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Bridging the Gap: Gender Equity in Transportation for Unhoused Women

A comprehensive project submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Master of Urban & Regional Planning

DaYoung Lee • 2024

Client: Los Angeles Department of Transportation

Faculty Advisor: Evelyn Blumenberg



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항상 건강하시고, 앞으로도 이런 기쁨을 함께 나눌 수 있기를 위하여.

Disclaimer

This report was prepared in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master in Urban and Regional Planning degree in the Department of Urban Planning at the University of California, Los Angeles. It was prepared at the direction of the Los Angeles Department of Transportation as a planning client. The views expressed herein are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Department, the UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs, UCLA as a whole, or the client.



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Executive Summary

The travel experiences of unhoused women in Los Angeles present a critical yet underexplored aspect of urban mobility and homelessness. Currently, there is insufficient literature addressing the unique transportation challenges faced by unhoused women. This report aims to fill that gap by contributing to the existing literature, confirming the significance of these challenges and emphasizing the need for solutions tailored to the unique transportation needs of houseless women.

I conducted interviews with unhoused women in Los Angeles to gauge their travel patterns and better understand their primary safety concerns. I conducted my interviews in two primary Locations: Van Nuys and Little Tokyo, to reflect the differences in travel experiences between the suburbs and the inner city.

Homelessness resources tend to be more concentrated in Central City Los Angeles, where Little Tokyo is located. This concentration of services, including a larger network of fare-free transportation options like the DASH service, provides a model for what could be possible in terms of providing relief for unhoused women in their mobility, safety, and access to public transportation. Women interviewed in Little Tokyo expressed appreciation for the DASH service, highlighting its role in facilitating their daily travel needs without the burden of additional cost.

Conversely, in Van Nuys, resources are sparse and spread out, compelling unhoused women to travel greater distances to access the same essential services. This scarcity of nearby resources prompts women in Van Nuys to optimize their travel time, such as planning to use their thirty-minute transit rides as valuable time to charge their phones and devices. This need to double-use their travel time underscores the importance of accessible and reliable transit services for unhoused women in suburban areas with fewer intersecting transit lines.

Key TakeAways on Mobility and Safety

- Unhoused women rely on community networks for managing their travel needs, especially for those in the Valley where these essential services are spread few and far in between.
- Biking is becoming an increasingly preferred mode of travel for many unhoused women in the Valley, as it is affordable and environmentally friendly. It must be noted that these interviews were conducted before the summer heatwaves that the Valley experiences.
- The use of bicycles and access to fare-free transit provides a sense of autonomy and independence, allowing unhoused women to manage their daily routines and responsibilities more effectively
- Unhoused women in the Valley who have to travel to the inner city for resources maximize their travel by accomplishing additional tasks during their trips.
- Though unhoused women report feeling concerned when alone or when there are not enough witnesses around, they are still wary of the presence of law enforcement.
- Public transportation modes and transit stations often serve as primary locations for recharging devices.
- Foliage such as bushes function as a safety measure by providing a sense of security and concealment, thereby reducing the risk of exposure to violence and harassment.



- Anti-homeless measures like 41.18, which criminalize people's presence within certain distances of various establishments, leads to continuous displacements, disrupting daily routines by forcing individuals to navigate the complex legal and geographic boundaries set by the municipality.

Findings

My findings suggest that to address the barrier faced by unhoused women's travels in Los Angeles, multiple policy recommendations must be considered.

- Addressing the fundamental issue of housing is essential to reduce the instability that forced unhoused women to seek stable resting places.
- Implementing more robust data collection and analysis will help identify the needs and gaps among different groups, providing the evidence necessary to recognize the unhoused as a protected class.
- Partnering with homelessness advocacy mutual aid groups can facilitate a non-law enforcement approach to outreach strategies, fostering community engagement built on trust and consistency.
- Securing increased funding for essential amenities, such as providing shade, seating, and phone charging stations at bus stops and on buses will improve the safety and accessibility of public transportation and overall mobility.
- Implementing infrastructural improvements, including increasing the number of bicycle lanes, planting more trees and bushes, and access to fare-free transit, will be essential to support the autonomy, mobility, and safety of unhoused women.
- All in all, a comprehensive approach to providing relief for unhoused women will require a combination of resources and support systems.



1. Introduction

Homelessness in Los Angeles is deeply stigmatized, resulting in unhoused individuals facing numerous barriers to basic needs and services (Phelan, et al. 1997). In a city dominated by car-centric infrastructure, travel is yet another significant challenge. For unhoused women, these difficulties are compounded by additional safety concerns and societal stigmas related to both their housing status and gender (Loukaitou-Sideris, 2014). According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, a reported 222,970 women — or 13.3% of every 10,000 women—were experiencing homelessness in the U.S., underscoring the critical need to address the challenges unhoused women face. Despite this relatively high ratio of houseless women, there is insufficient literature available to support the development of essential policy changes. This paper aims to fill that gap by adding to the existing literature and recommending policy implementations on the specific transportation needs and experiences of unhoused women within Los Angeles’s urban fabric.

Through the 2019 Changing Lanes Study, the Los Angeles Department of Transportation (LADOT) adopted the goal of achieving a gender equitable transportation system (LADOT, 2021). The 2019 report focused on several neighborhoods across Los Angeles with a high proportion of BIPOC women, identifying the specific travel barriers they encounter and proposing strategies to address these challenges. Building on this initiative, LADOT seeks to understand the travel needs of unhoused women, who encounter unique transportation challenges, including safety concerns while traveling or using public spaces (Loukaitou-Sideris & Fink, 2009). I conducted this study’s set of interviews to provide insights that will help further their goal of creating a more equitable and safe transportation system with a focus on the needs of unhoused women in Los Angeles.

I conducted a comprehensive literature review, followed by community outreach through interviews with unhoused women in two primary locations: the Orange (or G) Line in Van Nuys and in Little Tokyo in downtown Los Angeles. I was connected to the unhoused communities in these neighborhoods through the help of the Aetna Solidarity Coalition in Van Nuys and through JTown Action & Solidarity in Little Tokyo, both mutual aid organizations that advocate for their unhoused neighbors. While women’s ownership and use of private automobiles have increased steadily over the years, women in most cities remain more reliant on public transit compared to men, a trend seen amongst unhoused women as well (Loukaitou-Sideris, 2014). This report’s interviews and analysis will focus on understanding the travel modes and patterns of unhoused women. When approaching this topic, I used the following preliminary and secondary questions to guide the overall research project:

Preliminary Questions for Interviewees:

- *Where are unhoused women traveling to and what modes of transportation are they using to get around Los Angeles?*
- *What limitations do unhoused women encounter while navigating the urban environment, including safety concerns they face while using different modes of transportation?*

Following Questions for LADOT and like Transportation Agencies:



- *What could LADOT do to make more equitable and accessible transportation services in response to the findings?*
- *What policies or strategies can reduce the barriers unhoused women face in their unique transportation modalities?”*

By drawing from comprehensive interviews with houseless women and analyzing travel patterns, travel destinations, and travel options, this report aims to bridge gaps in both literature and policies concerning the intersection of gender and homelessness in the context of transit. Ultimately, this project aspires to spark a conversation on how to uplift the most vulnerable populations in the transportation world and improve accessibility in Los Angeles.

2. Literature Review

Before delving into the travel experiences of unhoused women, it’s crucial to first understand the broader context of homelessness and the factors contributing to its pervasiveness. This literature review will explore several key areas: the role of the affordable housing crisis on homelessness, the gender differences in people experiencing evictions, the historical concentration of homelessness in Los Angeles’s Skidrow, and the current landscape where homelessness has spread citywide. These areas of focus will provide a comprehensive backdrop for discussing the specific transportation challenges faced by unhoused women in Los Angeles and the critical need for accessible and reliable transportation solutions.

Homelessness and the Affordable Housing Crisis

It is difficult to capture the affordable housing crisis with one specific definition, yet the crisis stands as one of the primary drivers of homelessness in Los Angeles (County of LA, 2023). This growing unaffordability in America has led to an increasing number of low-income individuals and families suffering severe housing cost burdens and facing a serious risk of homelessness (Clark III, 2016).

A look at residual incomes—the amount of money available after paying for rent and utilities to cover other needs—provides insight into the increasing burdens renters face, particularly for low-income households (Joint Ctr., 2024). In 2022 alone, renter households earning less than \$30,000 annually had an all-time low median residual income of just \$310 per month, marking a 47 percent decrease from 2001 after adjusting for inflation (Joint Ctr., 2024). This amount is significantly lower than the \$2,000 per month in residual income that the Economic Policy Institute estimates that a single-person household needs to cover non-housing needs (Joint Ctr., 2024).



After a Swift Uptick in 2023, a Record Number of People Are Unhoused

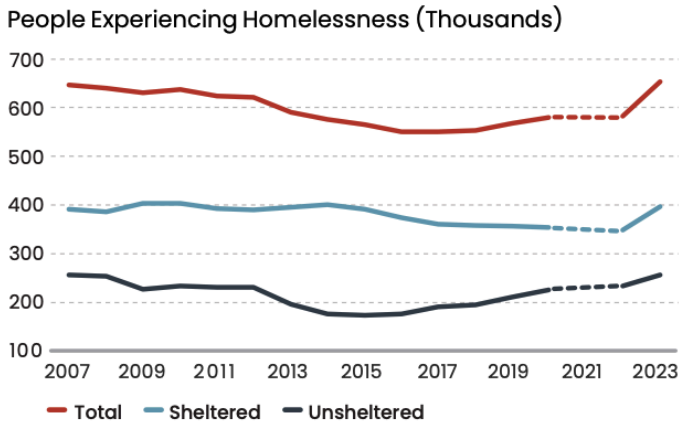


Figure 1. People Experiencing Homelessness between 2007 to 2023 (Thousands). (Source: Joint Ctr., 2024)

housing instability is once again on the rise (Joint Ctr., 2024).

Homelessness has grown significantly as housing costs have increased, reaching an all-time high of 653,100 people in January 2023 (see Figure 2). While renter protections, income supports, and housing assistance during the early years of the pandemic helped stave off a considerable rise in homelessness in the U.S, the end of these protections in 2022 have resulted in the number of people experiencing homelessness jumping by nearly 71,000 in just on year (Joint Ctr., 2024). In Los Angeles, the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) found 69,144 people experiencing homelessness countywide, a 4.1% increase from 2020, and no count was conducted in 2021 (Homeless Initiative, 2023). Figure 3 depicts these increases.

Homelessness is not a monolith, as studies have shown that there appear to be gender differences in how individuals end up in cycles of homelessness. For instance, formerly incarcerated men are more likely to experience homelessness than never-incarcerated men and women (Geller and Curtis, 2011), whereas women appear to be confronted with evictions at a higher rate than men (Desmond, 2014).

The 2020 COVID Pandemic showed that government intervention in the form of reduced eviction filings provided significant relief to vulnerable communities, particularly in majority-Black and low-income neighborhoods (Hepburn & et al., 2023). The Eviction Lab estimated that eviction filings dropped by 58 percent from the start of the pandemic through the end of 2021, aided by federal, state, and local eviction moratoriums and the \$46.55 billion Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA) program. However, by mid-2023, many states had nearly depleted their ERA funds, and eviction filings had returned to pre-pandemic levels. As a result,

The Rental Assistance Shortage Continues to Worsen

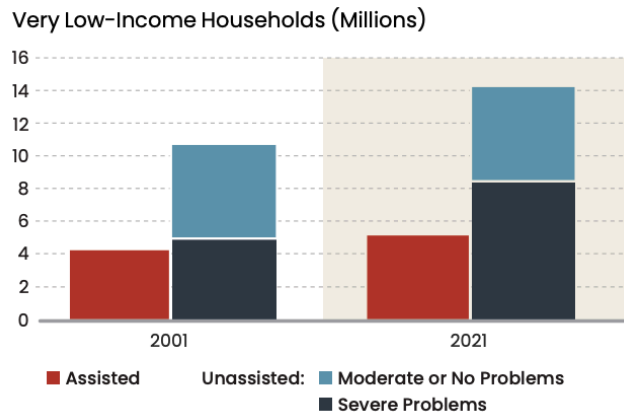


Figure 2. Rental Assistance Shortage Comparison Between 2001 and 2021. (Source: Joint Ctr., 2024)



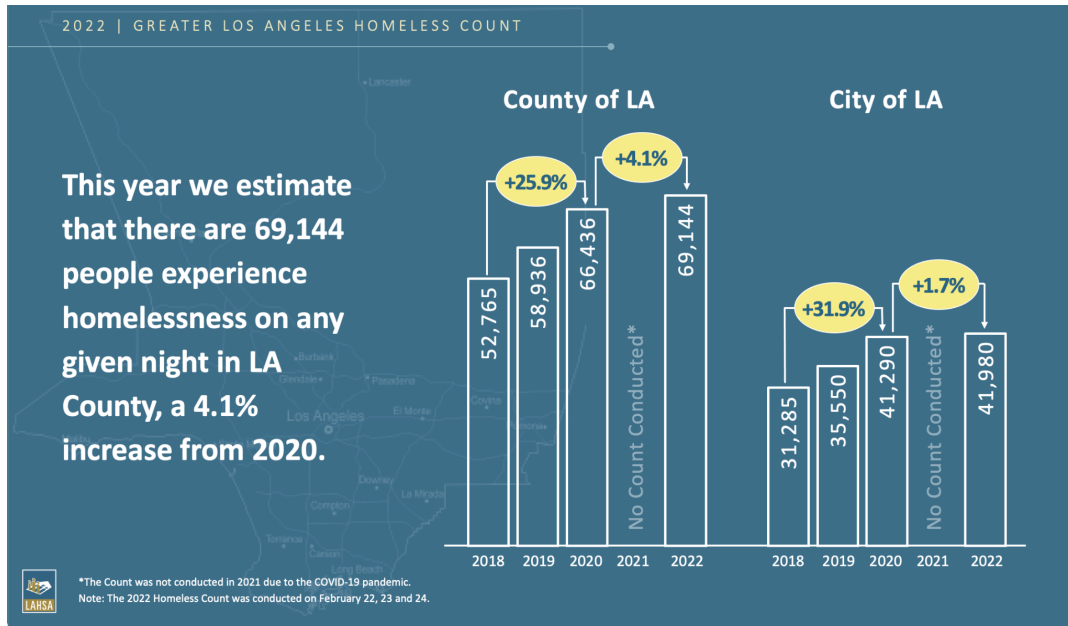


Figure 3. Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count, 2022. (Source: LAHSA)

The affordable housing crisis in the former section exacerbates this issue, as the severe housing cost burdens and high rates of eviction disproportionately affect low-income women (Desmond, 2012). The challenges posed by this crisis and the increasing number of homelessness underscores the vulnerability of women in particular.

In addition to struggling with maintaining stable housing, eviction records perpetuate cycles of housing instability for individuals, as landlords are less likely to accept housing vouchers due to the stigma that previously evicted tenants are unreliable tenants (George, 2022), particularly for women (Desmond, 2014).

Homeless Encampments

Homelessness in Los Angeles has reached a critical point, with encampments emerging in nearly every neighborhood due to the high prevalence of homelessness. (County of Los Angeles, 2024). To fully understand this phenomenon, it is essential to examine the origins and development of Skid Row as a designated containment zone for the homeless.

Skid Row, notorious for its high concentration of homelessness, gained its reputation as a marginalized area through decades of urban planning and socio-economic dynamics. Originally, Skid Row’s proximity to the national railroad network attracted transient men and returning soldiers from World War I migrating into Los Angeles in search of job opportunities (Schneider, 1988). However, these districts quickly became part of the urban law-and-order problem for city officials, as these transient men were viewed as a threat to the values of the dominant classes due to their extreme transiency, untrustworthy anonymity, and casual work style. Public concern about the “tramp problem” disrupting a safe, orderly and clean public environment rose to near-hysteria during periods of labor turmoil (Schneider, 1988).

Though attracting single, male migrant workers during the industrialization and railroad eras of the late 1800s, the Great Depression left these workers homeless, and the area became populated by unemployed individuals, today known as Los Angeles's Skid Row (Woolston, 2016). In an effort to contain homelessness, city officials, influenced by business leaders and the Community Redevelopment Agency, designated Skid Row as a containment zone for the homeless (Gudis, 2022). The approach was intended to keep the homeless and poor from spreading to other parts of the city and to make Skid Row the hub for social services and recovery. To actualize this goal, the city only partially cleared Skid Row and concentrated services there to manage the homeless population (Gudis, 2022).

Though Skid Row's reputation started with the transient male population, the demographics have shifted to include a significant number of women within its boundaries. (Batko, Bond, & Girod, 2023). This shift led to the establishment of critical resources such as the Downtown Women's Center (DWC), which was founded in 1978 to focus exclusively on serving and empowering women experiencing homelessness (DWC, 2024). The DWC provides meals, hygiene stations, mental health services, and permanent supportive housing, making it one of the largest housing providers for women in the country (Sgarzi, 2005). This increase in the number of women experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles County is reflected nation-wide. According to the Los Angeles County Women's Needs Assessment, the percentage of unsheltered homeless individuals who identified as women or transgender increased from 26% to 29% between 2015 and 2019 (2023). This trend continued from 2020 to 2022, with the number of women experiencing homelessness rising faster than men, with a 6 percent increase (6,837 women) compared to a 1 percent increase (about 3,663 men) (Batko, Bond, & Girod, 2023).

Yet, the resources provided by the DWC are not enough, as the increasing prevalence of homelessness has led to encampments popping up in all corners of Los Angeles, not just Skid Row (County of Los Angeles, 2024). This spread of encampments but lack of resource centers like DWC is exacerbated by the lack of consistent public transportation for women. For instance, the Shelter Bus Stop outside the DWC, designated by the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA), is a critical yet inadequately supported service (McNenny, Grode, & Mbella, 2020). This makeshift shelter bus stop is heavily used by unhoused women who wait for chartered buses that transport them to overnight shelters outside the neighborhood. Despite its importance, there is no infrastructure supporting this bus stop, and the privately chartered buses lack consistency and accountability. As a result, women waiting for these buses face frustration and compromised safety ((McNenny, Grode, & Mbella, 2020).

Travel Patterns and Mobility

Navigating the challenges faced by the unhoused community involves understanding the stigmatizations associated with homelessness that guide the geographic movement patterns of their daily lives. Mobility patterns for unhoused individuals are highly spatially constrained, shaped by social stigma, economic factors, and the rules and policies of transportation systems (Jocoy & Casino, 2010). Such rules include expectations for how "productive and responsible" citizens should behave and subsequently influence both those who want to help the homeless and those who aim to exclude them from their neighborhoods. Consequently, unhoused



individuals often choose destinations where they experience varying levels of inclusion and exclusions, traveling to spaces where they negotiate between extremes of placelessness or containment.

Inclusive spaces for a houseless person may involve maintaining access to resources provided by friends and family (Wolch et al., 1993). Exclusive spaces could be neighborhoods of housed individuals or government institutions like social services and public assistance agencies — places where stigmatization against the unhoused is high. Given that these institutions are typically scattered across towns—as such is the case with DWC—public transportation is critical for unhoused individuals seeking resources, frequenting shelters, food banks, and healthcare facilities (Ding et al., 2022).

This aligns with Jocoy and Casino’s argument that improvements in transportation accessibility can only be effective if they are coordinated with broader policies, such as housing regulations, social services, and law enforcement practices (2010).

Literature on gender differences in transportation highlights that women are more likely to “trip chain,” in which they make multiple stops during a trip that begins and ends at home or work (McGuckin & Murakami, 1999). This is due to women’s higher likelihood of performing household and care-related tasks, such as grocery shopping and taking children to and from school (Taylor et al., 2015).

The mobility patterns and navigation of the urban fabric by unhoused women particularly are influenced by social-support networks and the temporal nature of their coping strategies surrounding homelessness (Rowe & Wolch, 1993). Resource sharing among network members greatly influences their travel patterns, including trips for entertainment, maintaining social ties, or job searching (Wolch & Rowe, 1992). Additionally, unhoused women often rely on service facilities as their home base, around which their mobility patterns revolve (Wolch & Rowe, 1992). In line with the general houseless population, their mobility networks are influenced by both informal (inclusive) and semiformal (exclusive) spaces—social networks in the former and resource centers in the latter (Rowe & Wolch, 1990). Financial constraints often limit bus trips to those supported by social-service agencies providing tokens for proof of social-service appointments, leading to weekly, biweekly, or monthly routines for accessing services and jobs.

Safety concerns also significantly affect how and when women travel. Women experience greater fears of harassment and assault in public spaces than men, leading them to be more risk-averse (Tandogan & Ilhan, 2016). Lonely bus stops, unstaffed stations, and pedestrian subways are among the places that cause fear for women, restricting their freedom of movement within the urban landscape and leading them to travel inconvenient routes or make fewer trips to avoid fear-inducing situations (Yavuz & Welch, 2010). Traffic safety, including the presence of street lighting and automobile speeds, also influences women’s travel choices (Clifton & Livi, 2005). This necessity for safety influences their decisions about where and when to travel, often forcing them to retreat to less visible locations or travel at specific times to minimize risks (Radley, Hodgetts, & Cullen, 2006). Their mobility is not just about reaching destinations, then, but also about ensuring personal security, which can limit their access to resources and complicate their daily routines. The need to avoid danger often leads to them adopting transient lifestyles continually moving to stay safe.



It is important to note that transportation agencies like Metro have considered addressing these transportation inequities but have often chosen carceral responses like increased police presence and surveillancing, which do not actually make unhoused women feel safer (Metro, Everyone deserves a Safe Metro). Transportation agencies defaulting to top-down punitive strategies only further victimizes unhoused women, especially as recent literature suggests that law enforcement alone can only temporarily remove or displace homelessness rather than address its structural causes (Ding et al., 2022).

LADOT's "Changing Lanes" study, on the other hand, has highlighted the significant gender-based differences in mobility patterns and access to transportation in Los Angeles. Though their focus was not primarily on unhoused women, their findings revealed that women from low-income backgrounds face challenges in their daily travels that are exacerbated by their socio-economic status and responsibilities such as caregiving and household duties (LADOT, 2021). Additionally, they faced more barriers to transportation than men, including safety concerns, poor walking environments, lower access to driver's licenses, and the high cost and inefficiency of public transit.

LADOT's findings model the right direction for transportation agencies directing their resources towards addressing travel disparities through enhancing public transit services amongst vulnerable populations. While the study focused on low-income women, a critical next step is to examine gender differences in travel patterns within unhoused communities. Currently, there is a significant lack of comprehensive literature on the mobility patterns and transportation needs of unhoused women, further exacerbating existing gaps in understanding and addressing their unique challenges.

Research Gaps

Transportation is crucial in any urban setting, making equitable access necessary for the most vulnerable populations. Developing comprehensive literature on the mobility patterns and transportation needs of unhoused women can ensure that bottom-up methods from these communities are prioritized.

Bridging the gap in the limited literature on the intersection of homelessness and gender within transportation modalities includes conducting on-the-ground outreach. Understanding how gender influences the transportation experiences of unhoused women is essential for developing targeted interventions and policies. My project aims to add to LADOT's initiative to bridge gender disparities within transportation planning to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by unhoused women in their travel experiences across Los Angeles. As homelessness remains a pressing concern in Los Angeles, the need for systematic solutions becomes clearer in addressing gender equity in transportation to make traveling the streets of Los Angeles safer and more inclusive.



3. Research Design & Methods: Qualitative Data Collection

I interviewed groups in two distinct neighborhoods within the City of Los Angeles: Van Nuys and Little Tokyo (see Figure 3). I strategically selected these locations due to their contrasting residential density levels and access to public transit. Little Tokyo is a neighborhood located within the City of Los Angeles's Community Plan Area (CPA) known as Central City, which also contains neighborhoods such as the Fashion District and Warehouse District in Downtown Los Angeles. For purposes of this paper, when Central City is mentioned, I am referring to the women interviewed in Little Tokyo but may live outside the neighborhood but still within the boundaries of Central City.

Van Nuys is larger in land mass at 12.3 square miles and a population density of 13,199 persons per square mile, whereas Central City is only 3.5 square miles large with a population density of 15,226 persons per square mile (ACS 2018-2022).

I chose these two neighborhoods to explore a comparative analysis of the barriers faced by unhoused women in travel when accessing and using transit in both areas, potentially providing insights into how density and the number of available travel options might influence these experiences.

I also chose these two neighborhoods knowing there are established mutual aid groups who had established community relationships with the unhoused women of their respective neighborhoods. I recruited participants through these two grassroots mutual aid groups. A total of 16 individuals participated, with 12 of the 16 being included in the report: 10 cisgendered women and 2 nonbinary people with femme-presenting experiences. The ages of the interviewees ranged from 21 to 71 years old. All of the interviewees provided verbal consent to participate in the research and confirmed their ages, unhoused statuses, and gender identities. To encourage participation, I offered individuals \$50 gift cards for agreeing to the interview, even if they later elected not to have data from their interviews included in the report. Three women later chose not to move forward with the inclusion of their data in the report, and one audio was corrupted.

All interviews were conducted in English, though the ACS reports a 10% Spanish-only speaking population in Van Nuys and a 12% Asian-only speaking population in Central City (2018-2022); this holds for both house and unhoused peoples in Los Angeles. This language barrier is a limitation, as it underrepresents non-English speaking unhoused women in my sample. Their experiences and perspectives may differ in navigating homelessness and transportation due to language barriers. These challenges could include understanding transit schedules or communicating with service providers and law enforcement (Chinchilla & Gabrielian, 2020).

Interviews took place outdoors during mutual aid sessions organized by the respective mutual aid groups in each location: the Aetna Solidarity Coalition in Van Nuys and JTown Action & Solidarity in Little Tokyo. Conducting interviews during these sessions ensured that participants were comfortable and in a supportive environment, which facilitated open and honest discussions about their experiences and challenges related to mobility.



Table 1. Population Profiles of Van Nuys and of Central City, ACS (2018-2022).

Demographic & Geographic Data	Van Nuys	Central City
City Land Area in Sq. Miles	12.3	3.5
Total Population	162,175	53,465
Population Density (Persons per sq. mile)	13,199	15,226
English Speaking	41.6%	55.3%
Spanish Speaking Only	10.2%	2.2%
Various Asian Speaking Only	1%	12.8%

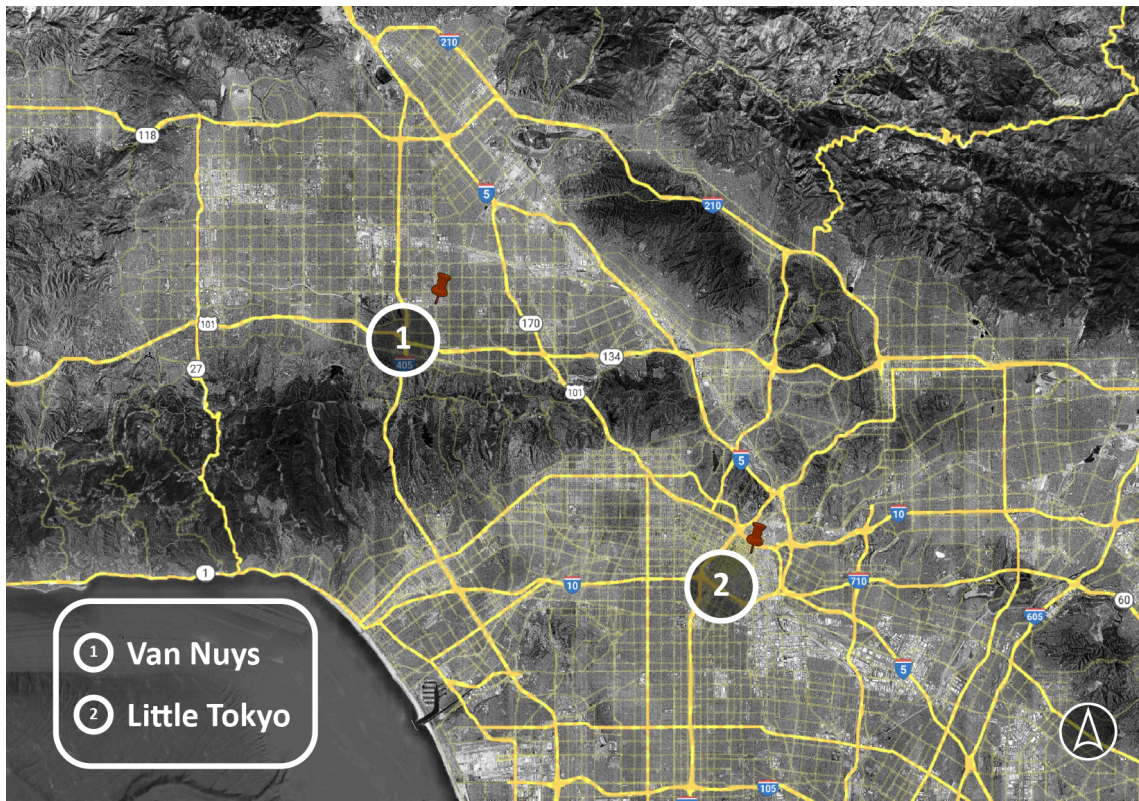


Figure 4. Map of Los Angeles pointing to the locations of Van Nuys and of Little Tokyo, 2024.



Mutual Aid Groups

Mutual aid groups in Los Angeles have played a crucial role in advocating for houseless individuals, especially following the COVID Pandemic of 2020. These grassroots collectives dedicate their time to organizing and building community power within their neighborhoods, creating cross-neighborhood solidarity with other mutual aid groups and unhoused people throughout Los Angeles. JTown Action & Solidarity and Aetna Collective not only disseminate information through their social media pages and at their outreach sites, but also organize actions, address harmful policies affecting their unhoused neighbors, and incorporate political education programming to destigmatize homelessness. Through these efforts along with their consistent weekly outreach sessions, they have built significant trust with their unhoused neighbors. Aetna's community members tend to be centralized around the Orange Line in Van Nuys, where they organize community nights on Tuesdays. In contrast, Little Tokyo's unhoused community members will travel from all parts of Central City to Little Tokyo every Saturday for JTown's weekly Power-Up Station (AetnaStreetSolidarity & JtownAction).

My involvement with these groups began during the peak of the pandemic when I participated in direct outreach through mutual aid work. JTown Action and Aetna were two key groups intentionally dedicating their time and resources to uplift their unhoused neighbors. These groups model the actions that state agencies and nonprofits in sectors interacting with the unhoused should take when approaching relief strategies and responses for houseless individuals.

I reached out to JTown and Aetna informally via Instagram Direct Messaging, as they are not formally structured like nonprofits, which made connecting with them straightforward. Their intentionality with their unhoused neighbors was evident from the questions they asked, to ensure that no further harm would come to their community members, as is often a risk with researchers engaging with vulnerable populations. After addressing their questions and sharing that I was introduced to their organizations by mutual, respected fellow organizers, they welcomed me to join their outreach sessions. I attended several of these, meeting some of the unhoused women attendees, before proceeding with the interviews in later weeks.

The dedication and approach of these mutual aid organizations have been key in effectively supporting and advocating for the unhoused community in Los Angeles, making their involvement and trust essential to this report.

Data Collection

The primary data for this study were collected through semi-structured interviews with unhoused women at both locations. The interviews focused on a range of topics related to mobility, including access to transportation, safety concerns, and navigation and mobility challenges. Participants also were encouraged to share their personal experiences and suggestions for potential interventions that could improve their mobility and overall quality of life.



I transcribed and analyzed the interview data for thematic content and used Atlas to output the cloud of concepts shown in Figure 4. I coded and analyzed these transcripts for recurrent concepts using the following four steps: (1) Initial Examination for common concepts and themes, (2) Categorization of the data into the emergent thematic categories based on these common concepts, (3) Validation of the transcripts to confirm or challenge emerging patterns in identified observations, and (4) Refinement of each transcript a final time to solidify the conceptual categories.



Figure 5. Cloud of Concepts from Interviews with Unhoused Women related to Access, Safety, and Mobility

The interviews provided more than just insights into how unhoused women talk about transportation; they also offered a broader conceptual framework for understanding the relationship between homelessness, gender, and mobility, and the crucial role of transportation in that relationship. The interviews revealed the wide variety of ways in which unhoused women discuss their mobility and access to transportation systems. Using a coding



scheme to analyze mobility and transit use in the interviews, I identified a broader set of themes regarding access, safety, and mobility of unhoused women, as seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Relationship between interview coding scheme and broader themes

Theme	Codes	Relationship to mobility and transit use
Accessibility	place, station, area, money, street, situation, resource, transportation, shelter, space, downtown, work, ticket, food, benefit, library, home, income, COVID, doctor	Impact of access to essential services and transportation options on the mobility and transit use
Safety	police, daytime, nighttime, officer, woman, man, friend, guy, safety, tree, bush, kids, community, sidewalk	Impact of safety concerns and personal security on the willingness and ability of unhoused women’s use of public transportation
Mobility	bus, car, DASH, bike, time, year, sidewalk, line, driver, tent, encampment, town, house, lanes	Impact of mobility capabilities and infrastructure on the overall movement and transit use of unhoused individuals within the urban environment

4. Results: Barriers to Mobility for Unhoused Women

Travel Patterns and Travel Choices

Reliance on various transportation modes—including public transportation, biking, and walking—to navigate their daily lives affects the travel patterns and travel choices of unhoused women in Los Angeles. These modes are essential for accessing resources, maintaining social ties, and seeking employment opportunities.

Their mobility—the overall ability to move freely and efficiently within the urban environment—is therefore unsurprisingly influenced by the various travel options available in different city districts. Consequently, travel patterns and choices differ notably between those in Van Nuys and those in Central City. Additionally, more resources for unhoused women and the general homeless population are simply more abundant in Central City than in Van Nuys, affecting travel distances and time traveled depending on where unhoused women find themselves.

Research Participants



All of the interviewees reported using public transportation, and five also mentioned using bikes to travel around their neighborhoods. None owned cars. This reliance on various modes of transportation reflects a characteristic of the unhoused participants in the study, and not of the research method. At least three participants identified having physical disabilities. Eight participants were in and out of temporary housing, while four were chronically unhoused. Three participants reported being formally employed with contracts, and nine reported relying on General Relief (GR) assistance—a county-funded program in California that provides financial support to adults who are not eligible for other state or federal assistance programs. None mentioned informal employment, but six participants mentioned income in the form of canning or buying-and-selling items. Two of the women mentioned their children, who were adults by then and/or did not live with them.

Seven of the interviewed women were in the Van Nuys encampments, whereas five were interviewed in Little Tokyo.

The following section will substantiate these observations through detailed quotes and analysis, highlighting the differences in travel patterns and choices among unhoused women in Van Nuys compared to those in Central City.

Van Nuys

In Van Nuys, unhoused individuals in my sample rely on government assistance programs found out of town and on public transportation to reach these destinations. One participant described their typical travel patterns:

I travel in the Valley, pretty much just back and forth between the Valley and like the edges of LA. I do go to resource centers and my friends' places in North Hollywood taking the G Line—or Orange Line—, and I spend my time here [in the Valley] charging my phone during the 30-minute rides.

This participant highlights how access to reliable transit lines influences their mobility. Not only does public transportation ensure they can reach their destination, but it also allows them to make double use of their time and resources. In this case, they charge their phone during the journey, planning their trip around the time it takes to travel. Instead of 30 minutes idly flying by on the bus, they maximize their productivity by combining travel with other essential activities. This underscores the importance of efficient and accessible public transportation in supporting the daily needs and routines of unhoused individuals.

Temporary housing, shelters, and encampments are some of the destinations unhoused women frequent due to the unstable nature of their housing situations. This constant movement significantly affects their mobility, as they must navigate various locations to find stability. One Van Nuys participant shared:

I got kicked out of my shelter recently. So I would go there at nighttime, sometimes I wouldn't because it would be too late. But yeah, it's kind of like back and forth between there, my boyfriend's house, and I'm in a hostel right now, so I go to Inner City LA.



This experience reveals how unstable housing forces women to remain hypervigilant about their travels, significantly affecting mobility as they consider the time of day for safety. Finding a place to stay at night to avoid dangerous situations, they must make risk assessments essential in planning their routes and travel times. Their overall mobility requires navigating several locations, including the homes of people they trust and shelters, in search of stability. Additionally, housing instability complicates mobility access, as they frequently relocate between temporary shelters, encampments, and the streets. This uncertainty makes it difficult to establish consistent transportation routines or access to reliable transit services. Constant movement forces them to continuously adapt to new transit routes and schedules, which can be both time-consuming and confusing.

Lack of permanent address hinders the ability for these women to receive important information and services, as many housing services or job applications require a stable address. The lack of stability, then, also leads to missed opportunities for access to essential resources and support services that could improve their mobility. One individual shared:

Having more housing and more available choices and less waitlists is what we need. If we had housing, we wouldn't miss out on calls and would be inclined to pick up our phones to know who's contacting us. We would have a place to go, we wouldn't have to sleep on the streets.

Though transportation interventions are essential for unhoused women, this interviewee underscores the root need for stable housing which will have the largest impact on their travel patterns. The absence of a stable home forces unhoused women to be in constant movement, complicating their ability to maintain consistent transportation routines. This continuous adaptation to new transit routes and schedules is laborious, further limiting their mobility.

The reliance on community networks, then, becomes a vital aspect of access and mobility. The individual interviewed for this report did not have a car or a driver's license, and so mentioned depending on friends for transportation assistance:

Sometimes my friends give me a ride home and to where I need to go, and my MediCal helps me get, like, doctor's appointments, stuff like that.

This network support is key for managing daily travel needs, especially for those in the Valley where these essential services are spread few and far in between. Doctor's appointments, for example, are time-sensitive, and missing them due to unreliable transit can present another challenge as it can sometimes take weeks to months before being able to book another available appointment. Unhoused people, who are already at higher risk for health issues than housed people, do not have the flexibility to risk missing these appointments. Combining supportive programs like MediCal with access to reliable travel options demonstrates that a multifaceted approach is necessary to alleviate the burdens on unhoused women; a single solution is insufficient to address the complex challenges they face.



Biking is becoming an increasingly preferred mode of travel for many unhoused women in the Valley, as it is affordable and environmentally friendly. It must also be noted that these interviews were conducted before the summer heatwaves that the Valley experiences. One woman shared:

I take the bus, I walk. And I have a bike, so I cycle. Bicycling, you know, where you need to go, boom, back fast. And it's like, also, you can actually take the time to just ride around because it's fun riding a bike. I go from like here North Hollywood down to Woodland Hills you know yeah the Valley Valley. I'm like everywhere yeah, the bus and now I got my bike. Yeah, they have bike lanes everywhere.

This particular woman uses a multimodal approach to travel, combining biking and bussing. She takes her bike onto public transportation and rides in different neighborhoods of the larger San Fernando Valley. The availability of bike lanes not only contributes to safer and more efficient travel but also enhances the overall experience of travel, making biking an enjoyable activity. Much like people who go on car rides to appreciate the scenery, unhoused women who bike find the option to be a scenic and pleasant way to travel the city. This dual purpose of biking—both as a practical mode of transportation and as an enjoyable pastime—underscores its importance in the day-to-day experiences of unhoused women.

Government services are a common destination for the interviewed unhoused women who rely on General Relief (GR) benefits as their primary source of income. For example, traveling to the necessary offices to resolve issues with government assistance can be cumbersome:

To get GR, sometimes if you get your card stolen and they took all your money electronically, you have to go and file to get your money back. From here (G Line), you can't go to the nearest Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) office because they only do EBT; you would either have to go to the Sepulveda DPSS or to Sun Valley. But yeah, to get to the cash GR for everything that you need it's either the PICO DPSS office (13 miles) or the one in Sun Valley (10 miles).

The considerable distances between their current locations and these essential offices force unhoused women to plan their entire days around traveling. This not only consumes a significant portion of their time but also requires careful coordination of transportation options, such as buses, bicycles, or reliance on friends with cars, to ensure they can complete their errands. The lengthy travel times and the need to navigate multiple transit modes can be a major hassle, complicating their daily lives and affecting their overall mobility.

In more recent times, the COVID-19 Pandemic has also affected travel choices, bringing temporary relief in terms of fare enforcement on public transit lines like Metro. One woman shared her experience with bus drivers:

Ever since COVID, I can pretty much kind of like get on the bus for free. I'll just ask the driver, 'Hey, can I get a courtesy ride?' and they'll be like, 'Yeah, sure.' So, I don't really pay, but I do just take to the buses just because I don't need to go to LA that much. They're more strict over there.



This informal leniency highlights the critical role that fare-free policies can play in easing the mobility challenges faced by unhoused individuals. The continuation of such policies can greatly reduce financial stress and improve access to essential services.

Central City/Little Tokyo

The unhoused women I interviewed in Central City relied on similar modes of travel in the form of bicycles and public transportation. Their daily routines involve navigating various parts of the city, especially if they are working. One participant explained how her mobility revolves around her job as a temporary worker in South Los Angeles:

Well, I have two bikes: an expensive bike and my little hooptie bike. Aside from my bike, these DASH buses, which are free, take me right to South Central—I'm hired as a temp there. Yeah, I walk if I'm just in this little area, but if I need to go to work, that's the farthest I'll go, I'll take DASH. I have always enjoyed DASH and then my bike, so these things are under my own control. It's free transportation and my own bike, is, I think the best I can do in the situation.

In this participant's case, mobility is not just about the ability to travel from one place to another but also about having agency and control over one's modes of travel. For unhoused women, the use of bicycles and access to fare-free transit provides a sense of autonomy and independence, allowing them to manage their daily routines and responsibilities more effectively. Ensuring that these transportation options remain accessible and reliable is crucial for supporting the independence and well-being of unhoused women.

In more densely populated areas like Little Tokyo and the larger Downtown Los Angeles neighborhood, proximity to essential services and resources means that the unhoused often travel shorter distances than in Van Nuys.

From here to work (Mid-City), that's probably the furthest I'll go... Otherwise, it's, you know, in the basic area or the downtown-ish area, library, those types of things. Just a couple blocks to the Little Tokyo library, but I try not to stay far [from my encampment] too long.

In such dense urban environments, unhoused women can frequently walk to their destinations, reducing the need for biking or using public transportation. The availability of nearby resources like libraries, clinics, and shelters, then, makes walking a viable and often preferred mode of travel. In contrast, areas like Van Nuys which are more suburban, required unhoused individuals to travel longer distances to access the same resources (like the individual who mentioned traveling several miles to the DPSS office). This distinction highlights the relationship between urban density and mobility patterns. Understanding how distance affects travel modalities is crucial for developing tailored transportation solutions to support the mobility and independence of unhoused women regardless of their various urban and suburban contexts.

Free public transit services like LADOT's DASH line serves as a positive example of accessible transportation, which multiple unhoused women in Central City reported using. One woman reported:



First of all, it's great that the DASH is free. So you don't have to expend anything getting to and from work or going any place, if you stay along the DASH line. You know, it's amazing that through COVID, when there was no one on them, you would get on and you could ride your whole way and be one to three people. And then even now, it's getting a little bit busier, but it's still not back even years out to what it used to be. It's so cool that they kept it free. Even after COVID, the (Metro) bus has returned after like three years, but that they kept the DASH free. So lovely. It's wonderful. I'm blessed.

The availability of free and reliable transportation options can make a substantial difference in the lives of unhoused individuals, providing them with a means to navigate the city without the burden of additional costs. This accessibility significantly affects the travel choices unhoused women have to reach essential services, employment opportunities, and safe spaces. Figure 5 shows a map of the available DASH lines in Los Angeles, where there are clearly more lines in inner city LA compared to the Valley. This disparity might explain why the unhoused women interviewed in Van Nuys did not mention the DASH line as their options for travel. Additionally, there was a DASH line in the corner of the interview location in Little Tokyo, whereas there was not a direct DASH line near the interview location in Van Nuys. This sheds a light on the effects of strategically located transit lines on the mobility choices and patterns of unhoused women.

However biking and long-distance walking are not viable options for everybody, particularly for disabled unhoused women and older adults experiencing physical disabilities. These individuals rely on heavily consistent and reliable public transit, including for retrieving their income. One older adult interview in her 70s recollected the critical importance of accessible public transportation for disabled unhoused women such as herself:

My main source of income was canning sometimes. Most of the time I go by myself. Few blocks. When my brother was here we'd go canning together cause he had a car. But we haven't gone lately because I can't move too much. I really can't.

Physical disabilities such as mobility impairments or chronic pain can severely restrict their ability to travel, making it essential they have dependable transit options on top of being located near a dense network of resources. Without these, their ability to access essential services and even income opportunities is greatly diminished. For older adults and those with physical impairments, the lack of suitable transportation options can be a major barrier to independence and daily functioning.



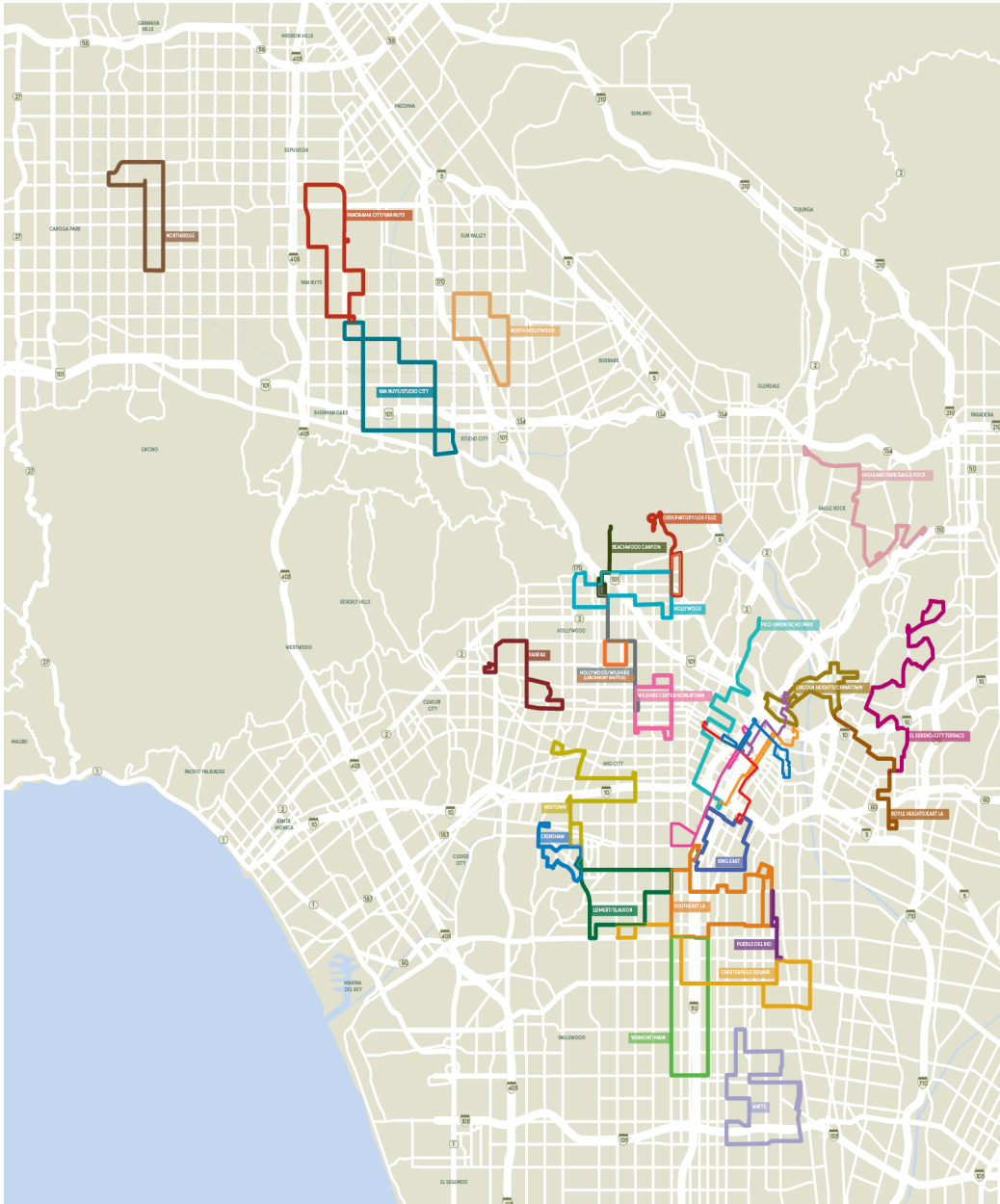


Figure 6. LADOT DASH System Map

Transportation Challenges

Traveling Los Angeles as an unhoused woman without a car poses several transportation challenges affecting their ability to navigate the city. Issues include fare enforcement on public transit, which serves as a financial barrier limiting mobility. Safety concerns, both in terms of personal security, traffic safety, and confrontations with law enforcement, also heavily influence their travel choices and patterns. Additionally, the need for improved infrastructure, such as well-lit bus stops and bike lanes, is critical to ensure safe and reliable travel. These challenges collectively hinder unhoused women’s access to essential services and opportunities, exacerbating their already precarious living situations.



Fare enforcement on public transportation modes like buses and rail lines have always presented significant barriers for unhoused individuals, affecting their ability to access essential transportation services (Loukaitou-Sideris et al., 2023). In Van Nuys, access to buses can be hindered by strict enforcement of fare policies. One participant recounted, “The police don’t let you get on trains if you don’t have fare.” They also mentioned that police enforcing fare policies had “backup tap cards” available for use in situations where riders were unable to pay. Yet, instead of utilizing these backup tap cards to assist transit riders without fare, law enforcement often enforces fare policies in a manner that creates additional barriers for individuals lacking sufficient funds. This was echoed by another participant who faced a similar situation, in which they “got cited almost by a group of officers that were guarding the gate, not letting you leave unless you have fare.”

Safety is a critical concern for women navigating homelessness in the city, including personal security while traveling, interactions with law enforcement, and the general safety of transit areas, especially at night. Safety concerns can deter unhoused women from using certain routes or modes of transportation, limiting their mobility. Ensuring safe transit environments and addressing safety-related fears is essential in improving the overall travel experience for unhoused women and femme-presenting nonbinary individuals.

In Van Nuys, multiple women reported they feel safer in denser areas. However, densities in Van Nuys are low compared to Little Tokyo. In response, they seemed to feel conflicted about increasing the presence of security.

For it to be more safe, cleaner, I wanna say more security, but that’ll probably cause more anxiety, especially if interactions with law enforcement are negative.

This sentiment was shared by another participant who recounted a bus raid in which “the cops raided the bus and stopped them from going forward; they evacuated everybody off just to get one person. That was scary.”

Though unhoused women report feeling concerned when alone or when there are not enough witnesses around, they are still wary of the presence of law enforcement, especially with the inconsistency of police responses. Instead, they reported their neighborhood’s mutual aid groups and networks of community as reliable sources of security. These groups often play a critical role in mitigating transportation challenges by providing essential information on available resources and offering practical directions, including estimated travel times and maps. Additionally, their visible presence and sense of trust and rapport with the unhoused women provide a layer of security, reducing the perceived need for law enforcement intervention and creating a supportive environment on the streets.

Safety concerns extend beyond law enforcement interactions to the general safety of transit areas, like bus stops, stations, and buses themselves. One individual reported on their experiences with traveling by bus:

The root problem of transportation and issue of anxiety around transportation is because we just kind of don’t have anything to do or anywhere to go. We’re charging our phones at the bus because there’s nowhere else to charge up our devices, which is kind of a safety hazard as well. Because if we only charge like 5% back and forth from North Hollywood to Chatsworth and



there's something happening on the bus, who knows what'll happen if the chargers aren't working.

The lack of reliable access to charging stations for phones not only affects communication but also poses safety hazards, as phones are one of the very limited forms of communication available to unhoused individuals. Without the ability to charge them, they cannot call for help in an emergency or contact loved ones, increasing their vulnerability when using transit. Additionally, transit facilities seem to be one of the few places where unhoused individuals can freely charge their phones, especially given the stigmatizing practices of cafes that require purchases to use their charging stations and the general unwelcoming attitudes towards unhoused individuals entering such establishments (Wen, Hudak, & Hwang, 2007). This challenge further heightens the safety concerns for unhoused women relying on public transit for uses other than travel.

The quality of driver training for bus drivers also affects perceived safety. One participant shared their concern about reckless driving:

Yeah, because people drive crazy. Oh my god, they're not even paying attention. One time a lady got hit [while riding] on a bus on the metro, she was a member of our community. And she was in a coma for a while and now making a recovery, but like, they need their training.

The need for better driver training was underscored by these incidents involving community members, particularly when the reckless driving of bus drivers results in passengers being seriously injured.

Especially as women, the unhoused participants cited personal experiences of violence and mistreatment shaping their perceptions of safety. One participant shared a harrowing story of being assaulted:

I'm not doing anything wrong or whatever, yeah, I was walking down the street going to store and three people came up to me: one is to the back of me and the other one in front with the other guy, he broke my ribs, I ended up in the hospital. When I got discharged, I ended up on the grass at some place, and there's this guy who yells at me, "Get out of here!" Why? I'm doing nothing. I'm just here because I'm in pain. You know, he said "I'm gonna. Call the cops," and I say go ahead tell them exactly what's going on. And then you know what he did? He turned on the sprinklers, got me all wet. Didn't ask me. "Are you okay?" or anything. See how people are just because you're in the street; you already feel bad enough being on the street.

Such incidents highlight the vulnerability and mistreatment of unhoused individuals, especially women, who are targeted simply for existing in public spaces. Ensuring their safety requires not only improved transit security and infrastructure, but also a societal shift in how we view and interact with those experiencing homelessness. Even in safer areas, participants noted the necessity to stay vigilant because of the increased exposure of such risks.

This brings to light the changes to infrastructure that several participants expressed a desire for to enhance their safety in their travel experiences. One woman mentioned increased foliage in her interview:



Yeah, it would be better to get more trees and bushes. I can hide in bushes, much less people bothering me, somewhere to sleep quietly.

The desire for increased foliage, in this case, is not solely for aesthetic improvements but serves as a function of safety. The bush could provide a sense of security and concealment, reducing the risk of exposure to violence and harassment. For unhoused women, strategic placement of trees and bushes can create safer resting places, shield them from potential aggressors, and offer a semblance of privacy in public spaces. By understanding and implementing such infrastructure improvements, planners can help create safer environments that mitigate the risks faced by unhoused individuals, particularly women in their daily lives.

The need for more lighting in public spaces was also a recurrent theme among the participants. One woman emphasized the importance of lighting in her travels:

For the biking, they really do need to have more lighting. You know it be so dark at night, I dare you to go down there, you're gonna disappear into the darkness... If I'm walking at night, I got a head lamp on, man. I gots to see."

Increased lighting is essential for enhancing both visibility and safety at night, thereby reducing the risks of accidents and crime. Adequate lighting in public spaces, including in bike paths and sidewalks, ensures that areas are safer and more navigable for unhoused women. These infrastructure improvements could foster a sense of security, facilitating easier and safer navigation, and ultimately contributing to the overall well-being of unhoused women navigating their neighborhoods.

Anti-homeless policies—in particular municipal code 41.18—present significant challenges for unhoused women by criminalizing their presence within certain distances of various establishments, including schools, parks, and other public areas. This code can enforce distances as specific as 500 feet from these locations, further restricting the areas unhoused individuals can legally exist. One participants described her experience with the enforcement of these zones:

If you look to see up there, it's a special enforcement zone. So there's a map on there that is shaded. And then in that zone, you're not allowed to be housed. But it shows very clearly that from the corner, past where at least to the sign is not in the shaded area. So police when they first put that up, which is two years ago, would come shouting, "You got to get out, you got to get up." So you have to get up and take the sergeant, we went over, we looked at it, he said, "You're right. I'm sorry. Have a good night. We're sorry we disturbed you." And so anytime it's only a couple other times with newer officers that they might want to come and try to, "This is the zone and you can't be in the zone." Then you take them over. It's right there, and it's very clear. You know what I mean? Because it's a map, this is a straight up street map, that this area, at least up until this post is not in the shaded area. And I always win, if you will, just because it's there. It's not me winning. But when you show them, they realize there's no argument.



The enforcement of such regulations adds another layer of stress and instability to their lives. This continuous displacement not only disrupts their daily routines but also poses significant challenges to their mobility, forcing them to navigate complex legal and geographic boundaries. This participant’s experience asserting her right to remain at her encampment was because she could read the signage with the physical map showing the 41.18 zone’s boundaries. Figure 4 shows an example of a 41.18 signage with a map of the zone’s boundaries.



Figure 7. sign seen in Lincoln Heights.
(Photo by Lexis-Oliver Ray for L.A. TACO)

Ray’s article (2024) highlights how the City of LA has spent over \$1.73 million on anti-homeless signs as a part of the expansion of LAMC 41.18, which has been used to criminalize homelessness without providing real solutions and instead leading to frequent displacements for the unhoused. This continual displacement disrupts the daily function of unhoused people, and a leaked memo from LAHSA indicates that these policies rarely result in housing placements, as cleared areas quickly become repopulated. Some city officials defend the ordinance, claiming it protects public safety and accessibility, while others view it as an ineffective and misallocation of resources that fail to address the root causes of homelessness, thereby further complicating the already precarious mobility patterns of unhoused people (Ray, 2024).

The visual map of one 41.18 zone underscores the importance of clear and accessible communication of regulatory boundaries by transportation agencies and government entities. Ensuring that information is readily understandable and easily accessible empowers unhoused individuals to know their rights and navigate legal restrictions effectively. Clear signage and detailed maps can serve as essential tools in reducing misunderstandings and conflicts.

5. Policy and Planning Recommendations

Transit agencies like Metro have recognized the need to address transportation equities affecting vulnerable populations, including unhoused women, by implementing programs like the “Everyone Deserves a Safe Metro” initiative. These initiatives utilize increased law enforcement and surveillance with reasoning that these laws encourage homeless individuals to move off the streets and into services. Yet, the data show that most unhoused residents report their lives have instead become more challenging, more stressful, and less safe following



expansion of quality of life policing (Robinson 2017). I propose the following policies and strategies in uplifting the burden of travel for unhoused women, instead.

Housing-first Programs

Policies directed towards providing a broad spectrum of housing options and financial assistance for individuals experiencing homelessness are necessary to preventing homelessness and addressing the varied needs of unhoused people (Chopin, 2023). Transportation agencies can bolster housing-first programs that prioritize moving unhoused individuals and families into secure housing before offering other comprehensive support services (Turner, Funge, & Gabbard, 2018). Addressing the fundamental issue of housing is central to significantly diminishing the instability that forces unhoused women to be in constant search for a stable resting place. Uplifting stable housing programming and funding will help reduce the constant displacement that leads to disruption in access to transportation, healthcare, and other critical resources, ultimately supporting a more secure and integrated approach to addressing homelessness.

Recognizing the Unhoused as a Protected Class

Data Collection and analysis are vital components of understanding the demographics of neighborhoods and identifying the needs and gaps among different groups. Currently, the majority of transit agencies do not count the number of unhoused individuals on their systems, implicitly sending a message that these people do not count (Wasserman et al., 2022). U.S. HUD requires regional housing agencies to conduct at least biennial “point-in-time” counts of people experiencing homelessness (2021), and transit agencies should disaggregate these counts to include unhoused individuals in transit systems. This disaggregation could then be leveraged to advocate for recognizing the unhoused as a protected class. Such recognition would significantly reduce and prevent further victimization of unhoused women, acknowledging their unique vulnerabilities and the higher rates of violence and harassment they experience (Chopin, 2023).

By first formally recognizing unhoused as a protected class and acknowledging their unique experiences within their systems, agencies will be better positioned to develop comprehensive plans, policies, and protocols that regard the well-being and mobility needs of unhoused riders. This will build a path to thereafter conduct comprehensive research on the gender differences within this class. Key performance indicators should include metrics like the number of unhoused riders referred to and placed into short-term shelter beds and long-term housing by partner organizations, or given other needed resources such as access to mental and physical health care (Wasserman et al., 2022). These metrics provide a tangible measure of success and impact, allowing agencies to evaluate the effectiveness of their programs and policies in providing relief for the unhoused.

Collaborative Outreach and Non-Law Enforcement Strategies

The growing recognition that law enforcement alone cannot address the root problems of homelessness has prompted a shift towards more effective outreach strategies (Boyle, 2016). Empirical studies suggest that punitive measures often lead to more displacement of unhoused people rather than resolving the underlying



issues, pushing them to frequently return to transit settings as they have nowhere else to go (Boyle, 2016). Outreach strategies, by contrast, seek to connect unhoused individuals with shelter opportunities, social services, and medical or mental health resources, presenting a more sustainable approach to addressing homelessness. Transit agencies, which tend to lack the expertise required for effective community engagement and outreach to unhoused individuals, could form partnerships with grassroots initiatives like Aetna and JTown to develop and implement effective outreach programs.

Collaboration and partnerships with these groups are vital given the scale of the homelessness crisis in Los Angeles. Considering that many transit agencies are already engaged in partnerships providing expertise on the welfare of their unhoused neighbors, these collaborations should also focus on proactively tailoring efforts to engage partners to help integrate those experiencing homelessness into the broader social service system. Instead of relying solely on law enforcement, agencies could partner with social service providers to conduct outreach using specially trained caseworkers. This approach acknowledges the unique skills and trust built by social service professionals to better address the needs of unhoused women while fostering a more supportive and less punitive environment.

Amenities and Funding

Infrastructural improvements should be tailored specifically to women's needs, including providing shade, seating, and phone charging stations in buses and at bus stations (McNenny, 2020). Such amenities not only enhance comfort but also improve safety and accessibility, making transit systems more accommodating for unhoused women. The provision of these amenities is crucial for the well-being and mobility of unhoused women, offering them safe and practical options while they navigate the urban fabric of Los Angeles. However, to implement these amenities, transit agencies need adequate funding. Currently, the vast majority of agencies do not receive external funding that could be directed towards addressing homelessness (Wasserman et al., 2022).

Given the rising rates of homelessness, LADOT can, then, lobby for grants and funds to respond to the homelessness crisis and hire and train necessary personnel to manage these challenges. Additionally, funding should be allocated to ensure that information regarding policies, such as LAMC 41.18, is readily understandable and accessible. Empowering unhoused women to know their rights and navigate legal restrictions effectively by adding in clear signage and visual aids can serve as critical tools in reducing misunderstandings and conflicts. By acknowledging their role in supporting vulnerable populations, transit agencies can advocate for additional financial support and resources to enhance their services. Integrating targeted amenities for women and securing greater funding are pivotal steps in creating a more inclusive and supportive transit system to relieve travel experiences for all.

Infrastructure Improvements

Implementing infrastructural improvements tailored to the specific findings of this report will also be essential to support the autonomy, mobility, and safety of unhoused women. Increasing the number of bicycle lanes,



planting more trees and bushes, and access to fare-free transit are three key implementations that will ensure that transportation options remain accessible and reliable.

To achieve expansion of bike lanes, particularly in the Valley, LADOT should focus on connectivity and safety from the perspective of unhoused women. Collaborating with houseless women and the broader unhoused population will help identify the most critical areas for bike lane expansion to ensure the network serves their needs effectively.

The strategic placement of foliage is also welcome by unhoused women, who have reported seeking bushes for safety and rest. This is a creative approach to relieving their stressors, as increasing foliage not only improves the visual aesthetics of a street but also act as shields for unhoused women from potential aggressors and offer a semblance of privacy in public spaces.

Fare-free transit services is an integral improvement that reduces the burden of lengthy travel times and the need to navigate multiple transit modes. Although the interviewees noted that bus drivers generally allowed them to take courtesy rides, a systematic implementation of fare-free transit should be established to ensure that ridership is not dependent on the discretion or mood of individual drivers.

Furthermore, it is important to ensure that transportation options are suitable for older adults and for those with physical impairments. Providing dependable transit options, such as the Metro Micro service, specifically tailored to these groups, will facilitate easier access to essential resources. This is particularly important for those living in more remote areas like the Valley, where access to a dense network of services can be more challenging.

Combination of Approaches to Providing Relief

A comprehensive approach to addressing the needs of unhoused women requires a combination of resources and support systems. For instance, combining supportive programs like MediCal with reliable travel options highlights the necessity of a multifaceted strategy to ensure that healthcare needs are met while providing means to travel to medical appointments.

Combining the aforementioned resources, including fare-free transit policies, implementing infrastructural improvements, and coordinating mutual aid partnerships creates a holistic support system for offering sustainable and effective relief to unhoused women's travel experiences.

6. Conclusion

Addressing the transportation needs of unhoused women in Los Angeles starts with understanding their travel patterns and their unique experiences of being unhoused and being women. Unhoused women face significant barriers, including safety concerns, limited access to resources, and the constant need to navigate public and often hostile spaces. These challenges are compounded by the need for reliable and consistent transportation to maintain daily routines and access essential services.



Improving transit stations and public transportation systems is crucial not only for creating secure environments but enjoyable environments. Enhancing lighting, fostering busy paths, emergency call stations, and trained transit staff can make transit areas feel and be safer for unhoused women. Because police responses are often more stigmatizing and can increase risk for unhoused individuals, the political education and partnerships with grassroots initiatives to destigmatize homelessness can serve as an additional step to ensure unhoused women feel welcome in these spaces.

When sidewalks are well-maintained, charging stations are regularly serviced, and transit services become more reliable for unhoused women, the benefit is felt by all users within the community. Acknowledging that unhoused women are not a monolith, and thereafter strategizing improvements around their autonomy to choose their travel modes, whether it is walking, biking, or public transportation, supports this independence. That said, by implementing these measures to increase accessibility, safety, and secure funding, Los Angeles can work towards bridging the gap in travel for unhoused women and, in turn, all Angelenos.



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