

MOBILITY NEWSLETTER

Research and reporting from California, the U.S.,
and around the world.

December 19, 2023

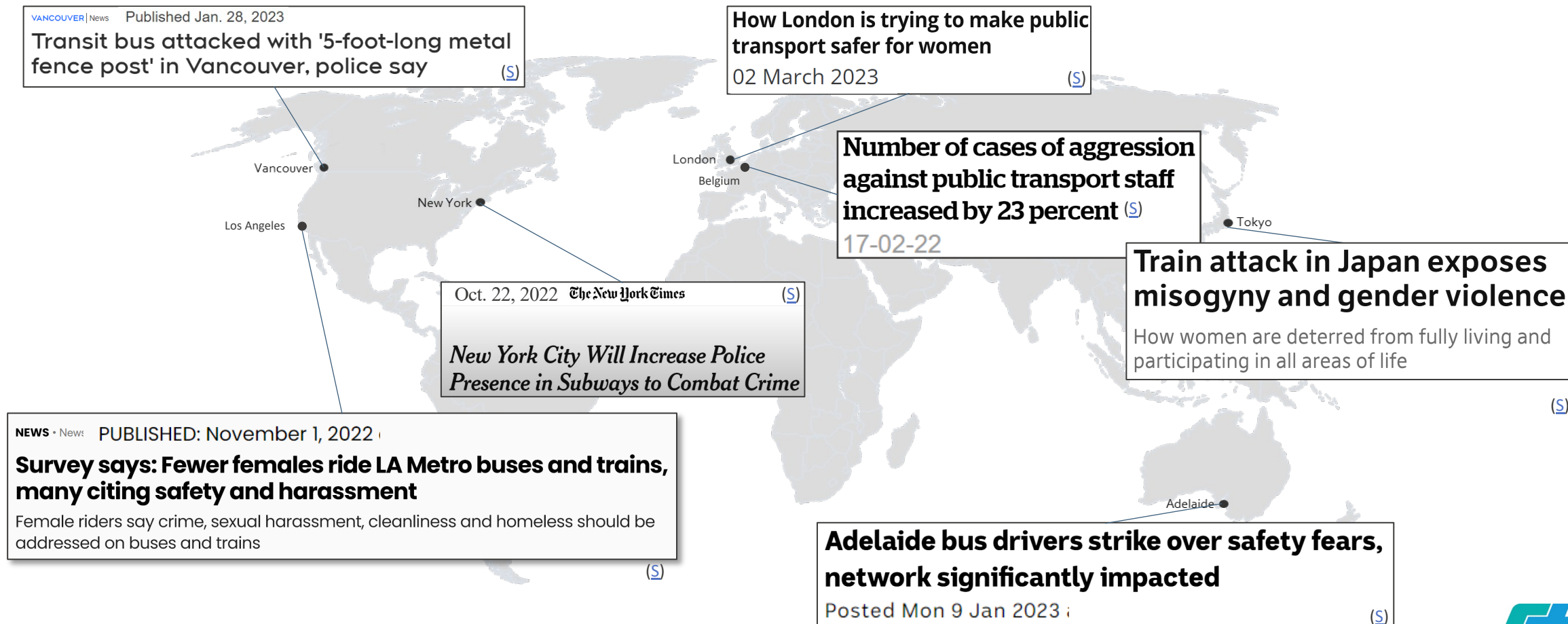


Public Safety on Transit:

Addressing a rise in crime and anti-social behavior on public transport

Incidents of violence on public transit across the globe are making headlines, and many perceive more crime since COVID.

The scale and level of attention dedicated to public safety varies significantly between regions.

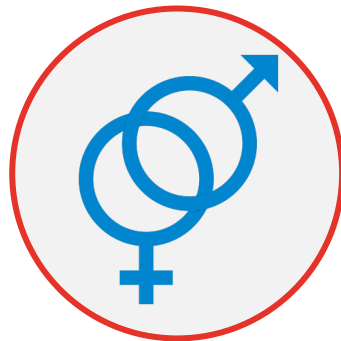


The rise in violence at transportation goes hand in hand with an overall rise in acts of public violence.



Drug use and overdoses

LA County experienced a 1200% increase of deaths caused by fentanyl overdoses. ([S](#))



Gender-based violence

An estimated 27% of women experience physical or sexual abuse in their lifetimes, many on public transit. ([S](#)) ([S](#))



Mental health issues

According to the WHO, the number of people with symptoms of depression, anxiety or post-traumatic stress has increased in recent years. ([S](#))



Unemployment

A study of 16 US cities shows historic level of job losses* associated with an increase in violence. ([S](#))

Let's take a look at how some cities around the world are working to address these issues →



TfL's relative crime rate remains above pre-pandemic levels.

TfL saw a relative spike in crime rate and anti-social behavior (abusive, aggressive or noisy behavior) during the pandemic.

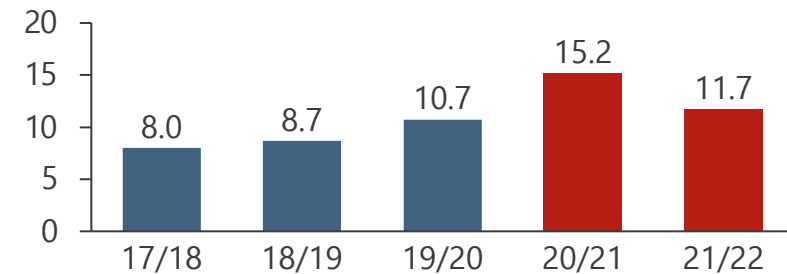
The higher crime rate reflects an overall increase in crime across London in recent years. (S)

In Q2 and Q3 of 2022, TfL saw an **8% increase** in absolute recorded crimes compared to the pre-pandemic average*. Due to decreased passenger volume and continued ridership recovery, this translates to a rise of 3.2 crimes per million passenger journeys compared to the pre-pandemic averages for the quarter. (S)

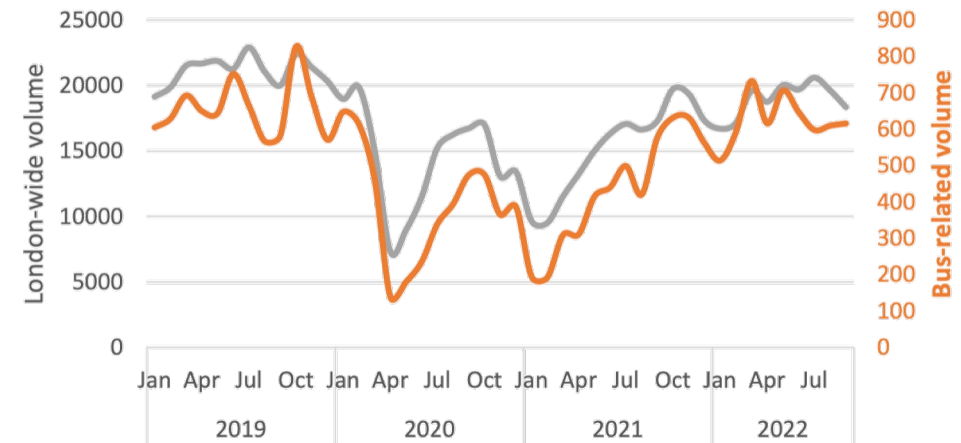
The rise in crimes mirrors trends across the city. Sexual offenses on London buses almost exactly mirror trends in sexual offenses across the city. Theft on TfL buses, right, also closely tracks citywide statistics.

*The pre-pandemic average is the average of the preceding 3 financial years FY17/18, 18/19 and 19/20. Pre-pandemic average crime rate: 8.3; April-September 2022: 11.5.

Relative crime rate (per million passenger journeys)



Theft on TfL buses and in London



(S)



London



A new campaign encourages passengers to be “**active bystanders**” in the fight against sexual harassment on transit.

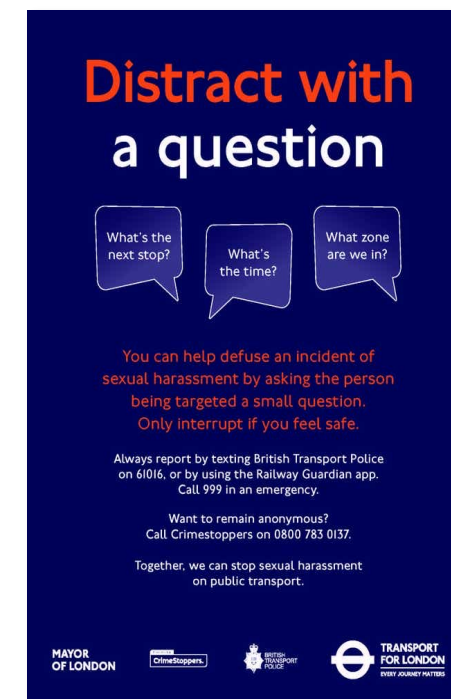
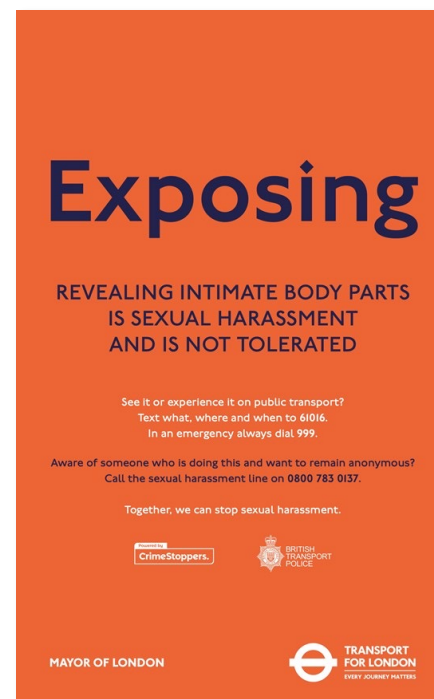


Education & Awareness: The campaign is run through both on-board advertisements and social media and educates riders on different types of harassment including staring, touching and cyber-flashing.

TfL’s network is monitored by the British Transport Police, a specialist force funded by UK railway providers. The BTP have a text hotline and an app, launched in 2022, where passengers can report crimes. On average, **the hotline receives a text every 2 minutes.** ([S](#))

In January 2023, TfL launched a new campaign to educate riders on sexual harassment, following a report that said **63% of people would be more confident** responding to a crime if they knew how to help. ([S](#))

The campaign also teaches bystanders on **how to safely intervene in such cases**. Recommendations include asking questions and assuring the victim.



Images taken from TfL Newsroom ([S](#))



Los Angeles



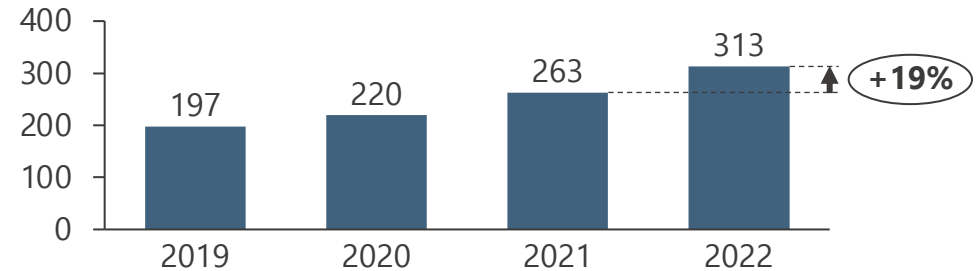
On Metro, in Los Angeles, crime has also increased in pace with city-wide trends.

According to data released by the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transit Authority, the overall number of crimes in Los Angeles in 2021 was lower than it had been in the years before the pandemic, but the rate of crimes per ride was higher since fewer people were using public transportation. (S)

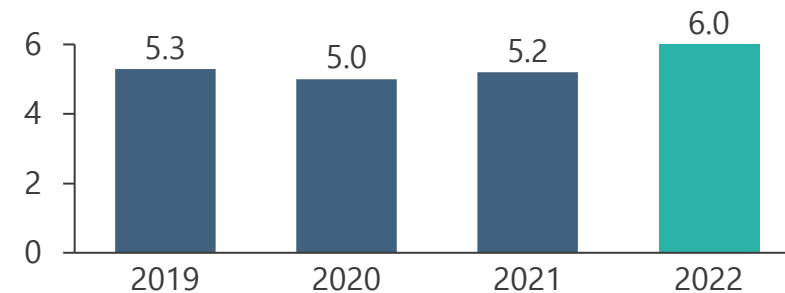
From calendar year 2021 to 2022 the relative rate of **crimes increased by 19%** on public transport. (S)

Like in London, LA Metro is a microcosm of what's going on in the region. The city is facing severe crises relating to the city's unhoused population and drug addiction. (S)

Relative crime rate* (per million passenger journeys on METRO)



LA City crime rate (crime rate per 1,000 residents)



(S)

*Definition of "crime rate" differs from TfL's (e.g. fare evasion is not considered as crime in TfL's statistics).



Los Angeles



LA Metro has deployed transit ambassadors and plans to create service hubs for homeless people to help community members.



Community Support: Metro aims to implement non-violent, non-police alternatives to keeping stations safe while helping mitigate root causes like homelessness.

LA Metro estimates that 800 people use Metro train and bus stations as shelter each night. LA Metro deployed hundreds of unarmed **transit ambassadors**. Ambassadors have received training in trauma-informed response, disability awareness, mental health awareness, customer experience, station cleanliness and evaluation, conflict de-escalation, homeless engagement, and more.

Metro also created a **Homeless Task Force** that collaborates with local organizations and service providers to connect those who are homeless with support services, mental health care, and shelter. (S) Metro is also considering a plan to open service hubs near the end stations of train lines. (S)



Metro's ambassadors helping direct riders (S)



San Francisco



In the Bay Area, the introduction of transport ambassadors has also proven successful in tackling non-violent crime.



De-Escalation & Enforcement: The ambassador program addresses the non-violent enforcement component of BART's wider crime-reduction policy that includes homelessness outreach and fare discounts (S).

In 2020, BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit) launched an ambassador pilot where 10 uniformed non-armed ambassadors were introduced on the network between 2 pm and midnight. (S)

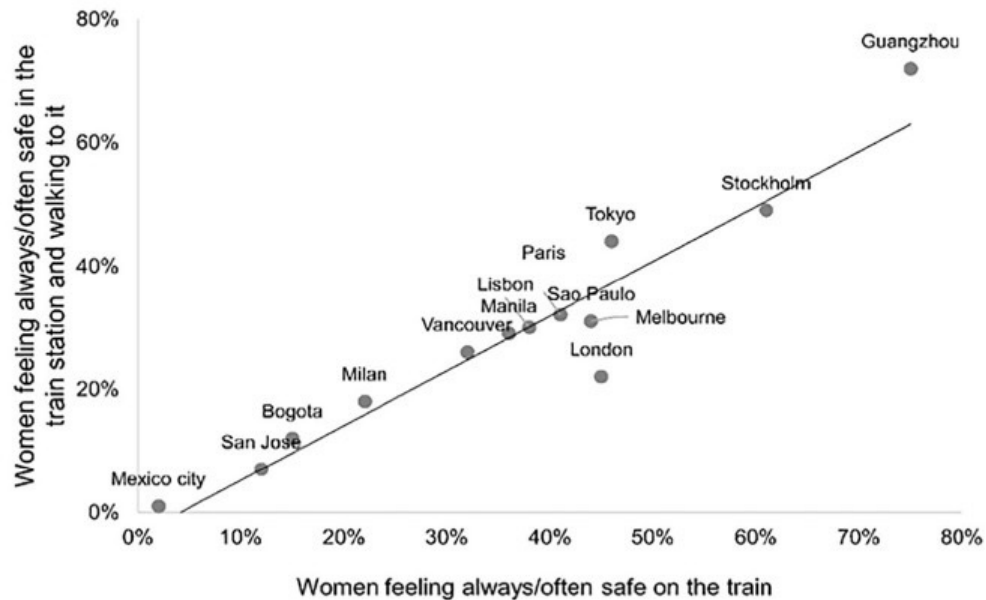
The ambassadors were intended to deter non-violent crime by providing an authoritative presence on board. Although they were allowed to escalate crimes to the police, this was rarely requested: police officers were needed in only 1.1% of cases (S). **Property crime on BART is down 60%** during that time from 3,444 incidents in 2019 to about 1,382 in 2022. (S)



Source

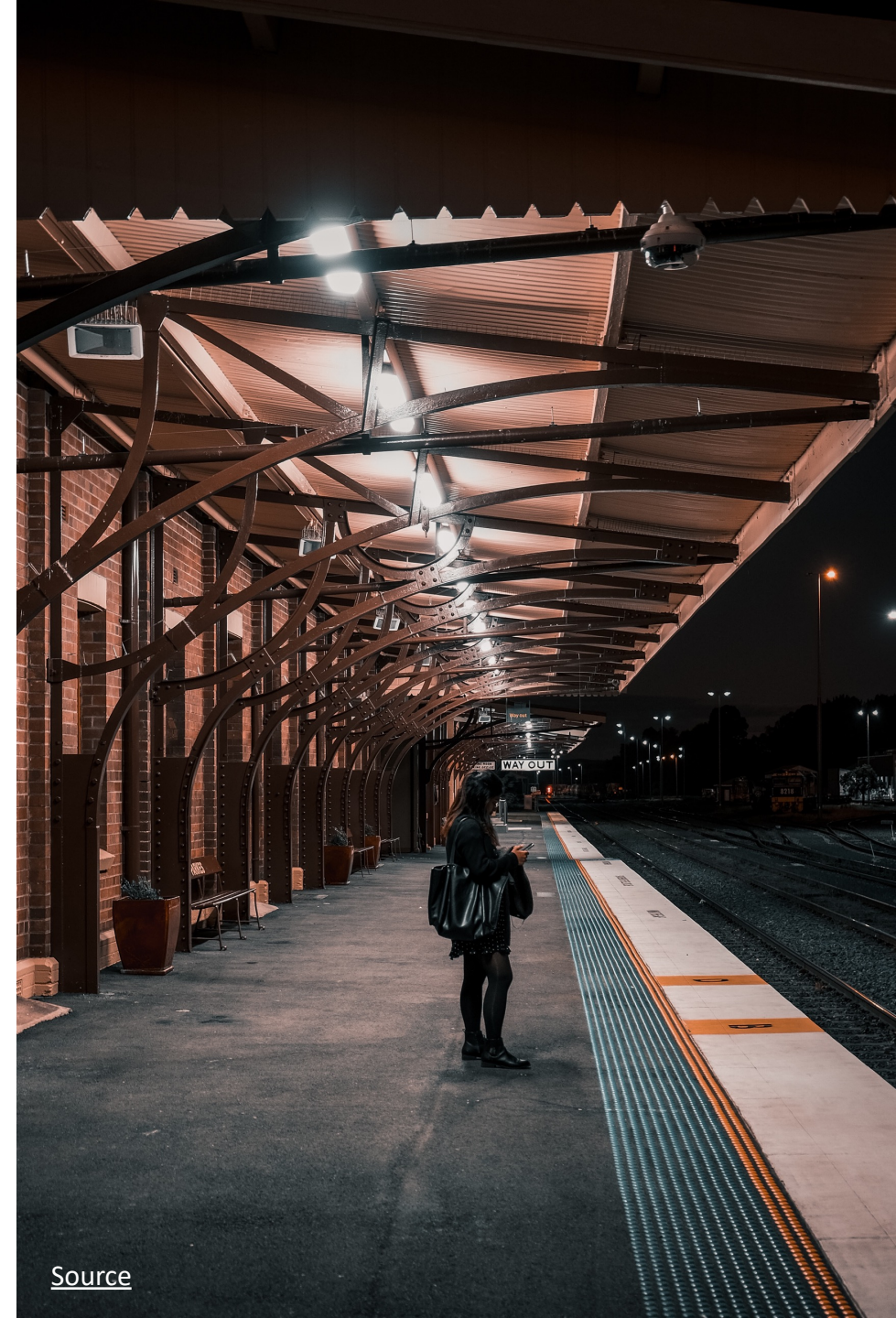
The pilot was deemed incredibly successful as a **way to reduce transport crime without increasing policing**. The program was awarded an Innovation in Public Safety Award, and the pilot was made permanent, with over 40 new positions added (S). Cities such as Chicago and Cleveland are also investigating similar pilots. (S)

Research also shows that perception of safety on public transport correlates with the perception of safety for the entire journey, including in the general urban environment.



These findings call for an approach to women's safety that goes beyond transport nodes and **focuses on the whole journey**, also examining different transit environments, during different hours of the day, weekdays, and seasons.

Based on a survey filled out by 13,323 university students ([S](#))



[Source](#)

The transit environment in stations and aboard vehicles also influences perceived safety.



Built Environment: improvements can help make riders feel safer, while also reducing the presence of risky environments like dark, isolated parts of the system.

5 most important station characteristics (S)



Lighting on the platforms and in station halls



The presence of others at the station (and onboard vehicles)



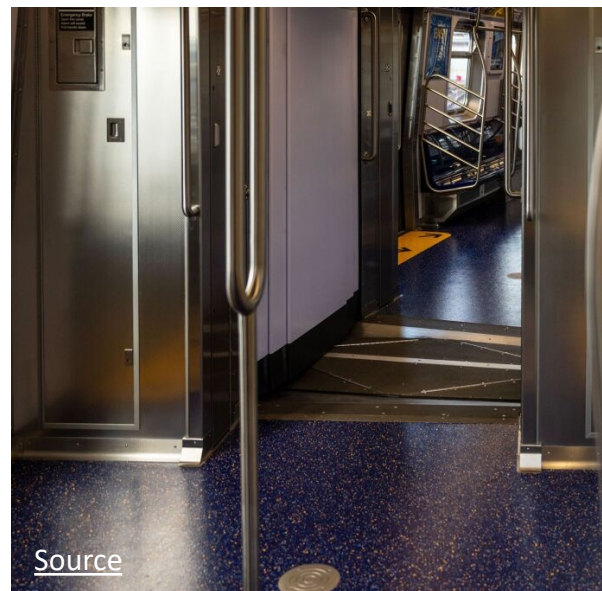
The presence of a place of refuge (eg. kiosk area, facilities, amenities)



CCTV cameras, surveillance



Clear view on platforms and in station hall (no blind spots)



*The MTA in New York is going to introduce new **open gangway subway trains**. The new cars will feature accordion-like connectors allowing free movement between cars. It will be useful to evenly distribute crowds, but helps prevent the feeling of travelling alone.*

Gates can have a positive impact on crime rates (S)



A Dutch study examining 260 train stations concluded that the use of entry gates correlated with a decrease of 9% in crime throughout 2013-2018 -compared to stations without entry gates. Offenders could only enter train stations with a valid ticket, which meant that they would be less likely to enter these stations and more likely to choose other places to hang around.

In summary, Cities are working to understand and mitigate both real and perceived threats, with an eye on recovering ridership.

Issues exacerbated by Covid are now contributing to decline in public safety:



Drug use



Gender-based violence



Fewer people in transit environment



Mental health challenges



Unemployment



Transit workforce shortage

Cities are deploying promising strategies to address public safety threats:



Community Support



Education & awareness



Built Environment



Enforcement

