

Learning about Street Harassment on Transit: A Survey Instrument for Transit Agencies

Presented by
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On-board transit passenger surveys

Surveyors approach passengers on-board or at stations and invite passengers to complete a short survey, usually on paper or online



Source: BART

PLACEHOLDER FOR AGENCY LOGO

PLACEHOLDER
FOR QR CODE

Transit Safety Survey

[Agency] is seeking to better understand if riders feel safe using their service. The following questions are sensitive, but will help [agency] improve safety. Your response is important even if you choose to skip some questions. The survey is for adults (18 years or older). All responses will be kept confidential.

1. How often do you typically use [agency]?

- ☐ 2 or more days a week ☐ 1 - 4 days a month ☐ A few times a year or less

The following questions ask about your experiences using [agency] over the past year or so. Think about all parts of a transit trip, both onboard and while waiting at stations or stops.

2. How often do you feel safe using [agency]?

☐ Always ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Never

3. Have you experienced any of the following yourself or seen them happen to others while using [agency] in the past year?

	Happened to me	Saw it happen to others
Hostile comments, sounds, or gestures	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sexual comments, sounds, looks, or gestures (asking you to have sex, calling you "babe," whistling, kissing noises, leering, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Following or stalking	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Unwanted groping, kissing, or other inappropriate touching	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pushing, spitting, coughing on you, or other physical assault	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Personal property damaged or stolen	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Showing pornographic or offensive pictures or words	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Exposing private body parts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sexual assault or rape	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (specify) _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
None	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Skip to Question 11 if **have not** experienced or seen any of the behaviors listed above.

4. How often did you experience or see any of these behaviors when using [agency] in the past year?

☐ Frequently ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Rarely

5. Where did these incidents happen? (Check all that apply)

- ☐ At stops/stations ☐ On board ☐ Other _____

6. When did these incidents happen? (Check all that apply)

- ☐ Daytime ☐ After dark

7. When these incidents happened, were you alone or with traveling companions? (Check all that apply)

- ☐ Alone ☐ With traveling companions

8. When these incidents happened, did you report any of them? (Check all that apply)

- ☐ Did not report any
☐ To [agency] (in person, online, by phone, via social media, etc.)
☐ To police/law enforcement
☐ Other (specify): _____

8a. Did you receive an appropriate response?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Sometimes

9. When these incidents happened, do you think the victim was targeted because of? (Check all that apply)

- ☐ Race or ethnicity ☐ Gender/gender expression ☐ Obesity
☐ Religion ☐ Sexual orientation ☐ None – it was random
☐ Language spoken ☐ Age ☐ Don't know
☐ Income ☐ Disability ☐ Other (specify) _____

10. Do you currently take any safety precautions when using [agency] to avoid being harassed? (Check all that apply)

- ☐ Don't ride at night
☐ Avoid certain routes, stops, or stations
☐ Don't ride alone
☐ Other (specify): _____
☐ No - don't take any safety precautions when using [agency]

ABOUT YOU

These questions are included to be sure we survey a mix of riders.

11. Age

- ☐ 18 - 34
☐ 35 - 64
☐ 65 and older

16. Gender (Check all that apply)

- ☐ Female
☐ Male
☐ Nonbinary
☐ Transgender
☐ Other (specify): _____

12. Home ZIP code _____

13. What is your primary language?

- ☐ English ☐ Other (specify) _____

17. Do you identify as LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, etc.)?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

14. Race or ethnic identification (Check all that apply)

- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
☐ Asian or Pacific Islander
☐ Black or African American
☐ Hispanic/Latino
☐ White
☐ Other (specify): _____

18. Annual household income

- ☐ Under \$25,000
☐ \$25,000-\$49,999
☐ \$50,000 - \$99,999
☐ \$100,000+

15. Do you have any disabilities that affect your experience using [agency]?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

19. What would you say is your religion?

- ☐ None

Comments or experiences related to safety/harassment on [agency]:

You may also share comments online at [\[url\]](#)

Thank you for completing the survey!

Research and survey development process

Preparatory research:

- Literature about street harassment on transit and public spaces
- Recent transit passenger surveys from large US transit operators to see if/how they asked about street harassment

Survey design:

- Multiple drafts with review from experts and transit riders
- Focus group with older Chinese riders (support volunteered by Chinese for Affirmative Action)
- Pilot tested survey with 329 riders on AC Transit and BART

Survey design challenge: balancing 5 priorities

1. Maximize the likelihood that passengers will submit a completed survey
2. Design a survey that is easy to administer and process
3. Design questions that a wide range of people can understand
4. Cover all topics required by SB 1161
5. Obtain information about all types of harassing behaviors

Types of street harassment

Verbal



- Threatening or hostile comments, sounds
- Sexual comments or sounds

Non-verbal



- Racist or sexualized gestures or looks
- Following or stalking
- Exposing private body parts
- Showing pornographic images

Physical



- Groping, rubbing, playing with hair, or other touching
- Pushing, spitting, coughing on someone, or other physical assault
- Personal property damaged or stolen

Document type of harassing behaviors

3. Have you experienced any of the following yourself or seen them happen to others while using [agency] in the past year?

	Happened to me	Saw it happen to others
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Showing pornographic or offensive pictures or words	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Exposing private body parts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sexual assault or rape	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (specify)_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
None	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Implementation recommendations

- Survey administration:
 - Offer the survey to passengers while they are riding the transit system
 - Have people complete the survey themselves, to offer more privacy
(Ideally: paper + online options)
- Administer the same survey every 1 - 2 years to identify trends
- Pair the survey with other research efforts that fill in gaps in understanding
 - Collect information about the experiences of people who may not respond to the survey in large numbers
 - Gather detailed descriptions of passengers' experiences

To learn more about this study

Final report and link to survey translations ([here](#))

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Legislation: [SB 1611](#) (2022)
[SB 434](#) (2023)



Survey languages available

- English
- Spanish
- Korean
- Hindi
- Hmong
- Japanese
- Khmer
- Korean
- Lao
- Mandarin
- Punjabi
- Samoan
- Tagalog
- Thai
- Tongan
- Vietnamese

MTI provided Spanish and Mandarin translations.

Thank you to [Stop AAPI Hate](#) for providing the other translations.

Additional Resources

Crime and Harassment on Public Transportation: A Survey of SJSU Students Set in International Context (2020)

"Sexual Harassment and Assault in Transit Environments: A Review of the English-Language Literature," Journal of Planning Literature (2020)
(available from the authors by request)

Transit Crime and Sexual Violence in Cities: International Evidence and Prevention (2022)

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Advisory board:

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