

Lakh ko 50 Bus Campaign

Women, children, and *urban mobility*

SUM Net India
Sustainable Urban Mobility Network





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Parisar

Women, Children, and Urban Mobility

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Foreword

Parisar has been advocating for better public transport – with a clear emphasis on bus-based public transport – for more than three decades, as a sine qua non for sustainable cities. We have seen the rampant increase in personal vehicles aided and abetted by misplaced public policies as ruinous for cities, their environments and the health of citizens.

In the second year of our “*Lakh ko 50*” campaign—a campaign aimed at directly highlighting the abysmal lack of city bus services, crudely measured by the number of buses per lakh urban population—we decided to take a thematic approach. This was done primarily to be able to engage a wider political spectrum and thus bolster the demand for improving city bus services. However, it also allowed us to explore more deeply the connection between better public transport and the theme at hand.

The first theme, women and child development and public transport, has yielded rich dividends. We have had the opportunity to engage with women and women’s groups across Maharashtra, understanding and learning about their experiences commuting in cities, their trials and tribulations using city buses. So too the empowerment and freedom that good public transport promises these intrepid women, as they handle work, domestic duties and social obligations. We have similarly been harrowed by the seemingly unending stories of harassment on public buses (and public spaces), cutting across cities and socio-economic class.

There has been much focus on the need for gender-sensitive cities, not just transport systems, and a wide variety of reports and opinion articles on this topic. We are glad to add to this growing chorus of voices. This report focuses on the State of Maharashtra, underlining the issues and drawing from the experiences and recommendations of women across cities in this State.

It is clichéd but deserves to be repeated. We cannot hope for a strong prosperous society without strong, independent and empowered women, and having a gender-sensitive public transport system is one of the key ingredients for this to happen. We hope this report will help the Women and Child Development Department of the Government of Maharashtra see this connection as clearly as we do, and seriously consider the recommendations that have been made by women themselves.

I would like to thank the author, Aila Bandagi, for an excellent report put together on such short notice, and Swati Pathak from the Parisar team for guiding and facilitating the making of this report.

Ranjit Gadgil
Program Director, Parisar

Executive Summary

Transportation is the primary connection between women and opportunities for economic independence, and bears a huge impact on women's empowerment. Cities, while providing children with better opportunities, also have certain negative impacts such as air pollution, lack of independent mobility, inadequate play spaces and lack of safety on the roads. The Women and Child Development (WCD) department at the state level remains the single most powerful and effective body to address the issue and substantially improve women and children's lives in our cities.

Women's travel patterns and mobility concerns are very different from that of men. The characteristics of women's urban mobility are:

- Women primarily depend on walking and public transport for their commute.
- Women do not travel along the centre-periphery routes because of their employment in the informal sector.
- A lot of women travel during off-peak hours owing to their care work responsibilities.
- Women trip-chain i.e. they combine multiple destinations within one trip.
- Women face sexual harassment (and the threat of it) on an everyday basis in public spaces and transport.

This means that a bad public transport system has a disproportionately higher impact on women than on men. Low frequency during off-peak hours increases women's travel time and adds an unnecessary burden to the double responsibility women already take up. Transport systems are unaffordable for women because multiple short distance tickets cost more than a single long distance ticket. Socio-cultural norms and fear of harassment keeps women away from accessing education and work opportunities.

Half the population in Maharashtra is living in cities. Even with 47 percent of the urban population being female, their work force participation is very low (18.8 percent). Almost half the women in a study in Maharashtra indicated that they are not allowed to travel

freely outside of their community - limiting access to opportunities. Of those who do travel outside their homes, most depend on walking, bus and train. Women in Maharashtra are also spending more time in transit than men because the same distance travelled by walking or using public transport takes longer to cover. However, the situation is not all bad because the state government has already expressed its willingness to improve urban women's mobility by implementing the Tejaswini buses programme, even though it was not successful.

In our country, eight months after the COVID-19 lockdown was imposed, 13 percent fewer women than a year ago were employed or looking for jobs, compared to 2 percent fewer men. Cost, personal security and time poverty are considered as the three main factors that influence women's transportation accessibility. Safe, comfortable, convenient and affordable transport can play an important role in not only helping meet women's practical needs such as access to schools and markets, but also in contributing to their empowerment by facilitating access to social and economic opportunities.

Gender expertise is perceived to be within the domain of conventional women's departments such as Women and Child Development but they are not usually involved in urban and transportation planning and implementation. We further urge the WCD to include the goal of a safe, comfortable, reliable, accessible and gender-responsive urban transport system within their agenda. The most effective way to do this, would be to:

- Develop a gender-responsive set of recommendations through extensive consultations with key stakeholders—specifically with women, women's groups, and groups working on children's development and welfare—for strengthening urban transport systems, especially bus-based public transport across cities in Maharashtra.
- Allocate resources from the department meant to ensure the safety and attainment of development goals for women.
- Gender sensitize transportation workers and department staff.
- Champion a State urban bus-based public transport policy that is inclusive of the above-stated goals.

Women, children, and *urban mobility*

Transportation is the primary connection between women and opportunities for economic independence, and bears a huge impact on women's empowerment. Transportation is what connects women to schools, colleges, offices, hospitals, and places of leisure. Access is gendered, whether it is to land, money, property, rights, or even skills. Transport is no different. [The everyday mobility](#) of women is not determined by simple factors like availability of or proximity to transportation but a set of complex issues.

According to the [2011 Census of India](#), women and girls make up close to 50 percent of our urban population. They comprise only [19 percent](#) of other workers. Yet, [84 percent](#) of women's trips are by walking, cycling, or public transport. [National Sample Survey Organisation \(NSSO\)](#) data also shows that more than 60 percent of both rural and urban households use the bus as their primary mode of transport, followed by auto-rickshaws. This clearly conveys that women primarily depend on public transportation for their travel needs, and a bad public transit system can have a direct and disproportionately higher negative impact on women.

Data from the [Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy's \(CMIE\) Consumer Pyramids Household Survey](#) shows the urban female labour participation rate (FLPR) in April 2020, the first month of lockdown, [fell to 7.35 percent](#). This was over 200 basis points lower than its

average of 9.7 percent in 2019-20 and much lower than rural female labour participation rate of 11.3 percent in 2018-19. It dropped to 7.2 percent in October and fell further in November at 6.9 percent. Women are mostly employed in the informal sector in our country, due to which most workplaces that women travel to are not in the central business districts of cities. Women's trips also tend to be during [off-peak hours](#). Owing to their care work responsibilities, women often

leave the house after the men have left for work and before the children come back from school—hours during which the frequency of public transport is lower—thus increasing their waiting time. This is because transport planning typically caters to the needs of men employed in the formal sector who travel from outskirts to centre of the city in the morning and back in the evening. It does not cater to the [travel patterns and needs](#) of a large portion of women, particularly those working



in the informal sector.

Women's travel is also characterised by 'trip-chaining'. They generally combine multiple destinations in one trip because of a double burden of economic and care related activities. Due to this, women's trips are generally shorter, more in number, and often require that they travel in the opposite direction of the final destination, diverting from the most direct route, and/or breaking the whole journey into multiple legs. Public transport agencies typically set up fares such that multiple short trips cost more than a single long trip. Women end up paying more than men because of this difference in travel patterns.

The lack of safety in public spaces and public transport remains the most concerning aspect of mobility. Even in cases where individual women have not faced any direct form of violence, the fear of what might happen continues to be a deterrent. This limits women's movement and the distances they travel alone. Multiple studies conducted in [Delhi](#), [Mumbai](#), [Guwahati](#), [Bengaluru](#), and [Chennai](#) show disturbing trends of high levels of sexual harassment faced by women while waiting for or using public transport.

The World Bank states that women's mobility is affected by restrictive socio-cultural norms, a lack of safe and sufficient transport infrastructure, gender-blind planning and governance, and a lack of access to information and communication technology.

Urban environments can also pose challenges for children, especially for the most vulnerable among them. On the one hand, cities provide advantages to children, such as better schools, sporting facilities, and health care. On the other hand, cities also force children to deal with disadvantages such as [pollution](#), [lack of independent mobility](#), [inadequate play spaces](#), and [lack of recreational or public spaces](#). Almost all children need the assistance of a caregiver or someone elder for mobility. Often, primary caregivers are

women who use public transport and walk. Providing safe, healthy and cleaner forms of transport, like walking, cycling, and public transport, and improving them can help reduce accident risks, along with reducing the exposure of children to pollutants on the streets.

In India, road traffic injuries claim a disproportionate number of young lives every day. Nationally, [9,977 people under the age of 18 died in road accidents in 2018](#), constituting 6.6 percent of all road accident victims. In 2019, this number [increased by almost 12 percent to 11,168 \(7.4 percent of total accident victims\)](#). With automobiles dominating streets at high speeds, it has become increasingly risky for children to cycle, walk, or play outside without being exposed to high risks of traffic accidents. [More than three million children](#) under five die each year from environment-related causes and conditions in the world. More than [80 per cent of all deaths](#) in developing countries attributable to air pollution-induced lung infections occur among children under the age of five.

Globally, living within 50 metres of a major road could increase the risk of lung cancer by up to 10 percent and stunt children's growth by [up to 14 percent](#). In India, [more than 16 lakh](#) people have died of air pollution in 2019 alone. As per a study conducted by HEAL Foundation and Breathe Blue in 2015, more than [one-third of school children](#) in four big cities of India suffer from reduced lung capacity. Prioritising sustainable mobility planning in our cities can reduce pollution levels, increase children's access to public and play spaces, and better aid in their development.

The main [objectives of the Women and Child Development \(WCD\) Department](#) are to focus on promoting the survival, protection, development, welfare and participation of women and children in a holistic manner. The department is responsible for policy making, formulation of programmes or

“Mostly, the solutions for gender-responsive public transport are in the form of women-exclusive buses, increasing surveillance and app-based solutions while holistic considerations like frequency, coverage, service reliability and affordability take a backseat.”

Pranjali Deshpande, Transport expert, Independent Consultant, World Bank

“Reservation of seats in public transport for women is not a sign of weakness. It is a recognition of citizenship. It is a way to tell the women that they belong in buses and in public spaces.”

Shilpa Phadke, co-author, Why Loiter: Women and Risk on Mumbai Streets

schemes, implementation of development programmes, and co-ordination of efforts of both governmental and non-governmental organizations working in the field of women and child development. Since mobility, especially public transport, plays such an important role in the lives of women and children, the WCD needs to pay urgent attention to the concerns of these vulnerable groups of people in urban transport. The Nirbhaya Fund instituted by the central government under the Women and Child Development Ministry is an

important initiative to demonstrate that urban transport is, after all, a women and children's issue. However, urban transport and the problems with it vary from city to city and can be best solved at the municipal level. Unfortunately, our cities do not have the political will or the financial backing to address such a complicated issue. The WCD at the state level remains the single most powerful and effective body to address the issue and substantially improve women's and children's lives in our cities.

This report gives a detailed perspective on the situation of urbanisation and urban transport usage in the cities of Maharashtra, focusing on big and fast growing cities of Mumbai, Pune, Nagpur, Amravati, Solapur, and Aurangabad. It will also make a strong case for why urban transport is an issue that requires the urgent attention of the WCD. It also looks at some best practice examples from across the world and India while bringing in a grassroots perspective and expert opinion on the matter.



Case studies from around the world

Vienna's government has made the city a [safer and more convenient](#) place for women after incorporating a gender lens into urban design. Vienna emphasised how gender-sensitive planning has many [overlaps with other policy areas](#). For instance, more walkable, greener cities that respect sustainable mobility principles benefit everyone. Vienna incorporated gender mainstreaming into urban planning and design. As the city's deputy mayor, Maria Vassilakou, [wrote in 2013](#) that gender mainstreaming ensures "fair shares in the city" for all by forcing planning to be approached from different perspectives.

In 1992, Vienna started the Frauenburg, the city's first women's office led by Kail, one of the world's pre-eminent experts in gender mainstreaming. The survey by the women's organisation of the governing Social Democratic Party led to a breakthrough revelation: roughly two-thirds of car journeys

were made by men, while two-thirds of those on foot were by women. "That was really an 'a-ha' moment," [Kail told the Guardian](#). For the first time, she was able to prove that men and women's experiences of city living were different – and women's were being overlooked entirely. Kail noted that transport planners had thought to devise standards for car parks, but not ramps for bikes or prams, "because they thought it didn't matter". When the women's office opened nearly 30 years ago, transport planners were exclusively "white, middle-class men," she says – "and car drivers in the city looked like them". When the city is viewed only as though through a windscreen, women feel the absence of measures to benefit pedestrians in a way that men typically do not.

The same [article](#) describes that between 2002 to 2006, street lighting was [improved in 26 areas](#) identified in surveys as inducing anxiety; traffic

lights were altered to prioritise pedestrians, and seating was installed in nine new locations. Initially, more than a kilometre of pavement was widened, and five areas were made entirely barrier-free, so as to better accommodate prams, wheelchair users, and elderly people.

Vienna also published a gender mainstreaming manual which is [available for free online](#).



Maharashtra

Urbanisation and female labour force participation

Almost half (49 percent) of the households in Maharashtra were located in urban areas in 2011 itself, which adds up to 45 percent of the total population. This population is estimated to be growing at a rate of 23.64 percent, per decade which indicates that even by conservative estimates, more Maharashtrians are now living in urban areas than in rural areas. 47 percent of this urban population was female and 11.9 percent were children under the age of 6, in 2011.

The female labour force participation (FLFPR) in the state was almost 31 percent in 2017-18, significantly higher than the national average of 23

percent. This is largely due to the rural labour force participation which is nearly 30 percent, almost 12 percentage points higher than the national estimates. The urban labour force participation rate in Maharashtra is only 18.8 percent, almost similar to the national trends. This is a highly concerning trend and we need to ask an important question as to **why women in the cities of a state with high female labour force participation are staying out of work.**

“If women are provided free public transport, I think their work force participation rate will improve substantially. Further, the dropout rate of girls will reduce because they will have better and affordable access to mobility.”

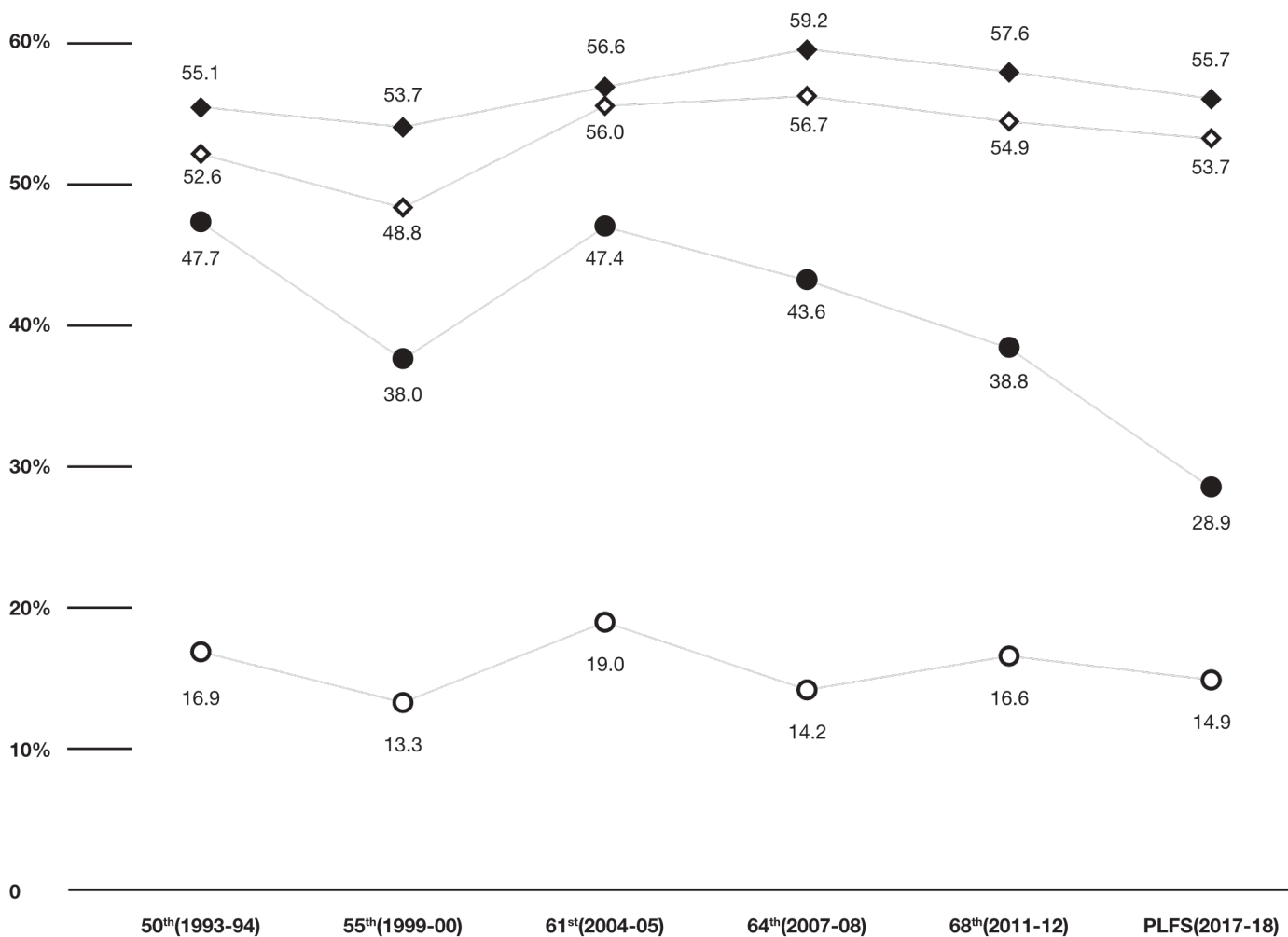
Pranjali Deshpande, Transport expert, Independent Consultant, World Bank



“In Amravati, employment opportunities are available but they are not accessible. Local working women from economically weaker sections of the society have to walk to work as they cannot afford any other private means of transport. Lack of transportation is a major reason why many are forced to leave their work.”

Gunjan Gole, Social worker, Gokul Ashram, Amravati

Trends in work participation rates



◆ Rural Male
◇ Rural Female

● Urban Male
○ Urban Female

Source: EUS 1993-94, 1999-00, 2004-05, 2007-08, 2011-12 and PLFS 2017-18, NSSO, MoSPI, GoI

<https://iwwage.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Maharashtra-Factsheet.pdf>

Gender and transportation

Transportation plays a key role in connecting women to opportunities of economic independence. In Maharashtra, **almost half the women (48 percent)** are not allowed to go by themselves to the market, a health facility, and places outside their own community. This limited mobility is certainly a cause for concern. Understanding the impact of these limitations on women's mobility in the context of the need for public transportation the **Asian Development**

Bank established that women may turn down better employment opportunities further away from home in favour of lower-paid local opportunities when the public transport system is unreliable or unaffordable. In light of this, there is an urgent and important need to understand women's mobility in the cities of Maharashtra.

Information on urban mobility, especially gender disaggregated urban mobility is very limited. The most

“As a student, buses are the most affordable option for me but I have to change two buses every day to get to the college. Mostly, buses are full and getting an empty seat is no less than a dream! Moreover, if I miss my bus, the waiting period is at least an hour if not more.”

Pragati, Student of Biotechnology, LAD College of Arts Commerce and Science for Women, Nagpur

“Women are usually not aware of the routes and take the bus by asking passengers at the bus stop. Relying on strangers in such a manner is worrying and it can prove to be a risk.”

Jyotsna Waghmare, Principal, Dakshinya School and Director, Sankalp Charitable Trust, Mumbai

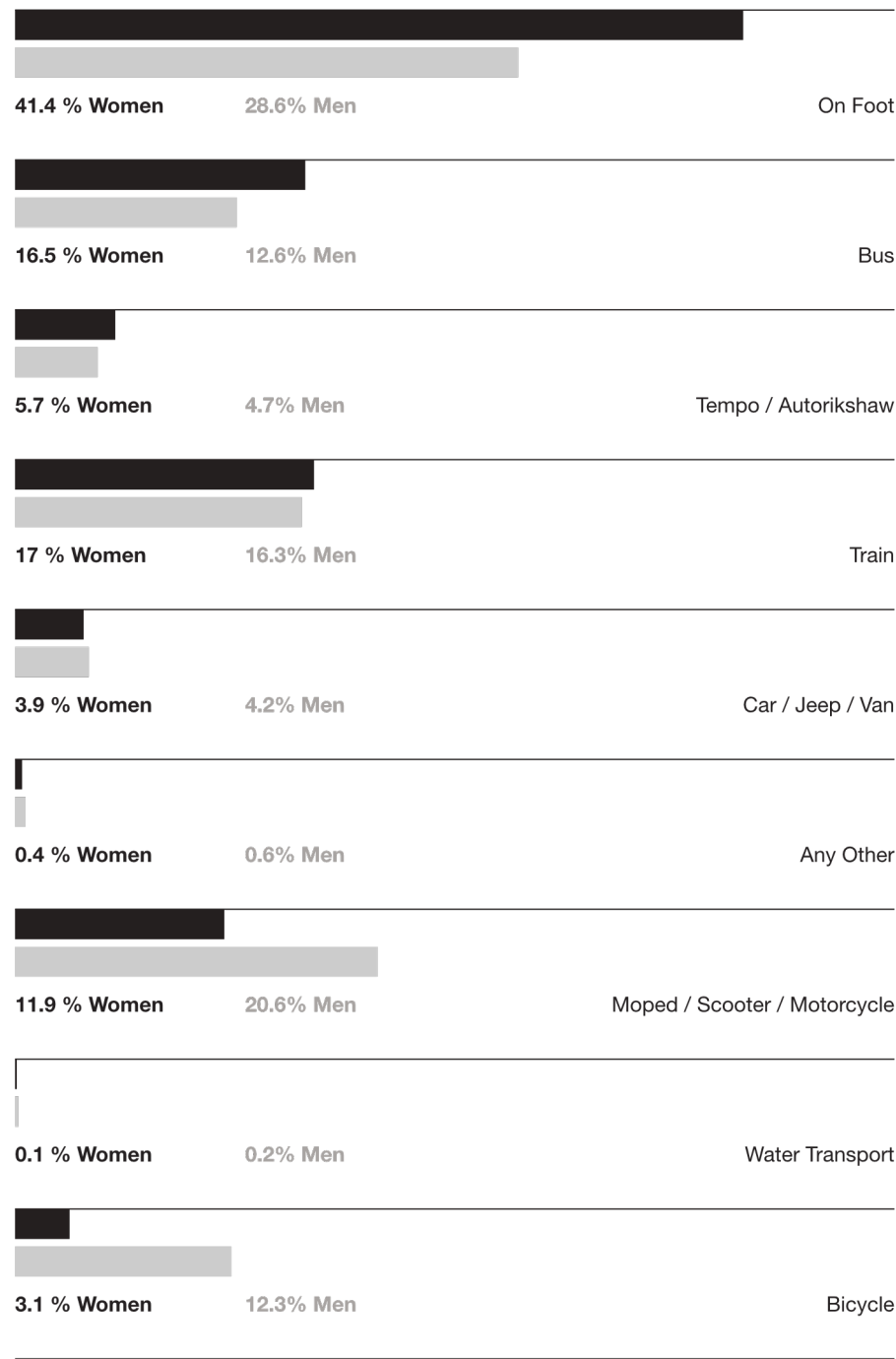


comprehensive source of data on urban women’s mobility is the Census of India. Though the dataset itself is dated (having been collected in 2011), the trends depicted in the Census remain valid as demonstrated by multiple agencies and authorities that still depend on the same information.

A very high number of women in urban Maharashtra — almost 28 percent — are reported as not traveling outside their house. While this could be surprising for most readers, it has to be noted that the mode of travel is only noted for people who are employed outside the house and are traveling for more than 500 meters between their home and destination. By definition, this dataset is excluding women’s travel for domestic work, health care, recreation and leisure. The graph on the right shows the different modes of travel that are used by men and women who are travelling for work outside their homes.

Most of the work trips by women—41 percent—are on foot. The next highest usage by women is of trains, no doubt impacted by the well connected local trains system in Mumbai. At 16.5 percent, bus is the third most used mode of transport for women and this usage would be higher in cities that do not have a well connected train system. On the other hand, walking remains the highest used mode of transport for men but the population dependent on it is much lower at only 28 percent. The second highest mode used by men is scooters or motorcycles and the number of men using this mode is almost equal to the men walking at almost 21 percent. The third most used mode for men is the train. In Mumbai, women made **45 percent more trips** by bus than by train, which increased to 67 per cent for households with incomes less than Rs 5,000 per month.

The differences in female and male patterns in the use of transport modes is very important to understand. Numerous studies have shown that even within a household, women are poorer than men because of lower

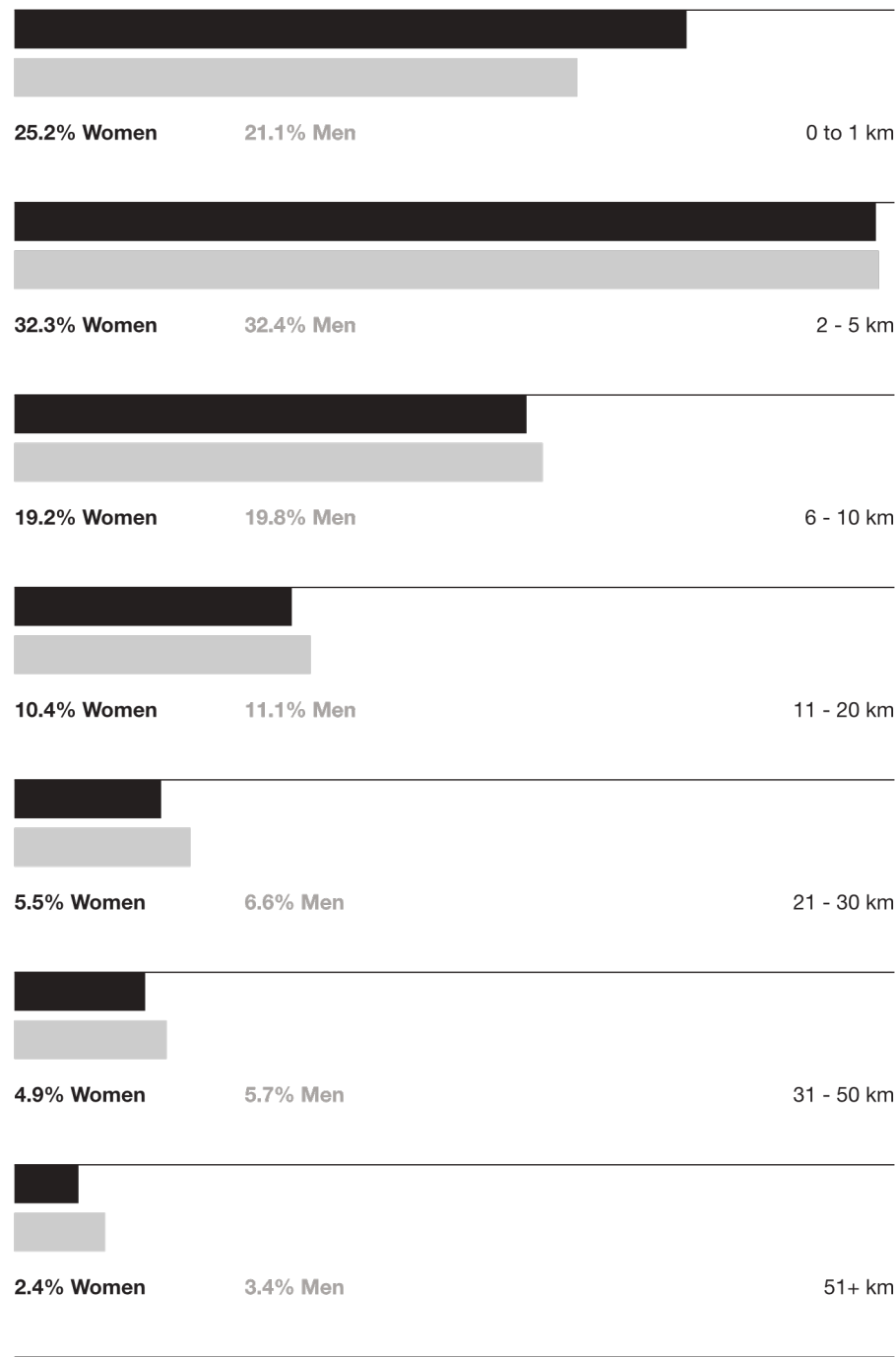


Travel Mode Distribution

Source: [Census of India, 2011](#)

status in the society, lower paid jobs and unpaid care work responsibilities. This means that women depend on the cheapest mobility options available to them - more often, walking longer distances and spending more time commuting. This also means that even if a household owns a private vehicle (especially if the household owns only one vehicle), women do not have access to it and continue to depend on public transportation and walking.

Another important aspect for us to note is the distance that people in cities are travelling. The following graph shows the distance reported by people who know how far they are travelling, or are able to calculate. The graph clearly shows that most people, both men and women, are travelling 2-5 kms everyday to get to work. While there are slightly more women travelling 0-1 kms, all distances between 6 kms to more than 51 kms have more men than women. Putting this in the context of women’s higher number of walking and public transport trips means that most of these distances are being covered on foot or via public transport. **This indicates that women are spending more time covering the same distance than men are.**



Travel Mode Distribution

Source: [Census of India, 2011](#)

Children and cities



While we notice that information on mobility patterns of women is limited, the same information in the case of children is almost nonexistent. A gap assessment study conducted by the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (ITDP) in Maharashtra, and Pune city in particular, states that disaggregated demographic information, trip characteristics (origin, destination, trip length, etc.), and mode share with regards to young children is not mentioned or mandated by any government policy, plan or guideline³³. This lack of data, in turn, prevents decision makers and planners from making evidence-based planning and design in our cities. The study also concludes that existing policies, plans, and guidelines overlook the needs of young children and caregivers in an urban environment as an isolated problem and do not commonly address them.

Psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott once said, “There is no such thing as a baby... There is a baby and someone.” In order to improve children’s lives, it is essential that we focus not only on the health and well-being of the children, but also on the empowerment of the mother. Especially in India, where mothers and other women in the family are the primary caregivers for children. Infrastructure support through quick, easy and affordable transportation would enhance the opportunities available to women. Its positive impact on livelihood would have a similar effect on nutrition and learning outcomes for their children. An argument can be made, in this case, that since children depend on their caregivers (mostly mothers) for their mobility in their early ages, **improving the transportation modes that the mothers use, will also improve children’s mobility.**

“We should think of transport not just in relation to work but in relation to play - this idea that it should facilitate our capacity to engage with our cities, belong to our cities, to have cities belong to us. Public transport must be seen as a larger public good.”

Shilpa Phadke, co-author, Why Loiter: Women and Risk on Mumbai Streets

Government's priorities

In 2016, Maharashtra introduced **Tejaswini buses**, which were ladies' special buses plying during peak hours in major cities including Mumbai, Navi Mumbai, Thane, Nagpur and Kalyan-Dombivli. **The cabinet said** that the decision has been taken to ensure security of women whose numbers are increasing in the workforce in urban centres and who face problems in commuting to work for want of secure mode³⁷. Our own study shows concerning trends in the Tejaswini bus schemes. So far, the experience in different cities has been that these ladies' special buses are introduced with much fanfare on Women's Day. However, they are introduced on very few routes and mostly during peak hours. Unfortunately, with the exception of Mumbai, most other cities have witnessed the closing down of these services because of financial losses. They either start allowing men during certain hours of the day or on holidays and eventually the buses stop

being "Tejaswini buses". These schemes or programs are also announced in an ad hoc manner, without any legal backing, meaning that they can also be shut down in the same manner.

It is important to acknowledge the efforts of the government in implementing this scheme, irrespective of the outcome, because it shows political and administrative will to have programmes that make urban commute safe for women. If only the government continued to finance the losses of the agency running the buses to keep these buses running for a longer period of time and during off-peak hours, the results would have been very different. It is exactly in this kind of advocacy that the Women and Child Development department (WCD) can play a crucial role.

"Bus services should not be determined by questions of profit and loss as it is an essential service."

Sujit Patwardhan, founder-member and trustee, Parisar

"The moment you have women only buses, not all will wait for it. Some will board other buses and the first one will not have the occupancy. Ultimately, what happens is that people begin to say 'women-only buses are a failure' and then the bus is made open for all. Similar thing happened with the Tejaswini Buses."

Pranjali Deshpande, Transport expert, Independent Consultant, World Bank



A policy note published by the World Bank studies mobility patterns and barriers to employment of women and men in the Greater Mumbai Region (GMR).

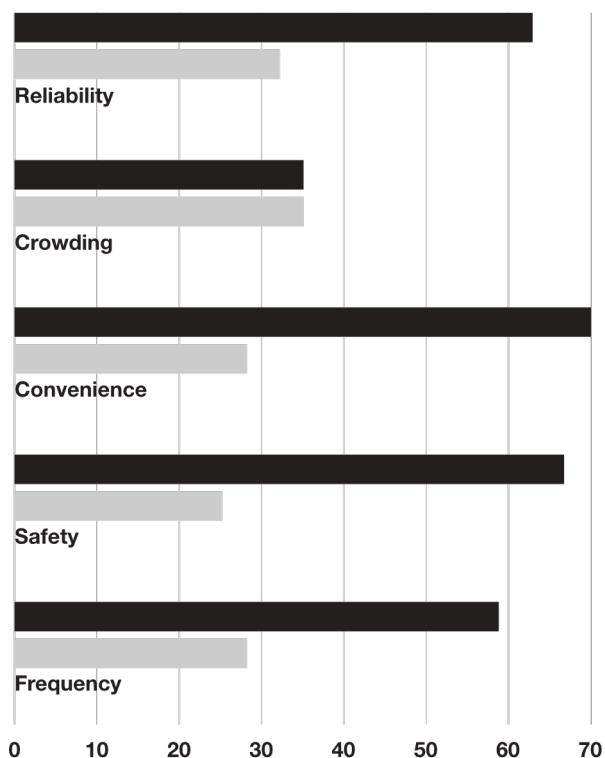
In 2019, 80 percent of men's trips but only 17 percent of women's trips were work related. Half of women's trips were for shopping or transporting children to and from school or tuition centres. 39 percent of women reported walking and 32 percent reported using public transit (rail or public bus) as their primary commute mode. In contrast, only 28 percent of men reported walking and 24 percent reported using public transit. 31 percent of the women surveyed reported commute as a barrier to work.

Between 2004 and 2019, the level of satisfaction with the bus and train systems in the GMR fell across different factors, as can be seen from the graph below. In the same period, men shifted largely to commuting to work by two-wheelers and women shifted to auto-rickshaws or taxis which tend to be more expensive per trip than two-wheelers. Owing to low private transport usage amongst women, there appears to be a surcharge or "pink tax" on women's mobility as they continue to use slower modes of and/or pay a higher price than men to cover similar distances.

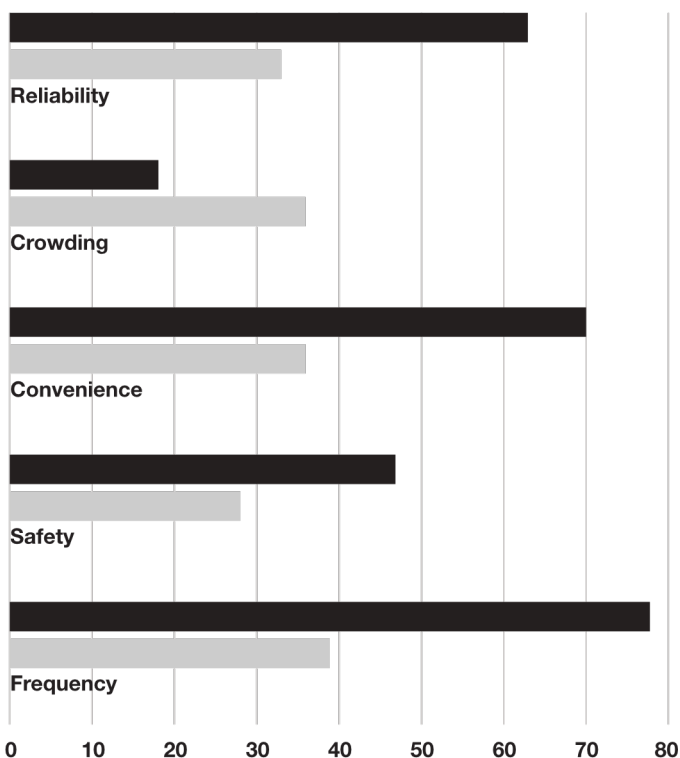
2004

2019

Percentage Respondents Satisfied with Rail



Percentage Respondents Satisfied with Bus



Source: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/35297>

Safety and Empowerment of Women and Children

The performance of urban transport services places **different burdens on women and men**, with the costs of poor public transport often being borne by women. A study of a low-income settlement in Delhi showed a gender dimension to the shelter-transport-livelihood link i.e. women are more affected than men when access to employment, education or basic services are located far away from their residences. For example, relocation of squatter settlements to the periphery of Delhi led to an **increase in female unemployment by 27 percent compared to just 5 percent for men**. In India eight months after the COVID-19 lockdown was imposed, **13 percent fewer women** than a year ago were employed or looking for jobs, compared to 2 percent fewer men. Inadequate mobility and safety, and lack of child care options were restricting women in urban centres from seeking work, according to the **'Impact of COVID-19 on Working Women'** report by Initiative for What Works to Advance Women and Girls in the Economy (IWWAGE).

Women's travel is characterized by **trip chaining**. In contrast to their travel patterns, the public transport fare system in Indian cities make it cheaper to take a single long trip instead of multiple short trips. For example, if a woman in Solapur has to travel a distance of 6 kilometers, it would cost her Rs 10. However, if she has to make 4 trips in a day, say to her children's school and to the vegetable market, which covers 6-7 kilometers, she would

end up spending Rs 40 on the bus fares. In the same city, if a man goes to an office that is 10 kilometres away and comes back home, he will end up spending Rs 30. The bus fare structure across major cities in Maharashtra like Mumbai, Nagpur, Pune, Amravati and Aurangabad happen to be similar to Solapur.

A study found that women from low-income households used slower and inexpensive modes of transport to manage transport costs which exacerbates their time poverty. Women tend to take more and shorter trips at different times of the day - during peak and afternoon off-peak hours. In Mumbai, **women traveled three-fourth the distance of men**. Unfortunately, the off-peak and peripheral public transport routes on which many women depend for their travel to the market or social facilities have **much less priority** than the radial commuter corridors going to the city centre. Cost, personal security and time poverty are considered as the three main factors that influence **women's transportation accessibility**.

Safe, comfortable and affordable transport can play an important role in not only meeting women's practical needs such as access to schools and markets, but also in contributing to their strategic empowerment by facilitating access to social and economic opportunities⁴⁷. In recent times, sexual violence in public spaces and transport, especially in our cities, has become a serious issue. The fear of

"When a woman is molested, it is difficult for her to speak up. She would rather just get off the bus. Besides, the employees on the bus don't usually help."

Anjali Pawar, Director, Sakhee

"The vector of equality when it comes to public transport is not that everyone can get on a train or a bus but the vector of equality is, does everyone actually get on to a bus or a train."

Shilpa Phadke, co-author, Why Loiter: Women and Risk on Mumbai Streets

sexual violence has an adverse effect on women's already limited mobility, and impacts their right to access the city and participate in the development process.

In Mumbai, a survey done by Akshara Centre in 2013 showed that 46 percent of women reported facing sexual harassment inside buses and 17 percent inside trains. While there are occurrences of gruesome and violent crimes, the defining characteristic of violence against women is its

normalization, and ordinary and continuous nature. It has been acknowledged that there is high under-reporting of the cases of sexual harassment. Many women find it difficult to report instances that take place while in commute. It is also very difficult to identify the perpetrator because of the anonymity provided by a crowd - in many instances, women simply end up moving away from the harassers and are unable to do anything else.



Case studies from around the world

Transport for London (TfL) launched the [Project Guardian in 2013](#) as a partnership between British Transport Police (BTP), the Metropolitan Police Service, the City of London Police, and TfL. A helpline number was widely publicized and awareness campaigns were conducted to help people gain confidence in approaching the Police. TfL staff and police officers were given [special training](#) to handle the cases of sexual harassment on public transport in London.

[Action on Equality](#) is a four-year action plan (2016-2020) that promotes equality by enhancing access to transport services and employment for a diverse group of people through accessible bus stops, legible maps, real time information on buses, and equal opportunities for all the staff⁷⁷. With 11 equality goals that aim at safer and convenient public transport in London, the plan includes priority seating, improved lighting around the

bus stops, safer streets for pedestrians and cyclists, diverse workforce etc.

London also introduced a [hopper fare](#) in 2016. it [allows passengers](#) to make as many changes as possible within 60 minutes. It was found to be [particularly beneficial to Londoners on low incomes](#) who rely more heavily on the bus network. Using the hopper fare, bus passengers can make longer journeys across London for just £1.50 for a standard adult fare. The fact that in three years, more than [368 million trips](#) were made on the hopper fare in London speaks volumes of the success of this scheme. This has the added advantage of encouraging sustainable transport among people by making it cheaper and hence, more attractive. This hopper fare is of particular advantage to women who trip chain, allowing them to make multiple trips at a standard fare.

Urban Transportation and Governance

The Sustainable Development Goal 11.2, which aims to, “by 2030, provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons” remains unfulfilled in Indian states, including Maharashtra. With an urban population of 45.23 percent, Maharashtra was the third most urbanised among major states, behind Tamil Nadu (48.45 percent) and Kerala (47.72 percent) in 2011 itself.

Unfortunately, gender is not a ‘core competence’ among urban local institutions or managers, who are primarily concerned with the provisioning of basic services. Gender expertise is perceived to be within the domain of conventional women’s departments such as Women and Child Development but they are not usually involved in urban infrastructure and transportation planning and implementation.

In India, women’s concerns in urban transport came to the fore primarily through the lens of safety since Jyoti Singh’s death in December 2012. Following this, the Government of India created the Nirbhaya Fund in 2013. The Fund Framework provides for a non-lapsable corpus fund to improve the safety and security of women in cities. However, six year later in 2019, 91 percent of this fund

remains unspent by states and cities. This is happening because city governments or even state urban development and transport departments are working in a silo from the WCD.

Individually, there are policies and programmes that indirectly cater to women’s needs in urban transport. The draft National Urban Transport Policy (NUTP) in 2014 recommends measures such as police verified drivers and conductors, Global Positioning System (GPS) for public and intermediate public transport, closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras in all transport infrastructure, and street lighting - which are gender responsive. The Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JnNURM) was launched in 2005 with the objectives of investing in urban infrastructure, introducing governance reforms and providing basic services to the urban poor. The Smart Cities Mission launched in 2015 aims to create walkable localities, promote mixed land uses, preserve and develop open spaces along with technology-centric pan city proposals such as CCTV cameras. Unfortunately, the NUTP (2014) never became a cabinet approved policy and the JnNURM and SCM do not directly cater to the needs of women.

Policies and programmes must acknowledge the multiple dimensions which shape women and girls’ travel, in order for our cities and transport systems to become gender-responsive. This will lead to women’s

“Why would I use my car which causes pollution in the city if I have a convenient public transport service in the city? Women, like me, who are in government jobs will prefer to travel by city buses than their private vehicles, provided the bus service is reliable and comfortable.”

Dr. Varsha Chikhale, Principal, Shri Shivaji Arts and Commerce College, Amravati

“I think women are getting wrong solutions, because they are not being asked the right questions. If you ask women about their preference between wanting more people on the street or more security cameras, I’m sure women will choose more people on the street. Due to wrong questions, incorrect data gets generated which directs investments in the wrong direction.”

Pranjali Deshpande, Transport expert, Independent Consultant, World Bank

empowerment and children's welfare. Since urban transport is not the responsibility of one ministry or department alone, gender inclusion will require interventions at multiple levels, and coordination with a number of ministries and departments. The WCD remains the only department capable of advocating for women's right to the city and its transport system. Hence, it is high time that they play a key role in these decisions.

Multiple international standards dictate that for a well functioning urban transport system, there should be at least 50 buses for every one lakh population in a city. India's own [service level benchmarks](#) state that there should be 40-60 buses per lakh population to have the second best level of service. In Maharashtra, there are only [11 buses per lakh of urban population](#) and if Mumbai and Pune are excluded, this number falls to a concerning 4 buses per lakh population.

“Like any other subject, transportation is a women's subject and we think women should be involved in the planning for gender-responsive transport.”

Ranjit Gadgil, Program Director, Parisar



Case studies from around the world

The Seoul government implemented [women-friendly city project](#) to ensure consideration of gender-based perspectives in all administrative actions, and to directly enact policies to empower women. The initiative resulted in making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. The Women Friendly City Project is in the charge of the [Women and Family Policy Affairs of the Seoul metropolitan government](#); the bureau steers the project, managing promotion plans and outcomes of the project.

The policy has [five pillars](#):

1. A Caring Seoul - Focused on improving child care facilities and helping social minorities.
2. An Active Seoul - Improve women's economic participation and develop a female workforce.
3. An Abundant Seoul - Improve women's quality of life through cultural and leisure activities.
4. A Safe Seoul - Improving safety of women in the city.
5. A Convenient Seoul - Improve public spaces and public transport facilities for women.

WCD and *Lakh ko 50*

In a post pandemic world, where economic concerns are significant, improving women's workforce participation could be key to economic recovery. In the pre-COVID world, one estimate had shown that getting even 50 percent of Indian women into paid work could **boost GDP by 1.5 percentage points** per year. Women's economic empowerment and independence in decision-making are vital for poverty reduction - research has demonstrated that women leaders **invest** more in communities, and that **women's education** has positive impacts on their children's nutrition and health. Beyond these economic and societal arguments lie women's own inalienable rights, agency and volition. We can also see that women themselves are **demanding better facilities** for their mobility in cities.

The National Ministry of Women and Child Development was constituted with the prime intention of addressing gaps in State action for women and children for promoting inter-ministerial and inter-sectoral convergence to create gender equitable and child-centred legislation, policies and programmes⁶⁵. The ministry further envisions empowered women living with dignity and contributing as equal partners in development in an environment free from violence and discrimination. In line with these goals, the **Maharashtra state Women and Child Development Department** (WCD) is responsible for policy-making, formulation of programmes or schemes, implementation of development programmes, and coordination of efforts between governmental and non-governmental organizations working in the field of women and child development. The ministry puts in **concentrated efforts** in the area of women development to ensure survival, protection, development and participation of women in a holistic manner.

Unfortunately, urban women's mobility has been an invisible issue and came under the radar of the WCD only recently. With increasing knowledge on this issue and advocacy from women and the civil society in general, the department has taken cognizance of the issue. We further urge the WCD to include the goal of a safe, comfortable, reliable, accessible and gender-responsive urban transport system within its policy objectives. The most effective way to do this, would be to:

1. Develop a gender-responsive set of recommendations through extensive consultations with key stakeholders — specifically with women, women's groups, and groups working on children's development and welfare —for strengthening urban transport systems, especially bus-based public transport across cities in Maharashtra.
2. Allocate resources from the department meant to ensure the safety and attainment of development goals for women.
3. Gender sensitize transportation workers and department staff.
4. Champion a State urban bus-based public transport policy that is inclusive of the above-stated goals

The gender-responsive indicators could range from capacity building of the transport authority staff to designing of the bus stops and waiting areas, from improving public transit coverage of the city to community engagement and impact evaluation of the existing and future schemes and policies. The active participation of the WCD will make gender a core competence and mainstream women's concerns into urban transport planning.

“The complaints made to the bus conductors—mostly male—remain unaddressed. Who else do we complain to if even the conductor is going to ignore our problems?”

Valentina, Student, Shri Shivaji Arts and Commerce College, Amravati

“When I was in Pune for two years, I could manage travelling by city bus. Since Pune's bus service was comparatively good, I could travel on my own. This made me realise that I can be on my own whether the city is big or small, crowded or not. The disabled people can travel and live freely, provided there is a reliable transport service.”

Shruti Kshirsagar, Sadbhavna Sangh, Mumbai

List of abbreviations

FLPR	Female Labour Force Participation Rate
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
JnNURM	Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission
NSSO	National Sample Survey Organisation
NUTP	National Urban Transport Policy
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
WCD	Women and Child Development Department



SUM Net India
Sustainable Urban Mobility Network

SUM Net is a coalition of individuals, voluntary organizations, and civil society networks and movements promoting sustainable urban transport solutions across India.