

TRANSIT SAFETY FOR ALL

Ensuring riders and drivers feel safe and secure

Transportation Choices' work on transit safety

Everyone deserves to be safe on transit. We know that transit is one of the safest modes people can use to get around, but we want to be responsive to concerns about safety. From some increases in reported incidents to a few high-profile headlines, transit safety is on people's minds. We know that riders and drivers need to feel a sense of security and belonging on transit, so we take transit safety seriously.

One of our top policy priorities is continuing to improve ridership and the transit experience for riders, operators, and other frontline staff. We want to understand what safety looks and feels like for people of different backgrounds and at agencies of various sizes from around the state. Then, we want to make a difference where it counts — by identifying best practices, resources, and funding that can make a meaningful difference. It's a major endeavor involving research, engagement with a diverse array of stakeholders, education, organizing, and advocacy.

Most importantly, we want to help people get the support they need rather than rely on punishment and policing. Approaching this issue with a mobility justice lens means we must redefine safety to include the right of Black and Brown bodies to be free from harassment and police violence and to reduce the number of people who suffer financial and mobility impacts from getting caught up in the court system. **Reducing safety incidents while reducing harms from enforcement is crucial to our work.**

What we're asking for now

Policymakers can help improve rider experience by supporting agencies with policies and resources for pilots, programs, and infrastructure that address safety in holistic ways.

- **Continue to fund agency requests for programs that address safety** with an emphasis on rider support and human services rather than policing and enforcement.
- **Convene agency and legislative partners to discuss safety issues** in conjunction with marginalized populations and those most impacted by transit safety in order to better understand specific issues and develop equitable policy solutions.

What we've learned about transit safety

Taking transit is a very safe choice. In terms of crashes, transit is 10 times safer than taking a car. Hundreds of thousands of people ride transit in Washington every day without incident — the overall number of serious assaults is low per trips taken. Additionally, secondhand drug exposure is unlikely to pose a health risk, and research shows that transit use is not a singularly important factor in the transmission of communicable diseases.

The issues impacting people's experience of safety are not specific to transit.

In the past few years, COVID undermined existing safety nets and exacerbated existing crises: the lack of affordable housing, the opioid epidemic, and a breakdown in healthcare and treatment for behavioral and mental illness have left a lot of people struggling and vulnerable without many public spaces or resources to meet their needs. The impacts of these crises are seen and felt by transit users, but it's important not to blame the people most impacted. These crises require systemic solutions.

Different users experience safety differently. For example, women and non-binary people are less likely than men to feel safe on transit. And BIPOC, disabled, women, gender minorities, transit-dependent, and non-white riders often experience higher levels of harassment and increased feelings of insecurity.

More policing is not the answer. While some people may feel safer in the presence of police, historically marginalized people can face race-based harassment and police brutality, and be deterred from riding transit altogether. Increased police presence puts marginalized people at risk of discrimination, violence, and even death.

Transit agencies are acting quickly to improve safety. An equitable approach to safety planning is essential for transit agencies to fulfill their role as responsible and responsive public transportation providers. Progressive policies adopted by agencies statewide are reimagining safety and proactively implementing alternative security programs and initiatives that move beyond traditional enforcement for incident response.

Further reading

- "Safety For All." TransitCenter, July 2021
- "Safety on Transit." TransForm, October 2023

To learn more about our ongoing transit safety work, please contact Hester Serebrin at hester@transportationchoices.org.

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