

Driving Women’s Suffrage Straight to the Polls

August 2021

The automobile driven by Alice Burke and Nell Richardson (pictured right) could not be ignored. Bright suffrage yellow and adorned with “Votes for Women” banners and flowers, the car carried the suffragist leaders across the nation in 1916. In their [Golden Flyer](#), the pair drove from New York to San Francisco to garner support for suffragist delegates attending national political conventions. Because women were expected to remain in the home, cars became a symbol of the movement. Driving broke stereotypes and enabled freedom, mobility, and independence.



Although over a century has passed since the ratification of the [19th Amendment](#) in 1920, which prohibited denying the right to vote on the basis of gender, transportation is still imperative in anti-voter suppression efforts. And women are often at the forefront of these equal rights campaigns.

At a time when many young voters and voters of color have faced hurdles when voting, women leaders like [Stacey Abrams](#) of Georgia have been paramount in the [fight](#) for free and fair elections for all Americans, including securing transportation to and from the polls. According to the nonpartisan [Brennan Center for Justice](#), between January 1st and June 21st, 2021, 14 states enacted 28 new laws that restrict access to the vote. These efforts are, in part, a response to the unprecedented turnout and vote-by-mail numbers in the 2020 election. Many Republicans [argue](#) the bills are necessary to combat a national increase in voter fraud; however, research has shown that voter fraud is [not a common issue](#).

Regardless, many Republican leaders continue to push for [bills](#) that limit vote-by-mail, that impose stricter ID requirements, that increase barriers to voter registration, and make it more difficult for many Americans to vote. Georgia’s Republican Governor Brian Kemp, for example, signed an [anti-voting rights bill](#) into law. Similarly, Florida Republican Governor Ron DeSantis signed a restrictive voting bill on May 6th, 2021, imposing [stricter voter identification](#), which was quickly opposed by the [League of Women Voters](#) of Florida and the [Black Voters Matter Fund](#). More than a [dozen](#) other similar laws have been enacted in multiple states, giving rise to movements and organizations willing to stand up to protect the right to vote.

Among those industries standing up for the democratic process is transportation—especially trains, light rail, and other public transit—by getting voters to polling places, which are a critical tool to ensure all Americans have the opportunity to vote. In the past, many transit authorities and other transportation agencies have offered [discounted or free rides](#) to polling places. Last year, [Santa Clara Valley](#)

[Transportation Authority](#) (VTA) developed a voter [map](#) listing 99 polling locations near a VTA stop. [Marin Transit](#) provided [free rides](#) on all fixed routes in the days leading up to the 2020 General Election.

Earlier this summer, in the spirit of the Golden Flyer and 1960s Freedom Riders rights activists, co-founders of Black Voters Matter, LaTosha Brown and Cliff Albright [journeyed](#) across the South to the Capitol in a bus to push for federal protection of voting rights. Clearly, the continued fight for equality and the transportation industry remain inextricably tied.

Transportation is critical for voter access. Even when voting by mail is an option, many people need transportation to vote in person due to physical or cognitive requirements or simple preference. Voters understand the critical role of transportation, too—especially when [2.8 million](#) essential workers, like hospital staff and grocery store workers, rely on transit. In 2020, Voters across the nation helped pass [15 out of 18](#) measures supporting public transit.

Now and into the future, women and transportation professionals will continue to play a critical role in driving the industry and the nation where it needs to be.

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