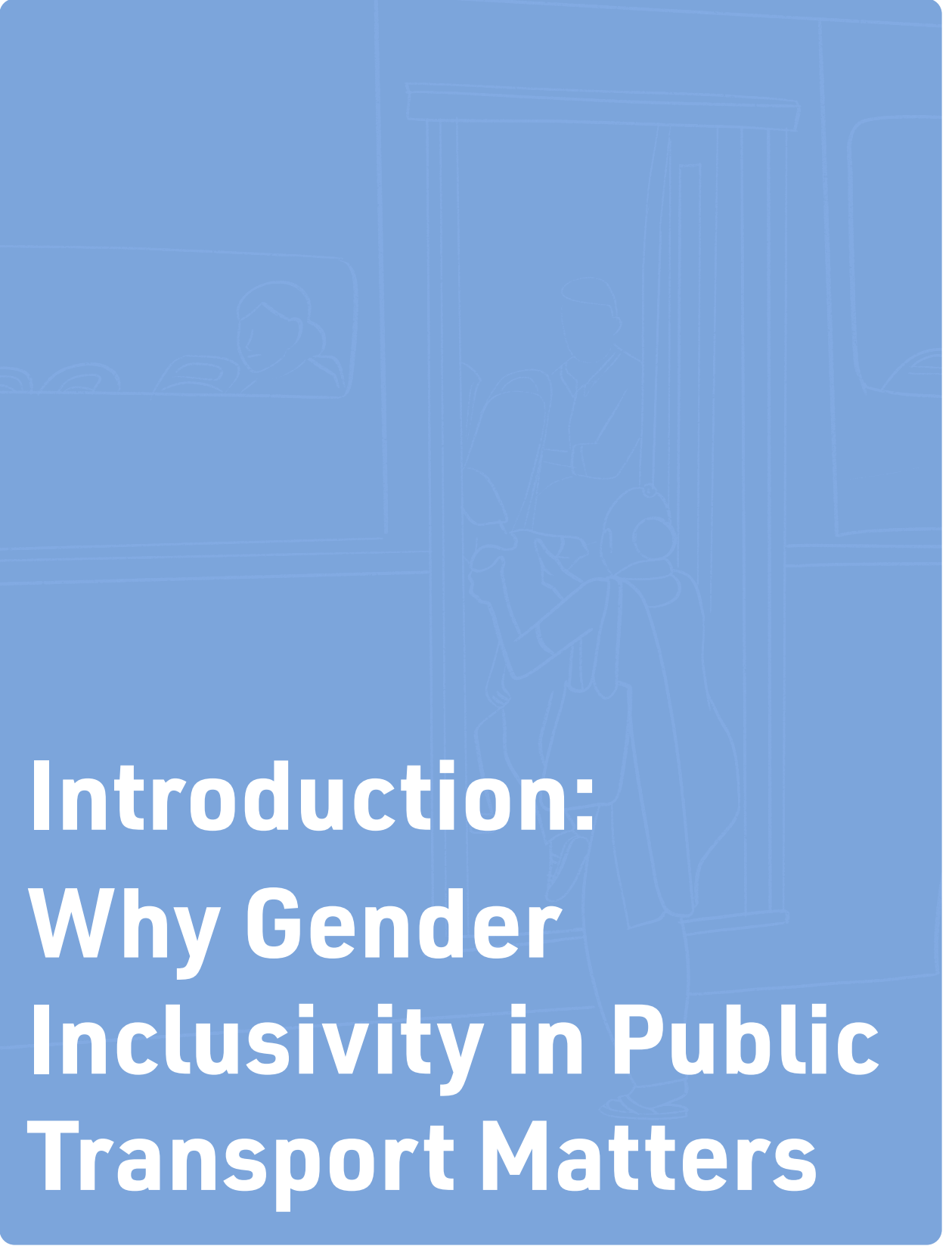
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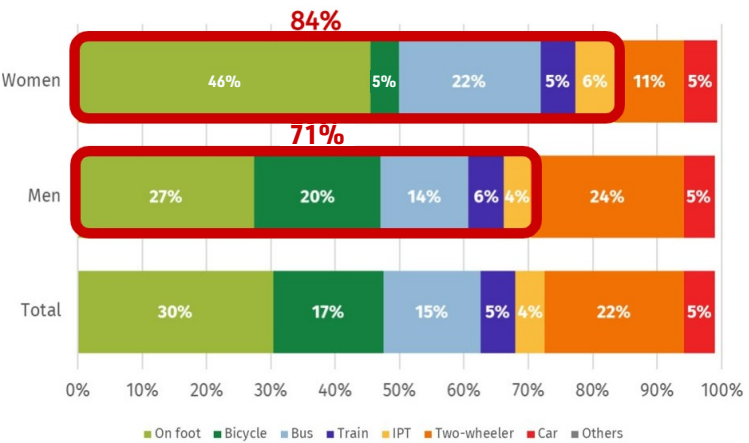


# **Introduction: Why Gender Inclusivity in Public Transport Matters**

Gender inclusivity in public transport stands as a foundational pillar for advancing both gender equality and fostering inclusive urban development across India. Transport systems have historically prioritized efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and sustainability, often overlooking women’s unique mobility needs and participation requirements. This oversight carries far-reaching consequences, as women rely on public transport more than men for daily activities including commuting to work, managing household responsibilities, accompanying children to school, and accessing healthcare services.

Data from the Census of India, 2011 highlights this disparity: 84% of trips taken by women for work in urban India were by public transport, informal modes, walking, and cycling, compared to 71% of trips taken by men. Despite this higher reliance, public transport systems are rarely designed with women’s needs in mind. The lack of gender-responsive planning restricts women’s access to economic opportunities, education, and essential services, thereby limiting their autonomy and life choices.

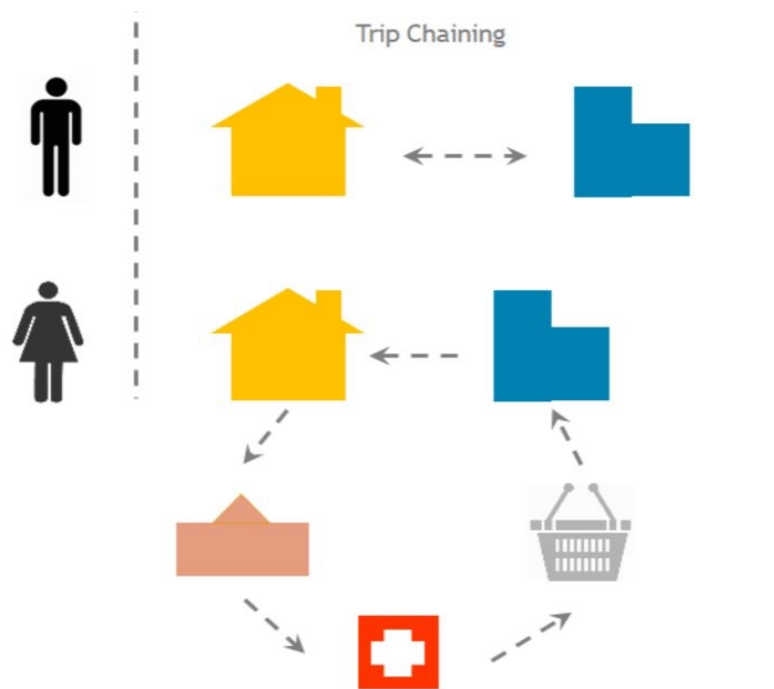
**Figure 1**  
Gender Disparity in Mode of Transport Usage



Source: Census of India, 2011

Several studies demonstrate that women make multiple shorter daily trips than men, who typically engage primarily in work-related commutes. This travel pattern, known as trip chaining, reflects women's broader participation in care work and community activities. A 2019 study in Delhi showed that women's trips were almost 38% shorter on average than men's, while men's average travel costs were 35% higher than women's. This leads to increased travel burden and safety concerns for women commuters.

**Figure 2**  
Trip Chaining Pattern among  
Women Commuters



Safety concerns compound mobility challenges significantly. A 2022 study by the World Bank revealed that 56% of women reported experiencing sexual harassment while using public transport. This alarming statistic highlights the urgent need for gender-responsive public transport planning and infrastructure improvements to ensure that public transport is safe, accessible, and inclusive for women. Evidence from Bhubaneswar and Hubballi Dharwad case studies confirms that safety perceptions vary dramatically across journey segments, with 94% feeling safe during daytime bus travel dropping to 82% for evening hours, forcing women to modify work schedules and limit economic opportunities.

The recruitment and employment landscape in India's transport sector remains overwhelmingly male-dominated. Women are significantly underrepresented not only in operational roles such as drivers and conductors but also in planning, policymaking, and administrative functions.

Within public transport specifically, women occupy a mere 0.16% of driving positions and 15% of conductor roles.

In 2020-21, the female labour force participation rate in India stood at just 26.2%, one of the lowest globally. Within public transport specifically, women occupy a mere 0.16% of driving positions and 15% of conductor roles. The underrepresentation stems from multiple factors: lack of secure infrastructure, poor lighting at stations, inadequate workplace facilities, and the absence of gender-inclusive policies that contribute to hesitation among women to pursue transport careers.

Workplace conditions in male-dominated transport environments often fail to accommodate women's basic needs. Focus group discussions in Delhi, Pune, Bengaluru, and Chennai revealed common challenges including inadequate toilet facilities, unsafe resting areas, absence of proper changing rooms at depots, and lack of emergency response systems for staff.

Several positive initiatives offer blueprints for change across India's diverse urban contexts. In Mumbai, the Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport (BEST) launched women-only bus services in 2019, increasing women ridership from 2,500 female passengers on 54 buses to 18,000 female passengers on 393 buses daily, a seven-fold increase. In Telangana, women can disembark buses at any point after 7:30 PM within the Greater Hyderabad Zone. The Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) revised hiring criteria in 2022, lowering minimum height requirements for women drivers from 159 cm to 153 cm and reducing required heavy vehicle experience from three years to one month.

The Bhubaneswar experience demonstrates possibilities with CRUT's women conductor program achieving 40% female representation in conductor positions, while Mo E-Ride became India's first e-rickshaw feeder service driven by women, transgender individuals, and people living with HIV. These initiatives contributed to a 200% increase in overall ridership within five years.

<sup>1</sup> Designing public transport in India that works for all, 2023, World Bank Group

<sup>2</sup> India: Making public transport more women-friendly, 2022, World Bank Blogs

<sup>3</sup> Designing Public Transport in India That Works for All, 2022, World Bank Blogs

<sup>4</sup> Periodic Labour Force Survey, Annual Report 2020-2021, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation

<sup>5</sup> Mumbai: BEST ladies commuters seven times more than pre-Covid, 2022, The Times of India

<sup>6</sup> Women can now hail and board TSRTC buses anywhere after 7:30 pm, 2021, Telangana Today

<sup>7</sup> Government relaxes norms for DTC women bus drivers, 2022, The New Indian Express

<sup>8</sup> Toolkit on Enabling Gender Responsive Urban Mobility and Public Spaces in India, 2022, World Bank Group

<sup>9</sup> Women and Transport in Indian Cities, 2017, ITDP & Safetipin

International examples further highlight the impact of gender-sensitive transport initiatives. Bogotá’s La Rolita program employs women-led transport services and invests in safer infrastructure. Seoul’s Women Friendly City initiative integrates women’s perspectives into urban design. In Dhaka, gender analysis led to comprehensive action plans including reserved seating, women’s vending zones, and female participation in BRT infrastructure construction and maintenance. These initiatives demonstrate that targeted measures can significantly enhance safety, accessibility, and participation of women in public transport - both as commuters and workforce members.

To study women’s experiences comprehensively, ASRTU has taken a progressive step by collecting gender-disaggregated data on women drivers and conductors for the first time, marking a pivotal milestone in understanding and addressing gender disparities across India’s transport sector. This initiative aims to celebrate women’s contributions while identifying pathways to improve working conditions and encourage greater female participation across different states.

**Purpose and Objective**

The primary purpose of this report is to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of gender inclusivity in public transport in India. This includes documenting the issues faced by women commuters and the representation, challenges, and achievements of women working in the STUs/SPVs as bus drivers and conductors.

1 The report analyses the current representations of women in STUs/SPVs in India and analyses the challenges faced by women drivers and conductors in the public bus transport sector, including workplace conditions, safety concerns, and job security, as well as their achievements and contributions.

2 It examines how women commuters feel about safety in public transport and the barriers that prevent women from using public transport using survey data from 46 cities.

3 The report also provides recommendations to improve workplace policies, job security, and infrastructure.

4 It delves into factors influencing women’s willingness to use public transport and highlights necessary policy recommendations.

5 The study draws its recommendations from best practices and international case studies on gender inclusivity in public transport. These insights contribute to strategies for improving women’s safety and representation in transport.

By achieving these objectives, the report aims to contribute to developing a more inclusive, equitable, and efficient public transport system that meets the needs of all users, particularly women.

## Scope of the Survey

This report draws on citizen perception data collected as part of the Transport4All (T4A) Challenge in 2021. A total of 2,00,000 respondents across 46 Indian cities participated in the surveys, of which approximately 78,000 were women commuters whose responses form the core of the gender analysis presented here.

The cities covered represent a range of population sizes:

- 23 cities with populations above 10 lakh,
- 13 cities with populations between 5–10 lakh, and
- 10 cities with populations below 5 lakh.

In each city, the surveys were led by a multi-stakeholder working group comprising representatives from the Smart City and/or Municipal Corporation, State Transport Undertakings (STUs) / Bus SPVs, the Nodal Officer, and NGO/academic institutions. The nodal officer in each city was responsible for ensuring that the surveys were rolled out and that responses were collected from diverse demographic groups, including women, persons with disabilities, economically weaker sections, and different age groups, and from neighbourhoods across the city.

The survey used a mixed-method approach, combining offline and online data collection:

- Offline (approx. 78% of responses):
  - On-ground surveys at high-footfall locations,
  - Face-to-face interactions in neighbourhoods with different income profiles,
  - Telephonic interviews using databases from NGOs, PMAY, and other government programmes.
- Online (approx. 22% of responses):
  - Dissemination of the survey link through print and social media,
  - Emails and SMS sent to citizen groups and government databases,
  - Circulation through RWA WhatsApp groups,
  - Collaboration with NGOs to maximise reach.

Each city was given a target sample of around 2,000 offline and 1,000 online responses to ensure representation of residents who may not have access to digital platforms. By December 2021, all participating cities had completed their surveys and submitted the data.

## Limitations and Timing of the Survey:

While the surveys provide robust, city-wide insights, a few limitations must be noted:

### Timing during the COVID-19 pandemic

The surveys were conducted during 2021, a period that coincided with different phases of the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated restrictions. In some cities, data collection took place when public transport operations and ridership were gradually resuming. As a result, reported experiences of overcrowding may reflect:

- Conditions during peak periods of service resumption, and/or
- Commuters' experiences and perceptions shaped by both pre-pandemic travel and ongoing adjustments in service levels.

### Sampling and representativeness

- Although cities were given clear sampling targets and guidelines to cover diverse user groups and geographies, the surveys are still subject to:
- Higher representation of respondents in locations with greater survey outreach (e.g., high-footfall areas),
- Potential bias in online responses towards those with better access to smartphones and the internet,
- Variation in survey administration timing between cities, which may influence comparability of certain indicators (e.g., crowding, wait times)

### City Coverage

The findings are based on 46 T4A-participating cities and are therefore most representative of urban areas engaged in the Challenge. They may not fully capture conditions in smaller towns or non-participating cities.

Despite these limitations, the surveys provide one of the largest consolidated datasets on women's public transport experiences in India to date, and form a strong empirical basis for the recommendations in this report.



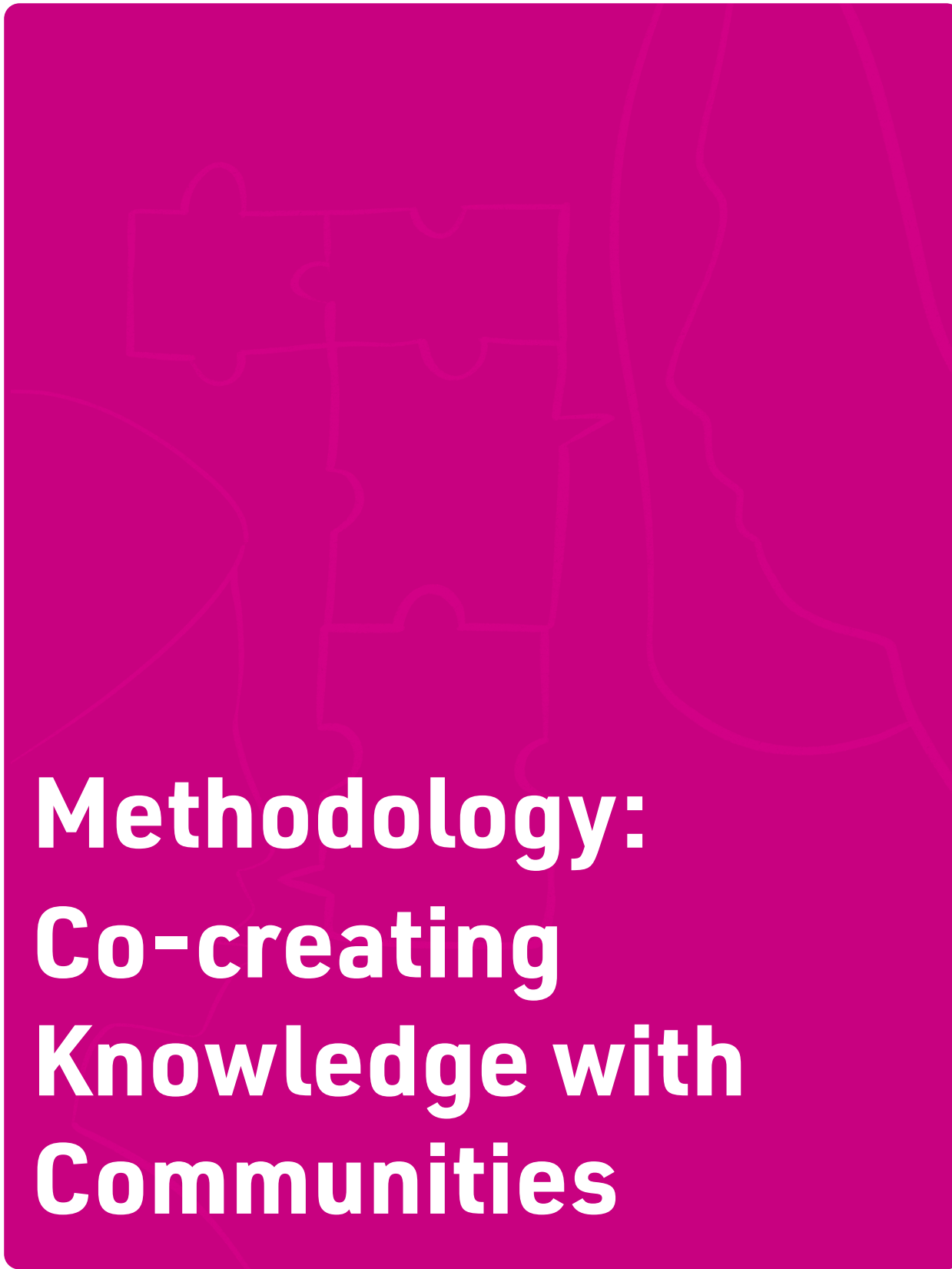
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# **Methodology: Co-creating Knowledge with Communities**

This study uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of women’s experiences in public transport. The methodology includes FGDs and in-depth interviews with women bus drivers and conductors across four Indian cities, citizen surveys across 46 cities, and case study analysis, ensuring that the findings are grounded in real-world data.

**Qualitative Research: FGDs with Women Drivers and Conductors**

FGDs were conducted in four major cities: Delhi, Pune, Bengaluru, and Chennai, involving women working as bus drivers, mechanics, and conductors. Each session was structured using a predefined questionnaire covering key topics such as employment conditions, workplace safety, harassment, infrastructural challenges, work-life balance, and professional achievements. Each session lasted between 90-120 minutes and was facilitated by trained moderators from the ITDP India team, who ensured open and inclusive discussions among all the participants.

**Participant Profile**

The women were selected through purposive sampling to ensure representation across different levels of work experience and age groups. A total of 75 women participated in the four FGDs. The table below provides an overview of the number of women participants in FGDs across Delhi, Pune, Bengaluru, and Chennai, categorized by their roles (drivers, conductors, and mechanics).

**Table 1**  
Overview of participants in the FGDs

City	Number of Women in FGD	Roles
Delhi	12	Drivers, conductors
Pune	10	Conductors, mechanics
Bengaluru	12	Drivers, conductors
Chennai	40	Drivers, conductors

**Image 1**  
FGD in Bengaluru

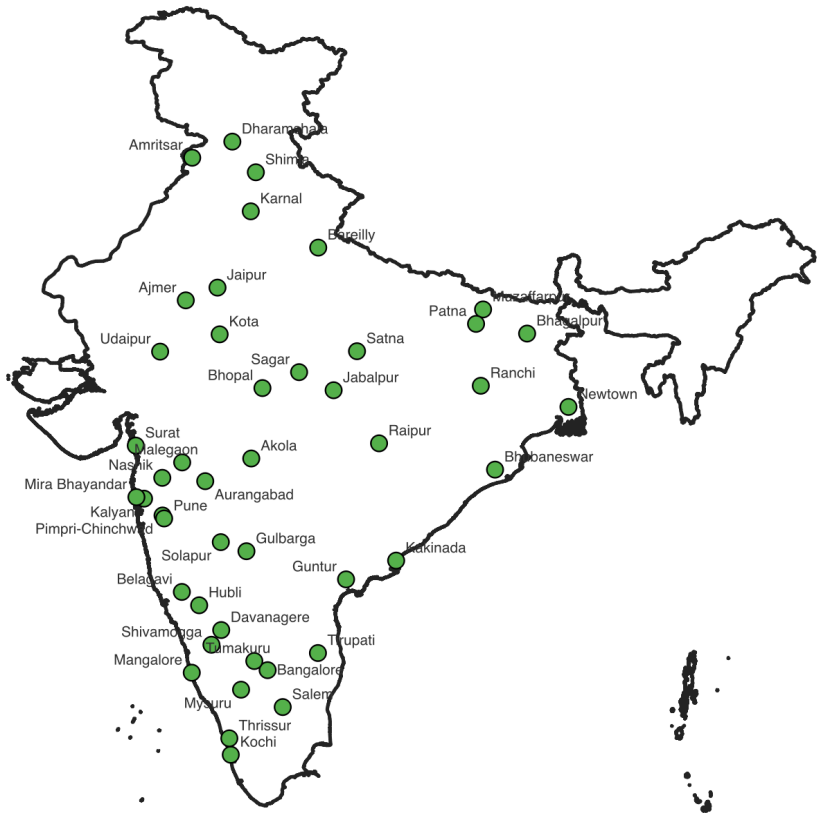




**Quantitative Research:  
Citizen Survey Across  
46 cities**

Public transport is incomplete without the voices of its citizens. To grasp the challenges faced by women commuters, a large-scale survey was conducted across 46 cities, capturing women’s public transport usage patterns and perceptions of safety, affordability, and accessibility concerns. The survey collected responses from over 2,00,000 citizens, including 78,000 women commuters. Data was collected through structured questionnaires and face-to-face interviews.

**Figure 3**  
46 Cities Participating in  
Citizen Surveys




**Image 2**  
Survey Conducted During  
the T4A Citizen Survey









# **Findings/Results: Understanding the Everyday Realities**

The FGDs and citizen survey data highlighted unique challenges faced by women in public transport - both as employees and commuters. These challenges are closely tied to inadequate working conditions, safety concerns, and societal perceptions. The key findings of the FGDs and the surveys are:

## Unseen Struggles: Workplace Challenges Highlighted by Drivers, Conductors and Mechanics

The FGDs conducted with women bus drivers and conductors in Delhi, Pune, Bengaluru, and Chennai provided valuable insights on the shared experiences of women working in the public transport sector within the STUs in India. These discussions highlighted common challenges that, reflect broader issues and experiences faced by women in the public transport sector across various regions.

### Inadequate Facilities

As a woman reflected,

*"There are no toilets at most bus stops. We must wait until the end of our shift to use the toilet."*

Infrastructure challenges were common across states. Many women reported the **lack of basic facilities such as clean toilets, safe resting areas, and proper changing rooms at depots.**

Lack of basic amenities affect their health and dignity, adding to their daily challenges.

### Harassment and Discrimination

As a woman driver mentioned,

*"Passengers think if a woman is driving, she will make mistakes. Some do not even want to board the bus."*

Another participant exclaimed, *"They tell us, 'You cannot do this job' or 'You should just go home.'"*

Women participating in these FGDs spoke about several challenges that affect their professional lives. **One major issue was workplace harassment**, which often came from both passengers and male colleagues. Many women shared how they faced disrespectful attitudes and dismissive behaviour simply because of their gender.

These experiences deplete their confidence and create an emotionally exhausting work environment.

### Lack of Support System/Unpredictable Work Environment

One participant shared, *"We work tirelessly, but even after years, our job feels temporary like it could be taken away at any moment."*

Another concern raised was **job insecurity**. Many women have been working for years on temporary contracts without the benefits that the permanent staff receive. This makes them feel vulnerable about their future.

One participant explained, *"We must arrive at 5 a.m. for spare duty, but sometimes we wait for hours before being assigned work. Our duty hours start only when the shift begins, not when we arrive."*

Balancing work with family responsibilities remains challenging. Women often juggle **early morning shifts or unpredictable professional duties**, which disrupts family routines, especially for those who are raising young children.

## Health Issues Caused by Long Working Hours

A participant revealed, "Four of my colleagues had to undergo uterine surgeries due to health complications from standing all day."

"However, the introduction of electric buses has been a positive change, as they are easier to handle and reduce physical strain."

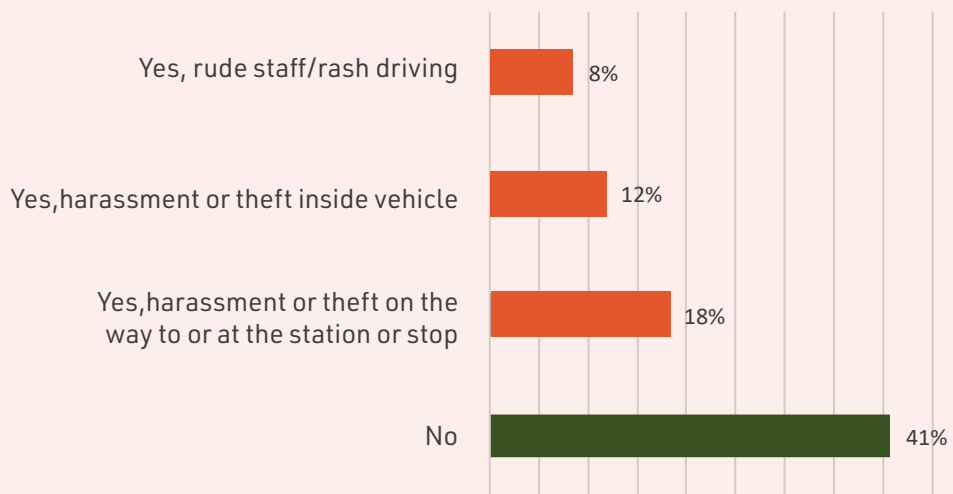
One driver said, "Driving the electric bus was a much better experience on my body and more enjoyable."

Health-related issues were also highlighted, especially due to the physical demands of the job. **Long hours of standing, exposure to vehicle vibrations, and irregular shifts** have caused long-term health complications such as back and joint pain and issues related to reproductive health.

## Navigating Fear: Safety Concerns Highlighted by Commuters

### Incidents of Harassment and Theft

Safety emerged as a critical concern. The survey revealed that **30% of women experienced harassment or theft** on the way to, at the station, or inside the vehicles, while **8% reported rude staff and rash driving**. These figures call attention to the urgent need for targeted interventions to improve safety in public transport environments.



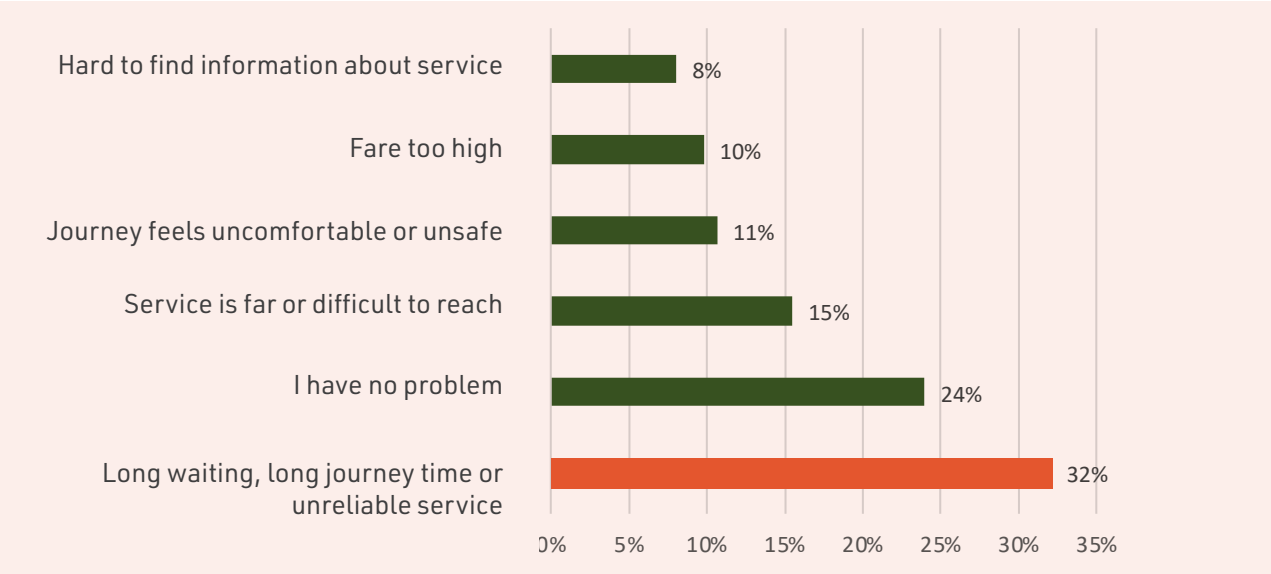
\* 21% reported Covid-19 as a safety concern.



## Designing for Dignity: Infrastructural Challenges Highlighted by Commuters

### Long Waiting Time, Journey Time, or Unreliable Service

The most significant concern for women commuters is **long waiting and journey times** (32%). Extended waiting periods can lead to increased anxiety and discomfort, especially in environments where women feel unsafe. This issue is further exacerbated by the **lack of reliability of public transport services**, which increases delays and vulnerability. Reducing waiting times and improving punctuality are critical to refining the overall travel experience for women.



### Accessibility Issues

**Access to information regarding routes and schedules** was cited as a major concern by 23% of women commuters, particularly with some women finding public transport services inaccessible due to **distance from home or information being hard to find**. These issues are significant barriers to women's mobility, particularly for those living in remote areas. Around 4% of women also found the **vehicles hard to climb**.

### Fare too High

A small but significant section (10%) of women commuters highlighted high fares as a significant issue when using public transport. The **cost of travel can be a major barrier for women from low-income backgrounds**, limiting their access to essential services like employment opportunities and social activities, thereby affecting their overall mobility and quality of life.

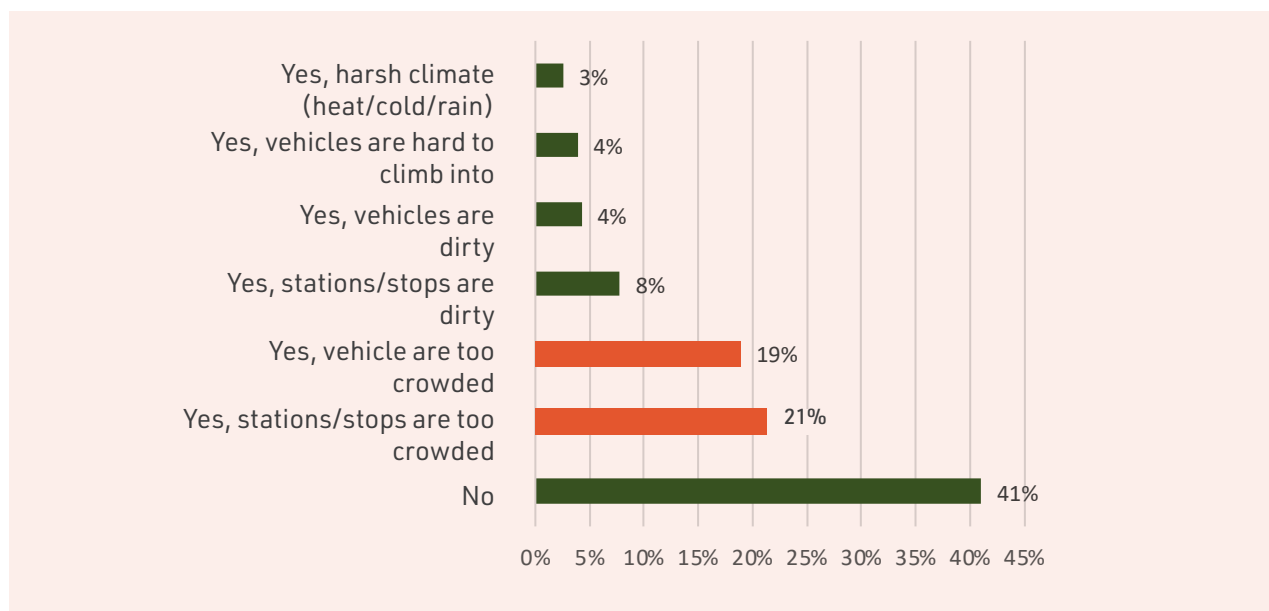
### Poorly Maintained Buses and Stops

**12% of the commuters highlighted that stations and vehicles were dirty**. This impacts women's overall commuting experience and influences their willingness to rely on public transport.

## Discomfort

Discomfort on public transport was another major concern.

**Around 41% highlighted overcrowding as a major challenge** at the bus stations/stops and inside the vehicles. Lack of personal space in crowded vehicles increases the risk of harassment and unwanted physical contact, making women feel vulnerable and unsafe during their commute.



## Voices of Hope: Positive Impact

### Recognition and Support for Employees

A conductor said, "It feels good when passengers say I am doing a great job. It motivates me to keep going." This growing acceptance has encouraged more women to join and stay in the profession."

A participant shared, "My colleagues have become like a second family. We support each other through the tough times"

Despite these challenges, the FGDs with women drivers and conductors also revealed positive developments. **Many women reported receiving more support from their families and observed a gradual change in public attitudes.**

Support from colleagues has also played an important role in creating a space for women workers. Women have formed **strong networks and support groups within their workplaces**, offering each other encouragement and practical advice.



Image 3  
FGD in Pune

### Financial Independence for Employees

*"I love wearing the uniform and being recognised for my work. It gives me a sense of accomplishment," said one driver.*

For many women, the job has provided **financial independence and a sense of pride**. The presence of women drivers and conductors in public transport not only **reinforces safety and security for passengers** but also challenges gender stereotypes, inspiring other women to pursue careers in fields traditionally dominated by men.

### Improved Workplace Policies

Some STUs have begun acknowledging the need for more gender-inclusive policies. **Changes in recruitment criteria and pilot programs to improve workplace conditions** are steps in the right direction. Although these initiatives are still in their early stages, they show a growing recognition of the importance of supporting women in the workforce.

The FGDs made it clear that the challenges faced by women bus drivers and conductors are not isolated incidents but part of systemic issues that require attention. Solutions like **better workplace infrastructure, job security, gender-sensitive policies, and public awareness campaigns** can significantly improve the working conditions for women in public transport.

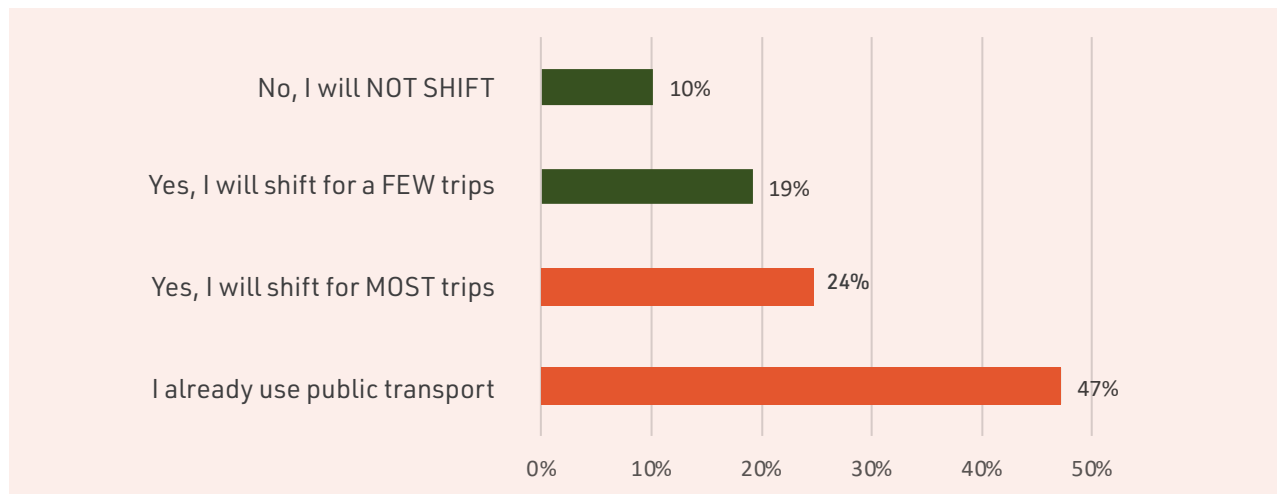


Image 4  
FGD in Delhi

## Willingness to Shift to Public Transport by Commuters

The surveys also highlighted key trends related to women's willingness to shift to public transport if improvements are made to the public transport system.

47% of women already use public transport, while **23% expressed willingness to shift for most trips if conditions improved**. This indicates a significant potential to increase women's use of public transport if safety, convenience, and comfort are enhanced.



The survey findings highlight the multifaceted nature of women's experiences with public transport. Safety, comfort, accessibility, and reliability are interconnected factors that influence women's mobility choices. The data underscores the importance of adopting a comprehensive approach to public transport planning and policymaking, one that prioritises the needs and experiences of women to create a more inclusive and supportive transport ecosystem.





# Case Studies

A photograph of a white Timestar bus with 'Namaskar' branding parked on a street. The bus is positioned in front of a building with a distinctive geometric facade of red and white panels. The scene is overlaid with a dark blue gradient. 

## Navigating Bhubaneswar & Hubballi-Dharwad:

**Women as Frontline Workers in Public Transport**



## Introduction

Bhubaneswar and Hubballi Dharwad present distinct yet complementary contexts for understanding gender-inclusive public transport in India. Both cities have seen investments in making public bus systems accessible, but each exhibit different starting points and pathways. Central to these efforts is the growing representation of women as frontline workers, conductors, drivers, and operations staff, demonstrating how women's active participation is transforming workplaces, commuter experiences, and public perceptions.

In Bhubaneswar, CRUT's modernisation initiatives include significant employment opportunities for women as bus conductors ("guides") and e-rickshaw drivers ("Sarthis") in the pioneering Ama E-Ride feeder service. These programs not only diversify the transport workforce but also enrich the commuter experience, making public transport more welcoming and safer for all.

Hubballi Dharwad, meanwhile, combines strong BRTS expansion with the Shakti scheme, providing free bus travel to women and expanding their presence in conductor and bus operations roles. Both cities thus present pathways, at different stages, for empowering women in public transport and highlighting the tangible benefits of their frontline representation.

These city experiences show that when women enter and thrive in staff positions, workplace dynamics change profoundly: women support networks emerge, confidence grows, and the overall dignity of the work environment improves. The presence of women in uniform provides role models for other women and signals broader possibilities for workforce participation in urban mobility.

## Methodology

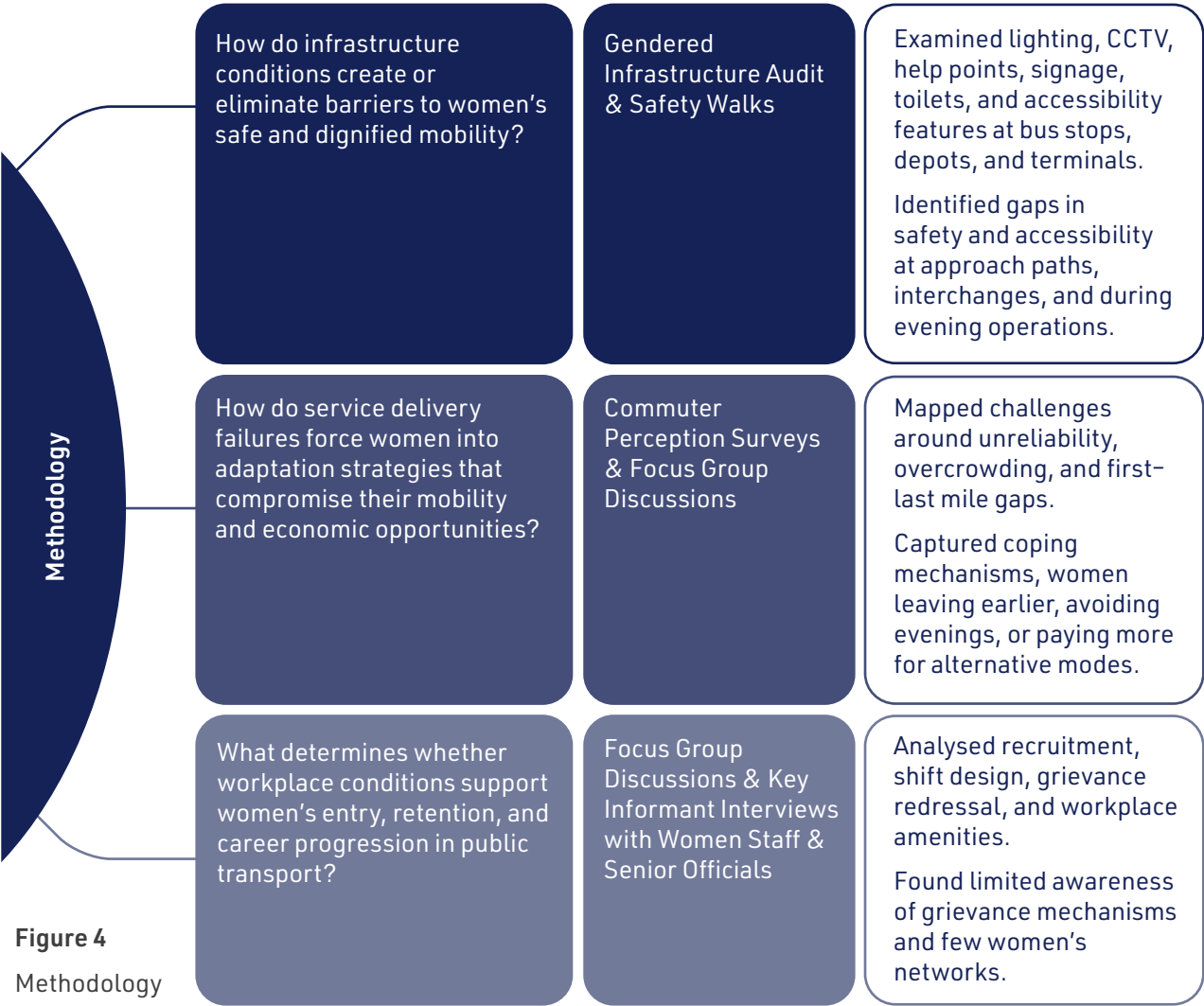
The study considered the transit network through a gender lens, focusing specifically on workforce diversity and how the presence of women as frontline staff positively influenced commuter experience, workplace culture, and broader community perceptions. Qualitative feedback, staff interviews, and capacity-building narratives underscored the profound role of women conductors and other staffs in daily operations.

First, gendered infrastructure audits were conducted across bus terminals, depots, and multiple bus stations using a standardized assessment frameworks that evaluated safety infrastructure (lighting, CCTV functionality, emergency systems), accessibility features (tactile paving, ramps, signage), and gender-responsive facilities (toilets, waiting areas, help points) at various times of day.

Second, the methodology integrated extensive stakeholder engagement through targeted focus group discussions with women commuters, persons with disabilities, transgender individuals, and women informal workers, alongside key informant interviews with STU personnel including women frontline staff.

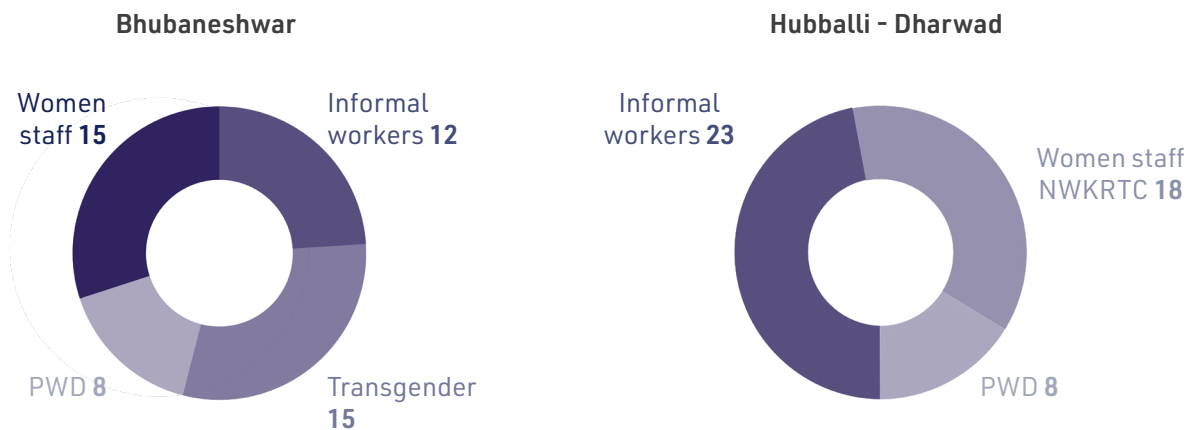
Third, perception surveys with 50 women commuters each in both cities captured quantitative data on safety perceptions, service satisfaction, and accessibility experiences across different journey segments and times of day.

Finally, systematic review of recruitment practices, workplace policies, grievance mechanisms, and institutional frameworks enabled an understanding of the effect of the established practices on shaping women’s employment and advancement opportunities.

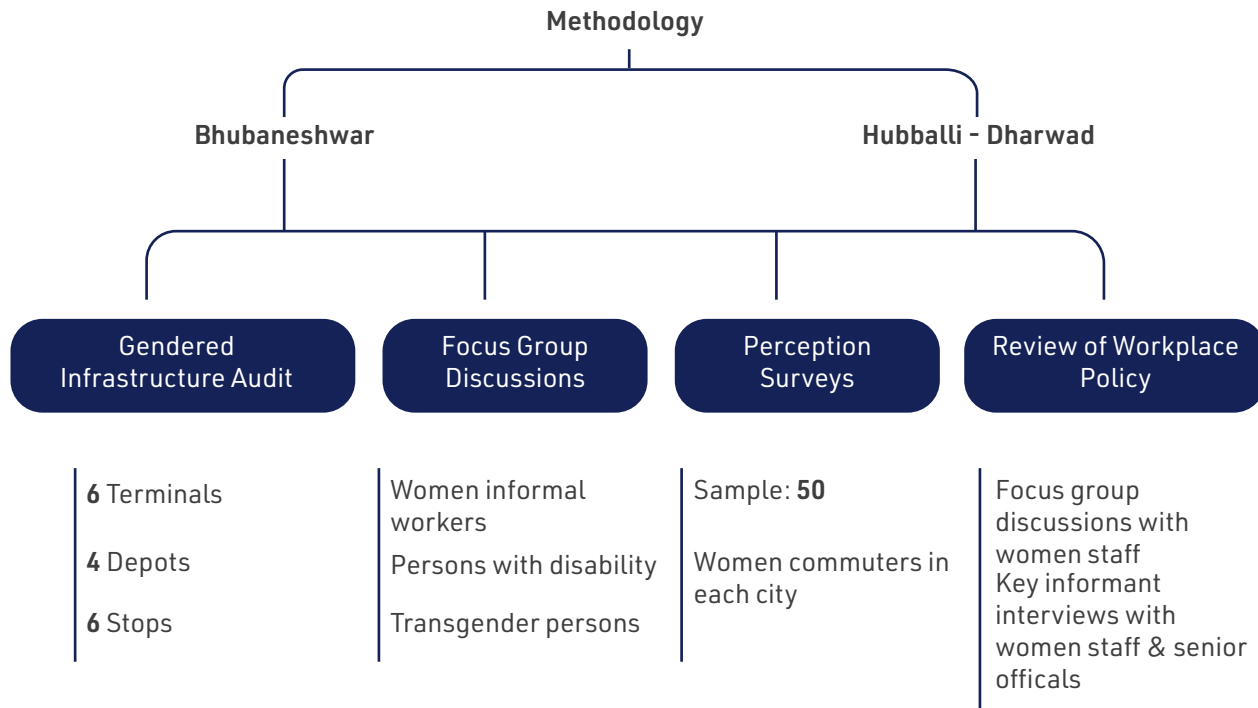


**Figure 4**  
Methodology





**Figure 5**  
Number of Participants  
across FGD Categories



**Figure 6**  
Methodology



Case  
Study

# 1 Bhubaneswar

## **Building an Inclusive Public Transport Workforce: CRUT's Women Conductor and E-Rickshaw Driver Programs**

Bhubaneswar has become a national leader in gender-inclusive public transport through the Capital Region Urban Transport (CRUT) system, which sets significant benchmarks for women's participation in frontline public transport roles. Through the AMA Bus and AMA E-Ride initiatives, CRUT has mainstreamed recruitment and comprehensive training for women, transgender, and other marginalized groups as bus conductors ("Guides") and e-rickshaw drivers ("Sarthis"). This strategic focus has advanced workforce diversity and positions Bhubaneswar as a model for equitable urban mobility across Indian cities.

Currently, women make up nearly 40% of conductors in the CRUT system, and the majority of Ame E-Ride drivers are also women or from marginalized communities. CRUT's policy achievements have earned national and international recognition, including the United Nations Public Service Award 2022 for promoting gender-responsive public services. The system serves over three lakh passengers daily, operating 670 buses on 115 routes, alongside India's largest electric bus fleet. The agency-managed, subsidized AMA E-Ride service further delivers vital first-mile connectivity for residents.

Building on this success, CRUT launched Mo E-Ride as India’s first e-rickshaw feeder service driven by women, transgender individuals, and people living with HIV. Beneficiaries complete a two-month training program covering e-rickshaw driving, light motor vehicle operation, traffic education, vehicle mechanics and repairs, financial literacy, customer interactions, and gender-sensitive service approaches.

Women’s visible participation in frontline roles has had a tangible positive impact, with increased comfort and safety for women passengers and a 200% rise in overall ridership over five years. CRUT’s approach, centering on gender inclusion, e-mobility, and first-last mile connectivity, has become a replicable template, demonstrating that inclusive hiring and supportive infrastructure benefit all transit users while expanding economic opportunity for marginalized communities.



Figure 7

## Key Highlights: AMA Guides and Sarthis Initiative in Bhubaneswar



### Institutionalized Recruitment and Support

Bhubaneswar's CRUT has institutionalized pathways for recruiting women as Amma bus guides (conductors) and Sarthis (e-rickshaw drivers). This includes targeted outreach, family counselling, confidence-building workshops, and skill development programs. New hires receive ongoing mentorship and support that builds their competence and morale.



### Comprehensive Training and Upskilling

All women guides and Sarthis are provided hands-on operational training, orientation on passenger service, and continual capacity-building modules. Career pathways are clear and progressive, allowing staff to advance from entry-level roles to bus driving and supervisory positions over time.



### Improved Workplace Environment

The presence of women in frontline staff roles, both conductors and drivers, has transformed the daily work culture, fostering mutual respect and collective strength. Employee support networks and positive peer mentorship have emerged, enabling resilience and ongoing participation despite challenges.



### Positive Community Recognition

Women staff in uniform are celebrated publicly and serve as role models, inspiring other women and marginalized groups to aspire to public transport careers. These initiatives have tangibly changed commuter experiences, especially for women and families, making public spaces safer and more inclusive.

## Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar Bus Terminal (BSABT)

Bhubaneswar's approach to inclusive mobility is further exemplified by the Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar Bus Terminal (BSABT), which serves as a model for integrating gender-responsive and accessible infrastructure into public transport networks. As the city's flagship terminal, BSABT features step-free access, ramps, tactile paving, and clear wayfinding that together deliver a universally accessible experience for all users, especially women, elderly passengers, and persons with disabilities. Well-lit pathways and a robust CCTV system enhance personal safety, making the terminal welcoming and secure for commuters at all hours.

Within BSABT, specific attention has been given to the needs of women frontline workers and passengers. Dedicated washrooms, secure waiting areas, and separate rest spaces for female staff not only ensure privacy and comfort but also aid in staff retention and day-to-day dignity. These features stand as best-practice benchmarks, showing how targeted investments in supportive infrastructure empower both employees and users, helping to sustain women's participation in public-facing operational roles.

As Bhubaneswar continues to expand gender-inclusive hiring and community-centric service models across its transit system, BSABT provides an ideal, scalable case study. The integration of high-quality design, operational support, and institutional focus at BSABT demonstrates that when infrastructure is planned through an inclusive lens, it can become a living example of safe, dignified, and equitable urban mobility for all.





## **Building on Successes: Bhubaneswar's Path Forward**

Bhubaneswar is actively building on demonstrated successes with the AMA Guides and Saarthi initiatives, working to strengthen gender-responsive transport and deepen the city's commitment to women's professional enablement and public safety. Based on the lessons and achievements documented in the case study, several key areas are being prioritized for ongoing improvement and state government consideration:



### **Infrastructure**

- Install CCTVs and panic buttons at all transport points.
- Provide clean washrooms, resting areas, and lighting.
- Ensure accessible paths, crossings, and bus stops.
- Adopt gender-inclusive infrastructure across districts.



### **Services**

- Upgrade the MoBus app with SOS and GPS tracking.
- Increase bus frequency and add request-stop options.
- Enable direct emergency systems for quick help.
- Form women's safety committees for better oversight.



### **Capacity Building**

- Train drivers and conductors on gender sensitivity.
- Offer upskilling for women guides and saarthi.
- Create career pathways with skill certifications.
- Promote mentorship between experienced and new staff.



### Policy and Guidelines

- Set up clear harassment and emergency protocols.
- Strengthen Internal Complaints Committees (ICCs).
- Track safety through defined indicators and audits.
- Ensure public transparency in all reporting.



### Working Conditions

- Provide menstrual leave and flexible work options.
- Build separate, safe facilities for women staff.
- Conduct regular ICC meetings and awareness drives.
- Promote open, multilingual communication channels.



### Gender Lab

- Establish a Gender Lab in every transport unit.
- Include experts for audits, policy, and training.
- Monitor implementation of inclusion measures.
- Drive research and innovation in gender safety.



### Gender Action Plan

- Create a 12-month structured gender plan.
- Review gender data and strengthen policies.
- Improve safety, leadership, and infrastructure.
- Ensure accountability through quarterly reviews.



Case  
Study

## 2 Hubballi-Dharwad

### **Building an Inclusive Public Transport Workforce: Shakti Scheme and BRTS in Hubballi Dharwad**

Hubballi Dharwad stands out for its progressive advancements in gender-responsive urban mobility, led by the successful implementation of Karnataka's Shakti Scheme and continued investment in the Hubballi-Dharwad Bus Rapid Transit System (BRTS). In 2025, H.D. BRTS has seen a ridership of 85000 passengers every day. The Shakti Scheme, which provides fare-free bus services for women, has enabled thousands of women to access public transport daily, allowing greater economic participation, freedom of movement, and new employment and livelihood opportunities.



Since the scheme's launch in 2023, Hubballi Dharwad has recorded a 21% increase in women joining the workforce, as many were able to switch from walking long distances or using costlier transport options to utilizing the city's extensive public bus network. Women now report traveling more frequently and over longer distances, not just for work, but also for education and essential errands, demonstrating affordable, inclusive public transport. Alongside this, the city's BRTS continues to prioritize high-quality, reliable services featuring modern bus fleets, expanded routes, and the integration of women as conductors and operational staff, giving visible representation to women in frontline public roles.

Feedback from the community and recent assessments point to meaningful savings, averaging 700– 800 per month for many women, now redirected to essentials like children's education and household needs, as well as a strong sense of dignity and empowerment. Hubballi Dharwad's experience with the Shakti Scheme and BRTS demonstrates how fare-free travel, fleet modernization, and workforce diversity can work together to deliver inclusive, equitable, and aspirational mobility outcomes for all citizens. The city serves as a compelling model for other urban regions seeking to enhance women's economic participation and public visibility through transformative transport policies.

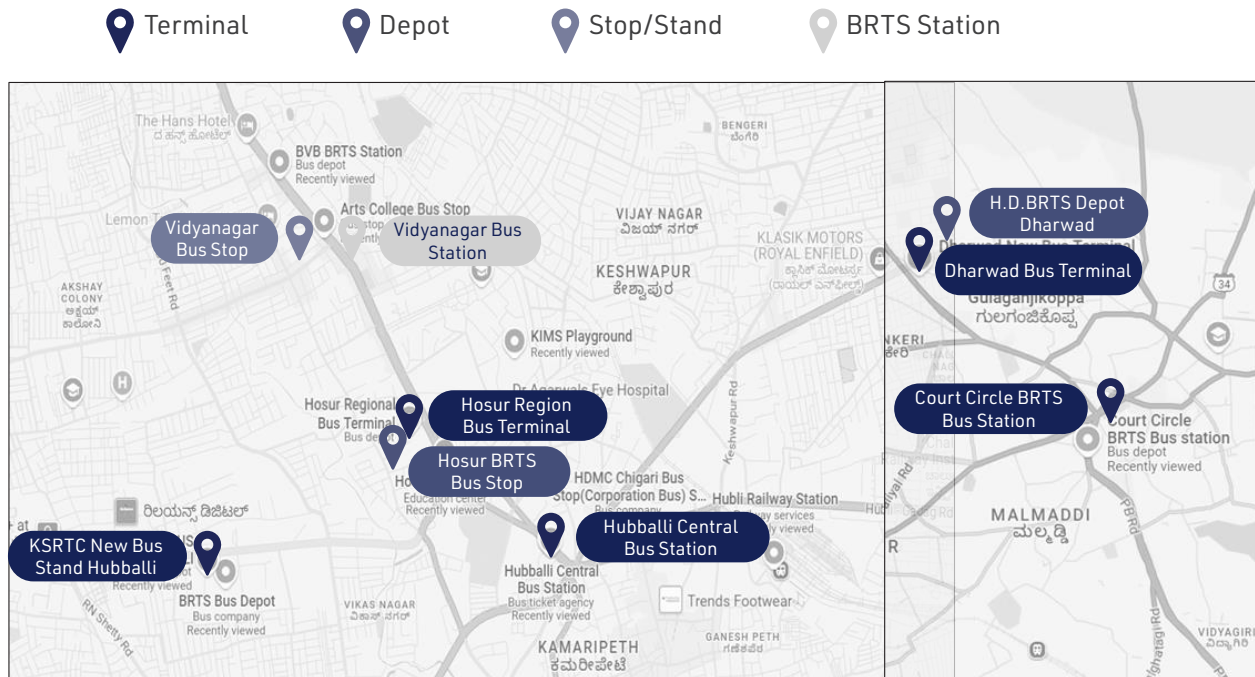


Figure 8

Image 6

Absence of Proper Boarding Protocol at Vidya Nagar Bus Stop



Image 7

Accessible Design for Boarding BRTS Buses





# Key Highlights: Hubballi Dharwad Shakti Scheme and BRTS



## Fare-Free Travel Expands Economic Opportunities

Karnataka’s Shakti Scheme has revolutionized women’s mobility in Hubballi Dharwad by providing free bus travel, enabling women to commute without financial barriers. This scheme contributed to a 21% rise in women’s workforce participation as travel became more affordable and accessible, allowing more women to seek and sustain employment.



## Enhanced Public Bus Usage and Social Impact

The city recorded a surge in women switching from walking or costly alternatives to public buses, supporting greater inclusion in education, healthcare, and economic activities. Women highlighted meaningful monthly savings redirected to family needs, illustrating the broader social benefits of the scheme.



## BRTS Modernization and Women’s Workforce Inclusion

Hubballi Dharwad’s award-winning Bus Rapid Transit System complements the Shakti Scheme by providing modern, high-frequency bus services along with a growing number of women as conductors and operational staff in frontline roles. This integration demonstrates a comprehensive approach combining affordability, service quality, and gender-inclusive employment, positioning Hubballi Dharwad as a leading example for urban areas aiming for equitable and inclusive mobility.

## **Building on the Successes: Enhancing Gender-Inclusive Mobility in Hubballi Dharwad**

Hubballi Dharwad's implementation of the Shakti Scheme and the modernization of the BRTS have brought transformative gains in women's mobility and workforce participation. To sustain and amplify this progress, ongoing focus areas include expanding fleet capacity and service frequency to meet rising ridership demands, particularly during peak hours, ensuring comfortable and reliable travel for all users.



### **Infrastructure**

- Install functional CCTVs, panic buttons, and better lighting.
- Provide clean women's washrooms at terminals and depots.
- Expand women's waiting areas and improve ventilation.
- Use NGO partnerships to maintain facilities and safety.



### **Service Enhancement**

- Develop a mobile app with real-time bus tracking and SOS.
- Offer multilingual route info and anonymous reporting.
- Increase bus frequency to ease peak-hour crowding.
- Deploy women security staff as first responders.



### **Capacity Building**

- Train duty bearers on gender sensitivity and accountability.
- Provide skill-based training for drivers, conductors, and staff.
- Support women with digital, leadership, and safety training.
- Run awareness campaigns on respectful behavior and grievance systems.



### Policy and Guidelines

- Conduct gender-based safety audits and surveys regularly.
- Standardize harassment reporting procedures and coordination.
- Revise restrictive driver-conductor job roles for women.
- Plan routes to better serve women-heavy commuting areas.



### Working Conditions and Hiring Women Staff

- Recruit women for roles like conductors and supervisors.
- Design BRTS infrastructure with restrooms and rest areas.
- Enable menstrual leave and flexible work options.
- Set leadership targets to close employment gaps.



### Gender Lab

- Establish a Gender Lab within NWKRTC for coordination.
- Include gender experts to monitor and advise on safety.
- Conduct gender and fleet impact studies regularly.
- Provide data-driven inputs for better route planning.



### Gender Action Plan

- Develop a structured 12-month Gender Action Plan.
- Set clear targets to manage overcrowding and safety.
- Track leadership representation and incident reports.
- Engage stakeholders and women's groups for feedback.



# **Policy Recommendations: Steps Toward Gender-Inclusive Transport**

Gender-sensitive transport planning is not solely about enhancing safety measures, it covers a broader spectrum of considerations, including the design of public spaces, availability of gender-specific amenities, equitable employment opportunities, and inclusive governance structures.

Building a gender-inclusive public bus transport system is essential for ensuring equitable access and mobility for all. Women's experiences with public transport are shaped by a range of factors, including socio-economic background, infrastructure gaps, cultural norms, and the structural design of transport systems. The barriers they encounter – such as safety concerns, inadequate facilities, job insecurity, and societal perceptions – affect both their mobility and their representation within the transport workforce. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach that embeds gender-sensitive reforms into transport policies, infrastructure development, employment practices, and public discourse.

The recommendations presented here are grounded in insights gathered from FGDs and the T4A citizen survey. These sources reflect diverse perspectives from women across different regions, offering valuable insights into their daily commuting experiences, professional journeys as transport sector employees, and broader mobility patterns. The findings point to the urgent need for systemic transformation that goes beyond surface-level changes-advocating for deep-rooted reforms that ensure public transport systems are safe, accessible, and inclusive for all women.

Gender-sensitive transport planning is not solely about enhancing safety measures, it covers a broader spectrum of considerations, including the design of public spaces, availability of gender-specific amenities, equitable employment opportunities, and inclusive governance structures. Recognising that women often rely more heavily on public transport for commuting, caregiving responsibilities, and access to essential services, it becomes imperative that systems are designed with their needs in mind. Doing so not only supports individual empowerment but also strengthens the social and economic fabric of communities.

This section outlines a set of actionable policy recommendations aimed at fostering a more inclusive environment for women in public transport. These recommendations are organised around key focus areas such as workplace infrastructure, job security, safety, accessibility, affordability, public awareness, and policy integration. Each recommendation is supported by local and global case studies, that showcase successful models and innovative practices that can be adapted to the Indian public transport system. Together, these strategies offer a roadmap toward, a more equitable, efficient, and sustainable public transport system that benefits women and society at large.

## Recommendation 1:

### Enhance Workplace Infrastructure and Facilities

A crucial step towards building a gender-inclusive public transport system is ensuring that workplace infrastructure and facilities are designed to meet the specific needs of women. Many public transport depots and stops, currently lack the necessary amenities to support women employees, which can affect their safety, health, and job satisfaction. Addressing these gaps requires a holistic approach that prioritises both functional and psychological needs.

Key recommendations for infrastructure enhancement:

#### Safety and Security

Facilities must be equipped with adequate lighting, security cameras, and emergency response systems to ensure safety during early morning and late-night shifts. Secure entry points, well-monitored parking areas, and accessible panic buttons can significantly reduce the risk of harassment or assault.

#### Sanitation and Hygiene

Clean, secure, and gender-specific toilets are essential. These should be regularly maintained and stocked with necessary hygiene products. Additionally, access to clean drinking water and designated rest areas for women can enhance comfort during long shifts.

#### Rest and Recreation Areas

Providing comfortable resting spaces for women employees with amenities like seating, lockers, and recreational facilities can improve mental well-being. These areas should be designed to offer privacy and relaxation, supporting employees during breaks.



Indicator	Data Source	Frequency	Recommended Benchmark	Milestone Timeline
Safety and Security				
Percentage of terminals and depots with uniform and consistent lighting of 30-40 lux	STU/SPV/ Municipal Corporation	Every year	All terminals, and depots	Short-term
Sanitation and Hygiene				
Gender disaggregated data on the availability of adequate and universally accessible women's toilets at bus depots and terminals or within 250m walking distance of a public transport stop	STU/SPV/ Municipal Corporation	Every year	All terminals, and depots	Short-term
Rest and Recreation Areas				
Percentage of terminals and depots with separate lockers and changing rooms for women, ensuring privacy	STU/SPV/ Municipal Corporation	Every year	All terminals, and depots	Short-term
Percentage of terminals and depots with separate resting rooms for women with proper lighting and ventilation				

## Case Study: Pune's Initiative to Convert Decommissioned Buses into Women's Restrooms

**Background** In Pune, India, the scarcity of clean and safe public restrooms posed significant challenges for women, affecting their comfort, health, and mobility within the city. To address this issue, entrepreneurs Ulka Sadalkar and Rajeesh Kher co-founded Saraplast Pvt Ltd and launched the "Ti Toilet" project in 2016, transforming decommissioned municipal buses into mobile restrooms for women.

**Implementation** • **Conversion of Buses:** The project began with the conversion of one bus in 2016, and over the next year, 12 more decommissioned buses were transformed into mobile restrooms.

• **Features:** Each bus is equipped with amenities such as toilets, washbasins, diaper-changing stations, and breastfeeding areas. To ensure safety and cleanliness, female attendants manage the facilities.

• **Sustainability:** The buses are powered primarily by solar panels mounted on the roof, reducing reliance on conventional energy sources.

**Impact** • **Daily Usage:** Each converted bus restroom serves approximately 150 to 200 women daily.

• **Accessibility:** Stationed near major bus stops, recreational areas, and community centres, the facilities have significantly improved women's access to safe and hygienic restrooms across Pune.

• **Employment:** The initiative has created job opportunities for women employed as attendants to maintain the facilities and manage on-board cafes.

• Each bus has a full-time attendant, and an emergency button in case the user feels unsafe.

Pune's innovative approach to repurposing decommissioned buses into women's restrooms has effectively addressed the critical need for safe and hygienic public sanitation facilities near major bus stops. This initiative enhances the quality of life for women in the city and serves as a replicable model for other urban areas facing similar challenges.

Source:

Pune Duo Convert Old Buses Into Ladies' Toilets That Have Been Used Over 1 Lakh Times, 2020, The Better India.

India: Pune entrepreneurs turns buses into women's toilets, 2020, Gulf News



Image 8: Ti Toilets | Source: TheBetterIndia

## Recommendation 2:

### Ensure Job Security and Fair Employment Policies

Creating a gender-inclusive public transport system also requires ensuring job security and fair employment policies for women. Across roles - whether as drivers, conductors, maintenance staff, or administrative personnel- women working in public transport, often face job insecurity, unequal pay, limited employment opportunities, and discriminatory practices. Tackling these issues is essential not only for the well-being and retention of women employees but also for cultivating a diverse and equitable workforce that enhances the overall effectiveness and long-term sustainability of public transport systems.

Key recommendations for job security and fair employment policies:

#### **Equal Pay, Career Advancement, and Equal Opportunity**

Ensuring equal pay for equal work is essential to eliminate gender pay gaps. Regular pay audits should be conducted to identify and address any disparities. Additionally, enforcing strict equal pay policies will ensure that women are compensated fairly. Professional development programs, mentorship, and leadership training should be offered specifically for women to promote career growth. The goal is to have at least 50% of leadership positions occupied by women within five years, fostering a more inclusive and diverse leadership team. Furthermore, it is important to ensure equal opportunity by aiming for at least 50% women at junior, mid, and senior management levels across different functions or reflecting the city's female population ratio, whichever is greater.

#### **Permanent Employment and Medical Benefits:**

To address job insecurity, offering permanent contracts to women employees after one year of service is crucial. These contracts should include comprehensive medical benefits to support their health and well-being. By receiving job security and medical benefits, women employees feel more valued and supported.

#### **Gender-Sensitive Leave Policies**

Establishing gender-sensitive leave policies, including maternity, paternity, and flexible leave options, is vital for supporting work-life balance. Offering six months of paid maternity leave as per the Government of India norms will provide necessary support for new mothers. These policies will help create a more supportive and flexible work environment for women.

#### **Anti-Discrimination and Harassment Policies**

Implementing strict anti-discrimination and harassment policies are crucial to creating a safe and respectful workplace. Clear reporting mechanisms should be established, and a zero-tolerance policy for harassment and discrimination should be enforced. Mandatory annual training on these policies and a dedicated grievance redressal cell will ensure that all employees are aware of their rights and the procedures for addressing any issues.

Indicator	Data Source	Frequency	Recommended Benchmark	Milestone Timeline
Equal Pay, Career Advancement, and Equal Opportunity				
Percentage of women employees in the public transport authority at different levels	STU/SPV/ Municipal Corporation	Every year	At least 50% women at junior, mid, and senior management levels across different functions or reflecting the city's female population ratio, whichever is greater	Short-term
Provide professional development programs, mentorship, and leadership training for women			Women should occupy at least 50% of leadership positions in public transport within five years.	
Implement regular audits to identify and eliminate pay gaps; equal pay policies to be strictly enforced			0% pay gap	
Permanent Employment and Medical Benefits				
Percentage of women employees with permanent contracts after completing one year	STU/SPV/ Municipal Corporation	Every year	100%	Short-term
Establish maternity, paternity, and flexible leave policies that support work-life balance		Till policy adoption	Policies established	
Anti-Discrimination and Harassment Policies				
Establish a zero-tolerance policy with mandatory annual training and a dedicated grievance redressal cell	STU/SPV/ Municipal Corporation	Every Year for annual training	Policy established 100% of staff undergoing annual training	Short-term



## Case Study: La Rolita- Empowering Women in Bogota's Bus System

To promote gender inclusion and sustainability in public transportation, Bogotá launched La Rolita, a public bus operator that prioritises employing women drivers and operates 100% electric bus fleet. This initiative is part of the city's broader commitment to reducing emissions and addressing gender disparities in the workforce. With a focus on creating stable job opportunities for women, La Rolita has transformed perceptions about women's roles in the traditionally male-dominated public transport sector.

### How La Rolita Achieved High Women Participation Rates

La Rolita's success in increasing women's participation in the public transport workforce did not happen by chance. It required a thoughtful approach to address women's unique challenges in this sector. To attract and retain women in bus driver roles, La Rolita introduced several supportive measures:

- **Flexible Work Hours:** Understanding the challenges women face in balancing work and family responsibilities, La Rolita implemented flexible working schedules to accommodate their needs.
- **Family-Friendly Employment Benefits:** The company offered benefits such as affordable childcare to help women manage their personal and professional lives more effectively.
- **Appropriate Infrastructure:** Recognising the importance of providing a safe and comfortable working environment, La Rolita ensured that modern restrooms and secure resting areas were available along bus routes.

These measures helped create an inclusive and supportive work environment that addressed women's specific needs, making it easier for them to join and remain in the workforce.

### Impact:

La Rolita's efforts have had a significant impact on women's participation in Bogotá's public transport sector:

- **Women Drivers:** Around 60% of La Rolita's bus drivers are women—a remarkable achievement compared to the overall 1.4% female participation rate in Bogotá's public transport sector as of 2022.
- **Positive Perception Shift:** The presence of women drivers has reshaped public perceptions about women's capabilities in traditionally male-dominated roles, inspiring more women to consider careers in public transportation.
- **Environmental Impact:** By operating a fully electric fleet, La Rolita not only promotes gender equality but also contributes to Bogotá's climate action goals by reducing emissions and improving air quality.

La Rolita serves as a pioneering example of how public transportation systems can simultaneously address gender inclusion and environmental sustainability. By providing women with meaningful employment opportunities and addressing their specific needs, Bogotá has set a benchmark for other cities to follow.

Source:

Bogotá's women in the e-bus driver's seat, 2023, International Finance Corporation, Comm Dev.

How Colombia's electric buses are countering climate change and creating jobs for women, 2024, UN Environment Programme.

**Image 9:**  
Women Bus Driver in Bogota



### Recommendation 3:

## Enhance the Safety, Comfort, and Reliability of Buses

Safety, comfort, and reliability play a pivotal role in shaping women's choices and experiences in public transport. Incidents of harassment, theft, and violence in public spaces severely limit women's mobility and impact their sense of security and well-being. Additionally, overcrowded, poorly maintained vehicles, and irregular service schedules further hinder their ability to travel efficiently and with dignity. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive safety measures, infrastructure improvements, and service enhancements that prioritise the needs and experiences of women.

Key recommendations for enhancing the safety, comfort, and reliability of public transport for women:

### Comfort and Reliability Enhancements

Improving the comfort and reliability of public transport involves ensuring that buses and stops are well-maintained and that the load factor does not exceed 100% of the total capacity during peak hours. Increasing the number of buses to 40-60 per lakh population as per the MoHUA Benchmark and ensuring that at least 35% of seats are reserved for women during peak hours will help address overcrowding and long waiting times. Reducing waiting times to less than five minutes during peak hours and less than 10 minutes during off-peak hours with nearby access to public toilets will improve the overall convenience of public transport for women. Ensuring that buses are clean, well-ventilated, and equipped with comfortable seating will further enhance the comfort of women passengers.

### Safety Measures

To ensure a safe and secure public transport experience for women, it is essential to implement comprehensive safety measures. This includes installing adequate lighting at all depots and bus stops, and security cameras for real-time monitoring and footage retention for at least 30 days. Emergency response systems, such as accessible panic buttons, should be implemented at key locations. Providing functional helpline numbers and emergency contacts at all stations will improve the user security. Additionally, conducting regular safety audits and providing gender sensitisation training for staff will help create a safer environment for women.

Indicator	Data Source	Frequency	Recommended Benchmark	Milestone Timeline
Comfort and Reliability Enhancements				
Number of buses per lakh population in the urban and peri-urban areas of the city/ metropolitan region	STU/SPV/ Municipal Corporation	Every year	40-60 buses per lakh population	Medium-term
Ratio of the number of passengers in the bus to the capacity of the bus			Load factor should not exceed 100% of the total capacity in peak hours	
Experience and perception of safety, comfort, and convenience of the public transport journey	Primary Surveys	Every two years	At least 80% of women perceive the public transport journey to be safe, comfortable, and convenient	
Waiting time for public transport in peak and off-peak hours in urban and peri-urban areas of the city/ metropolitan region			<5 minutes in peak hours <10 minutes in off-peak hours	
Percentage of seats reserved for women	STU/SPV/ Municipal Corporation	Till policy adoption	At least 35% seats reserved for women	Short-term
Gender disaggregated data on availability of adequate and universally accessible public toilets within 250m walking distance of a public transport stop		Every two years		Medium-term
Safety Measures				
Number of reported incidents of harassment or violence on public transport	City Police Department	Every year	Year-on-year decrease in the number of incidents	
Percentage of terminals, depots and bus stops with uniform and consistent lighting of 30-40 lux	Accessibility Audits and Primary Surveys between 7-9 pm	Every two years	All terminals, depots, and bus stops	Short-term
Percentage of street network with uniform and consistent lighting for pedestrians: - 25 lux in shopping areas - 30-40 lux in non-shopping areas			Entire street network	
Set up CCTV cameras and real-time monitoring to improve passenger safety, especially for women and girls			STU/SPV/ Municipal Corporation	
Percentage of drivers and conductors without criminal records, verified by the police	All drivers and conductors			

## Case Study: Improving Women's Safety in London's Public Transport

In London, women make up 51% of the population and tend to take more trips than men, mainly for work or to accompany children. However, many women reported feeling unsafe when walking from subway stations or bus stops in the evenings. A survey by Transport for London (TfL) also found that 90% of people who experienced sexual harassment on public transport did not report it to the authorities.

To address this, Project Guardian was launched in 2013, a collaboration between the British Transport Police (BTP), the Metropolitan Police Service, the City of London Police, and TfL. They introduced a helpline number and ran awareness campaigns to encourage people to report incidents. TfL staff and police officers received special training to handle cases of sexual harassment on public transport effectively.

As part of its efforts to make public transport more gender- inclusive, TfL consulted with 140 women's groups across London and developed an Action Plan focusing on five key areas:

1. Accessibility
2. Safety and Security
3. Affordability
4. Information
5. Employment

Following this, TfL introduced "Action on Equality," a four-year plan (2016–2020) aimed at promoting equality and improving access to transport services and job opportunities for all groups. This plan built on the earlier Single Equality Scheme (2012–2015), which focused on initiatives like accessible bus stops, clear maps, real-time bus information, and equal job opportunities within TfL.

The 11 equality goals under the plan focus on making public transport in London safer and more convenient. Key initiatives include:

- Faster customer service
- Priority seating
- Better lighting around bus stops
- Safer streets for pedestrians and cyclists
- A diverse and inclusive workforce

Additionally, TfL collaborates with youth groups to raise awareness about public transport safety. They also review these initiatives annually to track progress and make improvements.

Source:

Women and Transport in Indian Cities, A Policy Brief, 2017, ITDP and Safetipin  
Lost in Transit, 2018, Security Management A Publication of Asis International



# Distract with a question

What's the  
next stop?

What's  
the time?

What zone  
are we in?

**Image 10:** Campaign poster | Source: TfL



**Image 11:** Project Guardian in action | Source: Alamy via The Guardian

## Recommendation 4:

### Improve Accessibility for Women Commuters

Accessibility is a key determinant that influences women's ability to use public bus transport confidently and consistently. Challenges such as unsafe routes to bus stops, a lack of accessible infrastructure, or inaccurate information can significantly hinder mobility. These barriers not only limit their mobility, restrict access to economic and educational opportunities but also negatively impact their overall travel experience. Addressing these issues is vital to creating a more inclusive and equitable public transport system that meets the needs of all users, especially women.

Key recommendations for enhancing accessibility in public transport for women commuters:

#### Safe Walking Access

This involves improving pedestrian infrastructure in line with IRC 103-2022 standards, including universally accessible, shaded footpaths, pedestrian crossings to bus stops with clear signage. Regular safety audits should be conducted to identify and address any issues with pedestrian routes.

#### Access to Low-Floor Buses and Universally Accessible Station Designs

It is important to increase the availability of low-floor buses to accommodate women and people with disabilities. Additionally, designing bus stops, stations to be universally accessible, with features such as ramps, elevators, and tactile paving, will ensure that all users can access public transport comfortably and safely.

#### Access to Information and Communication

Providing real-time information, route maps, functional helpline numbers, and emergency contacts at all stations will enhance the user experience. Ensuring that this information is accessible and easy to understand in all local languages and to people with disabilities is essential for improving accessibility.

Indicator	Data Source	Frequency	Recommended Benchmark	Milestone Timeline
Safe Walking Access				
Percentage of street length with continuous, barrier-free clear walking zone of minimum 1.8 m as per IRC:103-2022, (Also refer IRC:103 for footpath widths as per adjoining land use and pedestrian LOS ) and maximum footpath height of 150 mm	Accessibility Audit	Every two years	Entire street network	Long-term
Percentage of street length with walking area shaded by trees or buildings	Primary Survey during afternoon hours			
Experience and perception of safety, comfort, and convenience of the public transport journey	Primary Survey and GIS Analysis	Every five years	100 – 150m	
Access to Low-Floor Buses and Universally Accessible Station Designs				
The percentage of transit stations/ stops with universally accessible designs, including ramps, elevators, and tactile paving	Accessibility Audit	Every year	All stations	Medium-term
The percentage of low-floor buses in the fleet	STU/SPV/ Municipal Corporation		At least 50%	
Access to Information and Communication				
Percentage of stations with real-time and up-to-date static information on schedules, routes, route maps, functional helpline numbers, and emergency numbers, available in multiple languages and universally accessible formats	STU/SPV/ Municipal Corporation	Every year	All stations	Medium-term

## Case Study: Delhi's Transition to Low-Floor Buses Enhances Public Mobility

**Background** Delhi's public transportation system faced significant challenges due to an aging fleet of high-floor buses. These buses were difficult to access for many passengers, including the elderly, individuals with disabilities, and women with children or heavy bags. The steep steps increased the risk of accidents and made boarding alighting time-consuming, leading to delays and inefficiencies in the transit system.

**Initiative by DTC** In preparation for the 2010 Commonwealth Games, the Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) undertook a significant fleet modernisation initiative:

**Procurement of Low-Floor Buses:** In 2010, DTC introduced 3125 low-floor buses, including both air conditioned and non-air-conditioned models. These buses featured a kneeling mechanism, allowing them to lower their entrance to curb level, facilitating easier boarding.

Additionally, they were equipped with ramps and designated spaces for wheelchair users, ensuring inclusivity. The spacious design, with wider doors and ample standing space, improved passenger flow and comfort.

**Impact** The transition to low-floor buses yielded significant improvements:

**Enhanced Accessibility:** Passengers with mobility challenges, including the elderly and sabled, experienced more comfortable and safer journeys.

**Operational Efficiency:** Reduced boarding times led to improved adherence to schedules and more efficient fleet utilisation.

**Safety improvements:** The design minimised accidents related to boarding and alighting, contributing to overall passenger safety.

Source:

Delhi Bus Route





Recommendation 5

Improve Affordability of Public Transport

Affordability remains a significant barrier for many women in accessing public transport. For those from low-income backgrounds high fares can restrict access to essential services, such as education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. Ensuring that public transport is affordable is crucial for promoting gender equity, enabling women to travel freely, and supporting their full participation in economic and social activities.

Key recommendations for improving affordability of public bus transport:

Affordable Fare

Public transport should be affordable as a means of transport for all, especially for people from low-income households, students, and other vulnerable groups. Women, who often depend on public transport for their mobility, benefit significantly from lower fares. Affordable fares can help women, particularly those who are dependents, move around more freely and access essential services. An important benchmark is to ensure that the average public transport fare does not exceed 10%-15% of a low-income household’s monthly income.

Targeted discounts and Free Fares

Subsidised fares can be introduced specifically for women to enhance affordability further. This can include offering lower fares or completely free fares for women in the form of subsidies or discounts. Women often engage in trip chaining, combining multiple trips for various purposes such as work, childcare, and household errands. This is due to their significant role in the care economy. Targeted discounted or free fares can support women more effectively by reducing the financial burden associated with trip chaining. Such measures can significantly reduce the overall cost of transport for women and encourage greater use of public transport.

Indicator	Data Source	Frequency	Recommended Benchmark	Milestone Timeline
Affordable Fare				
The average public transport fare as a percentage of a low-income household’s monthly income	STU/SPV/ Municipal Corporation	Before fare revision	Less than 10%-15%	Short-term
Targeted discounts and Free Fares				
Introduction of policy for targeted discounts / free fares for women	STU/SPV/ Municipal Corporation	Till policy adoption	Policy established	Short-term

## Case Study: Free Bus Travel for Women- Punjab's Public Transport Scheme

Public transport costs can be a financial barrier for many women, particularly those from low-income backgrounds. In some areas, women's participation in the workforce is limited due to expensive and unreliable transport.

- Some challenges include**
- High cost of daily travel, especially for low-income workers.
  - Limited mobility options, making it harder for women to access jobs and education.
  - Dependence on male family members for transport, reducing independence.

**Solution** In 2021, the Punjab Government introduced a free bus travel scheme for women across all government buses. The initiative aimed to improve mobility, encourage workforce participation, and reduce financial burdens.

- Key features of the scheme**
- Women can travel free of cost on government buses within Punjab.
  - The scheme covers students, workers, and daily commuters.
  - Requires only a valid ID for eligibility.
  - Increased bus frequency to meet rising demand.

**Impact of the scheme** **Increased Ridership:** The number of women commuters has doubled since the scheme's inception. Official data indicates that female ridership rose from 6.1 million in April 2021 to 11.2 million by November 2022. Over 300,000 women utilise the free bus travel facility in Punjab each day. During the 2023-24 fiscal year, nearly 110 million women benefited from the scheme.

Punjab's free bus scheme has transformed women's mobility, doubled ridership and removed financial barriers to travel, proving that removing cost barriers can encourage greater independence and workforce participation. It has empowered women, increasing access to jobs, education, and opportunities. This scheme is a step toward building a more equitable and inclusive transport system, where mobility is a right, not a privilege.



Image 14 Source: Newstracklive

Recommendation 6

Promote Gender-Inclusive Public Awareness Campaigns

Public awareness campaigns play a crucial role in shifting societal attitudes towards gender roles in public transport. Deep-rooted stereotypes and biases discourage women from using public transport and pursuing careers in the sector. Well-designed campaigns can help break these norms by promoting respectful behavior, highlighting positive role models, and fostering a culture of inclusion. These initiatives can create a more supportive environment that encourages greater participation of women as both commuters and professionals in public transport.

Key Recommendations for Public Awareness:

Educational Programs and Monitoring Impact

Integrating gender-sensitivity modules into annual training modules promotes respect and equality in the transport system. To gauge the success of these initiatives, continuous monitoring through surveys and feedback mechanisms helps refine strategies and improve outcomes.

Positive Representation and Storytelling

Showcasing women in diverse roles within the transport sector, such as drivers, conductors, and engineers, helps break traditional stereotypes. Sharing success stories of women in transport through multi-media platforms can inspire and motivate others.

Indicator	Data Source	Frequency	Recommended Benchmark	Milestone Timeline
Educational Programs and Monitoring Impact				
Percentage of drivers, conductors, and depot managers who have received training in gender sensitisation and standard operating procedures annually, along with quarterly follow-ups to discuss challenges and share learnings	STU/SPV/ Municipal Corporation	Every year	All drivers, conductors, and depot managers	Short-term
Create a complaints and redressal mechanism which collects gender disaggregated data on complaints filed and redressed by the public transport authority			At least 80 % of the complaints filed by men and women are addressed within 14 days	

## Case Study: Gender Sensitisation Trainings in Delhi

In 2007, Jagori launched gender sensitisation sessions for Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) drivers and conductors, training 3,600 staff through interactive role-plays inside buses to highlight women's experiences and spark discussions on gender and harassment.

Since 2012, the Manas Foundation has expanded this program, training over 100,000 transport personnel, including bus, taxi, and auto-rickshaw drivers, in partnership with the Department of Transport, which certifies trained drivers with official stickers.

### Key Programs

- **Building Bonds for Gender Sensitisation:** Engages public transport drivers through workshops on gender equity and women's safety.
- **DTC Marshal Training:** Trains marshals (home guards) in DTC buses under the 'Barabariki Dagar, Surakshit Safar' campaign to handle sexual harassment incidents effectively.
- **After-Training Support:** Auto-Sahara and Taxi-Sahara helplines offer continuous support, allowing drivers to seek advice on gender-sensitive behaviour, share concerns, promoting ongoing dialogue.



Image 15 DTC Training

Implementing these policy recommendations will address the challenges faced by women bus drivers and conductors, improve their working conditions, and promote gender equality in public transport systems. Collaborative efforts from government bodies, STUs, and civil society organizations are essential to creating a safer, more inclusive, and equitable transportation system that benefits everyone.

Source:

Women and Transport in Indian Cities, A Policy Brief, 2017, ITDP and Safetipin

## Recommendation 7

### Strengthen Gender-Inclusive Policy and Planning

Effective policy and planning are fundamental for creating a gender-inclusive public transport system. Integrating gender perspectives into every stage of policy formulation and planning enables authorities to proactively address the distinct challenges women face—ranging from safety and accessibility to affordability. When gender equity is embedded into transport strategies, it ensures that services are designed to reflect the diverse needs of all users, making public transport more inclusive, responsive, and equitable for women.

Key recommendations for strengthening policy and planning for gender-inclusive public transport:

#### Inclusive Mobility Planning

These measures can guide targeted interventions to improve access and ensure equitable, safe, and efficient transport options for women during the planning phase. Inclusive mobility planning should focus on key indicators such as the percentage of women and girls living within 400 m of public transport (PNT) and disaggregated mode share targets for women and girls when making mobility planning decisions.

#### Inclusive Decision-Making

Ensuring that women are represented in decision-making processes is crucial for developing gender-inclusive transport policies and plans. This can be achieved by including women in transport planning committees, advisory boards, and other decision-making bodies. Additionally, engaging with women's groups and organisations during the planning process can provide valuable insights and ensure that women's voices are heard.

#### Data Collection and Analysis

Collecting and analysing gender-disaggregated data is essential for informed policymaking and planning. Public transport authorities should regularly collect gender-disaggregated ticketing data and data on women's travel patterns, safety concerns, and accessibility needs while developing mobility plans. This data should be used to inform policy decisions and to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of gender-inclusive initiatives.

#### Budget Allocation for Gender-Inclusive Mobility

Allocating a dedicated budget for gender-inclusive mobility initiatives are crucial for ensuring that the necessary resources are available to implement gender-sensitive policies and projects. This budget should support infrastructure improvements, safety measures, and programs aimed at enhancing women's mobility and access to public transport.



Indicator	Data Source	Frequency	Recommended Benchmark	Milestone Timeline
<b>Inclusive Mobility Planning</b>				
PNT: Percentage of women and girls living within 400m walking distance of public transport in the city and metropolitan region, with a frequency of at least six schedules per hour	STU/SPV/ Municipal Corporation	Every year	At least 80% of women and girls	Medium-term
Mode Share: Percentage of walking, cycling, public transport (buses and metro-rail separately), intermediate public transport, motorised two-wheeler and four-wheeler trips by women and girls	Municipal Corporation/ Planning Department or Authority	Every five years	At least 80% of all trips are by public and non-motorized transport  At least 40% of all public and non-motorized transport trips are by women and girls	Long-term
<b>Inclusive Decision-Making</b>				
Percentage of women represented in transport planning committees and decision-making bodies	STU/SPV/ Municipal Corporation	Every year	At least 50%	Short-term
<b>Data Collection and Analysis</b>				
Percentage of public transport ticketing data that is gender disaggregated	STU/SPV/ Municipal Corporation	Every year	100%	Medium-term
<b>Budget Allocation for Gender-Inclusive Mobility</b>				
The percentage of the transport budget allocated to gender-inclusive mobility initiatives	STU/SPV/ Municipal Corporation	Every year	Sufficient allocation to meet the needs of gender-inclusive projects	Short-term

## Case Study: Maharashtra's Initiatives for Gender-Inclusive Transport Policies

**Background** Maharashtra has recognised the need to address gender disparities in public transportation to enhance women's mobility and access to opportunities. The state has implemented several initiatives aimed at creating a more inclusive and equitable transport environment.

### 1. Gender-Inclusive Future Transport (GIFT) Initiative

**Implementation** In collaboration with the UK government and the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA), the World Resources Institute (WRI) India launched the GIFT initiative. This program focuses on understanding the differing travel patterns of men and women along Mumbai Metro-1 (Versova-Andheri-Ghatkopar) to inform gender-sensitive transport planning.

**Impact** MMRDA became India's first metro agency to acknowledge gender-based differences in safety perceptions, travel behaviours, and decision-making processes. The initiative aims to improve the metro system's inclusivity and accessibility for women.

### 2 Maharashtra Urban Mobility Charter of Demands

**Implementation** Maharashtra Urban Mobility Charter of Demands, advocating for the adoption and implementation of a state-level gender policy for public transport. The charter emphasises the need for subsidies for all non-air-conditioned intra-city bus travel for women, among other gender-sensitive measures.

Maharashtra's multifaceted approach to integrating gender considerations into transport policies reflects a commitment to creating a more inclusive public transportation system. Through initiatives like the GIFT program, advocacy for gender-sensitive policies, and empowering women within the transit workforce, the state aims to enhance mobility, safety, and accessibility for women.



Image 16 Source: WRI India

Source:

Gender Inclusion in Future Transport: MMRDA Adopts Gender-Related Findings to Make Metro Commute Accessible and Appealing to Women, 2022, WRI India  
The Maharashtra Urban Mobility Charter of Demands, Jhatkaa.org





# **Implementation, Monitoring, and Evaluation: Measuring What Matters**

Achieving gender inclusivity in public bus services requires a structured approach to implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. The STUs/SPVs/Municipal Corporations should set clear timelines and indicators to ensure progress and accountability.

## Implementation Plan

STUs/SPVs/Municipal Corporations should aim to achieve short-term indicators within three years, medium-term indicators within seven years, and long-term indicators within 15 years.

In the short term, the focus can be on key infrastructure improvements, safety enhancements, and gender sensitisation training that can be easily achieved within a three-year time span.

In the medium-term, the focus can be shifted to changes in employment policies, public awareness campaigns, and some accessibility improvements.

Changes like infrastructure development, fleet expansion, and overall service quality improvements can be achieved in the long term.

## Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Framework

A prerequisite supporting system must already be in place for successful monitoring and evaluations. STUs/SPVs/Municipal Corporations should identify a staff member or members based on the size of the transport undertaking with adequate experience and skill sets in mobility issues. This staff member(s) would be responsible for managing M&E (including overseeing appropriate financing for M&E).

A key function of M&E planning is estimating the costs, staffing, and other resources needed and budgeting for them in public accounts. There is no set formula for budget allocations, but various organisations recommend allocating 1 to 3% of a project's budget to M&E.

Progress reports detailing achievements, challenges, and the next steps should be published annually, with accountability mechanisms established to ensure that targets are met and corrective actions are taken as needed.





# **Conclusion: Turning Voices into Vision**

The journey of women in public transport in cities like Delhi, Pune, Bengaluru, and Chennai is a testament to both resilience and the urgent need for systemic reforms. This report, supported by the findings from FGDs and T4A citizen surveys, underscores the urgent need for targeted interventions to improve workplace conditions, safety, accessibility, and affordability in public transport. Enhancing workplace infrastructure and facilities, ensuring job security and fair employment policies, and implementing comprehensive safety measures are essential steps towards achieving gender inclusivity.

The presence of women in roles traditionally dominated by men, such as bus drivers and conductors, challenges deep-rooted stereotypes, signalling progress while also exposing persistent barriers. Women in these roles often struggle with job insecurity due to temporary contracts lacking benefits such as paid leave and medical insurance. This unstable employment status affects their financial stability and long-term career prospects, making it difficult to plan for the future. Many women reported that their positions remained temporary even after years of service, leaving them vulnerable to sudden job loss without any social security. The absence of permanent contracts undermines their economic independence and reflects a lack of recognition for their contributions within the sector.

Workplace infrastructure further worsens these challenges. The lack of basic amenities such as clean toilets, safe resting areas, and designated spaces for personal care is a common issue across the cities studied. Women often have to endure long shifts without access to hygienic facilities, which negatively affects their health. Participants shared stories of limiting water intake to avoid the need for toilets breaks, leading to health problems. This neglect shows a failure to recognise and address the basic needs of women in the workplace.

The case studies from Bhubaneswar and Hubballi Dharwad reveal that the challenges identified in metro cities extend across India's diverse urban contexts, reinforcing the systemic nature of gender exclusion in public transport. Bhubaneswar's experience demonstrates that even in systems with progressive employment policies such as CRUT's targeted recruitment resulting in substantial female representation among conductors on the Ama Bus service and the innovative Ama E-Ride women-led e-rickshaw feeder service, fundamental infrastructure gaps persist. The disconnect between policy innovation and operational reality highlights a critical insight that symbolic inclusion measures cannot compensate for basic facility failures, surveillance inadequacies, and emergency response gaps that compromise women's daily dignity and security.

Hubballi Dharwad's experience with the Shakti scheme shows how demand-side policy successes can generate unintended operational challenges that disproportionately affect women. While the scheme has democratized access to public transport and increased women's economic participation, the resulting overcrowding has created new forms of exclusion through undignified boarding processes and increased harassment potential. The ridership achievements with persistent infrastructure deficiencies in lighting, emergency systems, and gender-responsive facilities reveals that policy impact extends beyond intended outcomes. This underscores the critical importance of supply-side preparedness when implementing demand-stimulating interventions, particularly when targeting vulnerable populations whose needs may differ from traditional male user assumptions.

The convergence of evidence across multiple cities and methodologies reveals three fundamental patterns that transcend regional variations. First, infrastructure inadequacies consistently cluster at predictable vulnerability points including approach paths, waiting areas, evening operations, and staff facilities. This suggests that systematic audit frameworks can effectively identify intervention priorities across diverse urban contexts. Second, women's adaptive behaviors emerge as rational responses to system failures, with consistent patterns of schedule modification, route avoidance, and economic trade-offs that convert mobility barriers into livelihood constraints. Third, local innovations that demonstrate measurable impact (employment programs, safety interventions, or service design adaptations) operate within broader institutional contexts that can either amplify or undermine their effectiveness.

Safety remains a major concern, both within the workplace and during commutes. Harassment from passengers and male colleagues is a common experience, creating an environment of fear and anxiety. Many women shared incidents of verbal abuse and inappropriate behaviour, often with little support due to weak reporting mechanisms. This unfriendly environment affects job satisfaction and discourages other women from considering careers in public transport.

Despite these challenges, the power of visibility is undeniable. Each woman driving a bus or managing a route act as a symbol of change, slowly shifting public perceptions. Their skills and abilities break old stereotypes about the jobs women can do. This cultural shift inspires young girls to aspire to careers without the limits of gender expectations.

Economic independence is both a cause and an effect of women's participation in public transport. Jobs in this sector provide financial stability and a sense of self-worth. This empowerment extends beyond individuals to influence families and communities, challenging traditional gender roles. To maintain this momentum, efforts must focus on creating career growth opportunities, leadership roles, and skill development tailored to women's needs.

Public transport policies must shift from being gender-neutral to genderresponsive. This means recognising that women's travel patterns, safety concerns, accessibility requirements, and work-life balance needs differ from men's. Including these perspectives in policy design ensures that public transport systems are both efficient and fair. Global examples like La Rolita in Bogota show how inclusive policies can create environments where women feel safe, supported, and able to succeed.

The T4A citizen survey highlights public perceptions and the daily realities of women commuters. It shows that barriers women face are not just at work but throughout their entire journey, from home to work and back. Overcrowded vehicles, poorly lit stations, and unreliable services affect women more, influencing their travel choices and limiting their economic participation.

Moving forward, the path to gender-inclusive public transport requires a comprehensive approach. This means addressing the immediate challenges women employees and commuters face and rethinking public spaces and services through a gender lens. It requires collaboration between government agencies, transport authorities, civil society, and the private sector. Policies should be based on data, and most importantly, on the voices of women using these systems daily.

Efforts should focus on policy reforms that provide job security through permanent contracts, equal pay, and full benefits. Recruitment strategies must encourage more women to join the workforce, supported by mentorship, leadership training, and career development programs. Workplace infrastructure should be improved with clean toilets, safe rest areas, secure changing rooms, and strong safety measures like CCTV, emergency response systems, and quick grievance mechanisms to address harassment.

Public awareness campaigns can shift societal attitudes toward women in public transport. Sharing success stories and highlighting role models can inspire others and foster respect. Gender-sensitisation training for all employees can create a more supportive work environment. Urban transport planning should consider women's travel patterns, ensuring routes and services meet their needs. Community engagement can offer insights for a more inclusive system, especially with women's groups.

Monitoring and evaluation are key to tracking progress and ensuring accountability. Collecting gender-specific data can identify gaps and guide future strategies. Collaboration between government, civil society, and the private sector is essential for keeping momentum and driving lasting change.

Ultimately, public transport can be more than a mode of travel: it can be a vehicle for social transformation. By addressing the unique needs of women, public transport systems can promote gender equality, economic empowerment, and inclusive urban development. The future of mobility in India will not only be shaped by technological advancements but by how equitably it serves all members of society.



## Annexures - Audit Toolkits

### Bus Depot Infrastructure Audit Toolkit



<https://bit.ly/BusDepotAudit>

Scan the QR code to access the toolkits

### Bus Stop Infrastructure Audit Toolkit



<https://bit.ly/BusStopAudit>

### Bus Terminal Infrastructure Audit Toolkit



<https://bit.ly/BusTerminal>

Prepared by

