

UCLA

Policy Briefs

Title

Gender Equity in Transportation for Unhoused Women

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6qn1n07q>

Author

Lee, DaYoung

Publication Date

2024-07-10

Gender Equity in Transportation for Unhoused Women

DaYoung Lee, MURP • 2024

Issue

Homelessness in Los Angeles is deeply stigmatized, resulting in unhoused individuals facing numerous barriers to accessing basic needs and services. In a city dominated by car-centric infrastructure, travel is one of these barriers. For unhoused women, these difficulties are compounded by additional safety concerns related to both their housing status and gender. According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, a reported 222,970 women were experiencing homelessness in the U.S., underscoring the critical need to address the challenges they face on a daily basis. There remains insufficient literature to support the development of essential policy changes. This research aims to fill that gap, partly through policy recommendations targeting the specific transportation needs and travel experiences of unhoused women within Los Angeles's urban fabric.

In a 2019 Changing Lanes Study, the Los Angeles Department of Transportation (LADOT) adopted the goal of achieving a gender-equitable transportation system. The report focused on several neighborhoods across Los Angeles with a high proportion of BIPOC women, identifying the specific travel barriers they encounter and proposing strategies to address these challenges. Building on this initiative, LADOT staff hope to better understand the needs of unhoused women, who face unique transportation challenges and safety concerns while traveling and using public spaces.

Study Approach

The researcher completed a comprehensive literature review and conducted community outreach through interviews with unhoused women in two primary locations: the Metro

G Line (Orange) station in Van Nuys and the Little Tokyo/Arts District rail station in Downtown Los Angeles. The researcher was connected to the unhoused communities in these neighborhoods through Aetna Solidarity Coalition in Van Nuys and JTown Action Solidarity in Little Tokyo, two mutual aid organizations that advocate for their unhoused neighbors. Because women — including unhoused women — remain more reliant on public transportation, the interviews and analysis focused on alternative modes of transportation, including public transportation, biking, and walking. None of the women interviewed used a private vehicle. The 12 final interviews focused on unhoused women's frequent destinations, modes of transportation, and the limitations they face while navigating the urban environment. This research was intended to uncover strategies for LADOT and other transit agencies to reduce some of these transportation and safety barriers.

Research Findings

- » Biking is becoming a preferred mode of travel for many unhoused women in the San Fernando Valley due to its lower financial and environmental costs. It must be noted that the interviews were conducted before the intense summer heat waves that the San Fernando Valley experiences.
- » Bicycle use and access to fare-free transit both provide a sense of autonomy and independence, allowing unhoused women to manage their daily routines and responsibilities more effectively.
- » Women interviewed in Little Tokyo mentioned the usefulness of the LADOT DASH bus line in their routine travel, while those in Van Nuys did not. This could be due to the higher concentration of fare-free DASH service in central Los Angeles in comparison to Van Nuys (Figure 1).

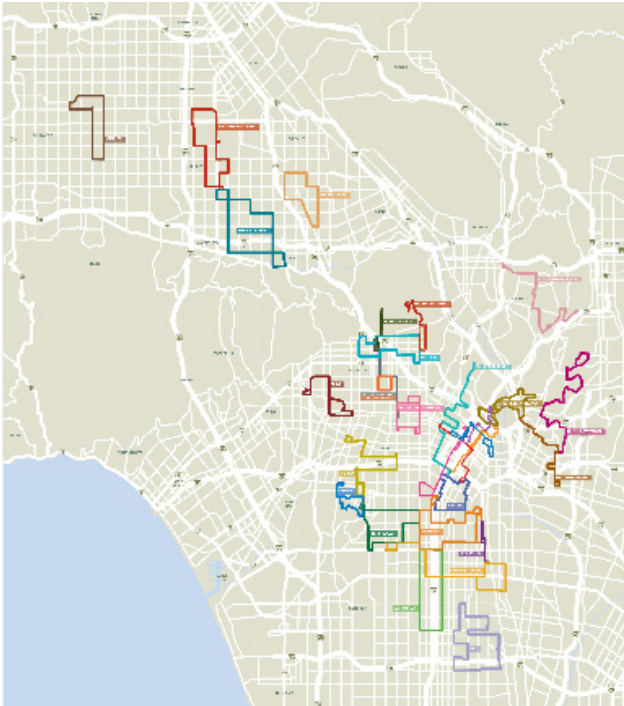


Figure 1.

LADOT DASH System Map

- » Unhoused women in the San Fernando Valley who have to travel to the central city for resources maximize their travel by completing additional tasks during these trips.
- » Though unhoused women report feeling concerned when alone or in areas with few witnesses around, they are still wary of the presence of law enforcement.
- » Public transportation vehicles and stations serve as primary locations for recharging phones.
- » Bushes and other foliage provide a sense of security and concealment, reducing the risk of exposure to violence and harassment in public spaces.
- » Anti-homelessness measures, like Los Angeles' 41.18 Ordinance that prohibits sleeping, sitting or placing property within certain distances of establishments, lead to displacement and disrupt daily routines by forcing individuals to navigate complex legal and geographic boundaries.

Recommendations

The findings suggest that to address the transportation barriers faced by unhoused women in Los Angeles, multiple policy recommendations must be considered.

- » Addressing the fundamental issue of housing is essential in reducing the instability that forces unhoused women to seek stable resting places.
- » Implementing more robust data collection and analysis will help identify the needs and gaps among different groups, providing the evidence necessary to recognize the unhoused as a protected class.
- » Partnering with homelessness advocacy mutual aid groups can facilitate a non-law enforcement approach to outreach strategies, fostering community engagement built on trust and consistency.
- » Securing increased funding for essential amenities, such as providing shade, seating, and phone charging stations at bus stops and on buses, will improve the safety and accessibility of public transportation and overall mobility.
- » Implementing infrastructural improvements, including increasing the number of bicycle lanes, planting more trees and bushes, and access to fare-free transit, will be essential to support the autonomy, mobility, and safety of unhoused women.
- » All in all, a comprehensive approach to providing relief for unhoused women will require a combination of resources and support systems

More Information

Lee, D. (2024). Bridging the Gap: Gender Equity in Transportation for Unhoused Women (Master's capstone, UCLA). Retrieved from: <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2m1257zm>

This capstone project was also supported by the