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Project Title:
FAST Act - PSR 010: Public Transportation
Safety Among University Students

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Public Transportation Safety Among University Students

To study how perceptions of personal safety may vary among university students and how it affects transit ridership.

WHAT IS THE NEED?

Transit use is on the decline in many American cities. A number of factors may contribute to this trend, not the least of which is increased car ownership (Manville et al. 2018). Other important factors influencing the decision to use transit relate to the quality of the service. One such factor is safety -- real or perceived. Research has shown that concerns about transit safety may influence travel behavior and transit use.

Studies have also found that women are particularly fearful about victimization while travelling and very concerned about sexual harassment, which is often unreported, and thus remains largely invisible to the transit operators (Loukaitou-Sideris 2015; 2014).

The objective of this study is to identify the transit safety-related concerns of college students, and how these may affect their propensity to use transit. While the researchers plan to examine a wide variety of safety-related concerns that may affect both male and female students, they are particularly interested in identifying issues of sexual assault and sexual harassment in transit environments that are besetting female transit riders.

WHAT ARE WE DOING?

The proposed study is a first comprehensive assessment of transit safety among college students in 16 cities across six continents: Los Angeles-USA, Vancouver-Canada, Stockholm-Sweden, London-UK, Paris-France, Milan-Italy, Sao Paulo-Brazil, Rio Claro-Brazil, Mexico City-Mexico, Bogota-Colombia, Tokyo-Japan, Guangzhou-China, Nairobi-Kenya, Pretoria-South Africa, Manila-the Philippines, and Melbourne-Australia. The Principal Investigators from the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm, Sweden are leading this study, which involves participation of researchers from the cities mentioned.



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California's transportation system

The US research team will analyze the results from the Los Angeles portion of this study and deploy the survey instrument at other California college campuses.

More specifically, the US researchers will survey college students to examine their patterns of mobility and transit. They will focus on the students' feelings of safety on public transit and other transportation modes, experiences of sexual harassment, and other types of crime and victimization.

Furthermore, the research team will establish the extent to which fear regarding their safety affects college students' transit ridership, and examine how survey responses may vary because of the students' sociodemographic characteristics. By sending an identical survey to college students around the world, the researchers are aiming to examine the nature, type, settings, and extent of victimization on public transport by gender among college students in different city/country contexts, assess the transit riders' safety needs, and examine innovative policies that respond to such needs.

Additionally, the research analysts plan to interview the transit operators in the Los Angeles metropolitan area, and in other major California regions to identify their policies about transit safety, and how these have changed over the years. The study results are expected to benefit both safety and equity efforts of public transit and transportation professionals in college campuses, California, and other cities around the world.

WHAT IS OUR GOAL?

Identify how safety issues on transit are currently addressed by the transit operators and what improvements can be made. The study's ultimate goals are to improve the transportation safety for college students, examine and respond to possible inequities among student groups, and possibly increase transit ridership among students.

WHAT IS THE BENEFIT?

The researchers will document the transit safety concerns of college students and how these affect their travel patterns and use of transit. Moreover, they will also investigate how these concerns may differ for different groups of students (by gender and race/ethnicity), and how policy makers and transit operators respond to these concerns.

WHAT IS THE PROGRESS TO DATE?

The project is expected to begin in early February 2019.