



Mpact Podcast  
Episode 66

## Women Who Ride Transit

With

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**Tamar Shapiro (0s):** Welcome to the Mpact Podcast. This is Tamar Shapiro, CEO of Mpact, formerly known as Rail~Volution. We are excited to have recently announced both our new name and tagline, Mpact: Mobility Community, Possibility. We're a national organization working at the intersection of transit, related mobility options and community development. The podcast is a chance to hear from a range of voices as we go deeper into how to leverage transit to make communities better for people.

**Jeff Wood (42s):** Hey there, I'm Jeff Wood, Principal of The Overhead Wire and your host. This month on the Mpact Podcast we're chatting with Meghna Khanna of LA Metro and Scarlett De Leon of the Alliance for Community Transit LA about women who ride transit. We talk about LA Metro's first of its kind Gender Action Plan and ACT-LA's Metro as Sanctuary report. Stay with us.

Meghna Khanna and Scarlett De Leon, welcome to the podcast.

**Meghna Khanna (1m 17s):** Hi. Thank you.

**Scarlett De Leon (1m 18s):** Thanks.

**Jeff Wood (1m 19s):** Well thanks for being here. Before we get started, can you tell us a little bit about yourselves? We'll start with Meghna and then go with Scarlett.

**Meghna Khanna (1m 25s):** Thank you again for inviting us. I am Meghna Khanna, I'm a senior director with the planning group which oversees the light rail planning at Metro and I've been with the agency for almost nine years now. Previously working with the private consulting firm

on light rail projects. In my role at Metro I oversee the light rail design and environmental phase. But in addition to that I also have this great opportunity to work directly with our office of the CEO on understanding how women travel study and the gender action plan.

So that's my role and that's who I am.

**Scarlett De Leon** (2m 4s): I am Scarlett De Leon campaigns director with ACT-LA, Alliance for Community Transit Los Angeles. We are a countywide coalition of about 40 organizations and we focus on housing justice and transit justice. So we're here to talk about our transit justice campaign today and the focus on that is advocating for better bus service, fareless transit and divestment from the policing budget, investment in community-based safety strategies.

And I've been with ACT-LA for about four years and previously I was organizing with the Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance. I've been doing community work organizing for about a decade now.

**Jeff Wood** (2m 46s): Awesome. What sparked your passion for transit Scarlett? Like what was the first thing that kind of turned you on to transportation policy or transportation more generally?

**Scarlett De Leon** (2m 55s): I think my passion is really for Los Angeles, the city of Los Angeles and the communities I grew up in. I grew up in Koreatown and I rode public transportation every single day of my life. I bought my first car I think last year only because I had a baby. But I've been riding public transportation my whole life. Some of my favorite and first memories are riding the 8th Street bus with my great grandma going to downtown on a Sunday after church to the S. So I guess my experience is what sparked my interest in public transportation, but really my interest is broader.

It's the city of Los Angeles and how can we improve the lives of immigrant communities, communities of color, low income communities. And, really, transportation is this thing that people don't really think about and yet it touches their every daily life, right? It's what they rely on to get to essential services, to get to church, to be social people. So it is the heart of our city and improving public transportation, it's just life-changing for so many folks who have no other choice but to be on public transit.

**Jeff Wood** (4m 3s): And Meghna, what about you? What was your kind of foray into transportation or Los Angeles for that matter?

**Meghna Khanna** (4m 9s): So if you couldn't tell from my accent, I am not from America. I was born in India and it's interesting in India, when I was going to architecture school, I relied on public transit because that was the only way to get back and forth from my school to the hostel where I was. And taking public transit in New Delhi, India was not easy. That was like the choice only choice I had because again, the resources were limited but everyday experience taking that bus ride was really brutal on me.

There were days, it was very upsetting because I went through harassment on almost a daily basis and there was nothing I could do. I could not talk about it. I could not mention about it on the bus because it was like I was in a situation, I felt like if I mentioned it, the situation will just get violent and everybody will just blame it on me because I am the women. So that was very, very interesting in a way that it just started changing my outlook. I was focused on architecture and the planning aspects, but I was like why is transportation so challenging in terms of women using it and the sexual harassment that's like a daily thing and it's a global problem.

Like I started reading articles, I'm like, is it just happening in Delhi? I wanted to do something about it. So that's where I changed course. I applied for a master's program at University of Michigan and Harvard and to look into transportation solutions and that's where my course just changed. And even as I started looking into getting a job with a private consulting firm where I was working for Element for primarily, but I was so focused on, again, the design aspects, I was always applying the gender lens.

But you know, I was a consultant so I just wanted to come to Element and I had this opportunity to then work on a women and girl governing council at Element and bring that gender perspective onto the trans.

**Jeff Wood** (6m 17s): Awesome. Well today we wanted to chat with you about women who ride transit and you all are both in LA. What was your primary route that you used to get places in Los Angeles? I assume you use Metro to go from A to B, but what is the route you use the most and maybe what is the route that you enjoy the most?

**Meghna Khanna** (6m 32s): So I can start, as you see this is right behind me. I put the photograph of the Red line, which is the subway line in Los Angeles and that's my primary route back and forth to work. And I moved to LA back in 2007. Between me and my husband, we only have one car. So I've always relied on public transit, taking buses, but Red Line has become my main commute to work. And even like if I have to go to other destinations, red Line is like my starting point.

So I feel like I am so invested to this line. And then three years ago I had a little girl and I am very proud that I do take her on transit with me where the challenges of taking a transit are being a parent trying to lock that stroller or even those bags because the daycare is at work, it's become like, you know, more and more apparent. But redline, I'm somehow invested and that's my primary mode of transportation.

**Scarlett De Leon** (7m 31s): I've taken every single bus line probably and definitely the red line lots of times. I would say that currently I'm taking mostly the red line getting on in the orange line because I'm in North Hollywood right now. But I think what's closest to my heart, I would say would be the 8<sup>th</sup> Street bus for sure. I have taken that with every family member that I have. And then I would say the Orange Line totally changed my life because I used to be one of those

kids that grew up in Koreatown and had to be on the bus stop at 6:00 AM and wouldn't get home till 6:00 PM because I was bused to Sherman Oaks.

So once the Orange line opened up, I had that freedom to just go on my own, come back. So I, I do love the Orange line.

**Jeff Wood** (8m 14s): What's the biggest benefit to you all personally of being a trans writer? Like what's something that you get out of taking the bus?

**Scarlett De Leon** (8m 21s): I think, well it changes right as different faces in your life, but I would say currently I think of two things very similar actually. One is that the values of being a transit rider, when you're in public transportation you get to interact with people in a very different way. And I know there's a lot of stories out there right now about how scary public transportation is and public transportation is, you know, a reflection of what's going on in our city. So there's definitely a housing crisis and a public health crisis going on, so you are going to encounter that.

But I actually think it's a good thing to encounter it because I think when we live in silo, it's easy for us to like stay in our bubble and really ignore what's going on with our neighbors. So as difficult as it can be, I think if it's happening in our city, I want to know about it, I want to know what's going on. But I also want to say that I see some of the best sweetest things happening on the public transportation, people really helping each other talking. I saw this just last week when I was on, I think it was the Red Line, yeah, I was on the red line going to Union Station to a Metro board meeting and I saw a young woman taking out these bags that had a design she had created that was really beautiful and she was like, it was like, it makes me teary.

It was so beautiful. She was like inspecting every little like stitch, making sure it was perfect. And then she got off at the L A C C stop I think to try to like sell them. And it's just, it's, I would've never seen that. So that is the benefit to me. But also when I taking my baby on public transportation, it's just going to instill those values that to me are already really important. Just by him being on public transportation and being able to see all of this and interact with other people.

**Meghna Khanna** (10m 7s): I think to answer that question, the benefit I see taking public transit makes me be a better professional because I'm living it. I go through that, right? Every day I'm seriously taking notes of what work, what doesn't work. And that just helps me apply all those things that I'm gathering, almost like doing an observation survey every day on my right back and forth. And that helps me just apply to how I approach my projects, how I approach when I'm dealing with communities because I, as Scarlett mentioned the safety concerns that are out there.

And by experiencing that every day I'm able to address those concerns working with community where I'm actually trying to build these new transit lines and address them upfront, what can we do? How can I work with that community to address those challenges? And interestingly

again, that community connections, relationships you bring every day on my commute, I think people who take Red Line, they all know about this guy who walks in who's selling socks, there's this guy who's selling incense on the train.

So we know about all these people and yes it adds to that experience you are having on the train. In addition to that, I would say my daughter, she started taking transit with me at three and a half months. She was in just that baby born, no idea of what mom's doing, but now she is three and a half years old and she knows her stops, she knows before Union Station we are going to hit Civic Center. She knows at MacArthur Park there's this guy who's going to walk in with his bicycle and mama, he needs that space so let's not stand in this corner.

So I really feel like I'm instilling that values of appreciating what transit does for me in her and I hope that passion I have for it, somehow I can transfer to her.

**Jeff Wood** (12m 4s): That's awesome. Both of those stories are really great. So Scarlett, in 2021 Act LA released a report about safety on transit. While not focused only on women, it includes the experience of women. What would you pinpoint as the top concerns of women and the one or two things that they wanted to see most changed?

**Scarlett De Leon** (12m 20s): Yeah, Metro As Sanctuary is really a vision of what care safety can look like when our system and just public spaces are actually approaching safety in a way that addresses root issues. And also by doing that welcoming us. So if you think about safety strategies, a lot of times it's about how do we get people out of our system, out of our public space. This is about how do we welcome people, make people feel safe and being here in the system. And that's important because I think one of the top things that women talk about when feeling unsafe is things like harassment, right?

I've had lots of personal experiences, especially as a young girl feeling unsafe, harassed, et cetera on the system. But the times that I felt the safest was when other transit workers, when other bus drivers were keeping me safe when they were speaking up. So these are some of the strategies that we have. So for example, having really activating the space with performances, street vendors, having more ice on the system, like transit ambassadors, which Metro has rolled out a program and things also like bystander training, like you know, sometimes you see something, you know it's not right, but you don't really know what words to say, how to stand up for someone.

So the, these are the type of things that this report calls on. And then another thing that's really important, especially for how women travel is our lived environment. So if you are in a bus stop that's really dark and there's no light, that's just going to feel really unsafe as a, so like totally changes the experience as a woman and as a writer, bus stop. So we call for things like, like shade and just like the infrastructure, how does infrastructure keep us safe?

Another thing that we don't think of as safety is just good bus service, bus service on time. If I see that on my app it says the bus is coming in five minutes and it's like a three minute walk, I'm

going to go and stand there for two minutes. But if, if I get there and now I'm waiting there for an hour now that leaves me alone in a stop for a longer time. So these are the type of things that we call on that directly impact women's safety because the top concerns for women's safety is things like harassed, being alone in a station, being afraid in a dark station on their own.

I remember when I was a student at L A C C and I used to take night classes after work and just if you've been in that station before, it's a really dark station with no one around. So I think these type of things would've been, I would've welcomed them, I would've welcomed a transit ambassador and better lighting, maybe some music at that time. And one thing I do want to note that's also very specific to how women travel, that is also like a safety thing is navigating the system with things like strollers and the type of trips that women take and our infrastructure sometimes is not friendly to that, right?

So I'm really excited about solutions like transit ambassadors who can be helpful with picking up a bag, helping you with your stroller. Yeah, these are the type of things that are on our report.

**Jeff Wood** (15m 27s): Awesome. And Meghna, LA Metro has also been studying the experience of women on transit. We had a 2019 report understanding how women travel and in the past fall, the gender action plan as well. What did the trade-offs women face to make transit work for them and some of the things that you found in your work?

**Meghna Khanna** (15m 43s): So I'll start with understanding how women travel because that was the basis of first time a transit agency, even trying to disaggregate the data or speak to the women and collect data onto what's working for them and what's not working for them. I do want to say that we quickly found out through our various ways of collecting data, and I want to spend like one minute just to emphasize how even collecting data or understanding how women travel, we had to take a different approach because focus groups and survey methods, again, they don't reach out to your most loyal writers, which are women facing homelessness, women with disability or women who have various immigration status and are traveling with kids.

So I think to even collect that data, we had to apply this lens of how can we reach these women? So we started working with these specific community based organizations that deal with women and we conducted like this participatory workshop. So it wasn't asking them standard questions, we went to them, we gave them like these tools and photographs and we just asked them to create a collage of their experience on public transit. And I can't tell you how much I learned from that.

Our workshop was amazing. These women spent so much time developing that collage which almost spread out the story of how they use it, what's working from them when they get to the bus stop, like you said is their trash. And they feel like they take ownership of even those bus stops and the buses or even that driver they see every day. So it was such a great way of just

learning from them through this exercise. We also did something where we created this observation form working with some of the gender experts and also professors from ucla.

So our team did 2000 hours of you know, just observing people on our train system and on a bus system. And this form was basically saying when women walk into the bus or train, where are they going? Are they sitting in the aisle space? Are they sitting close to the bus driver? Are they going in the path when they bring on the stroller, where are they putting the stroller? Where, where are they putting those bags? And if they're walking into the bus space, what, what are they noticing? Are the bars reachable?

So that observation was another unique way of getting that information. And then there were, we also did pop-up locations at a key transfer station catching PE women as they were transferring from one location to another and just asking two simple questions, what made your right easy today? What made your right difficult? And we were taking post-it notes and putting it on the wall. So all this just, I want to highlight that by doing this we got such a great qualitative data and we conducted focus groups with both men and women separately.

We didn't want to bring them together to bias their opinions or even just like, you know, discourage them from saying something. And we as metro staff removed ourselves from those focus groups. So these focus groups were conducted by a consultant or you know, people who are really keen on bringing these dialogues and conversations. We let them lead that discussion so that we could get that unbiased opinion. So those are the things I really want to mention because that was our unique way of collecting data and once we collected the data, we tried and categorized them into four key teams.

Safety, the biggest issue stations stop in vehicle design again because there are so many barriers to how the stations and stops have been designed or even our vehicles spaces, how they're designed, fair policy, that burden that women face when they're making these multiple trips. But these trips are very short and sometimes they're transferring within that two hour window which allows them to travel for free. But when it's outside the two hour window, they're paying this multiple fair And then the last but not the least for service frequency and reliability, we quickly noticed women are not traveling during those peak periods.

You know, again, transit agencies, we talk about frequencies during those peak periods, but women are traveling outside these peak periods because they're dropping kids to school, picking them up from schools, taking their elder parents to doctor's appointments. So we had to rethink how do we design our frequencies of the buses, the trains to meet those women needs. So those were the four key themes. And just going back to safety, we did notice that 60% of our women riders feel safe on metro system during the day, but that drops down to 20% during the night.

So a big contrast there. So those were the key findings. I can stop but that's what we are addressing in the gender action plan. The gender action plan, basically the biggest umbrella policy is to apply a gender analysis tool. So again, if I'm not there to remind people that gender

has to be considered in every aspect of Metro's program policy, there is this gender analysis tool which basically walks people through these series of question, how did you collect the data?

Did you include women or these marginalized group? Did you disaggregate the data to understand what is the key issues and concerns and once you've disaggregated the data, how is the plan or program or policy being catered to address the needs of that law marginalized group? So that's in a nutshell agenda analysis too. But we also have very specific strategies that we are trying to then develop under these four themes. I mentioned safety, their policies station, stock vehicle design and service frequency and reliability.

I do want to mention that the transit ambassador program. So things that have already happened as we were working on understanding how women travel and collecting all this data, one of the key things or themes we kept hearing from women that safety is a big concern but we don't want to see too much police presence on the stations of stops because again, aligns or bus surveys, it goes through various demographic area so you don't want to over police but they wanted more personnel or eyes on that stations and stops and that's how the transit ambassador program has gone and I'm so glad to say and as even started mentioned, that program has been implemented.

So we have these ambassadors who are on our platforms who are riding our trains and buses who can help actually address questions about directions or where can people access certain services or even help people with like, you know, getting onto the buses or answering questions about which stops or transfer points they need to connect. So it's again like you know, making sure there are people and eyes on the platforms and station.

Besides that, what we have done since then is we have readjusted our frequencies. So now throughout the day we have consistent frequency. There's no P cover, there's no non-PE cover. So I'm really happy to see that. So all our buses, all our train life have a consistent frequency throughout the day. We are also working with our safety group to now have that bystander program. So again, encouraging people if they see something to collectively say something or what should they say.

So we are working on that bystander program. In addition, we have updated a fair policy and we are now going towards fair capping, which will really, really help women. We are doing a fair pilot. So these are the things that are already happening. And for the gender action plan, I have a series of strategies under safety, we are looking at camera visibility and lighting in addition to the transit ambassador program. If you have recently been to union stations seventh Street Metro, the lighting levels have gone up.

Everything is so much brighter. So that's another key way of addressing that concern about dark spots or the lighting not working for women, making them feel safe. We are actually also doing a station stop design and safety assessment. So working with women CBOs, we are going to bring rider onto our system and do this checklist with them which have series of questions



which my team has developed so we can get the rider perspective. We also are revamping a sexual harassment prevention program.

We want to make it more personal. Right now it's lot of words which I think is great off limits harassment program. But we want to actually work with CBOs, the youth group to bring in more visuals so people can relate to it. When they see something, you know, they quickly can say okay, this is something that's so uncomfortable, we need to do something about it. We are trying to incorporate gender-specific operator training into our operator training curriculum so that they can be very well trained to address issues. When women come on board with stroller, what, what are they supposed to do? Because there's a lot of confusion about it.

Earlier on when I was working on understanding how women travel, we knew our policy guard that riders cannot bring unfolded strollers onto the buses. Imagine as a woman juggling a child, juggling bag holding this ruler coming on board. So that has been revised but we'd want to make sure that there is a specific gender specific operator training curriculum.

**Scarlett De Leon (25m 41s):** I just want to say because you know I've been advocating and working with Metro for a while in health and back when I first started Metro when they talked about safety it was so focused on policing. So I just feel so inspired and encouraged about how much the conversation has shifted. Even that report of how women travel like in the appendix you can see yeah folk, women do have a safety concern but women of color feel very different in terms of what makes them feel safe than like your counterparts of white women. So just like you said, more eyes on the system is so helpful does not necessarily mean policing that area.

Right. And currently metro, they're renegotiating and doing their contract stuff right now but their last contract, which was a five year contract went over seven 86 million. And I just think through like all these wonderful strategies, what would it look like if Metro shifted that funding? If we had a department of community safety that was focused on these tactics on like how are women traveling, how are communities of color traveling? How are women from communities of color traveling and what are those needs, right?

We had an activation at the compensation last August and it was just so inspiring to be there and hear music. We planted trees for shade and after like a heat wave, right? This was a station that was just full of cement, having street vendors having light. These are I think the type of solutions that not only work but they're inspiring and have the effect where writers feel cared for, feel heard. This has been me in my past and think through like family members, think through community members, think through transit writers that I talked to on weekly basis, what it feels like to have to be on the system with no other choice, like what that feels like.

But if you are there and you're feeling cared of and you feel like, you know what, I love being here, this is a great part of my day. Just the impacts to the mental health of our communities. Metro has such an opportunity to really support communities in such a unique way that I think

a lot of agencies don't. So yeah, it's really inspiring to hear a lot of these, these tactics that are going to happen and are happening

**Meghna Khanna** (27m 53s): Scarlett. I would say that's the approach we are taking. We have to find a balance. Like I said, we can't CE our system because that creates further issues. But at the same time as I continue to talk to our safety group and I know more people at Metro are rethinking about even that contract, as you were saying, you might have heard that at the last board meeting. Interestingly, when there is drug abuse or there violent crimes, we do need that police officer or that police contacts or presence.

I think we just have to find a balance because even myself, I've been told so many times, Meghna, when you are on the system, I know you feel like you have to do something in certain situations, but remember you are not trained to address certain issues. So I think call I take your points to heart and I, that's something even I struggle with. But at the same time I think we also have to remember what are we trained to do and if we are bringing these groups, what are they trained to do?

What, what are their responsibility or realm of trainings they have? And I do see some benefit of having police but definitely not over policing our system and making it more comfortable and welcoming.

**Scarlett De Leon** (29m 6s): Yeah, I, I feel like the biggest issues, the amount that's being spent on policing contracts, there's actually no data that backs up the need for these policing contracts. One of the biggest things cited is response times and yet there's no data around quicker response times with having a contract versus having a 9 1 1 call. We actually don't know when an incident happens because remember police come after an incident, whether it, those officers there were there because they're part of Metro or because they were called upon and they have to come because 9 1 1 is still part of the city.

Not only that, in the last metro board meeting as you mentioned, there is a lot of concern about how not only are these contracts paying for LAPD's overtime and sheriff's overtime, they refuse to say where they're patrolling, where they're at, if they're even out of their cars, if they're even in the system. So I think the issue really is where is Metro spending their money and how are these other tactics that actually get to the root issues of things like, like you mentioned drug abuse, this is a public health issue, there is a housing crisis and Metro has already taken steps in contracting with PATH and the mental health department and we have already seen such staggering results, right?

There are these issues that can be addressed in different ways. So just just to put it out there, when a police officer contacts a homeless person, 1% of these people receive housing versus path, which is 27% receive long-term housing. So these are the, so we know these other alternatives do work and Metro is currently talking about their contracts and currently also about to vote on their budget. So there is this like opportunity right now about how are we going to approach safety, how are we going to approach safety for women?

So many reports have been done, like we know what, what is needed. I'm hopeful, I'm hopeful that Metro is going to create some big changes.

**Jeff Wood (31m 7s):** I noticed that both of you all were talking about ownership and pride over the system from Rider and I think that that's an interesting thing that ties everything together because if you provide a safe system, something that's frequent reliable, that everything's designed well, then it feels like people will take, you know, kind of that ownership and that pride in in in writing the system even if they have to ride it every day because it's the only option that they have. And I'm wondering if you all have other stories about people's thoughts on Pride in the system or, or why they think it's important that they introduce their children to Metro or, or make sure that you know, they ride with their families or other things like that.

I think that that is something that might be under thought of when it comes to, you know, why people ride the system or, or why people feel like they want to be a part of a larger system that appreciates them as writers as well.

**Meghna Khanna (31m 55s):** I can just start and I'm going to just talk about some of the strategies which the gender action plan is bringing forward to then again make the community feel like they have ownership in the system. So under station stop in vehicles design, one of the strategies we are looking at is working with the business organizations would be it a downtown business improvement district or be it one of these nonprofits or be it even like a commercial tree, right?

We want look at ways of adopt stop program. So where these communities, they adopt a bus stop and they take pride in making sure the bus stop is clean, there's no trash. And if there is like issues around a light is not working or there's some paint issue, they can call Metro and notify us so we can go and notify the local jurisdiction and they can fix that bus stop. So this is where we are trying to again partner with the business organizations, the community organizations.

So they take start taking ownership of that stop. And by doing that we can even like encourage people to use more and more transit because they'll feel like now they're talking to their family members, they're talking to their community member and talking about how RA buses and bus stops feel safe. Another thing we really want to do, and this is something I learned from Transport for London, I had very good discussions with them. We want to promote business partnerships.

So working with our programs where we currently have programs for each shop play during the construction of a project, we partner with these shops or you know, restaurants and we just promote them and they, they in turn promote the transit line. I want to use this opportunity to have this business partnership throughout our lines where, you know, we as tra we can offer transit riders some discount, they can go eat at these restaurants and in return we can promote these businesses too.

Again, there is that, you know, pride in working together and in return some of the transit writers can use restrooms at these locations. So that is addressing, you know, multi-issue that we've heard from women who travel with children. They're like, sometimes when you are on a transit system there's no restrooms and that becomes an issue. So to your point, I know I changed the answer a little bit, but I wanted to mention like these new strategies of thinking about partnership, making sure businesses community feel like they have ownership in our system.

And by doing that I feel like we are just going to get these no riders, which will just transcend generations.

**Scarlett De Leon** (34m 45s): I think when you're raising a family or just even within yourself, there's so many choices that we have to make and a lot of those speak volumes about our values without us realizing it. And transit really carries the value of community cities and neighborhoods and communities who use public transportation just feel way more connected and way more have way more ownership, not only through public transportation but also of their neighborhood. And when you have ownership, you're going to treat the people better, you're going to keep it cleaner, et cetera.

So that is one of the reasons public transportation is so important. And also we are in an environmental crisis and public transportation plays a key key role. You know, the mayor, I remember when the former mayor, mayor Garcetti announced like these environmental goals we had, we are not going to hit any of our environmental goals as the city of Los Angeles, as California if we don't get everyone riding public transportation. And that's why public transportation is so important.

So as we see kids growing up now learning about the environment and this environment's crisis at schools, like how hopeless must that feel as a little kid to learn about an environmental crisis, this huge thing. And here's this thing that we can actively do to address that, which is take public transportation as a family. So it speaks volumes on our values. It also brings freedom like I, I mentioned when I was a young person, not everyone as a teenager has money or access to cars.

And it gives you this freedom to be able to get to know your city, to go places, to hang out with your friends and not only as a young person, but also as an elderly person when your life situation has changed because of your age. Here's this tool, public transportation that can still keep you connected to your family to church, things that are crucial to our mental health. So it plays such an important role and I do have some stories I want to highlight. My great grandma, she took public transportation, she never learned how to drive.

She came from Guatemala already in her thirties and worked really hard as a cook in a retirement home and never learned how to drive. So riding the bus was the way that she got to church and the way she worked every day and provided for literally our whole family. And the

day she wasn't able to ride the bus anymore because of health complications, it totally changed her life. It disconnected her from everything. She was no longer able to go to church. And this is the reality, right? This was a few years back. Now Metro has a few other services that might have been helpful, but this is why public transportation is so important.

There's this lady Lu Rosa from Koreatown who had a bus stop on eighth Street. It was a few steps away from her apartment that she lived in. So it was her bus stop, she felt really connected to it. And one of the redesigns, redirections of Metro, that bus stop was taken away and she had to walk now a couple blocks, which is not a big deal for most people when you are, you know, maybe you have like some pain or some physical reason why you cannot walk a couple of blocks. It became very difficult for her.

So she started her own petition and gathered hundreds of signatures just by riding the bus up and down and just talking to people who wrote that stop. And a lot of people relied on that stop. It was on eighth Street in front of <unk> if you know where that's at. And she got her stop back. She was so proud. Until this day, if you talk to her about Metro, she will tell you that she got her stop back and she uses it still. And just last week we were at the metro board meeting with some community members and one of the community members, a transit writer brought her daughter who is a high school student and rides the system and she gave public comments around safety concerns also and need for solutions like the ambassador program and, and she was also calling for Department of Community Safety.

This girl is 1514, she's young and she got teary-eyed. She was so passionate and I asked her after like, are you okay? What's going on? She's like, I just care so much because I'm on it every day and I know what it's like. So the system, you know, if you don't write it, you don't understand that this is something that it can make your day or it could break your day and you, you know, you have to be there. So it's, it's such an important part of our community and also it's an important part of our community now of the people who run our city of workers, restaurant workers.

But it's also an important part of our city for the future, for the type of city we want to live in.

**Jeff Wood (39m 39s):** I dunno how to follow on that, those are such good stories. But I do want to ask about language and, and how we discuss these issues. One of the things that I noticed recently, there was a, a Polish conference in Brussels, international folks talking on a panel about gender and in transportation and you know, a lot of the focus is on, you know, women's vulnerability when, when talking about gender issues, but they wanted to kind of flip it on its head and say, well it shouldn't just be about that. It should be about 50% of the writers or 50% of the population is women. And so why aren't women more in, you know, leadership positions to make decisions or in decision making arenas.

And I wanted to ask you about kind of the language of how we talk about gender and transportation and, and women in transportation because I think, you know, you can talk about the vulnerability, which is important, but you know, 50% of the population is women. And so

trying to think of it from that perspective as well where there's a lot to think about if you have that many people that could ride or do ride transit,

**Scarlett De Leon** (40m 33s): I love that. Just like from an outside observer, you know, this isn't only in transit, this is in everything, right? We start with men first, women second. and yet what a disservice we're doing to our whole community, to our whole city by doing that. Because through these studies and as we talk to women, women are really the center and the heart of our family, of our households, of our community. And if we started with women first, it would build a type of public transportation and public spaces that would benefit everyone.

It would benefit everyone in the family, all types of ages, men, everyone. Because women are having those type of detailed experiences that include other people at all times. Having the stroller caring for someone to take them to a doctor's appointment, we already are having those type of experiences that bring the whole family in, bring the whole community in. So if you start with women, you are already covering the needs of everyone.

**Meghna Khanna** (41m 35s): Yeah, and I'll just add to this, this is where, you know, when we did our understanding of women travel, and this was pre pandemic, both on our rail and bus system, we saw there's more than 50% of women riding our system. So of course more women rely on our system, they face the burden of, you know, if there's a car in the family, it goes to the men. So they have no choice, they're riding the transit. So I feel like they're our most loyal customers, so why not design it for them? And the fact that they are more and more susceptible to issues of safety blindness when it comes to station design or local design or even the burdens of their policy if we address their needs.

I think we are designing a system that works for all. So it's not like we are designing it only for the 50 some percentage. We are designing a system that works for all while addressing the issues of the most vulnerable that are women are people who identify as burden. So I don't want to just say it's women, it's like people who identify with women, we address their needs. We'll have a system that works for everybody. And I do want to say about there is a great shift in leadership that's happening in Metro.

I don't know if you look at our executives level or even our CEO who's a women who started the women in governing council when she was a deputy ceo and she's a ceo, a metro board, county supervisors, all county supervisors are on the board, they're all women. So it's such a great time, it's a unique time in metro, especially for Metro. I would say that we have so many women leadership supporting us. So I think let's design a system that works for people who identify as women, and I think we'll design a system that's safer, better, and works for us.

**Jeff Wood** (43m 28s): The other thing I wanted to ask you all about was, and Scarlett, you, you addressed this to a certain extent about, you know, climate and environmental issues. But you know, th this issue is really important and I think that it passes over into a number of important issues of the time. You know, racial justice, climate change, equity, all of these things. And so I'm

wondering how this specific issue of gender and, and women actually kind of connects all these things together, a transportation as one part of kind of a larger discussion about the topic.

**Scarlett De Leon** (43m 55s): Well the women in our system, a lot of them come from these communities that we're talking about. They come from immigrant communities, communities of color. So these issues are not separate, right? They are the issues that they are living every single day. All the issues of our time are the issues that are women, trans and writers are living. And it adds only layers of complexity, but it also adds the call for how important and timely it is to think through solutions that address how these women travel, right?

Because sometimes we like to get taken away by these big issues and try to think through, I don't know, like some fancy in the future solution. But the solutions are here, right here at home in front of us, in our city. And public transportation has such an important role to play when it comes to environment, the public health issue, housing crisis, and even just how we interact with our immigrant communities. This is the reality of public transit, of transit writers of women, transit writers today writing on the system.

And it's such a unique opportunity that Metro has to really stand up and meet the day. Like Metro has an opportunity, Metro's leadership Metro Board has an opportunity to really do something about these issues that we all want to do something about. They have such a unique opportunity, such a powerful opportunity because they have the budget and they're touching the daily lives of these people. So it's an exciting time and moment if we move towards the right direction.

**Meghna Khanna** (45m 45s): And I think from a metro perspective, I would say environmental sustainability goals are the key reason building transit system. We are trying to expand this transit system to reach communities which should really need it. And then again change that whole perception of people that transit is only for poor, you know, transit will work across demographics, it can solve that problem of environment, climate, crisis. So I think that's where transit comes in from.

And as a transit agency, that's our key goal. But to Scarlet's point, over the years we have applied that equity lens and now the gender lens, we've started looking into transit oriented communities. How do we work with local jurisdictions to give them the toolkits because we don't have jurisdiction over land use. I know, you know, when people see Metro, they see it all encompassing. We don't have jurisdiction over land use, but we want to provide those toolkits and resources to local cities.

So when they're building transit communities around our station stop, they are thinking about affordable housing, get thinking about uses household serving uses. At the same time for issues around homelessness, Metro has collaborated with the county and as we just talked about Path, path is a nonprofit who's been working on our system trying to address that issue on our trains, platforms and buses. But at the same time, I think we need partnerships.

We have to work with county, we have to work with nonprofits to address that issue holistically. Policing of our system. Like I said, we have to find a balance where we are working to address it in a way where we can provide eyes on the platforms and us train to the ambassador program. But we are not over-policing. That's my personal opinion. And I think Metro cannot do it all because end of the day we are a transit agency. It looks like we have a massive budget, but our capital projects, which are like expanding the light rail, the costs keep going up.

Escalation is real. So I do want to point out that Metro is very sensitive at this point. We are applying our equity policies, our gender policy, like you've heard, which none of the transit agencies have done. Like gender action plan is first of its kind. So Metro is trying to do all this. But I think we also need to partner and make sure that everybody is taking a holistic approach, including a local jurisdiction and county, a city of la

**Scarlett De Leon** (48m 27s): I just wanted to respond to one thing. I think one thing that is really great is this is Metro's job. Like unquestionably Metro's job is to have good bus service. Like no one can fight that. That's, that's metro's number one job. And most women and most communities of color are on the bus. So improving our bus service, it's crucial in changing the way women travel, right? So it is number one, when we think of different things that are pulling and tugging on the budget, on Metro's, budget especially, you know, things like the Olympics coming and we want to look great and we want to expand, but buses is where it starts.

It's the heart of the system and it is the thing that most people touch every single day. So just want to give a shout out to bus service and the need for improving bus service

**Meghna Khanna** (49m 19s): Just to say the next gen, which was a bus restructuring plan has happened. But our goal is to apply the gender analysis tool and see the improvements that has been made in that first year of almost like, you know, it was implemented pre covid but then COVID happened for all those adjustments and frequencies or staffs that were made. Our goal is to apply that gender analysis tool and within a year report back to the board what's working not and what's not working.

Because I think it's really critical to get women that access they need because without that access they miss out on opportunities and that burden on them just exponentially goes

**Jeff Wood** (50m 4s): Scarlett. Where can folks find more information about ACT LA and the stuff that you're working on in the reports that you've done?

**Scarlett De Leon** (50m 10s): Yeah, folks can find us online and ACT-LA.org. We're also pretty active on Instagram and on Twitter on our website you can find all our reports. We also constantly post toolkits action alerts so you can learn how to engage with Metro. If you, you are interested in these issues, you can, you know, always call into metro board meetings. We always uplift that or even come to a meeting with us. Yeah, we're pretty easy to find.



**Jeff Wood** (50m 36s): Awesome. And Meghna, where can folks find the gender action plan and other stuff that you're working on?

**Meghna Khanna** (50m 41s): So on the Metro website, if folks just on the top part, Google Women and Girls Governing Council or Gender Action plan, they'll find a link where they can download the gender action plan, understanding how women travel and if the organization or agencies have a difficult time finding it, reach out to me and I'll be happy to share the link.

**Jeff Wood** (51m 3s): Awesome. Well Meghna, Scarlett, thank you so much for joining us. We really appreciate your time.

**Meghna Khanna** (51m 7s): Thank you so much. Thank you.

**Tamar Shapiro** (51m 23s): Thanks for listening. Find out more about our work by visiting our website [impactmobility.org](http://impactmobility.org). That's M as in mobility and packed as in [agreement.org](http://agreement.org). [Impactmobility.org](http://impactmobility.org).