

Women's Travel Needs Often Go Overlooked



The needs of families and female-identifying residents are oftentimes overlooked in the design of our urban environments.

For example, women have [transportation needs that have not historically been met](#) in urban environments. The regional transportation system (including transit) was traditionally designed around the need to quickly get to work at central locations. Women tend to carry significantly more of the care-giving burdens of society and thus need a system that works **safely** for traveling with others to a variety of locations **at all times of day**. Women also represent a large portion of older populations who have unique transportation needs that are not well-served by our system built around driving and work destinations. Furthermore, women are more likely to live in poverty and have lower incomes than men, which impact many aspects of transit needs and housing needs or limitations. (Read our Equity Trend story from last year about [Women's History Month: progress and paychecks](#) for gendered income disparities). Learn more about how we can redesign and shape our cities through a more equitable process in Leslie Kern's book entitled [Feminist City](#).

With the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, we saw a greater trend towards telecommuting for some people and continued trends in aging. With these new considerations at play, compounded with the existence on previous burdens on women, when will the transportation system evolve for women?

Puget Sound Regional Household Travel Survey

Through the analysis of the regional household travel survey in this report, key trends have emerged that differentiate female-identifying resident's travel patterns from men's travel patterns across all modes. The 2017, 2019, and 2021 household travel surveys collected day-to-day information from households in the central Puget Sound region, such as how we traveled, where we went, how long it took—even where we chose to live and whether we got home deliveries, prior to COVID-19 and after.

This report starts with comparing travel by gender, during the stable period prior to COVID-19, and then dives into some broader, national trends, and finishes by taking a glance at recent trends that occurred in 2021, during COVID-19. Learn more at the [household travel survey webpage](#). Data from 2017 and 2019 have combined to give a more robust sample size. You can also [view the full dataset here](#), including 2017, 2019 and 2021 data.

Travel Behavior and Transit Trends

Travel Demands Put Different Pressures on Women

Women's trips are more varied to a broader spread of destinations and are more likely to primarily serve the needs of someone else (Figure 1). Women are more likely to live in a car-free or car-light household, take more trips with other people, take fewer single-occupant car trips than men, and are more likely to carpool or get a ride from a family member or friend if they don't have a driver's license.

Figure 1. Trip Purpose by Gender



Source: 2017/2019 PSRC Household Travel Survey

Women in households with more than two people tend to travel more with other people than men (Figure 2). Transit is often not well set up for people who are traveling with strollers. The walk and bike network are not built out for people of all ages to use.

Figure 2. Percent of Trips Taken by Number of Travelers, for People in Households with more than 2 people



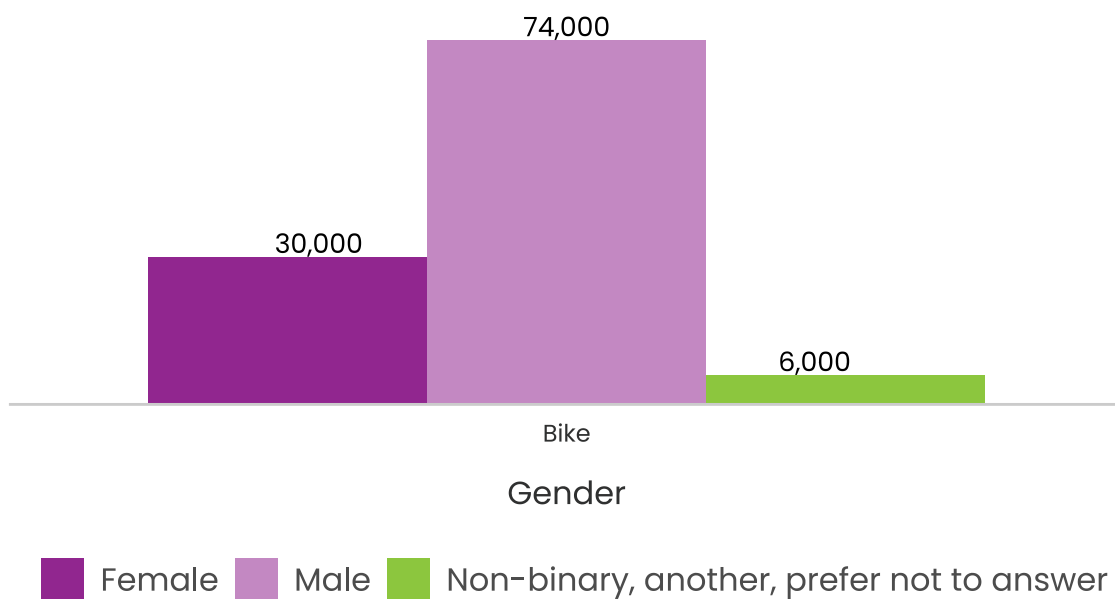
Source: 2017/2019 PSRC Household Travel Survey

Women Bike Commute Far Less than Men

Women bike much less than men. Some of this is undoubtedly because of bike network design does not feel well-suited or safe for all people of different ages and abilities. There are many considerations as to why women do not feel comfortable riding bicycles as a form of transit, as seen in a study performed by the [Institute for Transportation and Development Policy](#) in 2022. The inclusion of designated bike lanes, not only that increase comfort and safety for individuals, but that make traveling with children or larger cargo bikes easier would help create more accessibility and user-friendly options. Additionally, increased education about bike routes and access to bikes as a means to developing a biker's comfort and familiarity with bike safety, would help aid in bike commuting ease.

As a result of some of these considerations not being implemented, in the Puget Sound Region in 2019 only **6,000** bike trips were made by non-binary folks, and **30,000** bike trips were made by women, but **74,000** were made by men (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Number of Bike Trips by Gender



Source: 2019 PSRC Household Travel Survey Data

Not only are certain modalities not conducive to ways in which women move about their environment, but there is also the concern for safety.

[The Institute for Transportation and Development Policy in 2022](#) reported that even though women chose biking less often than men, there was still an active participation in dialogues about how to increase user uptake and

accessibility with biking because they deemed it a way to remain safe from harassment or negative transit or walking encounters that they experienced. Women should not have to choose between safety concerns.

How can the transportation and land use system better accommodate older people, household maintenance and caregiving needs? Addressing these questions will improve the system for all genders.

Regional and Nationwide Data Show Similar Constraints

The findings from [Understanding How Women Travel](#) about women's mode choices, how likely they are to travel with others in their care, and their complex trip-chaining patterns could all inform adjustments to Metro's fare policy to make it more equitable towards women and more cost-competitive with driving and carpooling. Findings about women's trip purposes and primary responsibility for household errands could all inform the way transit vehicles, transit stations, and bus stops are designed, so that space for traveling with others and carrying belongings could be better accommodated. Findings about when women are traveling, and average trip lengths could inform new service offerings that meet a mid-day peak travel demand and provide better direct connections over long distances while minimizing transfers. Women take shorter more local trips, as opposed to long highway trips (Figure 4).

Figure 4. 2017/2019 Trip Distance by Gender (in miles)

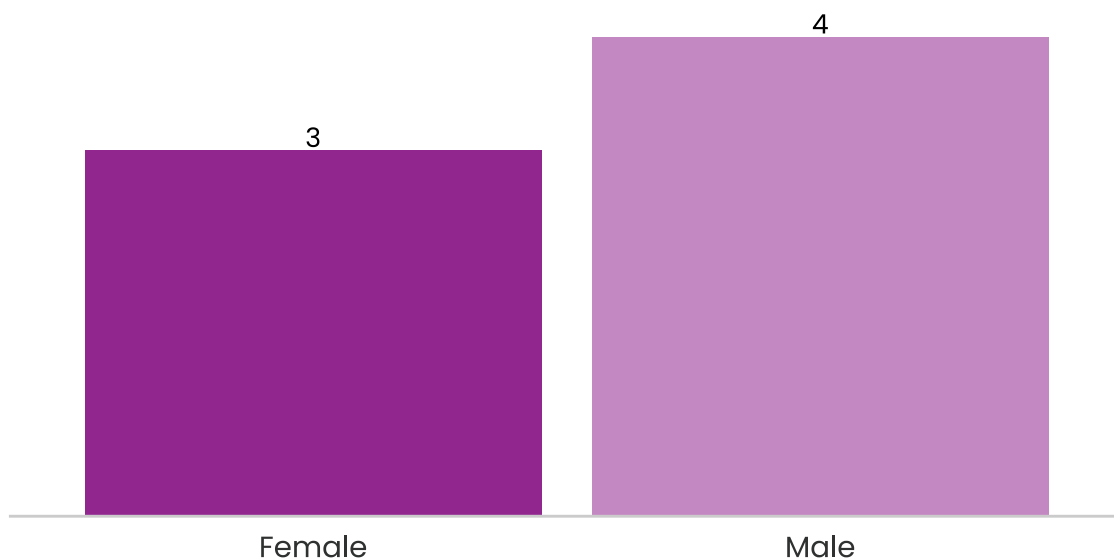
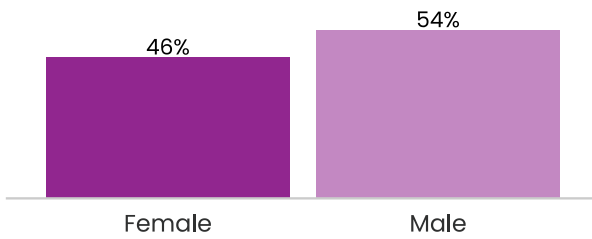
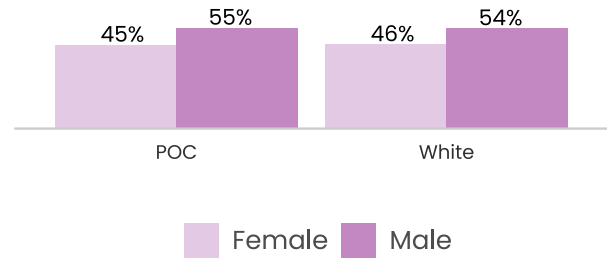


Figure 5. 2019 Employment by Gender

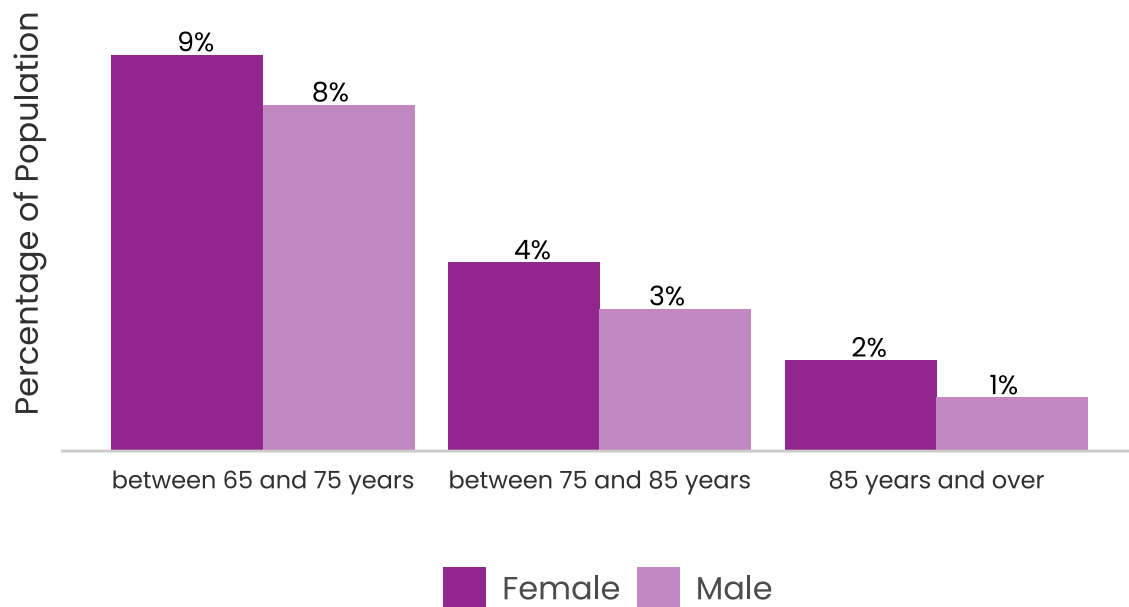


2019 Employment by Gender and by Race



Another consideration for amending transit and transportation access is that, women on average, tend to live longer than men, so that at older ages there are many more women who have unique travel needs than men (Figure 6). Women represent a greater share of the older population who needs more specialized transportation services, and less service to work locations. [New York Times](#). Older people (who tend to be women more often) have more need for transit in off-peak hours and specialized transportation services.

Figure 6. Age Group by Gender

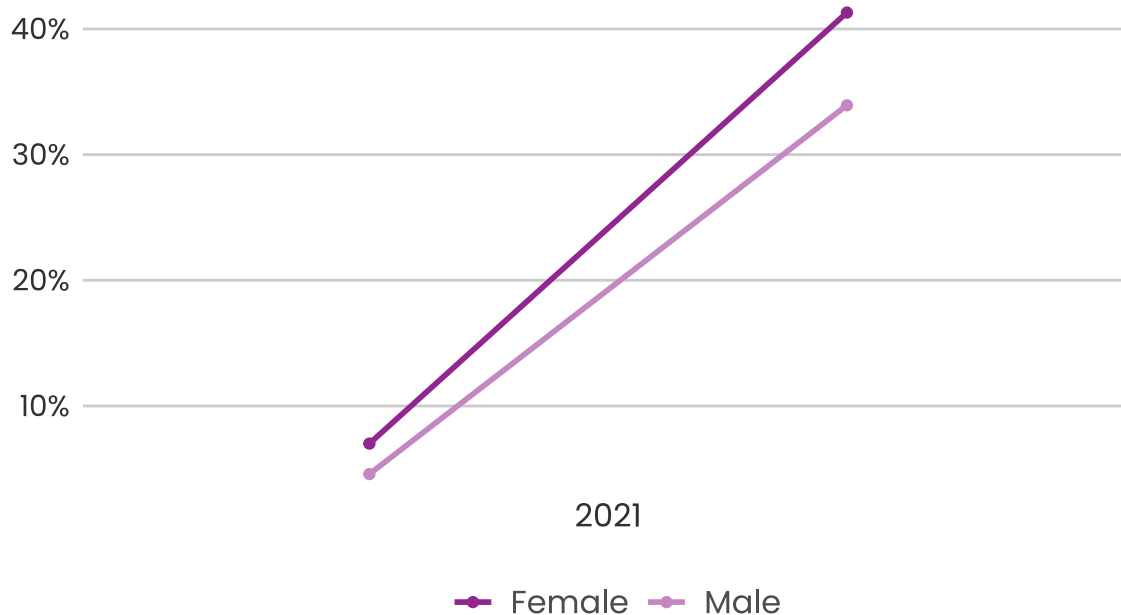


Source: 2019 Public Use Microsample Census data

Changes Brought about by COVID-19 Pandemic

Although there were apparent disparities in the 2017/2019 data, COVID-19 brought about abrupt changes to the transportation landscape in 2021. The 2021 Household Travel survey showed big changes in travel behavior. More people were walking and biking, and less people were using transit. Many more people also now had the opportunity to telework. Although women teleworked more than men before COVID-19, the data shows this increase even more in 2021. In 2021, 41% of women teleworked, as compared to 33% of men (Figure 7). The difference between telework rates relates to women's job sectors as compared to men, and also household responsibilities.

Figure 7. Increase in Telework by Gender



Trip Purpose by Gender (2017/2019 to 2021)

Not only were there changes in the trips made to work for men and women, but overall trip purpose changed from 2017/2019 to 2021 (Figure 8). COVID-19 brought about an increase in social, recreational, or restaurant/meal pick-ups in 2021 for both men and women, but with women surpassing men in percentage of these trips made. For more information or differences seen in deliveries versus trips made, visit [PSRC's website for a more in-depth analysis](#). Additionally, although it appeared as though women made less trips escorting additional family members (from 13% to 8%), men's trips remained at about 7%, which means that overall trips changed, possibly due to the

increase in women's telecommute behaviors or lack of activities outside of the home. Overall, women made more trips than men in all other categories besides work or school trips.

Figure 8. Trip Purpose from 2017/2019 to 2021



Conclusion

With increased emotional labor and care-taking demands, and with women more likely to live in poverty and having less employment and lower incomes than men, there are many aspects of transit and transportation modalities that need to be reassessed to support women's needs. Biking, walking, and transit don't always feel accessible or safe, and access to a vehicle isn't always available to women. While an increase in telework has removed some of the additional burden to trip-chaining for women, we need to consider how we create and manage transportation so that it may be equitable to all.

While we are working towards a more non-binary understanding of gendered data, we acknowledge that much of the data presented above does analyze information and patterns in a binary manner.