

## 2020 WTS-LA Innovative Transportation Solutions Award Winner - Metro's Understanding How Women Travel

Metro's UHWT looks to ensure that fare is fair...



Author Arthur C. Clarke said, “The only way to discover the limits of the possible is to go beyond them into the impossible.” The WTS-LA Innovative Transportation Solutions Award does that concept one better. Each year, the award recognizes outstanding transportation innovation with one proviso—women must play a meaningful role in that advancement. Why is that important? Because for too long women’s ideas, energy, and creativity were kept in check. This award helps promote the understanding that women deserve an integral seat at the innovation table. Nowhere is that more in evidence than with this year’s winner, Metro’s Understanding How Women Travel (UHWT) project.

Women travel differently. That’s not necessarily a choice, but it’s certainly a reality. However, transportation organizations rarely consider that factor, let alone address it. LA Metro (Metro) is different. According to the project website, “Although women comprise over half of transit, their mobility needs, concerns, and preferences have not been critically accounted for in the way our transportation systems are planned. As a result, women tend to bear outsized burdens and risks in the course of their daily travel.” Metro seeks to change that. In order to do that, however, they must study it first. And that’s the impetus behind the project.



A groundbreaking effort, the UHWT is a broad, intersectional effort to identify mobility barriers and challenges women face. The study analyzed existing data sets and activated five primary data collection methodologies to fill gaps in the existing qualitative data sets and to connect with core transit rider groups difficult to reach by conventional methodology. But reach them they did. And the findings were compelling. For example, though women make up 47% of the workforce, they comprise 52% of bus passengers and 46% of train riders. Yet entire systems are designed primarily by men with men in mind. The goal of the study is to “improve safety, reliability and convenience for our female riders by collection gender disaggregated data to better understand and address systemic issues within Metro’s planning methodologies.” Though extremely thorough, this is only a first step. Metro plans to use the data it collects as the foundation for a Gender Action Plan to “pivot from research findings into actionable changes.”

Naturally, a study like this is revolutionary. And given the subject matter, female leadership, let alone participation, is pivotal. From shaping to conducting to evaluating the study, Metro delivered. Metro women led the team, including Metro Chief Policy Officer Elba Higueros, Metro Mobility Corridors Senior Director Meghna Khanna, and Metro Board Relations Senior Manager Claudia Galicia. And gender awareness was also heeded on the other side of the table, including team project manager Chelsea Richer, and Sarah Brandenberg and Emily Finkel, all from Fehr & Peers. Focus groups were led by the Redhill Group's Judith McCourt, and Pueblo Planning's Monique Lopez led the participatory workshops, particularly those focusing on the most loyal yet vulnerable rider population—women riders facing homelessness, disability, and those with varying immigration status. In addition UCLA's Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideros and Madeline Brozen aided with literature review. While it's impossible to list every female participant, it is important to note that women led and participated in every aspect of the study to ensure its integrity, sensitivity, and effectiveness. And that is most certainly a credit to the project and Metro.

“The only way to discover the limits of the possible is to go beyond them into the impossible.” Metro has done just that by ensuring that a revolutionary study was created, formed, and conducted brilliantly and fairly. For that reason and many more, Metro's Understanding How Women Travel project richly deserves to be named the 2020 WTS-LA Innovative Transportation Solutions Award winner.