

Good Afternoon Council Member Bowser, Members of the Committee and Committee Staff,

What do the Boston, New York City, and Chicago transit systems all have in common with each other but not with WMATA?

They each have policies and a public service awareness campaign in place to address sexual harassment and sexual assault. It is time that Washington, DC, the second-largest transit system in the country, follows suit, especially given the testimonies you have heard today.

My name is Holly Kearn, representing Stop Street Harassment, and I'm an international expert on the issue of sexual harassment in public places. I wrote the book *Stop Street Harassment: Making Public Places Safe and Welcoming for Women* (Praeger 2010) and I've given more than 60 presentations on the topic, including at a New York City Council hearing on street harassment and at a United Nations-sponsored women's safety conference in Delhi, India. I'm based locally: I commute by bus and the orange line to my workplace in Ward 2 at AAUW and I'm a board member of Collective Action for Safe Spaces.

Sexual harassment on transit systems is a global problem. To be clear, sexual harassment is NOT mutual flirting or consensual compliments but instead it includes actions like sexual comments, excessive leering, sexual touching, public masturbation, and being followed. In recent years, every study conducted on sexual harassment on transit systems, including in New York City, Chicago, Tokyo, Beijing, and Delhi, showed that more than 60 percent of respondents – mostly women – had these kinds of unwanted experiences there.<sup>1</sup>

Sexual harassment on transit systems is not new. In 1909, more than one hundred years ago, women-only subway cars were proposed for one of our country's first subways, the Interborough Rapid Transit system in New York, because of the "fearful crushes," "sexual insults," and other types of sexual harassment women riders faced. In the end, they were not

instituted.<sup>2</sup> They were instituted, however, in Japan in 1912 for a short time for the same reasons.<sup>3</sup> Fast-forward to the present day and high rates of sexual harassment on public transportation has led many governments to create women-only subway cars and buses, including in Japan, India, Egypt, Brazil, Bangladesh, Mexico, and Pakistan.<sup>4</sup>

Is gender segregation the answer? I don't think so. But it's better than doing nothing. We in Washington, DC, need to do much more. Testimony given today, stories submitted to the blog of Collective Action for Safe Spaces and to other DC-blogs show it is a huge problem, even if we are not doing as much as other cities to document it or to address and prevent it.

But why does addressing sexual harassment matter? Is this something people just need to get a tough skin about? No.

Sexual harassment and also assault – and even the fear of it – cause most women (and some men) to restrict their lives in some way, whether it's by not taking the metro alone at night, by getting off at an earlier stop to get away from a harasser, or by going out of their way to wait at a bus stop that is harassment-free.<sup>5</sup> These restrictions make us unequal citizens.

And would you want to tell a 12-year-old girl to get a thick skin about a man licking his lips and making sexual comments to her? We may picture targets of sexual harassment as only being adults, but for my book research I surveyed more than 800 women from 23 countries and nearly 1 in 4 said they had experienced sexual harassment in public places by age 12. Nearly 90 percent had by age 19.

I can provide more information about statistics and studies on this topic upon request. But now, recommendations:

1. **Data Collection:** There should be a multi-agency working group of WMATA and local police collecting data on the prevalence of both sexual harassment and assault

- on WMATA so the numbers are more accurate and more incidents of harassment and assault can be dealt with appropriately. I know that Metro has said that victims can report sexual assault and harassment to transit police, but many do not because they don't know they can or how to do that. Ideally, to better track these incidents, there will be a new dedicated reporting mechanism just for sexual harassment and assault.
2. **PSA Campaign:** With the input of local organizations and stakeholders, WMATA should fund a PSA campaign that makes it clear that sexual harassment and assault is not tolerated and how to report it if someone should see or experience such behavior. Boston, New York City, and Chicago all instituted these kinds of campaigns in 2008 and 2009 and they have been well received. Please see Appendix A for more information about their PSA campaigns.
  3. **Training:** With the increase of violent crime, as reported in the Washington Times on February 19, 2012, and with the lack of concern some police and transit workers show when people DO report harassment to them, WMATA employees and transit police should receive more training on how to handle complaints of sexual harassment and assault.

Whenever I ride other transit systems, I am grateful for how clean WMATA is and how I generally feel safe from other crimes. But WMATA needs to do a much better job addressing sexual harassment and assault so that people can feel safe from these acts, too. I look forward to working with you to make that happen. Thank you.

### Appendix A: More Information about the Studies and PSA Campaigns in Boston, New York City and Chicago

In 2007, the Office of the Manhattan Borough President Scott M. Stringer conducted a survey about sexual harassment and assault on the NYC subway system. Of the nearly 2,000 people who responded to the online survey (the majority of whom were women), 63 percent said they had been harassed and one-tenth had been sexually assaulted on the subway system. Only four percent of people who were harassed reported it, as did only 14 percent of those who were assaulted. Forty-four percent said they had witnessed sexual harassment.<sup>6</sup>

Interestingly, before NYC did anything with these results in the fall of 2008, in early 2008, Boston responded to that study, recognizing that it was probably a problem in their city. They launched a public service announcement campaign with three different posters, more security cameras, and undercover police officers who look for harassers, gropers, and flashers.



Security cameras, undercover transit police, passengers with cell phone cameras. These are just a few of the ways we catch a person touching someone inappropriately on the T.

**Sexual Harassment is a crime. We get the picture. Do you?**

When we catch you, we will prosecute you. Report sexual harassment to an MBTA station official, or call **(617) 222-1212**.



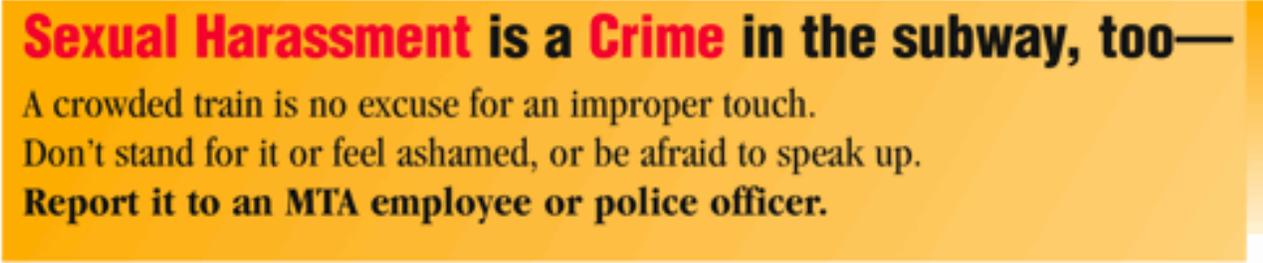
If you've been rubbed against or inappropriately touched by another passenger, you have nothing to be ashamed of. Report it to an MBTA station official, or call 617-222-1212 as soon as you can. Or if you see someone else being sexually harassed, report it. If you have a cell phone camera, take a picture. Sexual harassment is a crime, and offenders will be prosecuted.

**If someone gets too close for comfort, it's not your fault.**



24-hour hotline  
(800) 841-8371  
www.barcc.org

Back to New York City, where one of the 2007 report recommendations was a Public Service Announcement (PSA) campaign about sexual harassment on the subway. This was a recommendation the MTA took on. In August 2008, they launched their PSA campaign in 300 subway cars. The PSA reads “Sexual Harassment is a Crime in the subway, too – A crowded train is no excuse for an improper touch. Don’t stand for it or feel ashamed, or be afraid to speak up. Report it to an MTA employee or police officer.”<sup>7</sup> In February 2009, the MTA launched an audio version of the PSA for the newest subway cars.<sup>8</sup> They also encourage women and men to take a camera phone picture of a harasser, groper, or flasher to submit when they report him. They have had many successful cases of capturing perpetrators later thanks to photos.



**Sexual Harassment is a Crime in the subway, too—**  
A crowded train is no excuse for an improper touch.  
Don't stand for it or feel ashamed, or be afraid to speak up.  
**Report it to an MTA employee or police officer.**



**SubTalk**

During the spring of 2009, a group of teenage and college-age young women from the Roger's Park Young Women's Action Team (YWAT) surveyed 639 Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) riders, mostly young women. Over half of the survey respondents said they had been sexually harassed and thirteen percent said they had been sexually assaulted. Forty-four percent of those surveyed said they had witnessed harassment or assault. Only nine percent of those who had been harassed or assaulted had reported it.<sup>9</sup>

In July 2009, the CTA announced it would expand its policies on how bus and rail operators deal with harassers. Operators are being instructed to ask harassers to stop, and, if the

harasser does not, the operator will call the Control Center to receive instructions on what to do. The CTA said it would update its public safety tips brochures to include information about harassment and how to report it. The existing “If you see something, say something” posters and audio announcements will be updated to include sexual harassment. Lastly, sexual harassment complaints filed with the CTA customer service line will have a special code to enable better monitoring of the problem.<sup>10</sup>

In November 2009, the CTA launched a PSA campaign about sexual harassment on public transportation. Their new print PSA states, “If it’s unwanted, it’s harassment. Touching. Rude comments. Leering. Speak up. If you see something, say something.” At the bottom of the poster there is information for who to contact if a rider is the target of sexual harassment. CTA spokeswoman Sheila Gregory said, “An important part of improving safety and security on the system is knowing when, where and how often these types of violations occur so the campaign is intended to help reinforce the importance of reporting incidents.”<sup>11</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> These studies are listed in the first chapter of my book *Stop Street Harassment: Making Public Places Safe and Welcoming for Women* (Praeger Publisher, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Dorothy Schulz and Susan Gilbert, "Women and Transit Security: A New Look at an Old Issue," Proceedings of the Women's Travel Issues Second National Conference, October 25-27, 1996, Baltimore, MD, page 551.

<sup>3</sup> Daniel Krieger, "Why Women-Only Transit Options Have Caught On," *The Atlantic*, Feb. 8, 2012, <http://www.theatlanticcities.com/commute/2012/02/why-women-only-transit-options-have-caught/1171/>.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, and you can search [www.StopStreetHarassment.org](http://www.StopStreetHarassment.org) for articles on women-only buses and subways to find more citation examples.

<sup>5</sup> Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris et al, "How to Ease Women's Fear of Transportation Environments: Case Studies and Best Practices," Mineta Transportation Institute, October 2009, page 3.

<sup>6</sup> You can find the report in its entirety on the New York Times' website:

[http://www.nytimes.com/packages/pdf/nyregion/city\\_room/20070726\\_hiddeninplainsight.pdf](http://www.nytimes.com/packages/pdf/nyregion/city_room/20070726_hiddeninplainsight.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Sewell Chan, "Fighting Sexual Harassment on the Subways," *New York Times*, 2 October 2008,

<http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/10/02/fighting-sexual-harassment-on-the-subways/> (2 October 2008).

<sup>8</sup> "NYFST Actions to Date," New Yorkers for Safe Transit, n.d., <http://nyfst.org/actions/> (27 October 2009).

<sup>9</sup> Mary Wisniewski, "Tired of being harassed on the CTA, women fight back," *Chicago Sun-Times*, 15 June 2009, <http://www.suntimes.com/news/transportation/1622746.CST-NWS-ride15.article> (15 June 2009).

<sup>10</sup> *Chicago Sun-Times*, 16 July 2009, <http://www.suntimes.com/news/transportation/1668966.CST-NWS-harass16.article>

<sup>11</sup> "New Ads Target Sexual Harassment on CTA," CBS Chicago Area Local News, 9 November 2009, <http://cbs2chicago.com/local/cta.sexual.harassment.2.1300843.html> (14 December 2009).