



Women and Transport in London

A briefing by South London Fawcett Group,
part of the Fawcett Society *

Page 1 of 3

The issue

“Public transport – above all other issues.”¹

- London is one of the most vibrant and interesting cities in the world attracting millions of visitors every year.² There are substantial residential and working populations³ and yet public transport in London is stretched to breaking point. Overcrowding, queues, delays and cancellations are a fact of daily life for millions of Londoners.^{4,5} Furthermore, the public transport network is one of the most expensive and inefficient anywhere in Europe.⁶
- London has a wide range of public transport options – including the tube, bus, rail, waterways, tram, cycle and road networks – yet there is currently no fully co-ordinated transport policy or authority for the whole of greater London.
- The majority of public transport users are women who, for example, make 59% of bus journeys and 48% of underground journeys.⁷ Women have different expectations from public transport compared to men.⁸ The South London Fawcett Group’s survey* found that women’s priorities include personal safety, reliability/efficiency, cheaper fares, cleaner stations/vehicles and full-time staffing of stations, especially at night.¹

The current position

“I would appreciate more evidence of staff on duty on the late tubes – I’ve had several unnerving experiences.”¹

- Cost cutting measures have been introduced on all forms of public transport. One of the major issues arising from this is the marked reduction in late-night staffing. Many buses, rail and tube stations are under-staffed or unstaffed at night and this is a major deterrent for women travelling alone. Several women we surveyed recounted tales of unpleasant experiences or intimidation. Many said they could not consider giving up their cars at night until the issue of safety on public transport is addressed.⁸ Women are the fastest growing group of car users.⁸ They are abandoning public transport because it does not meet their needs.⁸
- Women make different types of journeys from men e.g. more fragmented journeys combining part-time working with childcare.⁸ Reductions in fares would benefit women more than men - who still earn two-thirds more than women.
- Women also want to see an improvement in the accessibility of all forms of public transport. Tube, buses and stations are especially difficult to use for women with buggies / young children and, while some changes are being introduced, this issue needs to be addressed in a very broad context.

A full summary of the South London Fawcett Group survey can be found on page 3

If you would like to know more, or have any questions, please contact us:

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or write to SLFG at Bts, PO Box 817, London SE21 7BY



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Results of South London Fawcett Group survey

“Bus conductors, staffed railway stations and improved public lighting to help prevent violence.”¹

- Public transport was the area where most respondents (68%) would like to see improvements. Of these, the first priority for women is undoubtedly personal safety (46%). Women want to be able to travel across London using public transport without constantly feeling threatened and intimidated.
- Unstaffed stations – especially at night – were quoted specifically by many women as a significant problem. Poor lighting was also mentioned by several women.
- In addition, women would like to see much improved reliability (26%); cheaper, more affordable fares (18%); cleaner tubes, trains, buses and stations (12%); more staff on stations at night (11%) and more extensive services – especially in South London (9%).

The future

“Decent, well run, well staffed, affordable public transport.”¹

- Privatisation of many public transport services has led to increased fragmentation, compartmentalisation and an absence of co-ordination between the different transport networks. If the GLA can redress this lack of cohesion and ensure, for example, that bus policy is fully integrated with underground, rail and road services, then we should be able to aspire to the well-run municipal transport services which characterise other major cities such as Amsterdam and Paris.

“Better transport links between inner London and outer London.”¹

- Transport 2000 notes that public transport in South London is significantly more fragmented and less comprehensive than in North London – people in South London generally have to go into the centre of town and come back out again because there are so few cross-town services. Cross-London transport and a more comprehensive public transport system serving South London would go a long way to making life easier for those of us who live / work South of the river.

“Safer environment for women travelling and walking home from stations, bus stops etc. on their own!”¹

- The GLA has made it clear that it wishes to run London in a different, more open way from conventional local authorities e.g. by hearing the voices of ordinary people. The South London Fawcett Group would like to see the issue of women’s safety on transport being addressed as a clear priority. This applies not only to public transport but also to safety on the streets and to private transport services such as taxis and minicabs.

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Recommendations

"If public transport catered better for the travelling needs of women and if it was safer – for example if there were more staff on the system – then women would be happier to choose public transport over the car." John Stewart, Vice Chair, Transport 2000

- 1. Greater presence of staff in all areas of tube, rail and bus networks – platforms, ticket halls, passageways etc. – throughout operating hours, especially at night.**
- 2. Re-introduction of guards and bus conductors – especially on late night and early morning services.**
- 3. The introduction of minicab licensing to be expedited.**
- 4. An ongoing gender audit of all forms of public transport to ensure that the needs of women are met now and in the future – which could be based on the Government's existing model.⁸**
- 5. Accessibility for women with small children / buggies to be improved on buses, tubes and trains so that they become a convenient means of transport. This would also benefit the elderly, the disabled and the able-bodied.**

*** Survey summary**

The South London Fawcett Group postcard survey asked people in South London (almost all of them women) for **"the three things you would most like the new London Assembly to provide for YOU"**. Postcards were distributed by members of the South London Fawcett Group during February to June 2000. A total of 122 postcards were completed by people attending the following events: Coin Street Festival (SE1, April 30th), Blackheath Fayre (SE3, June 3rd) and Myatt's Fields Fair (SE5, June 10th) and by associates of South London Fawcett Group members.

References

1. South London Fawcett Group survey – see box above.
2. "25 million visitors a year". In: "The state of London", Greater London Authority, August 2000: p4.
3. "... a resident population of over seven million and a workforce approaching four million . . .". In: "The state of London", Greater London Authority, August 2000: p8.
4. Various. In: "The state of London", Greater London Authority, August 2000: p9.
5. Around 4 million bus journeys in London each weekday and almost 3 million Underground journeys; 2.2 billion passenger journeys. (Source: London Transport Annual Report 1999/2000)
6. "... London Underground has the highest fares in Europe . . .". In: "The state of London", Greater London Authority, August 2000: p13.
7. London Transport Market Survey (no date given but reported in the Market Report, 1998).
8. Kerry Hamilton. The Public Transport Gender Audit, University of East London, November 1999. (includes independent research showing that women's journeys are curtailed/amended because of fear of danger, aggression and harassment – such as the 1992 British Crime Survey & 1988 Harris survey).

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