



# METRO VANCOUVER WOMEN CHANGING PUBLIC TRANSIT

**RESEARCH CONDUCTED ON UNCEDED X̱MƏŦḴWƏYƏM,  
S̱ḴW̱X̱W̱Ú7MESH, AND TSLEIL-WAUTUTH TERRITORIES.**

This report examines the experiences of women who use public transit in Metro Vancouver and how they feel about their ability to make changes or have influence on Metro Vancouver's transit system.



# Acknowledgements

CRIAW acknowledges its presence and work on Indigenous Territories. We respectfully recognize the legacy of colonization upon Indigenous Peoples.

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Changing Public Services (CPS), a three year Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) funded project, will research and document:

- What we know about what is changing in public services;
- What the impacts are on diverse groups of women, and;
- What actions we can take to respond to these changes.

The Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women is housing this research project in partnership with:

- Canadian Labour Congress (CLC)
- Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT)
- Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW)
- Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE)
- Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC)



Since the global financial crisis of 2008, Canadians have seen waves of changes in public services, including changes in public sector employment, policies and governance approaches that affect the provision of public services and programs at the federal, provincial and municipal levels. The choices governments make now about public services will have long-term effects on both historically marginalized and privileged groups of women in communities and regions across the country, and will change what, how and to whom public services are available in Canada. The decisions of one level of government may intensify the effects of changes made by other levels of government, and result in cascading effects.

### What Are Public Services?

Public and private services in Canada are increasingly difficult to distinguish. The traditional definition of a public service as a function performed and funded by government is no longer useful. Over the past decade, it has become more common for governments on all levels to share the responsibility of providing public services with the private sector (including corporations and non-profits). This is evident with health care, education, and in the case of Metro Vancouver, public transit as well. As a result, users of these para-public services can feel disenfranchised from their right to demand adequate and affordable services from their government. This is a case in Metro Vancouver regarding public transit.

TransLink is the statutory authority over public transit in Metro Vancouver. Despite being governed by a private corporation, public transit is still considered a para-public service as it is publically funded with revenue from taxation and user fees. This is also the case for two interrelated services for persons with mobility and other difficulties – HandyDart and the Taxi Savers programs.

Privatization, outsourcing, and other changes have affected not only how citizens

understand and access government services, but also how these services are funded, administered and delivered. In turn, this has made defining the ‘public sector’ and ‘public sector workers’ more complicated.

### Why Public Transit?

The Metro Vancouver research cluster examined public transit as a changing public service as a result of the social and political contexts of 2014-2015.

In December 2014, the Mayors Council on Regional Transportation proposed a 0.5% increase to the provincial sales tax in Metro Vancouver, dedicated to the Mayors’ Transportation and Transit Plan, with independent audits and public reporting. The plan called for adding in bus service for crowded routes, and increase in rapid transit Skytrain and Canada Line services, upgrading roads, adding new bus routes, and improving pedestrian and cyclist safety.

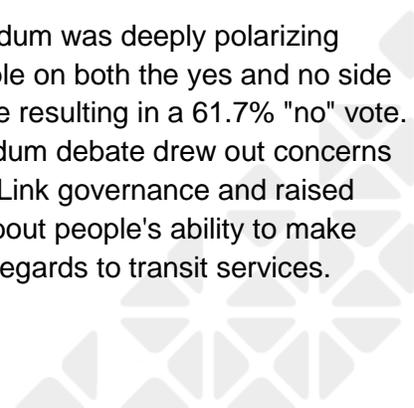
This referendum was deeply polarizing among people on both the yes and no side of the debate resulting in a 61.7% “no” vote. The referendum debate drew out concerns about TransLink governance and raised questions about people’s ability to make changes in regards to transit services.

### Our research questions

1. How do women in Vancouver experience their public transit system?
2. How do women perceive their ability to make changes to the public transit system?

### Data collection methods

90 minute focus groups



At the same time, a community-based group, Transportation Not Deportation, was working to end TransLink's agreement with the Canadian Border Service Agency (CBSA). This agreement allowed the Transit police to turn over fare evaders and others to the Canadian Border Service Agency. This agreement created fear in immigrant communities and created extreme stress to people who were without immigration status. This collaboration between Transit Police and the CBSA was highlighted when Lucia Vega Jimenez, a 42-year-old Mexican migrant, died in CBSA custody. Jimenez hung herself in a CBSA holding cell in the Vancouver International Airport awaiting deportation after the Transit Police reported her for an unpaid bus ticket in December of 2013. The campaign successfully ended the TransLink partnership with CBSA.

The political context around public transit demonstrates the impact of the private administration of public services. This especially impacts women and other vulnerable communities.

Transit is crucial in women's lives. The Women and Changing Public Services in Ottawa 2015-2016 report found that women reported that public transit was their second most relied upon service. The women we spoke to reported they used transit for a variety of reasons and often to access other public services such as education, parks and recreation, libraries, and health care.

### **Why did we look at Agency?**

Agency refers to the thoughts and actions taken by people that express their individual

and/or collective power. It is the power people have to think for themselves and act in ways that shape their experiences and life paths. Agency is not a constant. The intersections of women's identities impact how women may have agency in specific situations as a result of their particular social locations. Ultimately, our goal was to identify how women, in their respective social locations, perceive their ability to make changes to their public transit system.

### **Community Engaged Research**

Community engaged research creates opportunities to collect qualitative and quantitative data that provides context and depth to the area of study. By listening to direct users of public transit in Metro Vancouver across a large spectrum of identities and experiences, we are able to draw connections, provide emphasis, and make meaning in ways that would not be possible through the study of quantitative data or by limiting our conversation to formal institutions and organizations.

### **Intersectionality and Feminism**

Our focus groups targeted specific demographics to ensure that the data collected represented the diversity of women who use public transit in Metro Vancouver. We recognize the limitations of our research as we were unable to host focus groups for queer and trans women, Indigenous women, and women with children. However, individuals from these communities were present in the focus groups, demonstrating that women are at the intersections of multiple identities.



# WHAT WE HEARD

## Women with Disabilities

1. Being strapped in by bus drivers improperly, not at all, or not in accordance with passenger's instructions despite being required by regulations.
2. Other able-bodied passengers on the bus are unaware of how to respect the physical space of passengers who use wheelchairs.
3. Ambient noise on public transit as well as insufficient signage makes it difficult for deaf and hard of hearing passengers to hear emergency and safety announcements.
4. Bus drivers sometimes don't stop for passengers with accessibility needs if bus stop is not labelled accessible.
5. HandyDart and Taxi Savers are critical to their independent living.

## Migrant and Racialized Women

1. Fear of racial profiling by transit police partly as a result of the former partnership between CBSA and TransLink.
2. Undocumented and low income women reported dressing up to ride public transit in order to prevent profiling by transit police.
3. Cost of transit is a barrier for women to find and maintain work.

## Women Bus Drivers

1. Hostile passengers pose threats to safety.
2. Certain suburban routes in the late evening make drivers feel unsafe.
3. Secluded washrooms at the end of bus routes are unsafe and increase vulnerability.
4. Pressure from employer and passengers to keep up with a pre-set bus schedule causes stress and frustration.

## Students

1. Infrequency of buses and long waits on campus, especially at night, leave young women vulnerable and at risk of harassment.
2. U-Pass is an essential service that contributes to students' access to transportation.

## Senior Women

1. Crowding on buses and Skytrains poses risks of falling, being shoved and separated from travel companions.
2. Timing of doors opening and closing on Skytrains does not meet the needs of seniors with challenges to mobility.
3. Lack of public washrooms at Skytrain stations is a major accessibility issue.

ADVOCATE:

“

Most people feel  
powerless and that  
would be an accurate  
reflection.

”

Our research found the women who reported they had the most success with their demands for changes to public transit in Metro Vancouver were groups of women who use wheelchairs as a mobility aid. They have been working on the issue of public and accessible transit since the 1980's and as a result of their efforts and activism had developed formal structures and relationships with TransLink. Unfortunately, women with other visible or invisible disabilities did not share these experiences.

# CAN WE CHANGE PUBLIC TRANSIT?

*"I wouldn't have a clue what the mechanisms are to [make changes]...there was that incident that I didn't know about where I might report it."*

*Union woman*

*"We can make a request regarding something on the route and nothing will be done. I actually tell my passengers "if you want to change something you call in" and when they do, it happens."*

*Bus Driver*

*"In terms of policies and procedures, I don't feel like I as an individual have the authority to facilitate that change."*

*Student*

*"They say what different does it make, I just want to go to work, and come home, I don't want to bother because it's not going to make a difference."*

*Bus Driver*

*"I feel like talking to TransLink is like talking to a brick wall and I feel like talking to the provincial government is like talking to a brick wall and that's who's responsible."*

*Senior*

*"I don't feel like they {TransLink} make themselves available to have discussions about not just street harassment but, like, regarding visas and border control."*

*Migrant woman*

*"We might have all the advocacy skills in the world, but if you're dealing with someone who has a stereotypical notion of people with disabilities and their capabilities, all that advocacy is almost for not."*

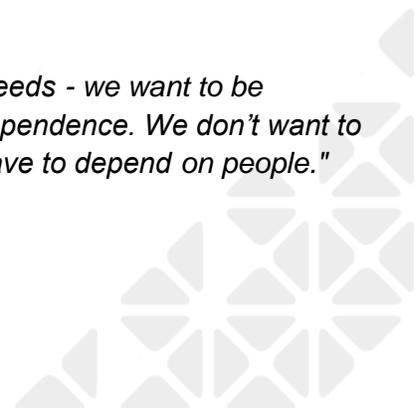
*Woman with disabilities*

*"Ideally, the people who ride or, you know, utilize public transit should be the ones who get the say in the changes they want to see in public transit. But, it feels like to me that there's no way for me to get my message across to someone because this is the separation that we're talking about, the public transit [being] not really public."*

*Migrant woman*

*"...we're talking about transit. We all have common wants and needs - we want to be independent, right? That's what we're advocating for, is our independence. We don't want to feel that we're relying on others, we don't want to feel that we have to depend on people."*

*Woman with disabilities*



# RECOMMENDATIONS

## Accessibility

Women depend on safe, affordable, and frequent access to transit in order to live healthy and fulfilling lives. Public transit is the backbone of the public service sector as it provides access to health care, education, recreation, etc.

## Safety

Safety was cited as a major barrier to accessing public transit. Translink staff are not trained adequately to address the safety issues that women encounter. Concerns include: sexual harassment, verbal harassment, mental health awareness, and addressing needs of women with disabilities.

## Transparency

Women want a public, accessible, and transparent process outlined for providing feedback on buses, Skytrains, and the Seabus. The corporate governance of transit services results in a lack of trust and understanding of how and why decisions are made.

1

### Transparent and accessible process for submitting and addressing user feedback

The use of advertising space in buses, Skytrains, and bus stops for publicizing the feedback process for transit users. Users should be made aware how to submit feedback, and TransLink's accountability measures for addressing user feedback. Reports on user feedback should be made public annually.

2

### Creation of independent Citizens Council for public transit

An independent advisory council consisting of transit users to be created in each municipality with the support of their local council. Citizens Councils should have regular access to TransLink to bring forward recommendations and advise for changes.

3

### Further engagement with vulnerable communities

TransLink and municipalities must actively engage with users who experience multiple barriers such as racialization, disabilities, income inequality, and precarious residency status. Consultation should occur prior to major service changes. The consultation process should be clearly outlined to users of TransLink services and reported upon regularly.

4

### Third-party review and evaluation of accessibility and inclusion training for transit workers

All bus drivers and TransLink staff at bus stops and Skytrain stations must undergo annual accessibility and inclusion training. A third-party review of training and evaluation of impact to be conducted annual and made public

