



Mobility in the child (and carer) friendly city: SEQ vs. Stockholm

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"I felt humiliated – I had the impression that, as a woman with two inconvenient children and some inconvenient luggage [a pram], I was barely tolerated on that bus system. Obviously two factors influenced my feelings there – the attitude of the driver and the design of the bus, neither of which made allowance for my – not-extraordinary – needs."
(Wright 1994:33)

"...the physical environment both reflects and conditions the wellbeing of children and gives children a very clear message about how they are valued (or not) within their community."
(Woolcock & Steele 2008:5)

Notions of public good and community obligations underpin public transport provision and are based on principles of equal citizenship and people's individual rights.
(Tedmanson 1994:13)

Abstract

The rationale for providing state subsidized public transport has changed over time from a social obligation to provide transport options for those without access to private transport to an environmental and economic imperative to minimize congestion and greenhouse gas emissions. In many jurisdictions this shift has seen a greater focus on the provision of peak hour commuter services and a shift in the demographic profile of the riding public and a significant increase in the number of commuter passengers relative to others. The scheduling of commuter services is not geared to meet the needs of children and their generally female carers who often need to engage in trip chaining and travel outside peak commuting periods and on weekends. In addition to service scheduling difficulties, transport infrastructure, both onboard and supporting infrastructure such as bus stops, train stations and connecting footpaths often do not support children and their carers to use public transport services. Combined with a negative attitude by passengers and service providers, such as bus drivers, which may see children, babies and young people as out of place and unwelcome on commuter services, these issues conspire to hinder the use of public transport by children and their carers. Overlaying feminist geography analysis and insights and child-friendly cities objectives, this paper proposes some basic criteria for the provision of public transport services and supporting infrastructure which meets the needs of children, babies and their carers and juxtaposes the achievement of these in South East Queensland, Australia and Stockholm, Sweden.

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Introduction

Our interest in this research project was sparked by a recent controversy in inner city Brisbane, Australia in 2010 (Ironsides 2010) involving claims of discrimination on public transport by mothers with prams. The story reported in *The Courier-Mail* shared the experience of Anita Flowers who was turned away from two buses and a train on her way to work at around 7 o'clock one Monday morning. Ms Flowers claimed that the bus drivers told her she could not board unless she folded up the pram carrying her sleeping five-month-old daughter. Ms Flowers says that she “accepted this and walked to the nearest train station where [she] waited for at least 15 minutes, and when the train finally arrived, the guard told [her] that [she] would have to wait for the next one as this one was full.” She alleges the he then proceeded to tell her that “all trains are full at this time, you should wait”.

Based on her experience, Ms Flowers lodged an online petition to the government calling for a pram friendly carriage on trains. Other parents who signed her petition said they had experienced similar acts of discrimination and some admitted to spending thousands of dollars each year to park in the city rather than catch the train because of the discrimination experienced when travelling with their child. Supporters of Ms Flowers said that “Other passengers are on the whole not tolerant of children in their space”.

The comments provided on the Courier-Mail’s online comments following the story were vitriolic demonstrating negative attitudes toward the use of public transport by mothers and their children, with or without a pram; both of which were deemed to be ‘out of place’ on peak hour services, despite the fact that Ms Flowers herself was a commuter on her way to work.

In affluent countries (with relatively high measured female workforce participation rates) like Australia and Sweden, the rationale for providing state subsidized public transport has changed over time from a social obligation to provide transport options for those without access to private transport to an environmental and economic imperative to minimize congestion and greenhouse gas emissions and service the economy through commuter travel. In many jurisdictions this shift has seen a greater focus on the provision of peak hour commuter services and a shift in the demographic profile of the riding public. It has also seen a significant increase in the number of commuter passengers relative to others and a withdrawal of some non-commuter services. The scheduling of these services is generally not geared to meet the needs of children and their carers who might need to engage in trip chaining and travel outside peak commuting periods and on weekends. As Ms Flowers’ experience shows, even parents travelling during peak hours with their children experience difficulties.

In addition to service scheduling difficulties, transport infrastructure, both onboard and supporting transit infrastructure such as bus stops, train stations and connecting footpaths do not support parents with children. As the vitriolic comments surrounding Ms Flowers’ experience demonstrate, these physical barriers are often combined with a negative attitude by passengers and service providers, such as bus drivers, which may see parents travelling with children and babies as out of place and unwelcome on commuter services. This is not surprising as it has been noted for many decades in the feminist geography and social justice fields that the needs of women are often overlooked in the planning and delivery of public transport services (Hanlon 1996, PLM>A 1995, Fritze 2007). What Ms Flowers’ story demonstrates most clearly is that there is also a deficiency in transport planning and service delivery with respect to meeting the travelling needs of children and babies and their carers.

The needs and aspirations of children and young people are often overlooked in the planning, design and management of our cities and neighbourhoods (Baker et al 2010). This is also often the case with transport planning and design. The child friendly cities agenda has generated some discussion on the need for effective models for involving children in the governance and development of their communities (UNICEF 2012:55). This approach recognises the right to safe and accessible transport as a prerequisite to delivering just cities for all citizens, but most particularly children.

The delivery of child friendly transport can slow the observed decline in children's independent mobility (Love & Whitzman 2011:1) and can welcome children and young people back into our communities. As well as a children's rights framework, the development of child friendly transport criteria in this paper is also informed by an understanding of the feminist geography literature on women's transport issues which recognise mothers as carrying a disproportionate burden of travel with children and for having to deal with the consequences of child unfriendly design and services.⁴

As in Australia, Swedish women are also disproportionately responsible for journeys related to care and purchasing (Vagland 2004:192). This paper proposes some basic criteria for the provision of public transport services and infrastructure which meets the needs of children and their carers and juxtaposes the achievement of these to date in South East Queensland, Australia and Stockholm, Sweden.

Transport and gender

Because of their youth, children often travel with others, however, the burden of transporting children is not equally distributed among parents with young children more than five times as likely to travel with their mothers than their fathers (McDonald 2006:1).

It is generally agreed that women carry a greater transport burden than men (Mashiri et al 2005). For example, women are primarily responsible for domestic work, including shopping and child rearing, regardless of their employment status (Hamilton 2001:3). As a result women's trips are more likely to relate to caring and family responsibilities while men are more likely to travel for business and leisure (Scottish Government 2002). Mothers are more likely to have responsibility for meeting children's travel needs, and children make more go-along trips with mothers and those trips on which mothers take them along are for household-sustaining purposes, such as shopping (McDonald 2006:4). Indeed it has been suggested that much of this travel is "babysitting on the go", particularly for single mothers for whom there may be no other form of child care available or by working mothers attempting to spend some time with their children (McDonald 2006:6).

As a result women make the majority of non-work trips with the exception of social/recreational, return home trips and childcare and education trips which are predominantly undertaken by children or women with children (Abrahams 1998). Women make more trips to and from education (including escorting children) and more shopping trips than men (Scottish Government 2002). Women are more likely than men to work part-time, to be responsible for child care and housework, and to perform tasks that are considered inherently "interruptible". The division of paid and unpaid labour and the assumption that women's work (paid or unpaid) can be interrupted may shape women's travel patterns in ways that men do not experience because women's travel patterns often reflect and reinforce the same message of interruptibility that characterizes their work (Spain 1996:276). As a result, journey to work is of less significance to women because women's travel patterns are more complex in duration, time of day and mode, due mainly to family and domestic responsibilities (Abrahams 1998).

Women are more likely to be accompanied by children and encumbered by baggage when travelling (Abrahams 1998). Women with family responsibilities have particular travel needs and for them the transport task is complex and multi-faceted. Their journeys are more likely to involve a range of different modes of transport (Scottish Government 2002) and to rely on trip chaining (completing multiple tasks within a single journey) to meet the complex demands of their multiple roles.

⁴ Certainly not all women are the same or have the same life experiences, however, research suggests that there are sufficiently significant differences between women's transport demands and experience as opposed to those of men in terms of access, patterns of commuting and in childcare responsibilities to justify treating women separately (Hamilton 2011:2).

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The result is that women need more travel flexibility than men (Spain 1996:277). Despite this transport planning has tended to focus on peak hour movement, the journey to work and movements into and out of the CBD (Mashiri et al 2005; Dowling & Göllner 1997). This focus is more appropriate to middle class men's employment (industrial areas are generally poorly served, if at all) and travel patterns than to women's and children's. As a result "they are poorly and disadvantageously serviced by current transport arrangements, and in particular public transport" (Dowling & Göllner 1997:8). As Ms Flowers' experience shows even women and children who attempt to mirror male commuter travel patterns and to take advantage of the services provided are not afforded equal access. Based on these constraints women travellers often seek more frequent and reliable services, safety and security, and good physical access (Costain 1995, Wright 1994, Ybarzabal 2010). Transport policy-makers need to understand that women with family responsibilities, particularly those who work outside the home and have children often have negative transport experiences (Austin 1994). These transport difficulties create significant barriers to accessing services, social networks and community participation for parents and their children (Fritze 2007).

Transport in the child-friendly city

While children have been variously described as including anyone from the age of birth to 18 (UN 1989), the transport needs and unmet transport demand of each of these groups is very different (table 1). In recent years a great deal has been written about that unmet transport needs of older children, young people and young adults, particularly in Australian regional and rural Australia (e.g. Currie et al 2005, Currie 2007). As relatively autonomous and independent travellers, in some respects the transport needs of these groups are not too different to those experienced by other able bodied adults, particularly with respect to a demand for frequent, reliable and affordable public transport services that operate outside non-peak periods (Demasi, Grant-Smith, Poulsen & Doring 2007). Significantly less has been written about the transport needs of younger children who are seen more as travel companions than travellers in their own right, perhaps because the majority of trips for infants are escort trips travelling with parents (Currie 2007).

Indeed in many respects these children are considered incidental travellers and their needs subordinate to other travellers. This is despite them having specific needs that are more in line with those of travellers with a disability and other special needs travellers, a point that Ms Flowers also made.

Table 1: categories of children and their transport needs and characteristics

category	indicative age	transport needs/characteristics
infants and toddlers	0-3 years <i>babies & toddlers</i>	Do not travel alone. Often undertake companion/care trips. Require carrying or travel in a stroller/pram some or all of the time. Requires high level of public transport accessibility and a good pedestrian environment where walking is required.
pre-school children	4-5 years <i>pre-school</i>	Can move more independently (i.e. not confined to stroller) but do not travel alone and often undertake companion/care trips. Require high level of public transport accessibility and a good pedestrian environment where walking is required. A strong emphasis is placed on the safety of transit situations because children of this age may act unpredictably (Gilbert & O'Brien 2005:21).
young children	6-10 years <i>primary school</i>	Some journeys are made without supervision (eg. school transport where they may travel with other children but are met at pick-up/drop off points by adults) but most travel tends to be with parents, carers and other family members.
older children	11-14 years <i>early to middle high school</i>	Many day-time journeys (walking, cycling and public transport) are made without supervision. Often travel in groups rather than alone. ⁵
young people	15-18 years <i>high school or vocational training</i>	Start to begin to move independently within the community. May have a licence and access to a car in later years.

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It has been noted that public transport

trips are imagined as being made by independent individuals, each contained in a body that is a distinct, separate and equivalent unit. Although there is some recognition of the physical needs of particularly groups (such as people with impaired mobility), bodies appear in conventional transport planning models as discrete entities with independent trajectories. However, we might query to what extent that model holds true. For example, someone travelling by train with a baby must carry the infant with them to ticket office, toilet stall, boarding platform and train compartment, and must manage the physical demands of embarking and disembarking while carrying baby (not to mention stroller and baggage). In a sense, then the bodily boundaries of the adult escort expand to encompass the small child. (Law 1999:581)

While such a view recognises the travelling needs of the parents it still views the child as part of the adult and not a traveller in its own right and with its own rights. Certainly a large number of responses to Ms Flowers' story questioned the right of her child to be transported on a commuter bus during peak hour at all either in or out of a pram. This view of children as being subpersons without the full rights of adults is not uncommon and is part of the rationale behind the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the child-friendly cities movement it spawned.

Cities aspiring to be child-friendly commit to implementing the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, including through a strong participatory approach and the mainstreaming of children's rights in budgets and policies. The convention is based on four core principles: non-discrimination; the best interests of the child; the right to life, survival and development; and considering the view of the child in decisions which affect them (according to their age and maturity) (UN 1989). UNICEF (2012:55) believe that within the urban context, an inclusive environment can be created with a focus on two major issues: transportation (the focus of this paper) and space.

⁵ Hanlon (1996:652) makes the interesting observation that while parents are often happier if their children travel in a group for safety reasons, "this 'group' of children, seen through the eyes of a bus driver, may easily be regarded as a 'gang'".

Internationally, the concept of child and youth friendly cities has been led by the United Nations as a means to improve the lives of children and young people in developed and developing countries. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) promotes the rights of children and young people to influence their communities, participate in family and community life, access basic non-discriminatory services and green and unpolluted spaces and live safely. This rights framework has been extended by some Australian Governments (State Government of New South Wales and various Local Governments) to include the design of the built environment. Safe public transport and well-regulated traffic are vital components of a city fit for children. For instance, successful initiatives in Colombia, Sweden and the Netherlands have combined car-free areas, dedicated bicycle and pedestrian routes, and public transport to reduce injuries and deaths (UNICEF 2012:71). In Australia, a number of local governments have adopted child friendly cities principles to inform the delivery of their services and their engagement with local communities (e.g. Baker et al 2010).

The Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY 2006) has defined a child friendly community as one in which children are valued, supported, respected, provided for and actively included. Based on this view ARACY developed a range of indicators or criteria for encouraging child-friendliness within communities (Table 2).

Table 2: Themes for encouraging child-friendliness within communities (ARACY 2006)

criteria	description
welcome and connection	learning how to listen, plan and take action with local children
value	recognising that local children and their families are valuable contributors to community life
safety	providing safe places to play close to home and connect communities with the care of children
meaningful action and self-determination	developing a joint community vision and imagining together what a child friendly community will look like locally
space	designing creative spaces for and with children and providing people with a reason to come into those spaces and use them
learning and development	recognising that learning and development happens in everyday places and in many different ways and that it is important to utilise these places, and to document the processes and outcomes for children as they learn and grow in everyday spaces
support	establishing practical and friendly pathways for families to get services they need
time	taking time and making time when working with children to counter the idea that consultation with children is a one-off event

The concept of a child friendly city is not based on an ideal end state or a standard model. It is a framework to assist any city to become more child friendly in all aspects of its environment, governance, and services. Access to appropriate transport is often identified as a factor in the achievement of child friendly cities (Commission for Children & Young People and Child Guardian 2006:7).

This idea has been expanded by researchers at the Centre for Sustainable Transportation in Canada (Gilbert & O'Brien 2005, 2010; O'Brien, Ramanathan, Gilbert & Orsini 2009) through the development of a set of guidelines for child and youth friendly land use and transport planning. These guidelines (Table 3) centre around four principles: putting children and youth first; providing for children and youth as pedestrians; providing for children and youth on bicycles (and other wheels); and providing for children and youth as public transport users.

Table 3: Guidelines for child and youth friendly land use and transport planning⁶

Putting children and youth first
The needs of children and youth should receive as much priority as the needs of people of other ages and the requirements of business in transport and land-use planning decisions
Within each municipality, designate a staff member or council member, or both, as responsible for bringing the perspectives of young people to consideration of transport and land-use planning issues.
As may be appropriate, establish or adapt one or more forums for children and youth to ensure that their perspectives are considered by land-use and transport planners.
Providing for children and youth as pedestrians
Identify where children and youth want to go or need to go and, to the extent possible, provide ways of getting there by foot. ⁷
Assess pedestrian routes used or to be used by children, youth and a person wheeling a stroller to ensure that they are as safe and suitable/usable for them as possible.
Separate sidewalks used by children and youth from heavily travelled roads to avoid harm.
Ensure that sidewalks are always cleared of ice and snow and debris. ⁸
Providing for children and youth as public transport users
Ensure that every part of a public transport system is safe and welcoming to young people and children, and affordable.
Avoid transfers by routing vehicles where children and youth want to and need to go; make transfers easy where necessary.
Examine every aspect of a public transport system from the perspective of a parent with a child in a stroller, and make adjustments to meet such a traveller's needs. ⁹
Keep fares for children low, so as to encourage their use of transit systems.
Help ensure that school policies and practices favour walking, cycling, and other modes of active transport for trips to and from school, and also regular public transport where this is available and appropriate.
For younger children, help arrange walking school buses, ¹⁰ and other means of supervision.
Where destinations cannot be reached by foot, bicycle or public transport, arrange land uses so that in-car time is reduced.
Post and enforce much lower speed limits, particularly in urban areas (and around schools).
Do what is possible to reduce amounts of motorised traffic generally and reduce its adverse impacts.

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⁶ It should be noted that guidelines were also provided for children and youth on bicycles and other wheels. Although we recognise their importance in increasing child mobility and travel independence these guidelines have been excluded as they do not related directly to the public transport task.

⁷ Similar considerations apply to children and youth who use wheelchairs.

⁸ It's hard to push a stroller or wheelchair through uncleared snow, an icy sidewalk or uneven path or to expect a toddler or even a slightly older child to walk there.

⁹ Among the most challenged users of transit systems are passengers with young children in strollers. These users have particular difficulties when there are stairs or steps and when vehicles are overcrowded. (Gilbert & O'Brien 2010)

¹⁰ The essential feature of a walking bus is a line of children, even holding a rope if they are under five years, led by and followed by one or more adults.

Preliminary criteria for child and carer friendly public transport

An engagement with feminist approaches to public transport is characterised by a political agenda to effect change and “to challenge the conceptions that have led and continue to lead to gender inequalities in transport” (Buiten 2007:23). So too the child friendly cities agenda is trying to affect a similar change for children. Thus combining the two approaches is not incompatible given the overlap in their interests and the disproportionate role mothers have in ensuring their children’s travel needs are met.

In the past policy makers and service providers have not always recognised the differential effects of their provision on some groups and the barriers they may impose on people who do not fit within the dominant pattern of need for which the provision has been developed (Scottish Government 2002). The frustrations and safety concerns of trying to use transport systems and a built environment which is not designed for parents with young children make completing daily activities unnecessarily difficult (Fritze 2007: 34).

From Ms Flowers' case we can understand that child-friendly passenger transport is as much about infrastructure and service deficiencies as it is about less tangible issues like the provision of assistance and the attitudes of other passenger transport users. Based on the child-friendly transport criteria and understanding of the challenges facing parents travelling with small children the following tentative criteria for child and carer friendly public transport are proposed (figure 1).



Figure 1: Criteria for child and carer friendly public transport

Accessibility

Accessibility is one of the most significant barriers to using public transport identified by the parents of small children (Fritze 2007). The use of public transport by people travelling with children is affected by physical and practical considerations relating to the structural design of buses, trains and trams. Inaccessible vehicles not only make travel physically difficult and emotionally stressful but also in some cases prevent carers from travelling at all (Fritze 2007:10-11). Buses are generally considered to be worse than trains because parents can generally move a pram on and off a train relatively easily. Issues with bus accessibility are exacerbated by policies requiring carers to fold up their prams before entering a bus. Many researchers have highlighted the indignity and difficulty associated with this issue (Fritze 2007:10-11, Wright 1994). Because those travelling with small children are often further encumbered by baby strollers and heavy shopping the design of many vehicles and carriages makes getting on and off under such circumstances extremely difficult (Hanlon 1996). The provision of physical access to vehicles, facilities and the surrounding built environment is important. This includes the development and provision of facilities for children to meet the needs of women travelling with

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children and the provision of adequate space on vehicles and within facilities (such as waiting areas) to allow for the storage of prams, bags and other items (Scottish Government 2002:9).

Practical constraints that seriously hinder access and ease of movement include: high steps which are difficult to negotiate for the very young; a lack of storage space for shopping, baby strollers, and other paraphernalia; lack of proper provision of seating for children and no seat belts; lack of organized assistance for women getting on and off who are laden with children, strollers/prams and shopping (Hanlon 1996). Accessibility constraints often extend beyond the actual vehicles to include: impractical siting of bus stops and train stations; inadequate provision of seating and shelter at stops and stations; toilets at stations and interchanges which are too small to accommodate an adult with a baby stroller/pram; awkward steps and crossings at railway stations and the quality of the paths to bus stops and train stations. In some instances, these 'constraints' and difficulties' can be dangerous. At the very least, they serve to deter parents and carers from using public transport and hamper them when they do choose to use it (Hanlon 1996).

Assistance

The barriers presented by inaccessible vehicles are exacerbated in many cases by policies in some areas requiring parents to fold prams before entering the bus, and by bus drivers failing to provide assistance. Difficulties in boarding and alighting from inaccessible buses and the need to fold up prams create a corresponding need for assistance using services. Current occupational health and safety 'no-lift' policies, nominally in place to protect bus drivers (but, ultimately, to protect bus operators from workers' compensation risk), have unintentional impacts on the ability of parents and carers to use bus services and can result in parents having to rely on strangers to hold their babies or to put the children down on the nature strip or pavement while they fold their prams or assist their other children on to the bus (Fritze 2007).

The availability of assistance for parents at transport facilities and onboard vehicles by staff who have an awareness of the issues faced by parents travelling with children can also have a positive impact on the travel of children and their carers and should be encouraged (Scottish Government 2002:10). It has been suggested that the development of policies to increase the usability of transport services for carers of young children should include designation and publication of when accessible services are timetabled; removal of operating policies that require prams to be folded; more assistance from drivers and other staff to assist women with prams or small children to board vehicles; and more involvement of drivers in ensuring that those holding young children have access to priority seating (Fritze 2007:13).

Affordability

On the whole women have lower income levels than men and some groups of women (such as single parents) are likely to be disproportionately represented among lower income earners. There is a need to encourage the general provision of public transport at a reasonable cost. The provision of flexible options which can reduce the costs of transport (such as multi-journey and through ticketing) can support affordability (Scottish Government 2002:15). Similarly, discounted or free travel for children can support affordability. An example of this principle is in operation in the Metropolitan Region of Helsinki which offers free use of the public transport system for people travelling with babies to encourage care givers travelling with their children to use public transport (UN Habitat 2008:193).

Availability, frequency & reliability

Public transport travel can be long and arduous, especially with young children in tow, due to lack of connectivity between services and long waiting times as well as a lack of direct services (Fritze 2007:20). It has been suggested that most transportation planning and modelling is based upon assessing the capacity of the system to handle rush hour loads and home-based-work trips, not off-peak, non home-based trips. This single minded attention overemphasizes capacity considerations on major facilities and de-emphasizes the difficulties faced by women forced to trip chain, make suburb to suburb or inner city to suburb trips and generally lavishes funding and

attention on the part of the travel market dominated by men (Dittmar 1996:669). The provision of integrated services without identifiable gaps in services is important (Scottish Government 2002:11) as waiting with children can be difficult especially in uncomfortable or unsafe environments such as those exposed to the weather or traffic.

Amenities & Services

A more carer and child friendly transport system would incorporate design features and service standards that reflect the realities of travelling unassisted with prams, baggage and young children (Fritze 2007:32). The lack of availability of baby change and toilet facilities of an acceptable standard in and around public transport is often a significant issue for parents travelling with children. Parents will often prefer to change their babies in their prams or cars rather than use public toilet and baby change facilities that are considered unsafe or unhygienic, or in some cases simply unusable or unavailable (Fritze 2007:21). This also extends to the provision of appropriate safety features onboard vehicles.

Attitudes

In the past, policy makers and service providers have not always recognised the different effects of their provision on women and the barriers they may unwittingly impose on groups which do not fit the dominant pattern of need for which the provision has been developed (Scottish Government 2002). Traditional transport planning has a tendency to determine and direct transport investments based largely on mainstream (unencumbered and able-bodied) commuter patterns and to tackle transport issues through a top-down approach, concentrating on technical requirements (Buiten 2007:28). Hanlon (1996:649) suggests that a contributing factor to the fact that these issues are not adequately addressed by the transport planning industry is that “women are woefully under-represented as professionals and as service providers”. This has resulted in public transport provision and planning is “an industry which is male dominated and little influenced by any awareness of the importance of gender” (Hanlon 199:654). The child friendly cities agenda recognises a similar absence of concern with the needs and voices of children, which their parents can assist in providing (particularly for very young children).

Mainstreaming these issues requires the examination of the policy process to ensure that issues relating to parents travelling with children have been examined and built into public transport policy and delivery. This involves actively seeking the views of parents and children specifically and taking action to address their identified issues (Scottish government 2002:4).

While the needs of carers with young children must be considered as part of accessible transport planning, including the design of public transport vehicles, buildings and facilities (Fritze 2007), a child and carer friendly public transport system also relies on the goodwill and attitudes of drivers, transport staff and other passengers (Wright 1994) in making women and their children feel welcome on public transport.

Child and carer friendly transport in SEQ

South East Queensland is one of the fastest growing regions in Australia with its population expected to grow from 3.1 million in 2009 to 4.4 million in 2031 (TMR 2010). In July 2008, TransLink Transit Authority was established as the statutory authority responsible for leading, planning, specifying and providing mass transit in South East Queensland – an area that stretches from Gympie and the Sunshine Coast to Coolangatta on the Gold Coast, and west to Helidon. TransLink operates across 23 zones and 7 regions in South East Queensland (map 1). By 2016 there will be significant extensions to TransLink services in line with the predicted SEQ (South East Queensland) Regional Plan urban footprint for 2026 (TransLink 2012c). TransLink delivers bus, train and ferry services, information, ticketing and infrastructure across South East Queensland – one of the largest integrated public transport networks in the world with TransLink and its partners providing more than 178.6 million passenger trips in 2010–11 (TransLink 2011). TransLink coordinates nearly five million bus, train and ferry services across the 10 000 square kilometre region of South East Queensland. The TransLink network spans 23 zones in a service area that is six and half times the size of London’s Oyster card network

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(TransLink 2011:8). Unlike metropolitan based public transport systems, which traditionally service large numbers of customers within a small geographical area, the size of South East Queensland means that TransLink must provide services and infrastructure to customers across a broader, more dispersed area.



Map 1: TransLink area of service

(<http://translink.com.au/resources/about-translink/our-service-area/region-map.jpg>)

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Availability

TransLink works with nineteen different public transport operators to plan and deliver more than 4.9 million services to South East Queensland (TransLink 2012d)¹¹. The TransLink network encompasses: **rail** with 201 three-car trains (generally coupled to make six car trains) which operate across 145 train stations and 740km train track; **buses** with 21 busway stations, 25km of busway system, more than 12,000 bus stops and more than 2300 buses; and **ferries** with 17 city cats and 9 city ferries (TransLink 2011:38). Public transport operations are both publicly and privately owned, with services provided under service contract arrangements with the Queensland Government.

The TransLink authority has improved the availability of public transport in the region by enhancing timetable integration across modes. Nevertheless, the frequency of public transport services in South East Queensland favours commuters travelling to the Central Business District of Brisbane at peak times. In peak commuting times, there are generally more scheduled buses and trains and more express public transport services. The cost of travel in peak periods is slightly higher than a comparative trip in an off-peak period. This is designed to discourage non-commuters from travelling on peak hour public transport services. The common “hub and spoke” system of service provision such as the South East Queensland network can make travel between suburbs difficult (Scottish Government 2002:12) and is better suited to meeting the needs of commuters travelling to the CBD. It should be noted that the Queensland Government does provide dedicated school transport services (for high school and primary students) on some routes.

Affordability

The high cost of public transport travel in South East Queensland is a contentious issue for the region’s communities. This concern, which has been accompanied by a decline in patronage, has been attributed to ongoing fare increases of 15 per cent per annum (PS News 2012b) since 2009. A single 15 km trip can cost an adult traveller up to \$8.00. Pre-paid travel (using a *go-card*) is up to 30% cheaper than *pay as you go* travel. Children aged four years and younger travel for free on TransLink buses, trains and ferries while children aged 5-14 (inclusive) are eligible for a concession fare (TransLink 2012) though they are not entitled to a seat if adults are standing.

The Queensland Government has committed to reintroducing discounted weekly fares for regular users of buses, trains and ferries (LNP 2012a) which will include free travel after nine journeys in a Monday-to-Sunday week for *go card* users (LNP 2012b, PS News 2012b). This is part of a strategy to deliver public transport in South East Queensland that works for commuters by delivering a reliable, frequent and safe network (LNP 2012a) and is unlikely to result in cost savings to those who are not employed in a full-time capacity.

Accessibility

TransLink, like all Australian public transport networks, works under the Australian Government’s *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* and *Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002*. TransLink is continuing its program of upgrading infrastructure and rolling out new buses, trains and ferries to meet the *Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002*. TransLink is also upgrading its existing 12 000 bus stops in the TransLink network to meet the Commonwealth Government’s target of 100 per cent DDA compliance by December 2022. This shift to DDA compliant transport infrastructure will assist service accessibility for parents and carers travelling with children as more lifts, ramps and onboard wheelchair bays combine to support the travelling needs of infants and young children.

Assistance

Due to workplace health and safety concerns TransLink staff are not required to assist in folding and loading prams and other large objects (TransLink 2012a). It is Translink policy that children may travel on buses and trains in a pram or stroller provided it is parked in the designated

¹¹ This does not include dedicated school transport services which are provided by private providers on behalf of the State Government through Department of Transport and Main Roads.

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wheelchair space with its brake on and the child is secured in the pram or stroller harness. However, children need to be removed from prams and strollers and the pram or stroller folded and stored in the luggage rack under the following conditions: if travelling during peak times,¹² if the bus driver advises that there is not enough space on-board the bus to safely park the pram, if it is not a wheelchair accessible bus, or if the designated wheelchair space is already occupied or it is required (for a wheelchair) throughout the trip (TransLink 2012a). It is TransLink policy that adults travelling with small children should be given priority seating on all TransLink services (TransLink 2012a). While the allocation of priority seating is a positive recognition of the additional needs of some passenger groups, it relies on the good will of passengers to relinquish their seats or on the confidence of passengers with special needs to request them to do so. Realistically, this does not guarantee access to these seats for those who need them (Fritze 2007).



image 1. getting onto a bus with a toddler and folded stroller

Amenities

Safety handles on buses are connected to the roof and are designed for adult travellers. Stop request buttons are also generally positioned at adult height. There is limited storage on buses and school bags are a particular problem during before and after school travel. You can only travel on a bus with a bike if it is a small fold up bike. Travelling with bikes on trains is also highly restrictive and is not allowed between 7am and 9.30am Monday to Friday (towards the city) and 3pm and 6.30pm (travelling away from the city). Drinking water fountains are provided at train stations in south-east Queensland (PS News 2012a).

Attitudes

TransLink consults with a range of interest groups in planning and providing services including those advocating for the interests of older people, people with a disability, students and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. They do not appear to have specific engagement with women or children (with the exception of parents and citizens group). In her PhD research into gender issues in public transport in SEQ Ybarzabal (2010) concluded that there is a lack of effective engagement with women in SEQ and that greater attention to gender consideration in developing public transport policies is required. She notes that while the Queensland Government has made a commitment to improving public transport provision for women it appears that such rhetoric has not yet translated into practice.

Child and carer friendly transport in Stockholm

Stockholm County is the capital region of Sweden, comprising more than 2 million inhabitants and growing at a rate of 30-40 000 inhabitants per year (Länsstyrelsen I Stockholms län, 2011a).

¹² Off-peak times are from 9am to 3.30pm and after 7pm weekdays until 2am the following day and all day weekends and gazetted public holidays (TransLink 2012b).

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The county covers 6488 km², with approximately half of the county area covered by forests (Länsstyrelsen 2011a). This is approximately 2/3 of the TransLink area in SEQ, with 2/3 the population, making Stockholm County more densely populated. Within the county, there is a further administrative sub-division into 26 municipalities (map 2). The higher administrative structures have different roles, with the County Administrative Board (a central government appointed board) responsible for planning and development in the county, coordinating among other things, transport planning and gender equality (Länsstyrelsen, 2011b). The county also comprises the County Council (landstinget) (2011b), an elected policy-making body, mainly responsible for health and public transport. The County Council controls public transport through a limited-liability company with a politically appointed board, *AB Storstockholms lokaltrafik, SL* (Landstinget, 2011a).



Map 2: Location and boundaries of Stockholm County and the various municipalities that make up the county.
Illustration - TimSE.

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Availability

There is a similar mix of public transport options in Stockholm and SEQ. In Stockholm, SL oversees the running of buses on 450 routes, commuter trains on 200km of track with 51 stations, local trains on 110km of track and 98 stations, trams and three metro lines with 107km of track and 105 stations (SL, 2011a). Ferries also operate throughout the Stockholm Archipelago, but are run through a separate limited liability company (Waxholms Ångfartygs AB) (Landstinget, 2011a). In many ways, SL operates in a similar way to SEQ's TransLink. Both agencies oversee public transport without actually providing the services themselves. SL contracts out transport services to seven private operators. Focusing on bus services, SL notes that there are over 700 000 passengers using public transport in Stockholm on a normal weekday, with approximately 40% of those passengers taking the bus (Landstinget, 2011b).

Accessibility

From personal observation, there are two 'types' of bus service – there is one type of service that is oriented towards commuters, moving people between outer municipalities and the central city and another type of service that moves people around a municipality. The commuter services seem to generally use high floored buses with steps and no capacity to 'kneel' (image 2a), thus making access difficult or impossible for parents with prams. The 'city' services generally seem to use newer MAN Lion's City buses with low floors and 'kneeling' abilities to allow access for parents with prams (image 2b).



image 2a (left) and 2b (right).

2a shows an older style commuter bus without the capacity to kneel and with narrow entry and exit doors. Additionally, there are 2-3 steps up once inside the bus, making it additionally difficult to load a pram. 2b shows a city bus that is low floored, able to kneel and has double mid-bus exit doors allowing easy access for prams.

SL has introduced a number of enhancements to bus operations and policies to ensure that it is easier for parents with prams to travel on buses within Stockholm County. These include rear or middle door entry, large designated spaces to 'park' prams, ability to secure prams and payment policies. Each of these will be described and discussed in the following paragraphs.

SL provides designated pram 'parking' in the front and mid third of each bus. The pram parking is therefore directly opposite and/or adjacent to the rear or mid exit door (depending on the specific bus model). For ease of entry, the mid or rear exit door has a door opening button on the exterior of the bus (image 3) so parents with prams are able to open the door (if no one is exiting the bus) and directly enter the bus to park their pram in the designated area. An additional feature of allowing parents with prams to enter the bus via the mid or rear exit doors is that there is a much higher chance that space will be available to them, rather than having to take their chances in the queue with other passengers.

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image 3. Button on the exterior of the buses by the mid exit door to allow parents with prams and people in wheelchairs to enter the bus easily.

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Affordability

When accessing an SL bus with a pram that holds an infant or toddler, the parent is not required to pay where the fare (25 SEK or ~3 Euro) is collected or ticket stamped by the driver. SL explains that this is a safety issue so that the parent does not have to leave the pram and their child unattended while they move forward to pay or have their ticket stamped (SL 2010; M. Ellman personal communication 2012-05-15). This policy however, does not extend to commuter and local trains, trams, the metro or even buses where the driver does not collect the fare or stamp the ticket. An example of this would be at Liljeholmens bus terminal, where fares are checked or collected by a ticket attendant upon entering the bus terminal.

There is one other exception to the no fare for parents with a pram policy – if the pram is empty or is being used to transport other things, the person with the pram must pay the fare. The child does not have to remain in the pram while on the bus – the parents are welcome to hold the child and still ride for free.

While SL appears to note that allowing parents with a child in a pram to travel free on buses is a convenience and safety feature, it is also a step towards the County Administrative Board's goal of ensuring gender equality through improving access to public transport for parents (mothers in particular) and their children. It also allows stay at home parents the ability to get out of their residence and conduct 'normal' daily activities. However, if this were the case, having fare-free access to local trains, metro and trams would be a greater indicator of this goal. Having access for prams via the exits also allows parents an equal chance of 'getting a place' on the bus with other passengers who do not have an additional burden of a pram.

Children under the age of 6 should be accompanied on SL services. As long as the accompanying older person has a valid ticket, the child travels for free. From age 7 to 20, children and adolescents pay a cheaper concession fare when travelling on SL public transport services (SL, 2011b).

Assistance

While bus drivers generally do not provide assistance to parents with prams, there is some 'mechanical' assistance provided – having kneeling buses to reduce the gap between the floor and sidewalk, and allowing parents with prams to enter via the mid-exit doors.

Amenities

Depending on the specific bus model, there may be room for three to five prams (with no wheelchairs present) (figure 6). Once on board the bus, there is the possibility to secure the pram to the bus using provided straps, and there are signs asking that parents ensure that the pram is secured. Pram brakes are expected to be applied. Some bus models have fold-down seating so when there are no prams, more passengers can be seated.



image 4. Depending on the configuration of the bus, there may be room for 2 to 5 prams. The figure on the left shows the pram area directly opposite the mid exit doors. The figure on the right is adjacent to the mid exit doors. There are some bus configurations (mainly articulated buses) that have both pram areas.

Attitudes

Women need to be involved in planning, implementing and evaluating gender-sensitive transport policies and programs (Mashiri et al 2005). It has been noted that gender equality has a long and successful history in Swedish politics. Indeed the incorporation of gender into the transport sector began in the mid-1990s when the Swedish parliament adopted a national directive requiring all committees and working groups to include an analysis of how their proposals might affect gender equality (Polk 2004:181). By the turn of the century, Swedish transport departments made gender equity the sixth goal of transport policy in response to legislation enacted in 2001. The transport policy equity goal reads: “the transportation system shall be designed so that both women’s and men’s travel needs are satisfied; women and men shall be given the same possibilities to influence the system’s design, formation and administration; and women’s and men’s values shall receive equal consideration” (Proposition 2001/02:20, translated in Polk 2004:180). By 2003 this commitment had been further extended to include an objective to achieve “an equal distribution of power and influence between men and women in every mode of transport” (Vagland 2004:193).

A Network for Women in Transport Policy with around 100 members across Sweden was established in 2002 to make a contribution to attainment of the gender equality objectives (Vagland 2004:193). However, Polk (2004:182) notes that although gender mainstreaming has a prominent role in official transport policy and has encouraged more attention to what gender equity could mean in practice it has not necessarily resulted in any real integration in subsequent works. Indeed, it has been noted that “there is still a dominance of men in the transport sector, and most of the decisions concerning planning, designing, or managing the transport system are taken with out a proper gender analysis” (Vagland 2004:194).

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Conclusion

In 1921, Edith Cowan, the first woman to be elected to an Australian Parliament raised the issue of women and children and transport in her maiden speech. She referred to the problems women with children had in getting prams onto trains and demanded that the Minister for Railways “parade the streets...for the whole of one afternoon with a heavy infant in one arm and a bag of groceries in the other!” (Tedmanson 1995 in PLM>A 1995:2). More than a century later the fundamental issues relevant to parents travelling with children have not changed significantly. This paper has argued that a just public transport system must take into account the travel needs of its most vulnerable users, children, and their parents.

Our transport systems are failing to meet the needs of parents and children (and other disadvantaged groups). In part this is because their transport needs need to be better understood “and not just defined as deviations from the normal” (Gallagher 1994:49). While this paper is by no means intended as an exhaustive or comprehensive analysis of the issues related to public transport for women and children it does aim to stimulate debate around and engagement with the political and practical issues associated with meeting their transport needs. It also aims to demonstrate the benefits of extending feminist analysis to include the concepts embodied in the child friendly cities agenda to delivery transport benefits to both children and their most often female carers. The idea of the child friendly city may be another way of addressing issues experienced by women, especially mothers because it draws attention to meeting the needs of vulnerable groups. It is hoped that applying the criteria in this paper may go some way toward assisting them to do so and delivering a public transport system in which both parents and children feel valued, welcome and as though they have “a rightful place on the buses” (Wright 1994:33).

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