

How women travel

and the cost of stepping out

For a woman earning ₹12,000 a month, the simple act of commuting can eat up 14% of her income. **In India, mobility isn't just about distance; it's a financial barrier to the workforce.**

From Delhi to Tamil Nadu, a new wave of "Zero-Ticket" policies is trying to erase the transport tax that women have to pay to be part of the workforce. We analysed 8 schemes to see if "free" actually works.

Many women rely solely on buses to commute due to lack of access to personal vehicles



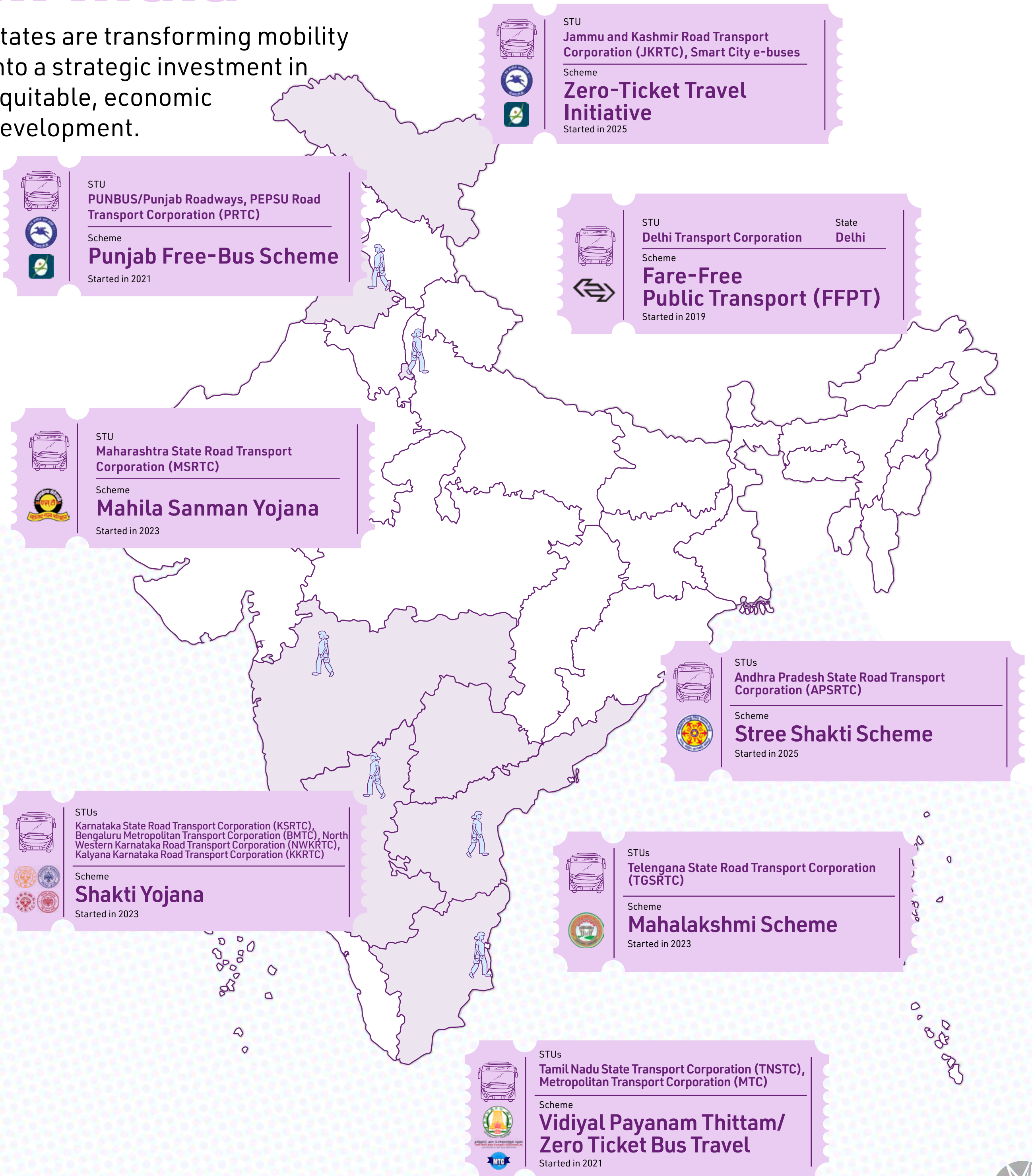
Reliable travel lets women work.

When women can get to work, it sparks a societal shift that can reshape the global landscape.



Fare Free Travel Schemes in India

States are transforming mobility into a strategic investment in equitable, economic development.



This map is for illustrative purpose only.



What did the schemes aim to achieve?

Karnataka

Reshape travel patterns; provide safe and affordable transport for resident women.

Maharashtra

Provide 50% concession on all bus types to reduce the burden of transportation costs.

Tamil Nadu

Social welfare and empowerment; specifically targeting "normal-fare" buses for short distances (up to 30km).

Delhi

Enhance mobility and safety; reduce school and college dropout rates for girls; address inequities in accessing education and employment.

Punjab

Social inclusion; access to healthcare/education; encourage women to take better jobs further from home.

Telangana

To reduce the financial burden of women and ensuring gender equity in transport access.

Jammu and Kashmir

Social and economic empowerment for working women and schoolgirls; safe transport via e-buses.

Andhra Pradesh

Part of "Super Six Promises"; make transport safer and accessible for women, girls, and transgender residents.

While all states have differently worded policy goals, there is one common goal and that's at the intersection of **social justice and economic policy**. Socially, it enhances safety, independence, and inclusion. Economically, it lowers barriers to participation in the workforce.

It is a strategic investment in gender equity and urban development.



What did the schemes achieve?

The schemes reported an **increase in ridership** across all active states, **improving women's access to opportunities and leisure.**



Increased Ridership

Andhra Pradesh

Women now constitute 65% of bus passengers. The scheme has resulted in a sharp **increase in women commuters from 40% to 65%**, with an average of 25 lakh women travelling daily.

Delhi

Women's ridership jumped to 13.3 crore in 2023 post scheme highest in six years. **"Women have returned to buses in large numbers, and stayed."**

Tamil Nadu

Minister for Transport said that the number of women passengers using the state buses increased from **40% to 70%** after the introduction of **Vidiyal Payanam.**

Punjab

Data shows a **doubling in the usage of public buses by women** and girls in a year between 2021-22.

More Women Part of Workforce

Tamil Nadu

The scheme has generated **incentives for women to undertake self-employment** activities such as vending of food products, thus contributing to **higher work participation.**

Karnataka

Women now outnumber men on many key routes, especially in Bengaluru's Central Business District, signalling a **structural shift in urban mobility and access to opportunities.** After the Shakti Scheme launched, according to a Fiscal Policy Institute study, the percentage of women looking for or engaging in work jumped by about 5%, proving that when you make the commute free, more women choose to work.



How did it help the women?

Improved independence and empowerment

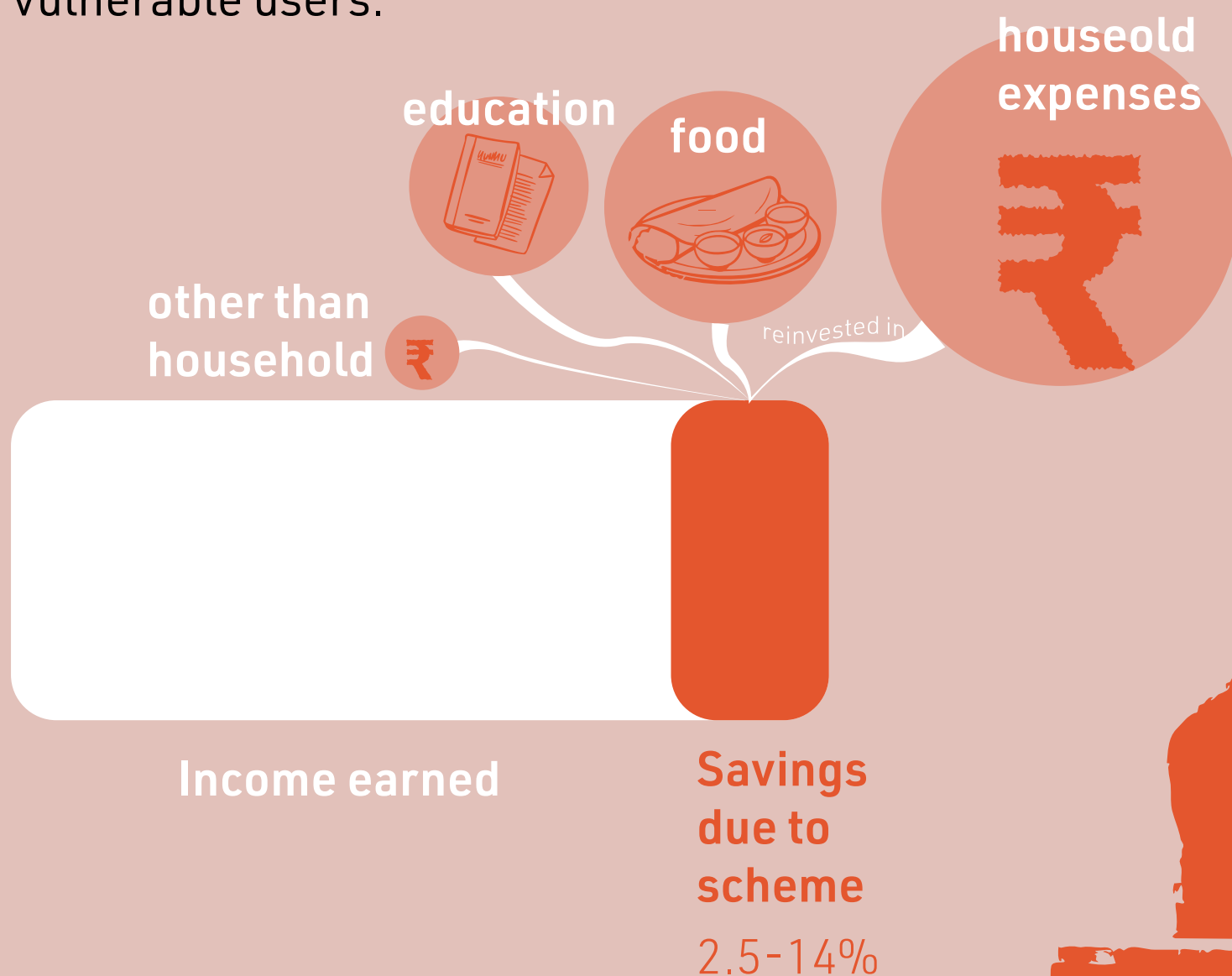
In multiple states, the fare waiver has also made women **less dependent on male family members, enabling them to travel alone** or pay transport costs for other family members. Many women also noted improvements in self-confidence and decision-making power.



More savings

Women from low income families in the study sample reported **saving a significant portion of their income**, across all active states.

In Delhi, more than 50% women of the study sample reported 2.5% savings. In Tamil Nadu, it was reported to be upto 14% in economically vulnerable users.



Easier access healthcare and caregiving

In Karnataka, about 83% of women said they could now access better medical facilities, while an equal proportion reported improved family relationships as they were able to visit relatives and children more frequently.



Leisure

Women in Punjab reported more savings and employment gains. This, along with increased leisure opportunities, **has given them greater visibility in public spaces otherwise dominated by men.**



More than just a free ride.

The data is clear: when we remove the "transport tax," we don't just fill buses—we unlock human potential.

While these 8 schemes have laid a powerful foundation, the journey continues. Sustainable funding, better frequency, and deeper safety measures are the next steps on the route to true gender-inclusive mobility.

The ultimate ROI of a "Zero-Ticket" isn't found in a ledger; it's found in the millions of new journeys toward independence, education, and dignity.



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