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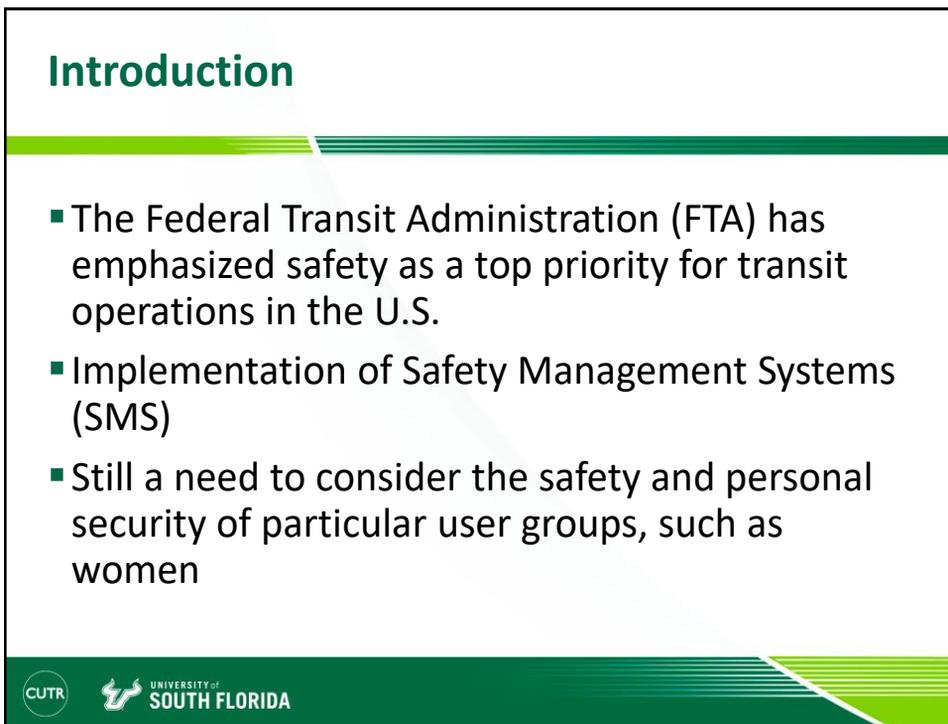
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Public Transit and Women's Safety: Real and Perceived Concerns

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Introduction

- The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) has emphasized safety as a top priority for transit operations in the U.S.
- Implementation of Safety Management Systems (SMS)
- Still a need to consider the safety and personal security of particular user groups, such as women

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Introduction

- Background
- Literature review
- General transit safety/security statistics
- Discussions with Florida transit agencies
- Findings



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Background

- Research shows that women do have specific safety concerns in public spaces
- Back in the 1970s, “street harassment” was identified as a systemic issue for women in public spaces
- By the teenage years, women are generally quite familiar with, and tend to accept, these concerns



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Background – Key Statistics

- Some key statistics from the National Sexual Violence Resource Center:
 - One in five women will be raped at some point in their lives
 - One in five women are sexually assaulted in college
 - 63% of sexual assaults are not reported to police
 - Prevalence of false reporting is only between 2-10%
 - Nationally, Florida is ranked as the third-highest human trafficking destination



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Background – Transportation Environment

- Transportation environment characteristics that can make one feel unsafe
 - Unmaintained pedestrian facilities with overgrown foliage and other obstacles
 - Poorly lit parking lots and structures
 - Isolated bus stops
 - Overly crowded (or, sometimes, nearly empty) transit vehicles and stations



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Literature -- Women's Mobility

- Women's concerns about safety can limit their mobility when they choose to not:
 - Travel after dark
 - Travel alone
 - Travel on specific routes/streets
 - Use transit (and women tend to be more transit-dependent than men)



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Literature – Public Transit

- Regarding transit, issues include:
 - Lack of safe pedestrian access to transit services
 - Personal security at transit stops/stations, on transit vehicles, and on shared use vehicles
- *It doesn't matter whether these safety concerns are real or perceived; they still influence women's choices*
- One study found that women prioritize safety and reliability of a mode over travel times



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Literature – Public Transit

- *It may take only one negative experience using transit for someone to not consider using it again*
- Crowded transit vehicles with frequent stops and passengers uncomfortably close together can make it easy for a harasser to escape quickly and allow the behavior to go unrecognized or unchallenged
- In smaller cities with less crowded transit vehicles, being only one of a few people on board can also make one feel uneasy
- These issues affect women transit workers as well as passengers



Literature – Public Transit

- Just 10 years ago, transit agencies in several major U.S. cities did not take these issues seriously:
 - *Harassment “really isn’t a big issue”*
 - *“One person’s harassment is another person’s flirtation”*
 - *Just one of the “odd occurrences” associated with city living*
 - *“You’re a pretty girl, what do you expect?”*
- Since that time, the resulting backlash and public relations issues resulted in stronger, more serious anti-harassment campaigns



Anti-Harassment Poster, King County Metro

Report it to Stop it

Sexual misconduct – comments, gestures, and behavior – is off limits on Metro.

Help us catch offenders.

If you see it or experience it

- > Tell your driver
- > Call Metro Transit Police: 206-296-3311
- > Call 9-1-1

Learn more: kingcounty.gov/stopnow

For 24-hour support, call King County Sexual Assault Resource Center at 888-998-6423

King County METRO SHERIFF King County Sexual Assault Resource Center

<https://kingcountymetro.blog/2018/04/24/report-it-to-stop-it-lets-put-an-end-to-sexual-misconduct-on-our-services>



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Anti-Harassment Campaign, MBTA Boston

I COULD HEAR THIS DUDE SAYING, "I'M JUST FOOLING AROUND, BRO" ... and then a young voice say, "Please, leave me alone," and I knew something wasn't right so I called the T police.

Everyone has the right to a safe ride, and anyone can experience verbal or physical sexual harassment. If it happens to you or someone else, report it to stop it.

To report, call the Transit Police: **617-222-1212**
For support, call the BARCC 24-Hour Hotline: **800-841-8371**

I COULD TELL THE WAY SHE WAS LOOKING AT ME SHE WANTED ME ... to back her up. So, I told the guy harassing her to leave her alone and sent his photo to the T police.

Everyone has the right to a safe ride, and anyone can experience verbal or physical sexual harassment. If it happens to you or someone else, report it to stop it.

To report, call the Transit Police: **617-222-1212**
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barcc
Boston Area Rape Crisis Center
INDEPENDENT LIVING
Download the See Say app at mbta.com/TransitPolice

<https://barcc.org/blog/details/barcc-mbta-and-partners-launch-campaign-against-sexual-harassment>



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Anti-Harassment Campaign, MBTA Boston



<https://barcc.org/blog/details/barcc-mbta-and-partners-launch-campaign-against-sexual-harassment>

Anti-Harassment Campaign, WMATA



<https://www.metro-magazine.com/rail/article/211753/transit-agencies-partner-to-prevent-sexual-assault>

Anti-Harassment Campaign, Chicago CTA

We're all watching.



Together we can stop harassment. If you see someone else is being harassed, tell a CTA employee or call 1-888-YOUR-CTA (1-888-968-7282) and *report* date, time, location and bus or rail car number or station location. *If it's unwanted, it's harassment.*

If someone's immediate safety is threatened, call 911 right away. 



IT'S NOT OK

If it's unwanted, it's harassment.

Many forms of harassment are criminal and violators will be prosecuted. Respect your fellow passenger.

If someone's immediate safety is threatened, call 911 right away. 

<https://www.transitchicago.com/speakup/>



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Anti-Harassment Campaign, Edmonton Transit

LEERING.

**IT'S NEVER OKAY AT WORK.
IT'S NEVER OKAY ON ETS.**

FOR IMMEDIATE HELP, PRESS A PASSENGER ALARM
OR CALL TRANSIT WATCH 780.442.4900

ETS HAS ZERO TOLERANCE FOR SEXUAL HARASSMENT.
Learn more: ets4ets.com/safe ride

**SNEAKING
A PICTURE.**

**IT'S NEVER OKAY AT
THE POOL.
IT'S NEVER OKAY ON ETS.**

FOR IMMEDIATE HELP, PRESS A PASSENGER ALARM
OR CALL TRANSIT WATCH 780.442.4900

ETS HAS ZERO TOLERANCE FOR SEXUAL HARASSMENT.
Learn more: ets4ets.com/safe ride

<https://shawglobalnews.files.wordpress.com/2015/08/08-18-ets3.png>
<https://shawglobalnews.files.wordpress.com/2015/08/08-18-ets4.png>



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Literature – Solutions

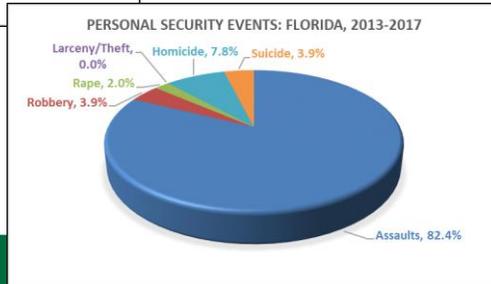
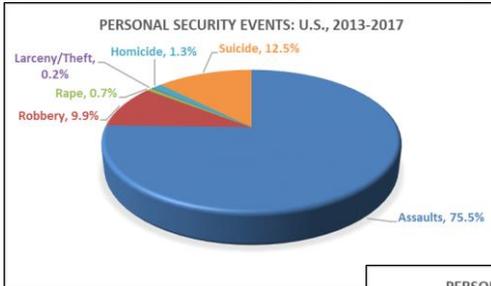
- Anti-harassment campaigns
- Apps that can enhance safety
 - NextBus, which provides real-time vehicle info
 - “See & Say” apps that allow anonymous reporting of harassment and other suspicious behavior
 - Digi Police (Japan)
 - Safetipin (India, Colombia, Kenya, Indonesia, Philippines)
- Transit agencies can allow flag-stops on buses
- Enhanced lighting, communications, security personnel presence



Transit Personal Security Statistics

- National Transit Database (NTD) Personal Security reportable events include:
 - Assault
 - Robbery
 - Rape
 - Larceny/Theft
 - Homicide
 - Suicide
- From 2013-2017 in the **U.S.:** 5,862 personal security events for over 14 billion revenue miles of service and nearly 48 billion passenger trips
- From 2013-2017 in **Florida:** 54 personal security events for nearly 700 million revenue miles of service and 1.3 billion passenger trips

Transit Personal Security Statistics



Transit Personal Security Statistics



Transit Personal Security Statistics

- 5,700 injuries in the U.S.; 43 in Florida (2013-2017)
- 430 fatalities in the U.S.; 7 in Florida (2013-2017)
- While the majority of transit riders are women, the majority of injuries and fatalities due to personal security events occur to men
- Distinction between the types of events that meet thresholds for NTD reporting and the types of incidents that include harassment



Florida Transit Agencies

- The study team reached out to representatives of a few Florida transit agencies to learn more about the experiences of women passengers and employees regarding personal safety
- Three agencies were able to provide information within the timeframe of this study
 - Palm Tran (Palm Beach County)
 - Votran (Volusia County, Daytona Beach area)
 - LeeTran (Lee County, Fort Myers area)



Florida Transit Agencies

- At the time of the study, harassment complaints were generally not tracked, but each agency acknowledged that these issues exist
 - Harassers are not just men, but also women, and groups of teens – agency responses tend to address all of these types of harassment
- At the smaller agencies, a harasser can often be identified and confronted by transit agency staff or police



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Florida Transit Agencies

- Not just passengers, but female bus operators and transit supervisors are also victims of harassment
 - Passengers crowding the operator while driving
 - Stalking
 - Staring/groping
 - Unwanted comments and conversation
 - Authority not respected



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Florida Transit Agencies

- Online reporting (apps) and physical reporting (cards that can be filled out) often have more of a system security focus, but can also assist with personal security reporting
- Apps can immediately provide a description, photo, GPS location
- People may be more likely to report something if they can do so without getting “too involved”



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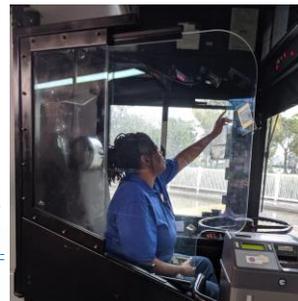
Florida Transit Agencies

- Better lighting, including solar lighting, at bus stops
- Operator barriers
- Some considering armed security at major transit stations, transfer facilities
- Initiatives to combat human trafficking
- Enhanced training



<https://www.urbansolarcorp.com/products/applications/bus-stop-lighting/>

<https://www.mastransitmag.com/safety-security/safety-services-products/press-release/21132244/pinellas-suncoast-transit-authority-psta-psta-completes-installation-of-safety-shields-on-100-percent-of-bus-fleet>



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Findings

- The current norm treats the harassment of women as a problem of individuals, rather than a societal problem – transit can help to change this
- Educate the next generation of planners, engineers, and other transit professionals to address these issues
- L. A. Metro found that 20% of women avoided a new light rail line due to fear of harassment and other safety concerns
 - The agency learned that “men should listen to women when they describe their environment”



Findings

- Limited resources at most transit agencies necessitate that actions to improve safety and security will tend to be focused on all passengers and workers
- However, these agencies are in a unique position as public entities to address gender-based harassment, not only on their services, but by engaging with their communities to address these issues on a larger, societal scale



Findings

- Future research can include surveys and focus groups to determine passenger characteristics and travel patterns, along with attitudes regarding personal safety
- Additional research can be conducted on existing and potential strategies for making not only women feel safer using transit, but also other under-represented groups (older adults, disabled, LGBTQ, etc.)



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Thank you!



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