



PROTECTING SAN FRANCISCO BUS RIDERS



Safety Recommendations
from Community Audits

SEPTEMBER 2026

促進會
華人權益
CAA
CHINESE FOR AFFIRMATIVE ACTION



Every day, our community members – immigrants, people of color, parents in low-income households – take public transit to go to work, drop off their kids at school, shop for groceries, or visit elderly family members. Public transit is essential to their lives. But still, many in San Francisco do not feel safe using it. Transit-reliant communities such as ours have deep expertise in what actually pushes people away from public transit because they experience it every day.

That is why, in a first of its kind project, Chinese for Affirmative Action organized community safety audits to hear directly from public transit riders. We recruited Chinese limited English proficient immigrants to serve as community auditors. Because the quality of public transportation shapes so many aspects of their lives, they were committed to improving public transit for themselves and other San Francisco residents.

Together, we rode buses to observe what made our “transit power users” feel safe or unsafe and develop policy recommendations. In addition to their observations, auditors shared past experiences from themselves or their loved ones. One elder told us about her friend whose belongings were stolen on the bus. Because of this one incident, she refuses to take the bus alone and tries to find people to take her places instead. This is difficult to do, and she often stays home instead of going on necessary trips, such as grocery shopping, or attending important events, like a family member’s graduation.

Even as Muni’s crime rates have dropped dramatically over the past decade, one negative experience can have long-lasting impacts. This is just one example of how safety issues cause our community to withdraw from public transit, and even public life.

Public transit is essential for healthy communities and thriving local economies. There are few alternatives to public transit, especially for elders, immigrants, people of color, and low-income families. That’s why it is imperative that San Francisco make visible efforts to



win back the public's confidence. Right now, the city's public transit systems are at a crossroads, requiring voters to approve system-saving investments at the ballot box this November and popular support generally to create a sustainable San Francisco where we all have easy, affordable access to public life. Policymakers must take rider experiences seriously to increase public confidence and ridership.

This report offers pragmatic solutions that community members said would make them feel safer, such as a courtesy public education campaign, more community ambassadors, and multilingual wayfinding. We hope that policymakers heed the community's call to make public transit both a viable and desirable option.

In community,

Cynthia Choi and Vincent Pan
Co-Executive Directors
Chinese for Affirmative Action

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Public transit is a lifeline for low-income people, immigrants, working families, and people of color. Although public transit is essential for the City to thrive, many San Franciscans do not feel safe while using it. We must make public transit a safer and more viable mobility option to increase equitable access to resources, strengthen the transit system's financial sustainability, and promote economic activity.

Chinese for Affirmative Action organized community safety audits to understand the physical, environmental, and social conditions that make people feel safe or unsafe while using public transit. Our community auditors were Chinese limited-English proficient San Franciscans trained to observe what made bus rides feel safe or unsafe on routes throughout the city.

Based on the data collected in these audits, we developed policy recommendations to improve transit safety for the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) and the city government.

KEY FINDINGS

- **SFMTA should define safety in a multi-faceted way.** Auditors were concerned about a host of safety issues that made them feel vulnerable. This included tension with other passengers, getting lost, injuries due to the physical environment and accidents, as well as theft and harassment.
- Auditors noted that **crowded conditions exacerbated safety concerns**. SFMTA should reduce crowding during peak times with increased frequency or bigger buses.
- Auditors reported that **a more welcoming environment overall makes people feel safer**. Physical design and public education can promote common courtesy and discourage harmful behaviors.
- Auditors reported that the **fear of getting lost, especially with the lack of multilingual wayfinding**, heightened safety concerns. SFMTA should adopt additional multilingual and timely stop announcements and invest in clearer, more consistent wayfinding tools including visual, audio, and digital supports.

- Auditors observed that when incidents occur, riders are often not able to receive **timely help or interventions from trained personnel**. SFMTA should increase the visible presence and accessibility of staff and transit ambassadors on board and at bus stops.
- **Riders feel safer when other passengers support them** during incidents. Public education and bystander training can cultivate a culture of mutual support, de-escalation, and safe intervention.
- SFMTA and the City should **invest in culturally competent, linguistically accessible, victim-centered services** to ensure riders can report incidents and access support. Doing so helps individuals heal from trauma that would otherwise disrupt their sense of safety. Audits indicate that a large proportion of riders have experienced harassment or other forms of harm that often go unaddressed.
- Auditors reported experiencing or observing **injuries associated with infrastructure conditions and, at times, vehicle operations**. They identified opportunities to reduce these risks through enhanced training and targeted physical improvements such as expanding the use of bulb-outs to help buses align more closely with sidewalks.
- **Community members expressed that transit safety requires expanding economic opportunity and strengthening social services**. They saw how disruptive behaviors on transit are linked to untreated mental health needs and how poor economic conditions push people into illegal activities. The City should invest in and coordinate cross-agency responses such as mental health outreach, housing stability, and economic opportunity programs with transit operations to address root causes and create a safer, more stable environment for all riders.

INTRODUCTION

Transit safety is a major concern in San Francisco, especially for people of color and immigrants. Only 44% of limited English proficient (LEP) passengers and 48% of passengers of color feel always or almost always safe on Muni compared to 64% of white English proficient passengers (SFMTA, 2025).



Auditors assessing a bus stop for safety.

We must improve safety to work toward equity, but also to strengthen the fiscal sustainability of public transit and increase economic activity. Feeling unsafe has led people, including members of the Chinatown community, to avoid using certain routes and stops or riding at night (SFMTA, 2025). In order to make public transit a preferred option and increase transit ridership, riders must feel like it is a safe mobility option.

Solely focusing on crime is ineffective because many factors contribute to a rider's sense of safety. As such, SFMTA has begun collecting data on harassment and general safety experiences. To supplement SFMTA's efforts, we trained community members to conduct safety audits of bus routes that are important to the Chinatown community. This report shares our findings and policy recommendations from the audits.

METHODOLOGY

We took a community-participatory approach in which community members collected observations, interpreted data, and generated solutions collectively. SFMTA's existing surveys and focus groups provide a systematic overview of safety issues and call attention to specific patterns. Community audits can help with interpreting survey results and create actionable findings that speak directly to our community members' experiences. They allow community members to bring up ideas or concerns that survey creators may not anticipate. Audits also complement focus group discussions by creating space for shared and structured observations of live conditions. See our Online Appendix for the observation log our auditors used.

In preparing for the audits, we spoke with our Chinese, immigrant, and limited English-speaking constituents to determine which bus lines were most important for the community and had safety concerns. Out of the multiple important bus routes for our community, we audited the 1 California, 8 Bayshore, and 30 Stockton bus lines to and from Chinatown.



Auditors assessing a bus stop for safety.

We rode segments of these lines that served schools as well as the neighborhoods of the Richmond District and Portola, which are social and economic centers for Chinese immigrants. See Figure 1 for a map of the routes through San Francisco and Chinatown.



Figure 1: Map of audited bus routes

We conducted audits of seven bus route segments over three days. We rode buses either in the morning or afternoon to observe school and work commute times. We did not conduct audits at night but asked auditors to imagine how they would feel or share their experiences of a particular bus or bus stop at night.

At the end of each day, we debriefed our observations and discussed policy recommendations as a group. A total of 14 community members served as auditors, many of whom were low-income, LEP, middle-aged, Chinese immigrant women with children. We shared our preliminary findings with a larger group of community members and incorporated their feedback and priorities. All of our audit and focus group activities were conducted in Cantonese to uplift the nuances of our community members' experiences.

SAFETY IS MULTI-FACETED

Community members expressed an expansive vision of safety. Auditors named interpersonal problems as a major safety issue and did not limit their concerns to theft or other crimes. Community members wanted to address harm that may not necessarily be considered crimes, such as harassment. Additionally, conflict with other passengers, even if they did not rise to the level of harm, and a lack of common courtesy made people feel unsafe.

Community members raised concerns beyond interpersonal issues. They pointed out issues with the physical environment and human error that increased the risk of injuries or other hardships. Additionally, difficulty with wayfinding, especially for immigrants and elders, made people feel vulnerable.

Specific populations experienced compounded vulnerability, including seniors, people with limited English proficiency, and women. Seniors had more difficulty navigating through the physical environment and might feel more physically vulnerable in many different scenarios. People with limited English proficiency experienced difficulty requesting help and accessing English language resources available to other passengers. Women shared their experiences with gender-based harassment and safety incidents while riding the bus with their children.

In this section, we describe these safety concerns and community experiences in more detail.

INTERPERSONAL HARM

Although no safety incidents occurred during our audits, multiple auditors experienced interpersonal violence or harm on Muni in the past. Many others witnessed harm or knew people who experienced harm in the past. This is consistent with SFMTA's survey of the general public, which found that 45% of riders experienced harassment and 72% witnessed harassment in the past year (authors' analysis of SFMTA, 2025). The types of incidents community members brought up included theft, battery, and harassment. In particular, the auditors, who were mostly women, shared experiences that reflected a pattern of gender-based and sexual harassment.

Community members felt more at risk of harm in crowded conditions. Crowding emerged as a factor underlying multiple distinct safety concerns. Auditors were especially worried about getting pickpocketed when the bus and bus entrances were crowded.



Many passengers waiting to get on a bus.

Language barriers made community members more vulnerable to harassment. One auditor shared a time when a passenger followed her around the bus and touched her. She tried to get him to stop but did not know how to speak to him or other passengers in English:

“ He intentionally followed me and wanted to touch me. He touched the sleeve of my arm. He wanted to test my tolerance. He followed me from the front to the back of the bus. My English was not that good, so I didn’t know what to say. What should I say after I say, ‘help?’ I have a language barrier. ”

– Community auditor

Community members felt worse when no one helped them during an incident. One auditor recounted a time when a passenger spat on her while she was riding the bus with her baby. It felt terrible that no one helped her and her daughter. On the other hand, auditors appreciated when someone on the bus intervened on their behalf. One community member commended a bus driver for preventing their phone from being stolen by closing the door. Another community member described a time when a passenger followed them around the bus and kept kicking their chair. They told the harasser to stop, but they only stopped after another passenger intervened.

These negative experiences can have long-lasting consequences, even for non-violent incidents. One senior told us about a friend who experienced a theft on the bus several years ago. The incident impacted her friend so much that she still refuses to take the bus alone because she is afraid of getting lost or experiencing another safety incident. This severely limits her mobility as it is difficult to find travel companions.

INTERPERSONAL CONFLICTS

Public transit is one of the few places where strangers from multiple walks of life spend time with each other in close quarters. A lack of shared norms and compassion on the bus made community members feel unsafe because it increased conflicts between passengers, which in turn increased the risk of harm. For example, community members frequently witnessed passengers crowding doors to get on to the bus rather than being courteous, which caused disputes or prevented people from getting off the bus safely.



It's hard to fight through people to get off the bus. During rush hour, there's a lot of people. It can't be helped unless they increase the bus frequency. Even when the bus is full, people still want to get on the bus.

– Community auditor





A crowded bus with little standing room.

Multiple auditors shared experiences where they accidentally bumped into another passenger, who then reacted angrily. One auditor said another passenger hit him after accidentally bumping into them. Another auditor had a similar experience and wished people would be more compassionate rather than being quick to blame.

Community auditor 1: “One time, I accidentally bumped into someone. They hit my arm in response, but it was not under my control.”

Community auditor 2: “They should have public service announcements to demonstrate the right behavior. You should ask people, “are you okay?” rather than place blame. I also experienced this when my stuff accidentally fell on someone. It was because we were in stop-and-go traffic.”

Conversely, community members perceived fewer threats when other passengers were friendlier or more considerate:

“ **It feels more safe. I can talk with the passengers...
Youth with headphones will still stand up for seniors.
The passengers have good intentions.**

– Community auditor ”

Conflicts also arose when aisles were crowded, either because of shopping carts, other large items, or bunching of passengers near bus entrances. It made it difficult for people to get on the bus, move through the aisle, or find seats. Community members wished passengers would leave more space for others, move to the back of the bus, and be more mindful of their shopping carts.

“ People carry shopping carts that are too big during rush hour. Other people cannot pass and there is no space to buy your ticket. It creates disorder and inconvenience. ”
– Community auditor



The audit team helping to keep each other from falling on a crowded bus.

Another common source of conflict was around priority seating and perceptions of disability. Auditors brought up times they were pregnant and scolded for sitting in priority seating. For example:

“ One time I went to the hospital and took the bus back. I sat in the front seat reserved for seniors and pregnant people. Even though I was pregnant, the passenger told me I’m not supposed to sit on that seat. ”
– Community auditor

Community auditors wanted public education campaigns to educate riders on transit etiquette and to encourage compassion for fellow passengers.

FEAR OF PEOPLE WHO SEEM AT HIGHER RISK OF AGGRESSION

Community members felt less safe around people they perceived as less predictable and might harm them. Community members' fears were shaped by both direct experience and broader social narratives about who poses a threat. Broader social narratives can distort perceptions of who is at higher risk of aggression. Stereotypes, stigma, and other belief systems, including anti-Blackness, inform society's perceptions, which can lead people to overestimate risk and raise their guards. For example, studies have shown that racial and ethnic stereotypes and minority presence in neighborhoods are associated with higher perceptions of crime risk, even after accounting for actual crime rates (Quillian and Pager, 2001; Drakulich, 2012).

In our focus groups, we asked auditors to describe what made them feel unsafe on public transit. Outside of particular incidents, auditors said they worried about people with visible mental health issues, people who look or smell like they use controlled substances, people displaying visible signs of homelessness, and people under the influence of alcohol. These groups were perceived to be more willing to break social norms, have poor decisionmaking, or be more prone to aggression.



If you see someone acting weird or unnatural, I will also feel unsafe regardless of whether they're on the bus or bus station. Some people might try to initiate a conversation with you or get closer to you. That might make you feel unsafe.

– Community auditor



This happened a few times during the audit. While waiting for a bus at Chinatown-Rose Pak Station, auditors commented on how safe they felt because the street was bustling with people going about their

business. Then a woman walked by while talking in Chinese about a “凶手,” or murderer. An auditor noted:

“ In the beginning it was fine, but then there was a mentally disturbed individual talking to themselves and we felt uncomfortable.

– Community auditor

For some auditors, their core concern was with disruptive behavior rather than mental health status itself – a distinction the next auditor makes explicit:

“ There was a woman who had a mental health issue. If you looked at her, she might start yelling. The bus driver told her that if she kept yelling, she would have to get off. She stopped yelling. There just needs to be a person to take care of the situation.

– Community auditor

When traveling in groups, community members could look out for each other to navigate known risks. For example, while assessing a bus stop, a man walked back and forth on the street, trying to engage the audit team in conversation. Two of the auditors, who were women and used this bus stop often, recognized him as someone who gave women unwanted attention. The auditors advised the rest of the team not to engage with this person. A male staff member stepped in to redirect the man’s attention. This moment illustrates that community members’ heightened awareness on transit is often grounded in accumulated experience and local knowledge, not unfounded fear. It also points to the value of peer networks and community presence as informal safety infrastructure.

INJURIES DUE TO THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT AND ACCIDENTS

Auditors observed issues with the physical environment and bus driver behavior that made them feel unsafe.

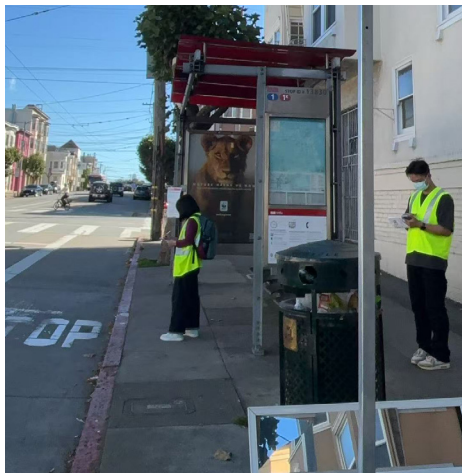
One of the major danger points was getting on and off the bus. Auditors observed many instances during their audits and daily life where the bus did not pull close enough to the curb. It made it especially difficult for seniors and people with disabilities to get on and off the bus. Sloping sidewalks made it difficult for the bus to stop close enough to the sidewalk and for people using wheelchairs to navigate. On top of this, auditors noted that drivers did not always lower the platform for seniors or people with shopping carts.



A bus stopping far from the curb.

Concerns about bus stop conditions were common among auditors. One major issue was sidewalk crowding from commerce. Supermarkets and individual merchants sometimes partially blocked the sidewalk with merchandise. Many people pushed trolleys for shopping, which also took up space on the sidewalk. Crowded conditions meant people bumped into each other, especially when passengers were getting on or off the bus. Auditors witnessed a senior missing the bus because she could not find a clear path to the bus.

While some bus stops were clean, others had overflowing garbage cans and debris on the ground. Auditors were concerned about broken glass and other hazards. Dirty and smelly buses and stops also made taking public transit much less pleasant.



A bus station near California St. and 10th Ave.



A bus station near Stockton St. and Sacramento St.

Another issue was how passengers waited for the bus. Auditors observed people standing very close to the road while waiting for the bus, putting them in danger of being hit by traffic. Some people may do this because crowded buses makes it difficult to find seats:

“ The passengers who stand too close to the curb, it’s dangerous. They’re waiting and facing the bus and want to be the first one to get on the bus to get seats.

– Community auditor

Injuries on the bus were also common. Multiple auditors reported injuries due to doors closing on passengers. Sometimes bus drivers closed the door too quickly and pulled out of the bus stop:

“ My friend had a bad experience one time when he was boarding and the door closed on his arm and it broke his arm. A lady was dragged by a bus in a similar situation.

– Community auditor

Some auditors recommended more bus driver safety training. Another auditor pointed out a difference between door technology on buses versus BART:



On BART, when there is an object between two doors, it opens right away. On the bus, I saw seniors step on and the doors kept closing and didn't open. They had to scream out loud to stop.

– Community auditor



Falling was another major safety concern for our community members. Multiple auditors noted past experiences when bus drivers started driving before passengers were seated or finished onboarding. The lack of handrails within reach in the main bus area and at the back door increased the risk of falling, especially when the bus was crowded or when carrying a large item.

Finally, many auditors complained about closed windows and poor ventilation. Hot and stuffy buses were extremely uncomfortable. One auditor was worried about the increased risk of illness due to inadequate ventilation.



Making a big step off of a bus.

GETTING LOST OR MISSING THE BUS

Community members expressed anxiety over getting lost or missing their bus. Being lost puts people in a vulnerable position, especially if they do not speak or read English well or if they have difficulties with walking. Even experienced transit riders could be unfamiliar with certain parts of a route or miss their stop and find themselves somewhere new. The lack of multilingual bus stop announcements and route signage made it harder for LEP riders to navigate the system. These wayfinding barriers prevent people from accessing resources and exploring the city beyond a handful of familiar places.



A bus stop that is difficult to identify from a distance because it does not have a bus shelter nor a metal sign.

Although many of the stops we audited had bus shelters, auditors shared that in their day-to-day experience, bus stops can be difficult to identify, especially from a distance, because they do not have highly visible and recognizable markers. One auditor was concerned about making Chinatown a welcome environment for tourists. She noted that a bus stop was obstructed by a store's sign:



With many tourists in Chinatown, those unfamiliar with the area may struggle to find the stop.

– Community auditor



People were anxious about finding the bus stop in time to catch their bus. Due to low frequencies for certain lines or at certain times of day, missing the bus means waiting a long time and potentially missing an appointment or other important obligation.

Additionally, multiple auditors raised concerns about buses skipping their stop, either because the bus was crowded or the driver did not see them waiting. Auditors experienced this frequently on the 1 line, which is an especially important line for traveling for work, groceries, and school among Chinatown residents and commuters. To address this, riders had to walk to specific stops where they felt more confident that they would get picked up. This lengthened their transit times, increased the amount of walking required, and made taking public transit less accessible.

COMMUNITY-CENTERED RECOMMENDATIONS

Community members developed a multi-pronged strategy to address safety, including long-term solutions to economic hardship and behavioral health issues, timely help when safety incidents occur, increased bus frequency during peak times, language access, public education and training, and physical improvements to bus stops.



Auditors debrief their experiences on the audits and recommend solutions to the issues they observed.

REDUCE CROWDING WITH INCREASED FREQUENCY OR BIGGER BUSES AT PEAK TIMES

Community members resoundingly requested more frequent or bigger buses during peak times to reduce crowding. Reducing crowds solves multiple safety problems, including falls, theft, and tension between riders. Making more space on the bus during peak times might also reduce the number of skipped stops because bus drivers sometimes skipped stops due to buses being full.

Community members stressed, however, that more space was not needed during off-peak times. They would feel less safe if there were too few passengers. This sentiment was echoed in previous research with girls and gender-expansive youth in the Bay Area, who shared that empty BART stations felt unsafe (Alliance for Girls, 2024).



A longer bus with space for passengers to walk through the aisle.

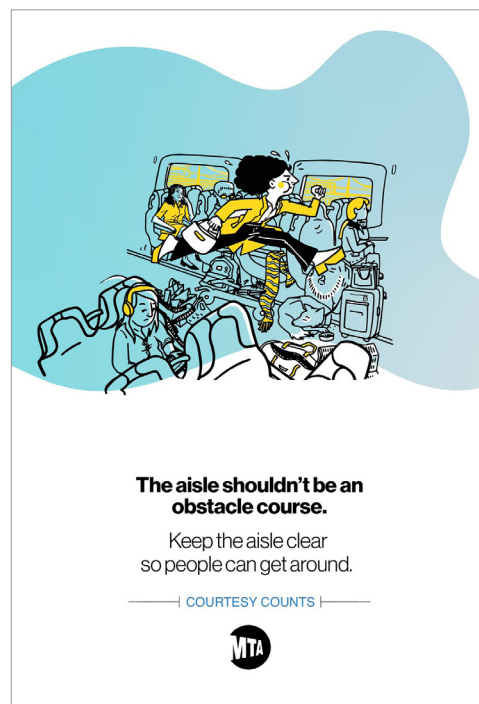
SUPPORT BUS DRIVERS IN PROVIDING HIGH QUALITY SERVICE

When asked to describe what currently worked well on Muni, multiple auditors commended bus drivers. They felt that many drivers performed their jobs well, had good attitudes, and were helpful to passengers. They shared examples of when drivers helped ensure that wheelchair users and people with bicycles could board the bus smoothly. Although not all bus drivers did this, they appreciated when drivers reminded passengers about the next stop. They also noted when bus drivers reinforced positive passenger culture, such as reminding passengers to move toward the back when boarding the bus. Overall, community members trust and expect bus drivers to do the right thing.

Bus drivers are central contributors to public transit safety. However, their jobs are difficult, requiring them to juggle multiple safety responsibilities, including operating heavy machinery, staying vigilant to traffic dangers, and monitoring passenger issues. On top of this, they must be patient with passengers who may not return the courtesy. Many of the recommendations in this report ease the burden of passenger management, making it easier for bus drivers to operate vehicles safely. We also recommend gathering insights from bus drivers on how to best support them and address safety issues.

USE PUBLIC EDUCATION TO CREATE A WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT

Auditors recommended public education campaigns to make the City's bus culture more orderly, considerate, and kind. Transportation systems in London and the Greater New York City area have implemented these culture-building campaigns in the past.¹ Topics for an SFMTA campaign could include compassion in response to accidents, lining up for the bus, moving to the back of the bus to make space in the front, and being mindful of leaving walking space when carrying shopping bags or other large items. Passengers could be educated on priority seating, visible and invisible disabilities, and pregnancy. A campaign could also promote cross-racial understanding and compassion. Auditors thought adding bus advertisements or television screens to show educational videos could be effective because passengers were a “captive audience.” Auditors also emphasized the importance of making these educational campaigns multilingual and representative of the City's diverse population.



A poster from the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's (MTA's) Courtesy Counts campaign.

¹ For example, see MTA (2023) and Transport for London (2017).

Not only can public education increase kindness, but it can also reduce harmful behavior, such as gender-based harassment. BART partnered with Alliance for Girls, Betti Ono Foundation, Black Girls Brilliance, and The Unity Council's Latinx Mentorship and Achievement Program on a public education campaign called "Not One More Girl." The campaign created posters to discourage gender-based harassment and encourage bystander intervention and distributed multilingual tools to support passengers in asking for help and asking if others needed help. Based on surveys conducted before and after the campaign's launch, the campaign reduced rates of passengers experiencing gender-based harassment by 4 percentage points, or 33 percent (BART, 2026). Given auditors' multiple reports of gender-based harassment and harassment of seniors, future campaigns should focus on reducing harassment against multiple targeted populations.



A poster from the "Not One More Girl" campaign to discourage sexual harassment.

More in-depth conflict navigation skills training could also improve public transit culture, including cross-racial interactions. Under the Coalition for Community Safety and Justice (CCSJ), Chinese Progressive Association created restorative justice workshops for Asian American youth and LEP adult Chinese immigrants (CCSJ, 2025b). Workshop participants reported that the learnings from these workshops helped them have positive interactions with passengers of other races. One adult participant offered support to youth of a different race/ethnicity on the bus, which created a shared positive moment. A youth participant mentioned accidentally bumping into a passenger of a different race, which caused tensions to escalate. She transformed a potential conflict into a friendly conversation by giving an authentic apology, which she learned in the workshop. These interactions take place in a broader context of anti-Asian and anti-Black racism, community trauma, and narratives that pit Asian Americans against other people of color. Conflict between passengers of different races is experienced and interpreted through this context. Therefore, conflict

navigation skills that are rooted in racial justice can prevent the stoking of cross-racial tension and even spark cross-racial healing.

DELIVER MULTILINGUAL ROUTE INFORMATION AND OTHER WAYFINDING IMPROVEMENTS



A digital sign shows bus arrival times.

SFMTA can adopt or increase the adoption of several features to make wayfinding easier, especially for LEP immigrants:

On the bus

- Announce stops earlier so that people have time to request their stop
- Include multilingual stop announcements
- Provide more information about the route, such as a complete list of stops or upcoming stops, so that people can prepare to get off the bus

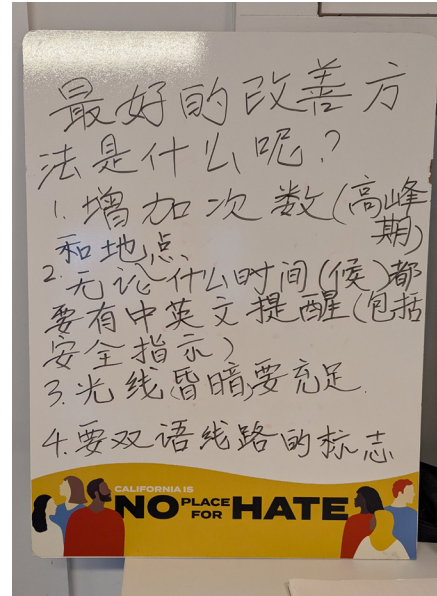
At the bus stop

- Add multilingual route maps
- Add multilingual indicators for the direction of the bus
- Add digital arrival times

- Add digital route maps
- Add obvious bus stop markers that can be recognized from a distance, like the signature Muni bus stop canopy or a large sign
- Evaluate stops for visibility and signage obstructions

Some bus stops already include these features, such as digital arrival times, but more consistent adoption, especially at higher traffic bus stops and routes used by LEP immigrants, would close wayfinding gaps throughout the City.

Even though passengers can use the Muni app and 311 for in-language trip planning, community members did not bring it up as an option or mention using it. San Francisco can invest in public education to advertise the ease of accessing in-language information through the Muni app and 311.



Notes taken from an audit debrief session.



A bus stop near Stockton St. and Clay St. with real-time bus arrival information, seating, and a recognizable canopy.

PROVIDE TIMELY AND TRUSTED HELP FROM AN AUTHORITY FIGURE

Auditors expressed the need for an authoritative and trusted person on the bus to handle interpersonal harm or conflict in a timely manner. That person did not have to be a law enforcement officer nor armed. Most of the time, people thought the bus driver should intervene. For example, community members suggested that drivers stop the bus until an incident was handled. Their desire for bus drivers to handle situations reflected their trust in drivers and generally positive experiences with them. However, they acknowledged that bus drivers already had difficult jobs and many responsibilities. People were enthusiastic about adding Muni staff on buses and stops to assist drivers in handling incidents and encouraging good transit etiquette.

Community auditor 1: “Making too much noise affects the concentration of the driver and makes it unsafe to drive. If there was an extra person that would be good.”

Community auditor 2: “Then the bus driver won’t have to be so busy. And it would feel more safe.”

If in-person help was not available, community members would still appreciate virtual assistance during an unsafe situation. Language barriers make it difficult for community members to ask for help from other passengers or de-escalate situations themselves. Auditors would have felt better if they could talk to someone who could help. Advertising the ability for passengers to call 311 to receive in-language assistance could make community members feel more equipped to handle safety incidents.

Relatedly, community members wanted more public education about 311 and to encourage people to report incidents. That way, Muni could concentrate resources on routes and times with the most safety incidents.

EDUCATE PASSENGERS ON HOW TO REDUCE THE RISK OF THEFT

In the short term, auditors thought passengers could take precautions to reduce their personal risk of theft. They suggested adding multilingual announcements to remind people to keep their personal

belongings safe. For example, an announcement could remind people that phones are easy to take out of one's hand. The City could also invest in in-language, culturally competent safety workshops. For example, under CCSJ, Community Youth Center (CYC) conducts in-language workshops to deliver safety tips in multiple Asian languages.

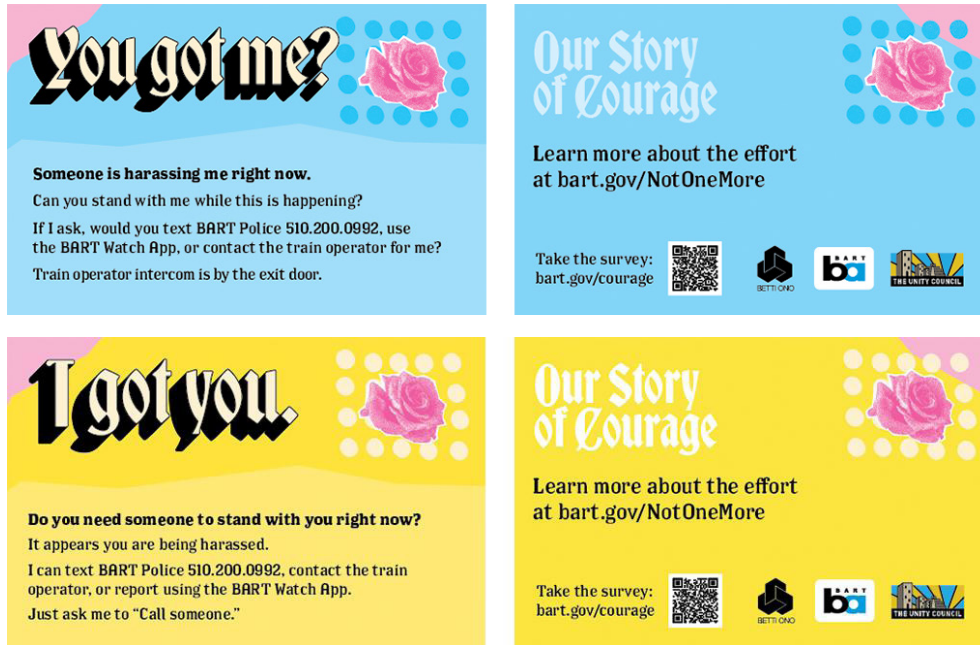
FUND VICTIM-CENTERED SERVICES AND OUTREACH TO HEAL FROM HARM

People often need help with recovery after experiencing harm, including non-criminal harm, such as being called a racial slur. Victim-centered services with a case manager model can assess a person's needs and coordinate multiple supports. These supports may include counseling to heal from trauma and assistance with navigating government programs to obtain funding to replace lost items, pay for medical bills, and other expenses. Not only must victim-centered services be funded, but culturally competent and in-language outreach must also be funded to connect people with resources in times of crisis.

Given the lack of availability of in-language and culturally competent victims services for many years, many San Franciscans may be living with unhealed trauma. Support groups that specifically address long-term trauma, such as CYC's healing groups for Chinese-speaking immigrants, can help people return to normal daily activities and feel less afraid [CCSJ, 2025a].

CULTIVATE PASSENGERS' CAPACITY FOR MUTUAL SUPPORT AND SAFE INTERVENTION

Community members felt better when passengers looked out for each other, but they acknowledged that it was hard to intervene for someone you do not know. San Francisco and SFMTA can invest in multiple levels of interventions to encourage a culture of mutual support and increase the public's capacity for safe bystander intervention. For example, the "Not One More Girl" campaign on BART distributed wallet-sized cards that passengers could use to ask for help and ask if others needed help.



Bystander intervention cards from the “Not One More Girl” campaign.

The City should also invest in in-language and culturally competent de-escalation and bystander intervention workshops. Under CCSJ, CYC adapted de-escalation and bystander intervention curricula for multiple Asian languages. These trainings help community members build skills and confidence in navigating difficult situations they may encounter. For example, Right To Be’s bystander intervention training, adapted by CYC, emphasizes safer strategies, such as distraction and delaying, over physical confrontation (Right to Be, 2022).

MAKE PHYSICAL IMPROVEMENTS TO BUS STOPS AND BUSES

Community members pointed out several physical improvements that SFMTA and the City could make to increase safety:

At the bus stops

- Ensure that lighting is sufficient for visibility at night²
- Add more bulb-outs to make it easier for buses to stop adjacent to sidewalks

² Chalfin et al. (2022) found that street lights reduce nighttime outdoor crime.

- Demarcate safe areas to stand while waiting for the bus
- Work with local businesses to create more sidewalk space at bus stops
- Widen sidewalks near bus stop for pedestrian traffic
- Address sloping sidewalks, which might make it difficult for passengers to get on and off, especially people using wheelchairs and seniors

On the bus

- Install more safety railings, especially near the back door and on routes frequented by seniors
- Assess technological improvements to prevent passengers from being caught in doors
- Increase bus driver training on preventing injuries caused by closing doors on passengers and driving before passengers have settled in
- Fix air conditioners or open more windows

EXPAND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AND STRENGTHEN SOCIAL SERVICES

Community members recognized that interpersonal harm was a societal issue that was mostly beyond the purview of the transit system. When asked how society could reduce theft on the bus, they said that there needed to be better economic conditions and jobs, so that people would not have to turn to theft. A community auditor explained,



If they can't make enough money, then they will turn to illegal activities...If they have the opportunity to make a better future, a stable life, if they have a goal, they won't turn to illegal activities.

– Community auditor



Relatedly, there was support for rehabilitation and reentry programs for people who have committed crimes, especially if those programs built in timelines and accountability for people meeting their personal goals, such as attaining education or employment.

In addressing people they feared would behave aggressively, such as people with mental health issues or experiencing homelessness, community members wanted more social services. In fact, in our larger community discussion, community members unanimously chose improving the behavioral health system and increasing housing as a priority.



Community members discuss the safety audits.

LIMITATIONS

Our findings are shaped by our study design and rooted in the experiences of our auditors. Modifying this study design could generate additional insights on transit safety. First, we did not conduct the audits at night, which could have emphasized different issues, such as street lighting. Second, as our auditors were mostly middle-aged LEP Chinese women, this report may be missing safety issues and recommendations that other demographic groups, such as youth, seniors, men, and LGBTQ+ people would find important. Other communities of color and immigrant communities may also offer different perspectives on transit safety. We recommend that more audits be conducted with community members from different backgrounds and at night to complement the findings in this report.

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