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FARE-FREE FUTURE



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Women's Perspectives on Public Bus
Transport in Mumbai



FARE-FREE FUTURE

Women's Perspectives on Public Bus
Transport in Mumbai

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Summary

01. Public transportation is crucial in Mumbai,

where about 3.3 million people,  including 1.2 million women

rely on buses for daily travel. 

In 2011, 28.5% of workers used public transport (bus and rail) to travel to work in Maharashtra. Walking and using public transport are higher among women than men in Mumbai.

02. Implementing a fare-free bus scheme for women, as seen in Delhi, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka, has significantly increased female ridership, improving access to education, employment, and essential services.

03. In the context of increasing demand for fare-free public transport, Greenpeace conducted a rapid survey of 504 women at bus stops across Mumbai to collect views on the prospects of making public buses fare-free. The survey also explored connected issues of safety and reliability.

04.



of survey respondents said that if bus services were made fare-free for women, they would use public buses more for daily travel and travel to other cities.

05. 94 percent of women would like political parties to make fare-free, safe, and reliable public bus transport an essential agenda item for the Maharashtra state assembly elections. 95 percent of survey respondents endorsed the Greenpeace campaign for introducing fare-free public transport for women and transgender persons in the election manifestos of political parties.

06.

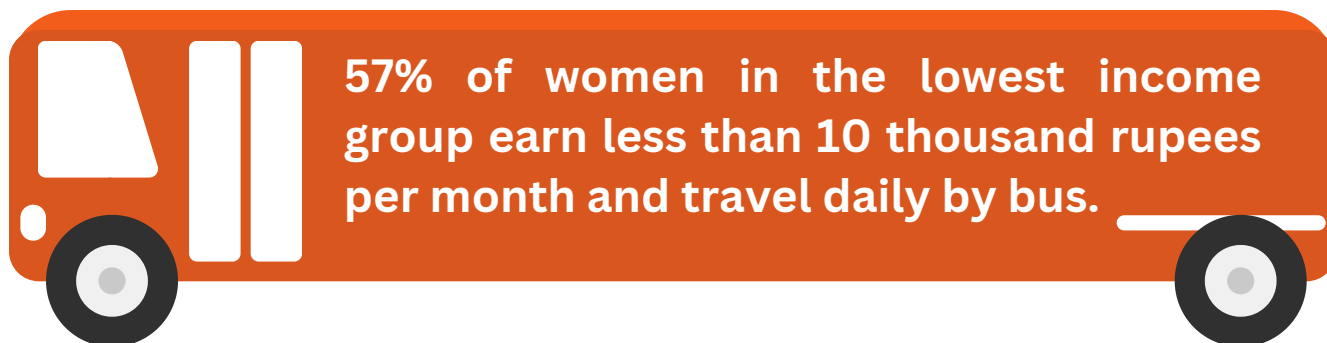


Two in three surveyed women showed a strong inclination to vote for the parties with fare-free buses as a critical agenda in their manifestos.



07.

Nearly half of the students and women with a monthly income of less than 40 thousand report travelling daily by public bus.



57% of women in the lowest income group earn less than 10 thousand rupees per month and travel daily by bus.

08.

While buses are the most cost-effective option for women, 22% of women in the lowest income group still reported that fares are expensive, pointing to their economic strain and the potential benefits of a fare-free scheme.

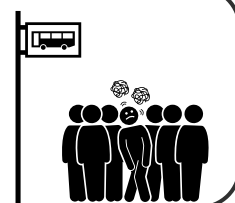
09.

Overcrowding (92%) and safety concerns (48%) were the most significant problems, making public buses less appealing for women, especially during peak hours and in poorly lit areas.



10.

Long waiting times (84%) and lack of clean public toilets (57%) at bus stops were also identified as key barriers, disproportionately affecting women and making bus travel uncomfortable and unsafe.



11.

Discrimination and harassment against women in public buses were reported by 20% of respondents, underscoring the need for gender-sensitive policies in public transport.



CONTEXT

Public transportation is crucial in Mumbai, where about 3.3 million people, including 1.2 million women, rely on buses for their daily travel¹. According to the latest available data from the Census of India, 28.5% of workers used public transport (bus and rail) to travel to work in Maharashtra in 2011². A World Bank study estimated that more women than men walk and use public transport, especially buses, in Mumbai. 40% of women walked compared to 28% of men, and 32% of women used public transport compared to 24% of men, according to the study³.

However, the experience of using this system is often fraught with concerns that go beyond mere convenient mobility. Various factors, including these spaces' economic affordability and safety, influence the decision to use public buses. These factors deter women from using public buses, pushing them towards more expensive, time-consuming, and less convenient alternatives such as taking taxis or walking long distances.

Based on a detailed review of literature on gender and mobility in low- and middle-income countries, Borker (2024) underlines that women make frequent, shorter trips with more stops along the way to combine multiple tasks⁴, a behaviour often termed as 'trip-chaining' in planning literature. This is remarkably different from the mobility patterns of men who generally make direct, single-destination trips with linear routes.

The specific travel pattern of women often makes transportation more expensive for them, as they need to purchase multiple tickets for their linked trips in one journey. In the current social context of urban mobility in India, where women are solely burdened with unpaid care work, the cost and frequency of public transport affect women significantly more than men. Additionally, network planning issues

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- 1 Times of India. (2023, September 24). Why women commuters are on the rise in city. Times of India. Retrieved from <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mumbai/why-women-commuters-are-on-the-rise-in-city/articleshow/103898108.cms>
 - 2 Singh, N., & Tiwari, G. (2018). Travel to Work in India: Current Patterns and Future Concerns. Transport Research & Injury Prevention Programme, Indian Institute of Technology Delhi.
 - 3 World Bank. (2021). Closing the gap: Gender, transport, and employment in Mumbai (Policy Note 2021). Mobility and Transport Connectivity Series. Washington, DC. <https://www.worldbank.org>.
 - 4 Borker, G. (2024). Understanding the constraints to women's use of urban public transport in developing countries. World Development, 180, 106589. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2024.106589>

like the absence of a reliable public transport system and last-mile connectivity problems limit women's use of public transport. Transport policies in Mumbai, other cities in Maharashtra, and, more generally, in Indian cities have failed to address the gendered mobility experiences of women⁵.

Public buses offer affordable transportation for many women with low incomes. Yet, even the seemingly low fares can restrict access for women with low personal income, students, and those financially dependent on the earning members of their families. Therefore, making public transport fare-free is crucial for providing equitable access to opportunities, especially in Indian cities where gender inequalities in mobility remain significant.

Fare-free public transport for women has already seen success in other Indian states. Delhi was the first to introduce such a scheme in 2019, significantly increasing female ridership by removing the financial barrier to public transport. When Delhi made buses fare-free for women, there was reported a 10% increase in women's ridership within the first three weeks. This rapid increase demonstrated the immediate impact of removing financial barriers to public transportation. Following Delhi, several other states have launched similar initiatives.



Punjab

In April 2021, the Punjab Government launched the fare-free bus travel scheme for women to travel in buses run by the state government, including Punjab Road Transport Corporation, Punjab Roadways and City Services run by municipal bodies. However, only women with proof of residence in Punjab can claim the benefits. There has been reported⁶ a near doubling in the usage of public buses by women and girls, from 7.1 million to 12.3 million, within eight months.



Tamil Nadu

On International Women's Day 2021, Tamil Nadu's government rolled out the 'Vidiyal Payanam' scheme, a fare-free public transport scheme for women, which has been in effect across the state since July 2021. The scheme was later extended to transgender persons and the physically disabled (with over 40% disability) and their escort. No domicile proof is required to avail of the scheme's benefits, but it is applicable for travelling only on Ordinary buses and not on Express/Deluxe buses.

⁵ Narayanan, Y. (2020). Violence against women in moving transportation in Indian cities: Reconceptualising gendered transport policy. In *Engendering cities: Designing sustainable urban spaces for all* (pp. 58–70). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351200912-4>

⁶ Behal, A., & Behal, D. (2023, July 28). Punjab's free bus scheme has changed women's lives but its future is shaky. Behanbox. <https://behanbox.com/2023/07/28/punjab-free-bus-scheme-has-changed-womens-lives-but-its-future-is-shaky/>

Citizen Consumer and Civic Action Group (CAG) conducted a detailed study on the scheme's impacts. The study estimated that the scheme immediately led to a 60-95% increase in women's bus trips⁷. The study, based on a survey of 3000 women across 6 cities in the state, found that the scheme also resulted in significant average monthly savings of 400-800 rupees for nearly 90% of bus users. The study revealed that about 25% of women now participate in leisure activities like visiting temples, friends and family, parks, and beaches, which they previously avoided due to the extra financial strain that transportation costs imposed on their families.



Karnataka

The Shakti scheme in Karnataka was launched in June 2023 as one of the first actions by the newly formed state government since it was one of the six key poll promises made by the Congress party in their election manifesto. All women, including female students, irrespective of their caste and religion, can travel for free on state government buses, including on intercity routes across the state. A 30% increase in bus ridership was reported⁸ immediately after the scheme's launch, showing its broad appeal and high impact in promoting the use of public bus transport among women.



Telangana

Similar to the Shakti scheme in Karnataka, the Mahalakshmi scheme was among the six essential poll guarantees of the Congress party, and it was introduced in December 2023, soon after the formation of the new state government. The 'zero-ticket scheme' abolished fares in Telangana State Road Transport Corporation (TSRTC) buses for girls and women of all age groups and transgender persons who are domiciled in Telangana. Travel is free on Palle Velugu and Express buses within the state borders. The latest official reports suggest that the average daily bus ridership of women in TSRTC buses in the nine months following the scheme's launch is more than 3 million⁹. The average occupancy rate of public buses jumped by 28 percent and reached 88 percent immediately after the scheme's launch.

⁷ Narayanan, S. (2023). Fair fares: Towards gender-inclusive public transport. Citizen Consumer and Civic Action Group (CAG), Tamil Nadu, India.

⁸ The surge in the ridership was reported widely in the media, such as: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/bengaluru-news/shakti-scheme-led-to-surge-in-state-buses-ridership-revenue-govt-data-101688152988331.html>

⁹ Government of Telangana. (2024, September). CM gives nod to TSRTC to purchase more buses. Telangana. <https://www.telangana.gov.in/news/press-releases/2024/09/cm-gives-nod-to-tgsrtc-to-purchase-more-buses/>

These cases hint towards the potential benefits of a fare-free transport scheme in Maharashtra. By making public transport more accessible, such policies can significantly increase women's use of buses, making commuting more affordable and improving access to education, employment, and essential services.

Public transportation is a state subject in India's constitutional framework, meaning that the state government in Maharashtra has the authority to implement such a scheme across the state, benefiting women in Mumbai and across the state. As a matter of fact, Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC) buses already have a 50 percent concession under the Mahila Samman Yojana (scheme) of the MSRTS, which has witnessed a similar increase in women's bus use¹⁰. The Brihanmumbai Electric Supply & Transport Undertaking (BEST) runs buses in Mumbai, and it could adopt a similar policy to further improve the bus ridership and expand the accessibility net for all women in the city region. It could be a natural extension of their existing gender-affirmative policies, such as keeping 12 seats reserved for women in each BEST bus and operating 'Ladies' Special' buses in several areas, including Colaba, Lower Parel, Andheri, Goregaon, and Malad¹¹. In 2021, BEST introduced 70 new routes with 100 buses, including 10 'Ladies' Special' buses exclusively for women¹². That brought the number of women-only buses to 137¹³.

PURPOSE OF THE SURVEY

This survey gathered opinions from women in Mumbai about the city's public bus system and their views on a proposed fare-free bus scheme for women. The survey also touches upon the related issues of why some women avoid using buses, looking into challenges like safety, overcrowding, and the condition of bus shelters.

The survey has been conducted at a critical time before the upcoming state elections. Although the respondents are all from Mumbai, their views also reflect broader concerns and aspirations for public transportation across Maharashtra. While the opinions were collected exclusively from women in Mumbai, the survey explores their perspectives on whether such a scheme should be implemented across Maharashtra. Greenpeace India hopes that survey results will help shape public transport, urban environmental, and gender discourse in Maharashtra during the state assembly elections. Hopefully, the survey findings will help advocate for safer, more affordable, and reliable public bus transport for women in Maharashtra.

¹⁰ Times of India. (2023, November 15). 50% fare discount drives 54 crore women to ST buses. Times of India. Retrieved from <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/nagpur/50-fare-discount-drives-54cr-women-to-st-buses/articleshow/109229287.cms>

¹¹ Times of India. (2023, September 24). Why women commuters are on the rise in city. Times of India. Retrieved from <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mumbai/why-women-commuters-are-on-the-rise-in-city/articleshow/103898108.cms>

¹² Saxena, A. (2021, November 4). 'Ladies Special': Mumbai to launch dedicated bus services for women from November 6. The Logical Indian. <https://thelogicalindian.com/good-governance/mumbai-best-women-buses-31719>

¹³ Sen, S. (2021, September 16). Mumbai BEST launches 100 'Ladies Special' buses. Times of India. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mumbai/mumbai-best-launches-100-ladies-special-buses/articleshow/87516892.cms>

METHODOLOGY

SAMPLING

In this study, 504 women were interviewed at 52 bus stops spread across Mumbai to ensure broad spatial coverage (please refer to the map of survey locations for spatial distribution). Equal numbers of bus stops were selected from four regions that comprise Mumbai: **South Mumbai, Western Suburbs, Eastern Suburbs, and Harbour Suburbs**. Interviews were conducted at various hours throughout the day to capture responses from different types of female commuters, ensuring a diverse sample. This method aimed to represent a broad cross-section of women using public transport at different times, improving the representativeness of the survey.

**Residence locations
of survey respondents**

**Total number
of respondents: 504**



SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

The survey form for this study included questions to understand how women in Mumbai feel about public buses and their views on a potential fare-free bus scheme. The survey on women's bus usage in Mumbai aligns with broader discussions on public space and mobility in the city, particularly in the context of safety, accessibility, and inclusivity. The findings highlight the relationship between women's access to public transportation and their ability to navigate urban spaces freely and safely. Here's a breakdown of what the survey covered:

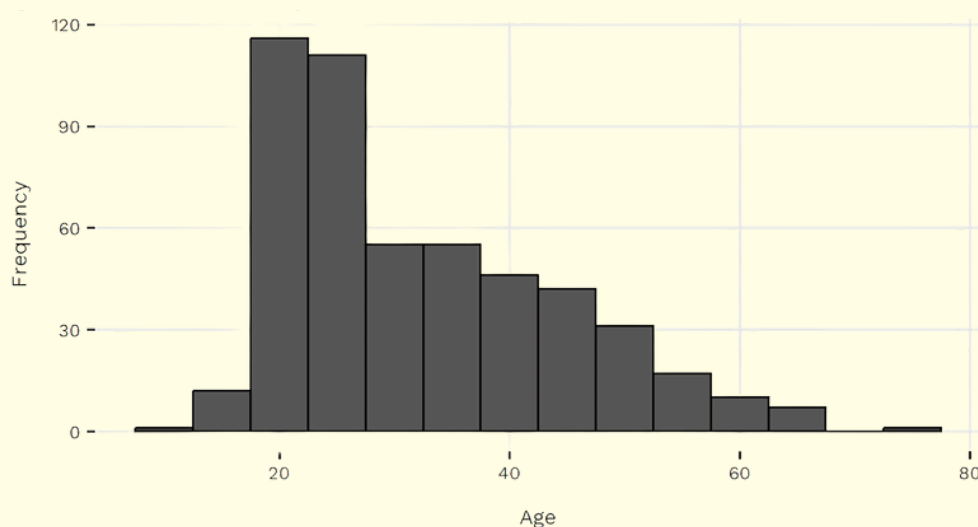
- **Policy-related Views:** The survey asks if women think political parties should promise free bus rides and if this would influence their vote in upcoming elections. This is to understand the importance of this issue for women. The survey asks if women would start using buses more if rides were free. This question directly measures support for a fare-free policy and its potential impact on bus ridership.
- **Bus Use:** Respondents are asked how often they use public buses. This helps understand whether income levels affect how much they rely on buses and whether they would benefit from free bus rides.
- **Time and Convenience:** Questions about how much time women spend on buses and waiting for them help understand whether the service is convenient enough or if long waits and travel times are a deterrent.
- **Money Spent on Bus Rides:** The survey also looks at how much women currently spend on bus fares each month, giving a sense of the financial burden and how a fare-free policy might help.
- **Problems Faced:** The survey asks about specific issues like safety, crowded buses, and the lack of clean public toilets at bus stops. These insights can guide improvements to make buses more user-friendly. Women are asked to rate the bus shelters, which can highlight areas where the infrastructure needs upgrades.
- **Why Some Avoid Buses:** A vital part of the survey asks why some women don't use public buses. Possible reasons include safety concerns, overcrowded buses, long waits, high costs, or harassment. Others might prefer using the metro, cabs, or their vehicles. Understanding these reasons helps pinpoint the main barriers to bus use.

RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS



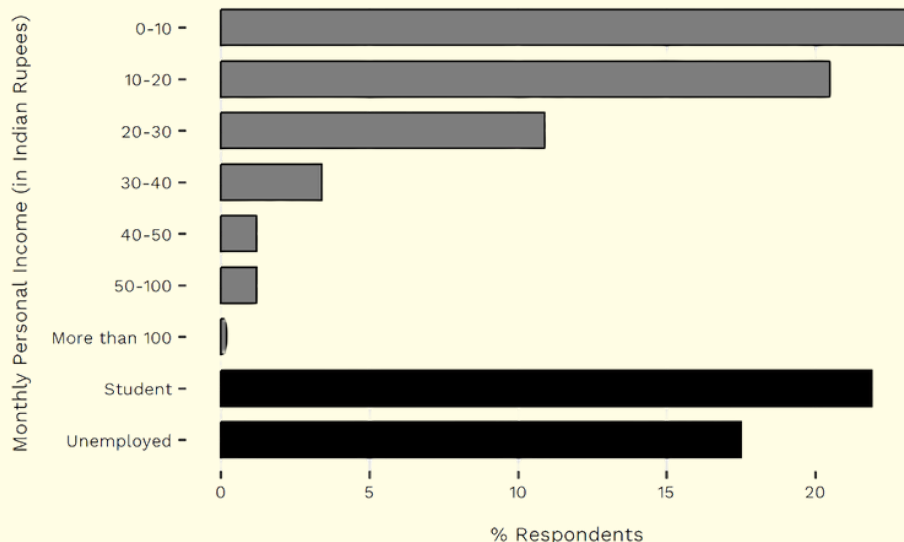
The survey data indicates that the largest group of respondents were women aged 15-24 years, making up 35% of the sample. The second largest group was women aged 25-34, comprising 27% of respondents. Women aged 35-44 accounted for 21%, and those aged 45 and above made up 18% of the total respondents. While these figures reflect the survey sample, it should be noted that they do not represent the general age distribution of all women in Mumbai. However, it should also be noted that younger women rely more on public buses due to their education and employment needs.

In terms of personal income, 30% of the surveyed women reported earning less than 10,000 rupees per month, while 26% earned between ₹10,000 and 20,000. Around 14% of the respondents had an income between ₹20,000 and 30,000, and only 2% earned over ₹50,000 per month. 22% of the respondents were unemployed, and 6% were students. This income distribution highlights that the majority of surveyed women fall into low—and low-middle-income brackets.



Age distribution of respondents

Income of respondents



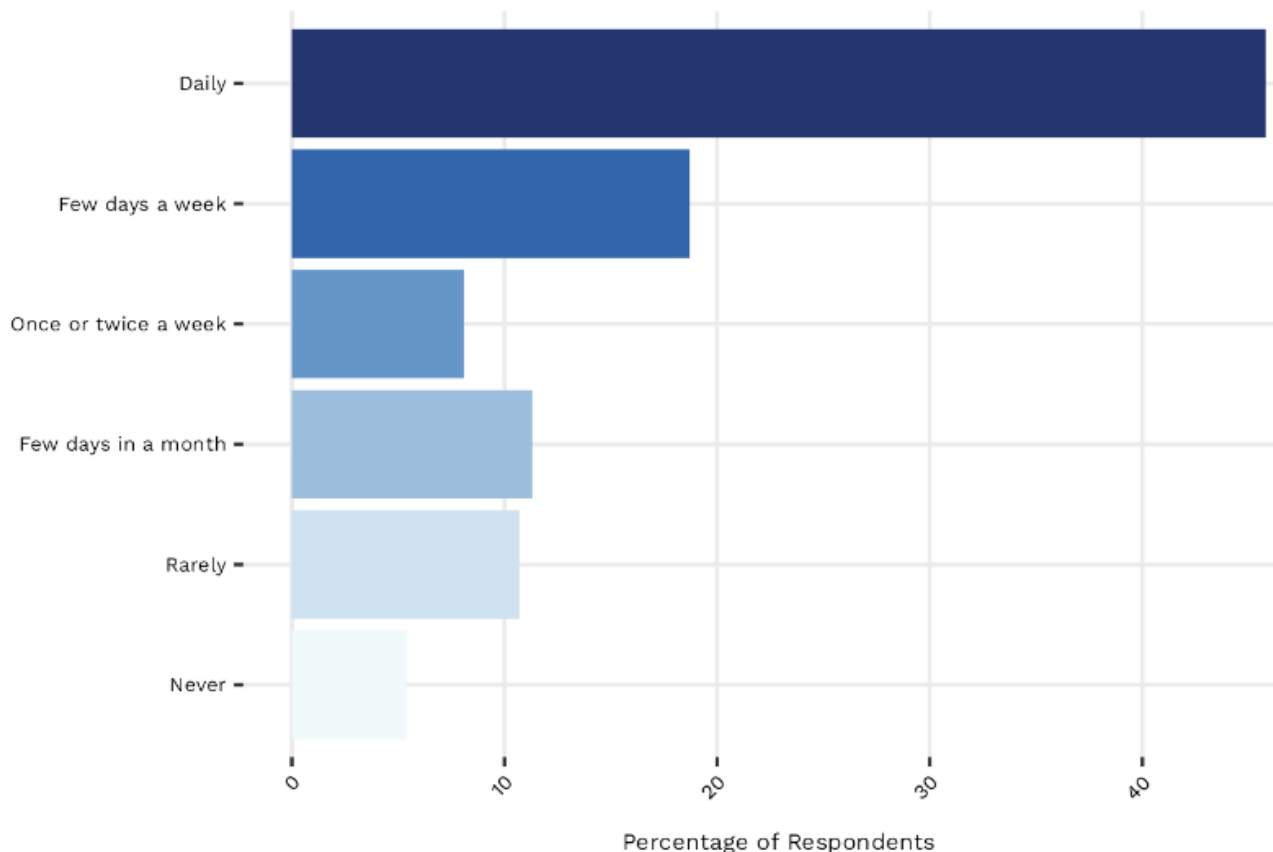
CURRENT BUS USE AMONG RESPONDENTS

Among the women who travel in Mumbai, many rely on buses as their primary mode of transport. The survey respondents represent that group of women but it also reveals a significant number of respondents who use buses infrequently or avoid them altogether.

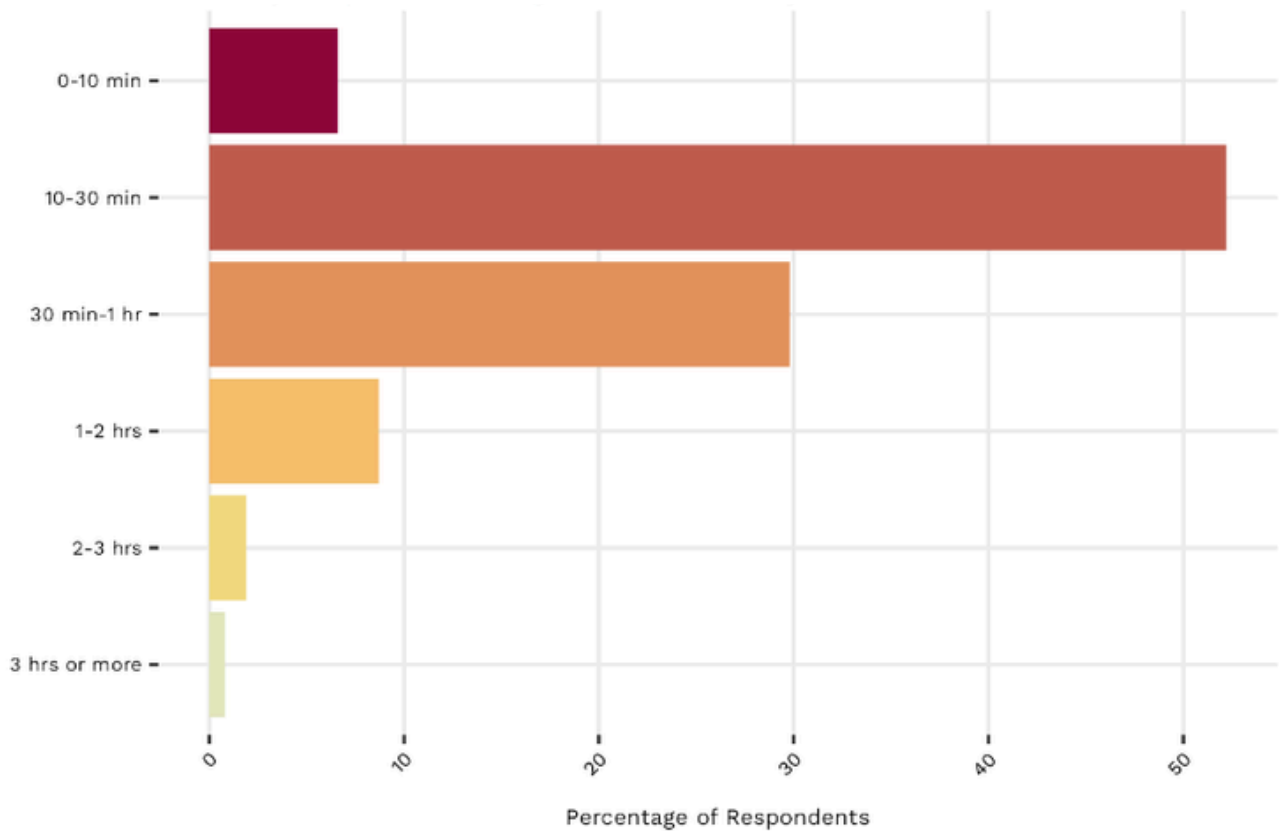
Regularity in bus use

46% of respondents reported using public buses daily. Another 19% indicated that they use buses a few days a week, showing a strong dependence on public transportation for daily commuting. About 11% use buses a few days per month, and 11% rarely use them. Notably, 5% of respondents reported that they never travel by bus. These numbers suggest that for many women in this survey, buses play a central role in their daily lives. However, a small segment of the respondents avoided public buses, likely due to social and cost barriers or different mode preferences.

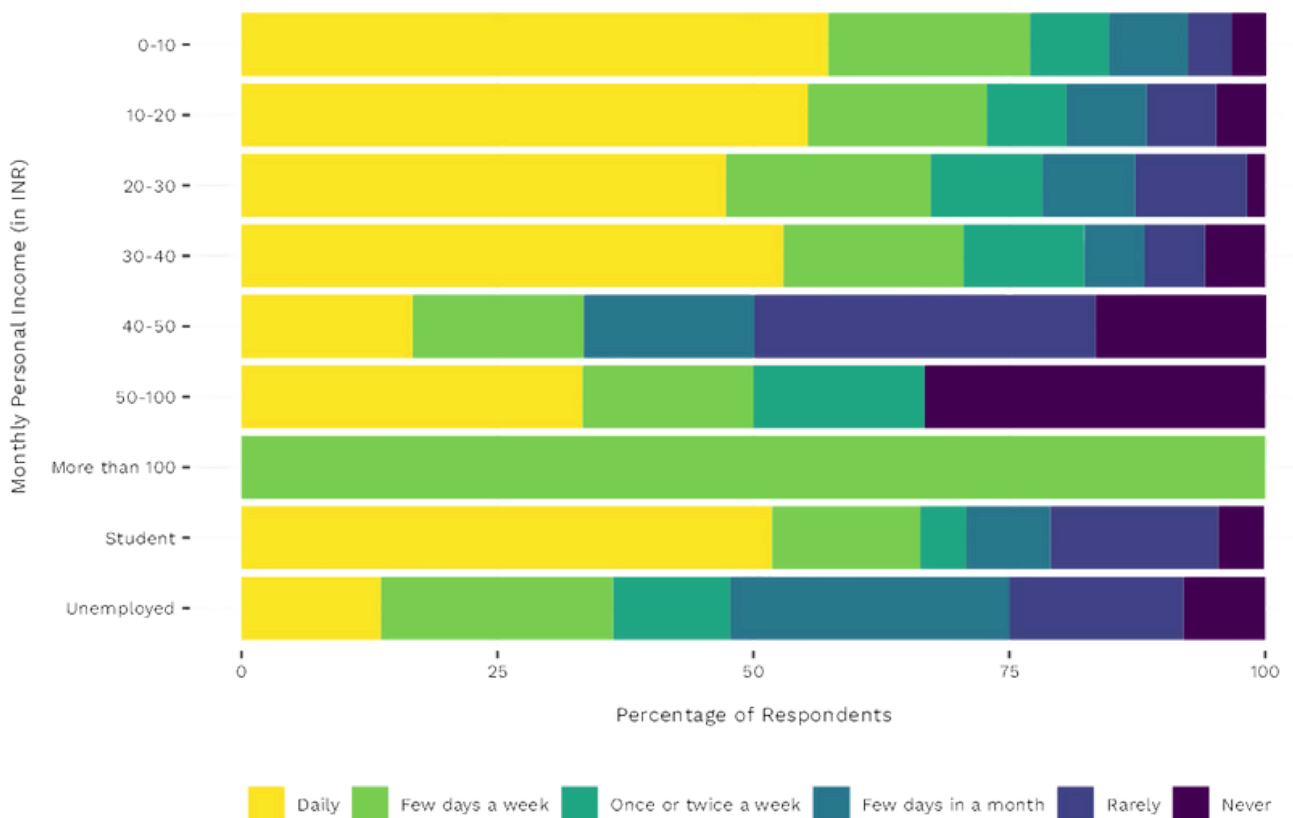
How often do you travel by public buses in Mumbai?



How much time do you spend travelling in bus whenever you travel?



Regularity in bus usage across income classes



More than half of women with monthly incomes of less than 40 thousand rupees and students report travelling daily by public bus. This use is most prominent among the lowest-income group of women earning less than 10 thousand rupees per month, with 57% of women in this group travelling daily by bus.

Time spent daily on bus travel

The majority of respondents (52%) reported spending between 10 and 30 minutes on bus travel during their commute, with 30% indicating they travel for 30 minutes to 1 hour. A smaller proportion (9%) said they spend 1-2 hours on buses, and only 3% travel for over 2 hours. These results suggest that women tend to travel relatively short distances on one trip. However, a small group of women also face longer travel times. This is likely due to trip chaining, which is multiple trips undertaken by women on a single journey as they travel for daily care work that women in Indian society perform almost exclusively. Apart from that, in many cases, distant locations of colleges, workplaces or other places of interest could involve changing multiple buses.

FINDINGS

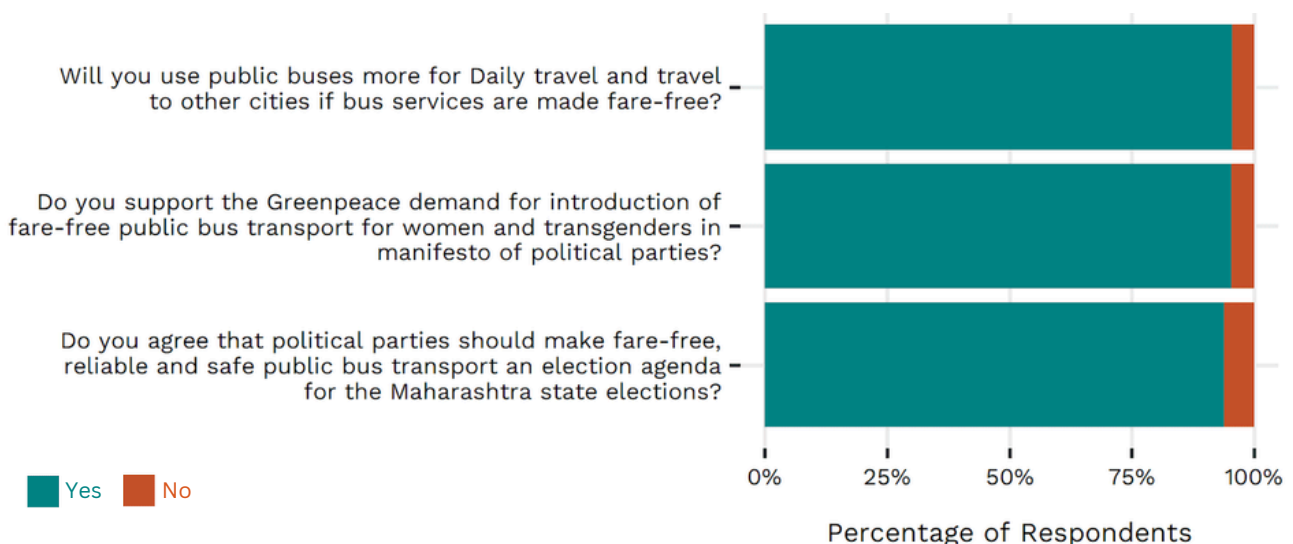
DEMAND FOR FARE-FREE PUBLIC BUS TRANSPORT

The willingness to use fare-free buses for both daily travel and intercity trips is also high, with 94% of respondents saying they would use such services and just 4% saying they would not. These results reflect strong public support for affordable and inclusive public transport policies.

The findings suggest overwhelming support for fare-free public bus transportation in the context of the upcoming state elections. A striking 94% of respondents agree that political parties should make fare-free, reliable, and safe bus transport a key agenda item. Only 6% oppose this idea.

Similarly, support for Greenpeace India's demand to include fare-free public transport for women and transgender persons in political manifestos is even stronger. 96% of respondents back this initiative, while only 4% are opposed.

Demand for making public bus transport fare-free in Maharashtra

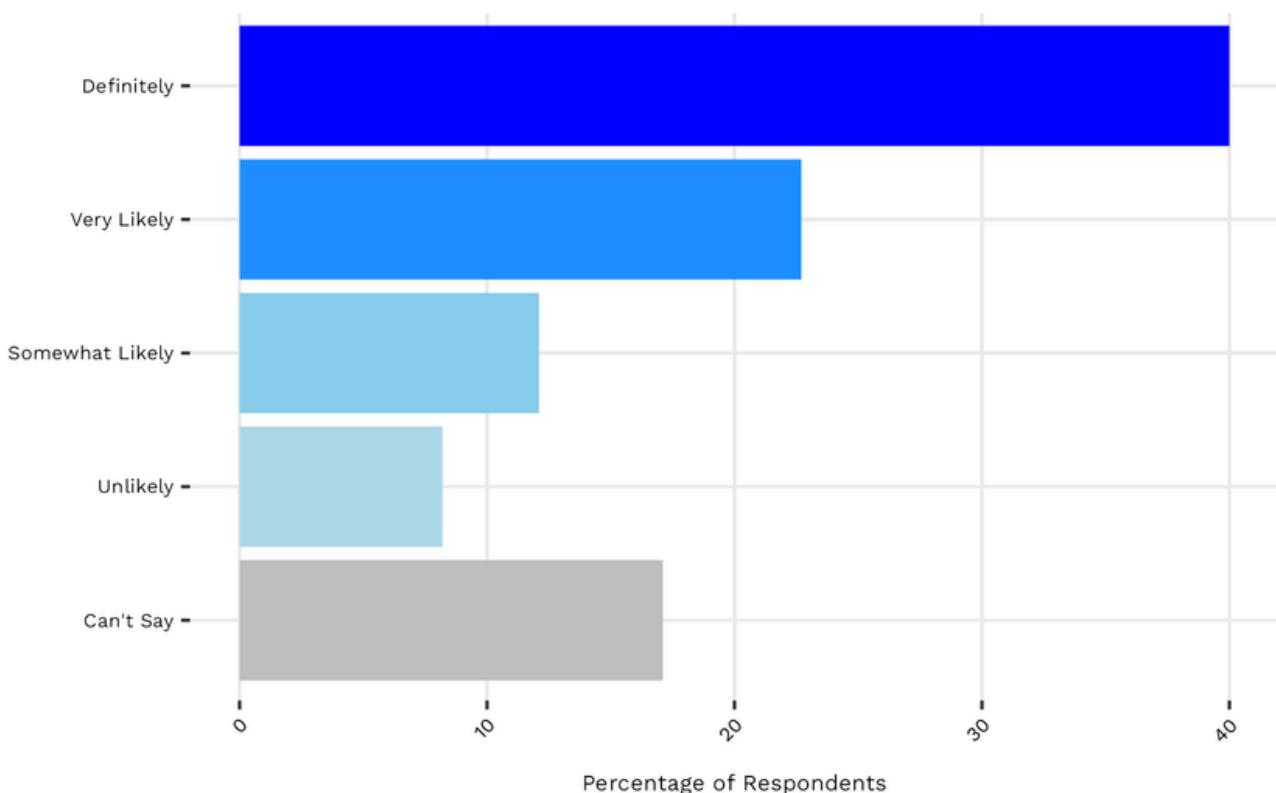




Inclusion of fare-free bus transport in party manifestos

46% of respondents reported using public buses daily. Another 19% indicated that they use buses a few days a week, showing a strong dependence on public transportation for daily commuting. About 11% use buses a few days per month, and 11% rarely use them. Notably, 5% of respondents reported that they never travel by bus. These numbers suggest that for many women in this survey, buses play a central role in their daily lives. However, a small segment of the respondents avoided public buses, likely due to social and cost barriers or different mode preferences.

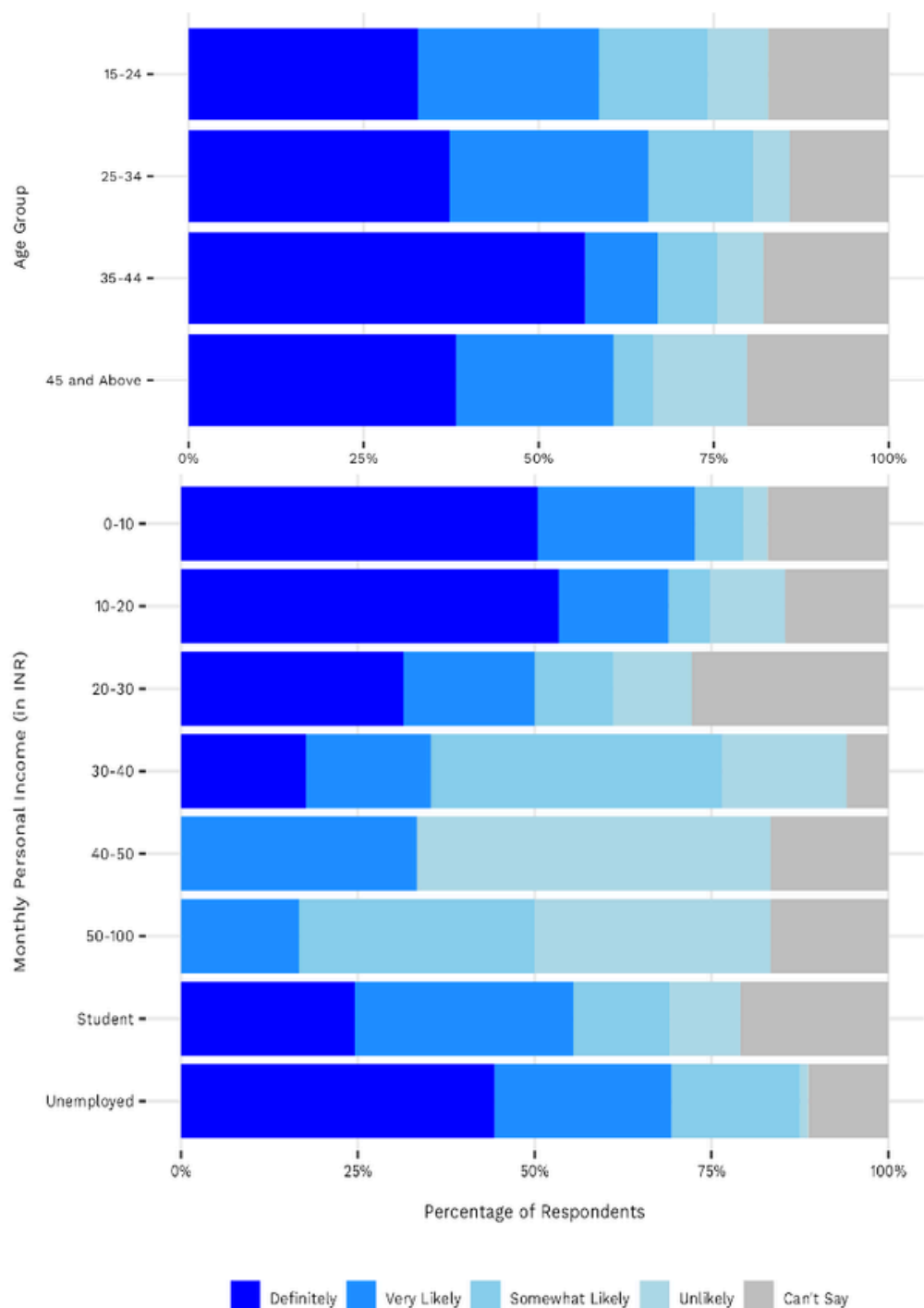
Would you consider voting for a political party that promises making public bus transport fare-free for women in Maharashtra



The data in this study points to strong support for fare-free bus travel across all age groups with varying levels of intensity, the strongest votary being the youngest (15-24 years) age group. Among this cohort, 71% were "definitely" or "very likely" supportive of the idea (40% definitely and 31% very likely). In the 25-34 age group, 76% were "definitely" or "very likely" supportive of the idea (43% definitely and 33% very likely), showing more pronounced support than the younger group.

The 35-44 age group exhibits the highest level of firm support, with 69% "definitely" in favour, while a smaller portion (13%) express they are "very likely" to support. Finally, among those aged 45 and above, support remains strong, with 48% "definitely" and 28% "very likely" in favour. These findings suggest that while all age groups generally support fare-free public buses, the intensity of support varies, with the women in the 35-44 years age group showing the most decisive backing.

Would you consider voting for a political party that promises making public bus transport fare-free for women in Maharashtra



The demand for fare-free public bus transport for women has strong backing across most income groups, but particularly among lower-income and unemployed individuals. Respondents earning less than 10 thousand per month show overwhelming support, with 61% definitely in favour and 27% very likely to support the policy. Similarly, 62% of those earning 10-20 thousand are definitely supportive.

In higher-income groups, the majority remains supportive, but the support becomes more divided. For example, in the ₹20-30 thousand group, 44% are definite supporters, while 26% are very likely. Among those earning ₹30-40 thousand, 44% are only somewhat supportive. In higher income brackets, only 20% or fewer are very likely to support.

Students and unemployed individuals exhibit strong backing, with 31% and 50%, respectively, definitely supporting the policy. This data suggests that the scheme could specifically benefit low-income groups, students, and unemployed women since the potential economic and social benefits of fare-free bus transport are most important to them.

COST BURDEN



One in five bus users found public transport fares to be expensive. As discussed previously in this report, for many low-income women, public buses represent the most cost-effective mode of transport, but unaffordable fare can limit their access and contribute to the larger gender gap in mobility and economic participation. The public transport system, thus, plays a key role in ensuring equitable access to opportunities, particularly in cities where gender inequities in mobility persist.

OTHER MAJOR CONCERNS



Reliability

Lack of connectivity and waiting time

Nealy, one in four women reported that they did not have sufficient bus connectivity in their area. The majority of respondents (57%) also reported waiting between 10 and 30 minutes for a bus. About 28% mentioned waiting between 30 minutes and 1 hour, while only 8% reported waiting less than 10 minutes. A smaller portion, 6%, said they wait for 1-2 hours before boarding a bus. 1% of respondents reported waiting for even more than 2 hours. Long waiting times, reported by 84% of respondents, and the lack of clean public toilets (57%) are significant infrastructural barriers that disproportionately affect women.

Condition of bus shelters

When asked about the condition of bus shelters, 39% of women rated them as “Very bad”, and 43% of the respondents rated them as “Satisfactory”. Only 16% of women found them “Good,” and a mere 1% rated the shelters as “Very good.” These results suggest that a significant share of women are dissatisfied with the quality of bus shelters. Research on the subject indicates that the presence of dimly lit bus stops, lack of security personnel, and absence of gender-sensitive policies create a perception of public spaces as unsafe for women ¹⁴.

While a bit over half of women experience relatively manageable wait times, a significant number still face longer waits, and very few women experience the ideal waiting time of less than 10 minutes. The issue with bus frequency and availability is particularly more intense in certain areas. Long waiting times at poorly lit or isolated bus stops increase women’s exposure to potential risks, further intensifying their reluctance to use public buses ¹⁵.

¹⁴ Phadke, Shilpa. 2013. “Unfriendly Bodies, Hostile Cities: Reflections on Loitering and Gendered Public Space.” *Economic and Political Weekly* 48 (39): 50–59.

¹⁵ Anand, A., & Tiwari, G. (2006). A gendered perspective of the shelter-transport-livelihood link: The case of poor women in Delhi. *Transport Reviews*, 26(1), 63–80. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01441640500175615>

Safety

The overwhelming majority of respondents (92%) identified overcrowding as a significant problem with Mumbai's public buses. The safety concerns are further emphasised by 48% of respondents who specifically mentioned safety issues. In light of the research that points to the issue of overcrowding in public transport systems as a significant barrier to women's mobility, this is a central area of concern for public transport planning in Mumbai. Overcrowded buses reduce physical comfort, limit the sense of personal safety, and increase the risk of harassment, leading to physical, emotional, and psychological harm¹⁶.

A previous survey of women bus users conducted by Akshara Centre in 2011 found that 95% of women experienced sexual harassment in public spaces, including inappropriate comments, staring, molestation, groping, and sexual abuse. The survey also reported that the majority of women (69%) felt unsafe on buses¹⁷.

Gender-Specific Discrimination

The lack of clean and accessible public toilets at bus stops, especially when waiting times are considerably high, presents a major gender-specific challenge. Women's biological needs, including menstrual and urinary tract hygiene, require more frequent access to public sanitation facilities¹⁸. Still, public bus systems often neglect this aspect, causing discomfort and discouraging bus use. Though pay-per-use facilities address the problem in a limited sense, the absence of proper sanitation facilities disproportionately affects low-income women who rely on public transport for daily commutes.

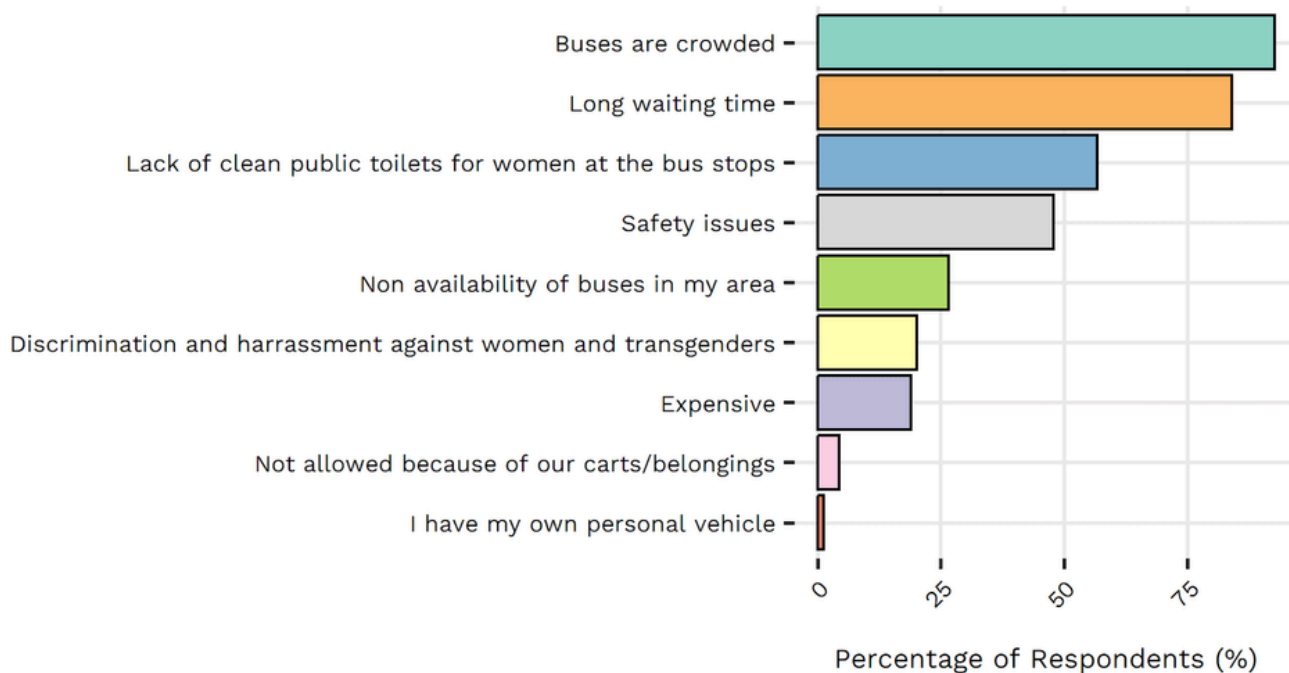
Discrimination and harassment against women and transgender individuals, reported by 20% of respondents, reflect larger societal and behavioural issues rooted in gender insensitivity. In India, societal norms and expectations often restrict women's freedom in public spaces, including transport systems. This discrimination is particularly severe for transgender individuals, who face systemic exclusion and stigma in public services (Swamy et al., 2021).

¹⁶ Ceccato, Vania, Nathan Gaudet, and Gabin Graf. 2022. "Crime and Safety in Transit Environments: A Systematic Review of the English and the French Literature, 1970-2020." *Public Transport* 14 (1): 105–53. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12469-021-00265-1>.

¹⁷ Akshara Centre. (2017). Empowering women's mobility: A program with transport systems.

¹⁸ Burt, Z., Nelson, K., & Ray, I. (2016). Towards gender equality through sanitation access. <https://doi.org/10.18356/25216112/12>.

Problems faced by women in public bus transport in Mumbai



Difference in Priority of Issues across Income Groups

Women in the lowest income bracket (₹0-10k/month) overwhelmingly report overcrowded buses (91%) and long waiting times (89%) as the most significant problems. These two issues are dominant across all income groups, but their intensity is particularly pronounced for this group. Moreover, the lack of clean public toilets is a notable problem for over half (59%) of the respondents, underscoring a major infrastructural gap that disproportionately affects women in lower-income communities with less flexibility in their travel schedules. Safety concerns are also prominent, with nearly 47% of women in this income category citing safety issues during their commute.

Interestingly, although public buses are generally considered a comparatively affordable mode of transport, 22% of women in the lowest income group still find the bus fares expensive. This reflects the precarious economic position of this group, where even small increases in transportation costs can increase their financial burden. The survey highlights that affordability is not just about absolute costs but also about relative income and expenditure priorities, particularly in a city like Mumbai, where daily expenses are high.

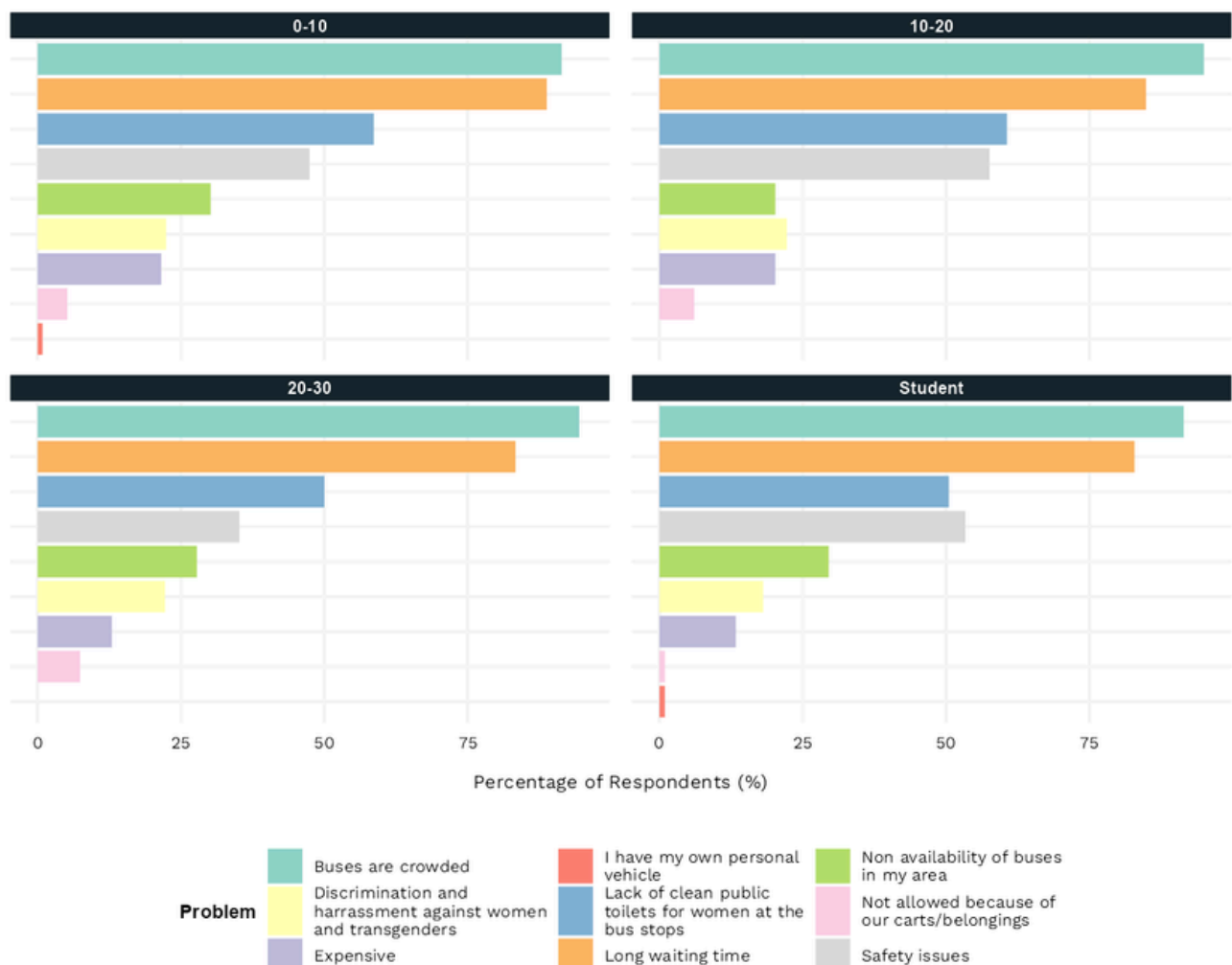
The middle-low income group (₹10-20k/month) echoes similar concerns about overcrowding (95%) and long waiting times (85%). However, this group reported a higher percentage of safety issues (58%) compared to the lowest-income group. A potential explanation could be the difference in routes and timings taken by women in this income group, possibly exposing them to more unsafe environments during their commute.

Interestingly, affordability as a problem sees a slight decline in this group, with only 20% reporting bus fares as expensive. This could indicate that while cost is still a concern, it is not as prohibitive for this group as it is for the lowest income bracket. The percentage of women reporting discrimination and harassment remains similar to the lowest income group (22%), highlighting that gender-based harassment cuts across economic lines, affecting women irrespective of their income.

The cost of transportation, however, is less of an issue for the middle-income group (₹20-40k/month), with only 13% finding buses expensive. This aligns with broader trends in public transport use, where affordability becomes a less pressing concern as income rises.

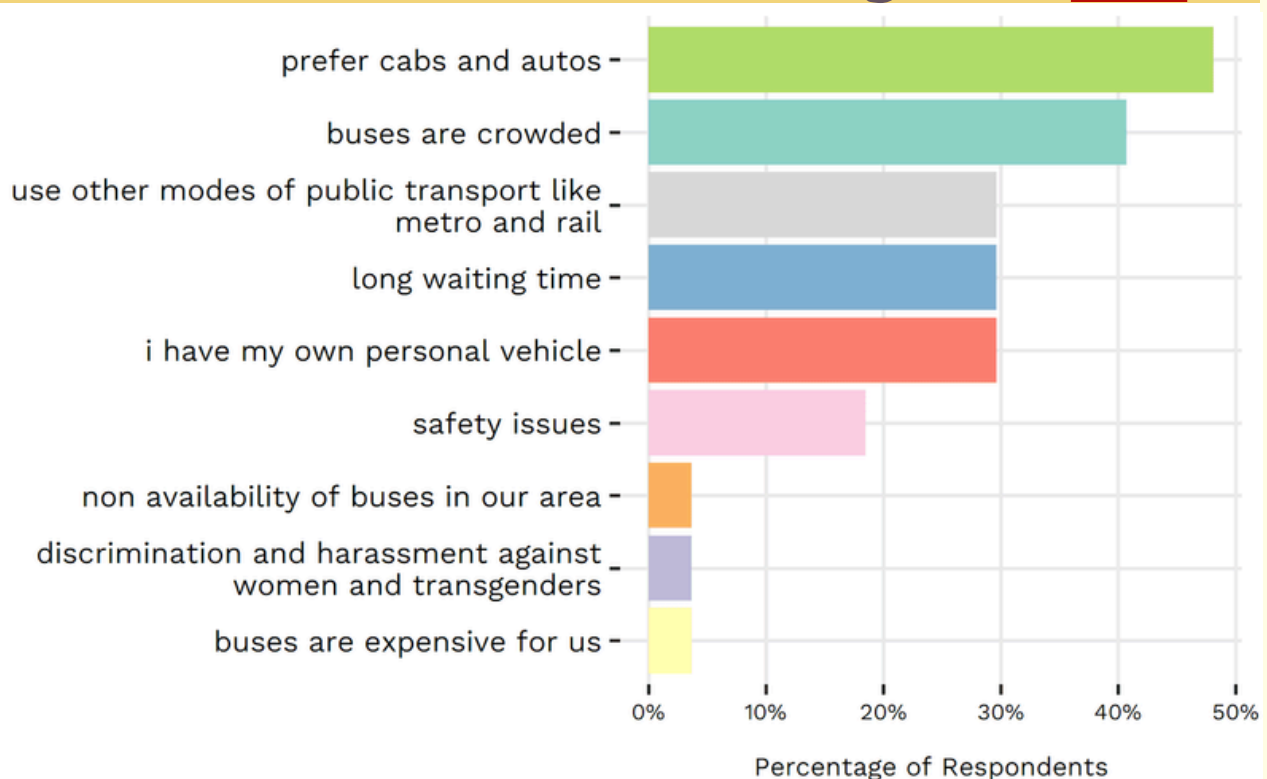
Problems faced by women in using public buses

Women across the income classes find **overcrowding** and **long waiting hours** as the two major challenges in bus use.



Thus, the survey shows that issues faced by women while using public buses in Mumbai are founded on both social factors and infrastructure deficiencies. And gender-based concerns hamper women's access to safe and reliable public transport. The results of the survey on issues faced by women using public buses in Mumbai reveal critical concerns about overcrowding, long waiting times, lack of clean public toilets, and safety. These findings reflect larger patterns discussed in academic and social sector research on gendered access to urban public transport.

Reasons cited by women for not using buses



Most of the non-users avoided buses because they preferred cabs/taxis and auto-rickshaws, indicating that a sizeable section of non-users will not use buses as they can afford to use other more convenient modes. For making buses an option that those women can consider, it will be important to focus on service quality and reliability rather than financial viability. Other highly cited reasons for avoiding public buses were: overcrowding, long waiting times, and safety concerns.

Though public bus transport is not reported to be expensive by non-users, the success of fare-free public bus travel schemes in states like Delhi and Punjab demonstrates that fare reductions or eliminations can significantly increase women's ridership (refer to the Introduction section in this report). This finding also emphasises the need for reform measures that address the specific vulnerabilities of women and gender minorities in buses and public spaces.

CONCLUSION

The survey results show overwhelming support for fare-free public bus transport in Maharashtra, especially among women from lower-income groups and younger age categories. A significant majority of respondents, across income brackets and age groups, expressed an apparent willingness to support political parties that prioritise this policy in their manifestos. Additionally, 94% of respondents expressed strong intent to use fare-free buses for daily and intercity travel. Both working women and students face many of the same issues when using public buses. Affordability of public transport is reported as a challenge by 13% of students, but for working women in the 0-10 and 10-20 income brackets, this concern rises to about 20%.

The findings indicate that introducing fare-free bus transport, especially for women, could become a key electoral issue with widespread public backing, particularly among economically disadvantaged groups. The introduction of fare-free or subsidised fare schemes for women, as seen in Delhi and Punjab, could make public buses a more accessible option for women from all income groups, particularly for low-income groups.

The scope for improvement also includes better infrastructure, such as clean public toilets and safe waiting areas, which would alleviate some of the discomfort women face when using public buses. Moreover, initiatives that reduce overcrowding, such as increasing the frequency of buses or introducing dedicated women-only services, could go a long way in improving women's experiences and safety. In addition to infrastructural changes, gender-sensitive training for transport personnel targeting gender-based violence is critical for fostering a safer, more inclusive public transport system¹⁹.

¹⁹ Turner, J., & Grieco, M. (2000). Gender and time poverty: The neglected social policy implications of gendered time, transport and travel. *Time & Society*, 9(1), 129-136. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0961463x00009001007>

Key Recommendations

Implement fare-free bus services for women and transgenders across Maharashtra, with reserved seats for women and transgender persons.

Expand public bus fleet size, increase the frequency of bus services, add small buses for underserved areas, and introduce women-only (ladies' special) buses in all major cities.



Upgrade bus stops and depots with better facilities for commuters and bus staff, including shelters, toilets, and safety systems.

Implement Bus Priority Lanes on all major roads in cities with a million-plus population in Maharashtra.

Regular surveys should be conducted to collect gender-disaggregated data and analysed for better aligning policies with women's needs and lives



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GREENPEACE INDIA

DEMAND OF MAHARASHTRA MANIFESTO FOR STATE ELECTIONS

- **Introduction of fare-free public bus transport scheme for women and transgenders in the all state, city and municipal-run buses in Maharashtra**
 - A fare-free public bus transport scheme should be announced for women in the state. This scheme should apply to all state, city and municipal-run buses in Maharashtra.
 - Dedicated funds should be allocated to implement a fare-free bus transport scheme for women in the state.
 - A fare-free public bus transportation policy should be announced for transgender persons in the state where all state government, city and municipal-run buses should be free for transgender persons. Delhi has already a dedicated fare-free bus transport scheme for transgenders.
 - At least two seats should be reserved for transgender persons in all state- and city-run buses in Maharashtra.
- **Introduction of women-only buses/ladies' special buses in different cities/towns of Maharashtra**
 - Women-only buses should be introduced in different parts of the state, especially in its major cities.
 - The introduction of women-only paratransit facilities in areas where ladies' special buses cannot be used.
 - Increase in the number of ladies' special buses in Mumbai
- **Increase the number of buses in the state of Maharashtra. This should include increasing the number of buses in major cities of Maharashtra like Mumbai, Pune etc, as well.**
 - Increase in the number of state transport buses run by MSRTC
 - According to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs' benchmark, Cities need 60 buses per one lakh population. Major cities in Maharashtra, like Mumbai and Pune, fall way below this line. The number of buses in Mumbai, Pune and other cities in Maharashtra should be increased in proportion to the population to at least meet the MoHUA benchmark
 - According to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs benchmark, the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) requires at least 13000 buses to meet the ridership demand.
 - State and city transport corporations should procure and run more buses rather than leasing out public buses to private companies.

- Introduce mini buses for first and last-mile connectivity
- **Improve public bus transportation infrastructure in the state.**
 - Dedicated funds should be allocated to improve bus stops, depots, and buses in different parts of the state and cities.
 - Provide a sufficient budget to ensure that bus stops have proper shelters with amenities like toilets, public announcements, information display systems, and CCTV cameras.
 - Bus depots in major cities of Maharashtra, like Mumbai, should be protected, and infrastructure facilities in these depots should be enhanced rather than selling these depots to private companies or builders.
- **Implement recommendations by Comprehensive Mobility Plans for different cities in Maharashtra.**
 - Non-Motorised Transport Policy and Parking Policies should be prepared and implemented in Mumbai, Pune and other cities of Maharashtra.
 - Exclusive Bus Lanes (EBL)/ BRT should be introduced especially in major cities of Maharashtra like Mumbai.
 - Integrated fare structure and Common Ticketing among existing public transport systems in the state
 - A Comprehensive transport plan for all the major cities of Maharashtra
 - A Unified Metropolitan Transport Authority (UMTA) to facilitate coordinated planning and implementation of urban transport programmes and projects and an integrated management of the urban transport systems should be formed and given legal and binding authority/powers
- **Employee welfare**
 - Bus drivers and conductors should be well paid and provided with permanent employment, including all welfare and service benefits in state- and city-run buses in Maharashtra.
- **Dedicated Sustainable Public Transportation Fund**
 - Separate urban transport fund to ensure an efficient transportation system
 - Introduce polluters pay principle and add additional sales tax/cess on fossil fuel, additional registration fee on four-wheelers, annual taxes on private cars, congestion tax, green tax, advertising revenue on transit corridors, etc.
 - Levy road charges for big cars (SUVs) with less than 3 passengers.
 - Provide tax concessions to all public transport systems, including waving off annual taxes levied on public buses.
- **Mumbai Suburban Railway**
 - Introduce fare-free/subsidised tickets or passes for women passengers, the physically challenged, and transgender people on the Mumbai suburban railway.





Greenpeace India is an independent campaigning organization that acts to change attitudes and behaviour, to protect and conserve the environment and to promote peace.

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