

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.