

Project: [Florida's Public Transit and Women's Safety – Real and Perceived Concerns](#)

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Summary

In 2019, the Federal Transit Agency (FTA) implemented a Safety Management System (SMS) to manage safety risks and risk mitigation. Although it is thorough, effective in implementing procedures, and promotes active employee involvement, there is nothing that addresses specific groups of transit users, particularly women. Transit safety for women is more than social equity as access to transit often means access to significant economic and educational opportunities. This report seeks to address transit safety concerns for women with Florida as a case study. The full report includes three sections: background and a review of literature, security data from the National Transit Database, and a set of discussions with three Florida transit agencies, and overall research results.

In conducting background research, the report found that many women simply learn to accept that public spaces in general, particularly at night, are not places where they feel safe. Recent literature reports found that one in five women and one in seventy-one men will be raped at some point in their lives. Further, 91% of victims of sexual assault and rape are female and that Florida is ranked as the third-highest human trafficking destination in the US.

In relation to transportation planning, transportation environments like unmaintained pedestrian facilities with overgrown foliage and other obstacles, poorly lit parking lots and structure, isolated bus stops, etc., all represent stressful settings for women. A University of Alabama report found that when choosing a mode of transportation, women are more concerned with reliability and perceived safety more than travel time. Ultimately, there is some research that evaluated characteristics impacting mode choice for men and women, but no efforts explore women's personal safety to any extent. The background obtained from existing literature also found that one hurdle in transit safety is the transfer of knowledge from researchers to practitioners who can make change. A solution would have transit agencies, as well as local and regional governments, prioritize incorporating women's voices in planning processes. Other solutions include anti-harassment campaigns, like the app "Digi Police" in Japan that can be used to activate an extremely loud voice shouting "Stop it!" Another app, "Safetipin," available in some countries, allows users to map the safety in public spaces. Bus stops, for example, are given a safety score. There are also operational policy solutions, like allowing intermittent stops along routes at night or that run in areas that are considered to be less safe. These stops can minimize the distance a passenger must walk to access the transit service at night. In evaluating data from the National Transit Database, the report found that since one of the main thresholds for reporting an incident to the NTD is injury that required immediate medical attention, many assault incidents are not ever reported. The data found that assaults are the most common personal security event occurring on public transit; however, they are still a rare occurrence.

The report also conducted three case studies of Florida transit agencies that includes Palm Tran in Palm Beach, VOTRAN in Volusia County, and Lee Tran in Lee County. In discussions on harassment and personal security, the agencies reported that there are occasional complaints of harassment and that they are mostly from women. They reported that sometimes it may not be clear to passengers that the operator should not be interfering with passengers who are fighting or harassing each other, and often look at the operator for assistance or direction. On smaller transit services, it is possible for a regular customer to be identified as someone who frequently causes trouble and can be easily banned from the agency. Ultimately, all three of the agencies are aware, to some degree, of the unique security issues faced by women traveling in public spaces; however, at the current time, resources are scarce, and most are allocated toward a variety of safety and security issues. More close attention to these issues will require a strong top-down leadership from the agencies.

The report found that transit agencies tend to follow the current norm of treating harassment of women as a problem of individuals, rather than a problem in society of how women are treated. The analysis of the NTD data showed that more men than women are injured or killed as a result of personal security events on public transit (with the exception of rape), even though women tend to make up more than half of all public transit ridership. The research suggests that transit agencies can benefit from focusing attention on women's security by gaining ridership because, when women feel unsafe on transit, they will likely not take the trip. Ultimately, transit agencies are in a unique position as public entities to lead the way in addressing gender-based harassment, not only by addressing incidents on their services, but by engaging with their communities to address these issues on a larger, societal scale.

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