

LONDON ASSEMBLY

Planning and Regeneration Committee

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Via email

Question: What is the impact of gender biased design in the built environment on women and girls?

The absence of a gender lens in the built environment means that our cities are not designed to enable or encourage the full participation of women and girls in urban public life. This denies women and girls the right to the city – the right to access, shape and take advantage of urban life and amenities – and the right to safe mobility – the right to move around freely and safely, without fear of harassment or violence.

Question: In what ways are women and girls disadvantaged by London's public transport system?

As I discuss in my 2022 [report](#) on gender inclusive transport systems for the Women's Budget Group, gender is one of the most robust determinants of travel behaviour (e.g. journey purpose, mode, travel time). However, considerations of gendered differences in urban mobility are often overlooked in transport policy and planning. One of the most obvious examples is radial planning, which is the norm in transport planning. Radial planning means that transport systems are built to optimise radial journeys, or longer journeys from the outskirts of cities into the city centre or business districts, during peak hours. This reflects a middle-class, male bias, as it caters to the 'typical' work commute that men make from their suburban homes to their offices in city centres.

Because of the gendered division of caring and domestic responsibilities, women tend to make more encumbered care-related journeys that require multiple stops (e.g. 'trip-chaining'). These types of journeys are not well served by our public transport systems, which primarily facilitate peak-hour radial commutes. Because women are more reliant on walking than men, they are also disproportionately disadvantaged by narrow or absent pavements, pavement clutter and car parking on pavements. Women are more likely to be disabled than men and therefore more disadvantaged by poor accessibility (e.g. absent, insufficient or broken lifts) and signage/wayfinding at public transport stations and on public transport (e.g. inadequate wheelchair space or priority seating on tubes and buses).

Gender-based violence in public space is another barrier to safe urban mobility for women and girls. London has the highest rates of public sexual harassment in the UK and 40% of sexual assaults occur in public spaces, particularly on public transport. 55% of women in London have experienced sexual harassment on public transport, mainly on the tube. (See [YouGov poll](#) and [my 2020 report](#) on improving women's and girls' safety in London's public spaces for more.) Tackling gender-based violence in London's public spaces and public transport network, therefore, must be a priority.

LONDON ASSEMBLY

Question: How could the design of London's transport system be improved for women and girls?

Three key ways to improve London's transport system for women and girls include:

- Creating a dedicated pavement fund to ensure that pavements are well maintained, free from barriers and of a high quality. Women are more dependent on walking and public transport than men, and every journey involves some element of walking (e.g. walking from home to the bus stop). However, pavement clutter, uneven or poorly surfaced pavements and inadequate pavements that are too narrow are all factors that make walking challenging and unpleasant. This is especially the case for women who are traveling with children and/or older people.
- Conducting gender safety audits and accessibility audits. Both are participatory tools; the former investigates women's, girls' and nonbinary people's perceptions and experiences of safety in public space and on public transport; the latter investigates accessibility barriers to public space and public transport experienced by older people and disabled people. Both enable diverse lived experiences to feed into design and planning decisions.
- Collecting intersectional data (data disaggregated by sex, ethnicity, age, etc.) to understand the diverse travel needs of Londoners. I expect a fair amount of this data is already captured in Transport for London's Travel Demand Survey. TfL and the GLA need to analyse that data to inform planning decisions, including service design and provision. The GLA should also adopt gender budgeting to ensure that public spending decisions do not exacerbate gender and other inequities. Adopting gender budgeting in cycling is especially important because despite increased investment in cycling infrastructure in London over the past decade, the gender gap in cycling persists, whereby women make less than one-third of cycle trips in London. Gender budgeting would help ensure that investment in cycling infrastructure is distributed more equitably, in a way that closes – rather than perpetuates or exacerbates – the gender gap in cycling.

Question: What should guidance on gender-informed planning look like?

As discussed in [my 2019 report](#) on gender inclusive climate action in cities, gender-informed planning consists of two strands:

- **Gender expertise:** The GLA can develop gender expertise by conducting gender safety audits; collecting and analysing intersectional data; integrating gender budgeting in infrastructure investments; and developing more gender-responsive and participatory planning approaches.
- **Increasing women's leadership:** To increase the representation of women in the built environment and planning sectors, investment in mentoring programmes, as well as other equity, diversity and inclusion initiatives to ensure that women can enjoy rewarding careers in the sectors.

LONDON ASSEMBLY

Question: What are some examples of successful case studies or pilot projects related to gender-informed planning both in the UK and globally? What lessons can London learn from these?

See pages 12-15 for examples of recommendations to create gender-inclusive sustainable transport systems, along with case studies for each recommendation in my 2022 [report](#) for the UK Women's Budget Group. See also case studies of Vienna, San Francisco and Bogota, which I produced for Sustrans. The Vienna example highlights how gender-disaggregated data and gender budgeting have been applied to make public realm improvements that benefit everyone, particularly women and girls. The San Francisco case study is an excellent example of a community-led initiative (without involving the police) to improve women's and girls' safety on public transport. The Bogota case study is an inspiring example of how the city has 'socialised' care by creating 'Care Blocks' to support female caregivers and those they care for.