

# Is there a case for free rides for women?

Revenues from appropriately charging personal transport can make public transport cheap



SANDIP CHAKRABARTI & AKSHAYA VIJAYALAKSHMI



"Free public transport can bring more women to public spaces, and, consequently, make those spaces safer for women." A Metro train coach in New Delhi. \*SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

Women may soon get to travel for free on buses and Metro trains in Delhi. This gender-based public transport fare subsidy programme, announced by the Aam Aadmi Party government, has not been tested anywhere in India in the past. Proponents claim that the policy will protect and liberate women. Critics argue that it is financially unviable and unfair. As polarised debates over the intent and impact of the policy continue, it is useful to assess whether this idea, in principle, has any merit.

**Subsidies to the disadvantaged**  
Cities often provide public transport fare subsidies to all or some citizens to encourage them to use public transport, or for easing their travel cost burdens. Singapore, for example, offers a discount to rail commuters who are willing to travel before the morning rush-hour. Public transport is free for residents in Estonia. Luxembourg, with a population of about 600,000, has made public transport free for those under the age of 20. Paris, with a population of over 2 million, has announced a comparable plan. Hong Kong has implemented a public transport fare concession scheme for people aged 65 years or more. Berlin offered women a 21% ticket discount for one day in March this year to highlight the gender wage gap. In India, however, urban transport fare discounts are less common, although concessions for seniors, students, and other socio-economic groups are available for government-operated flights and long-distance railway services.

Fare discounts intend to make public transport truly public as some people are at a relative disadvantage in urban transportation markets due to their unique social, economic, and health circumstances. Article 13 in the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognises freedom of movement as a basic human right. If we consider transportation as a fundamental social need

and providing mobility for the transportation-disadvantaged as our collective responsibility, then any urban transport policy should include subsidies targeted at the disadvantaged. Specific supply-side investments or fare price discounts to help the disadvantaged travel, conduct activities and prosper are therefore justified. Public transport may even need to be free for some. In this context, let's take the case of women.

Women in India travel far less than men, and this has significant impacts on their education, employment, and enjoyment. A study in Delhi found that college girls, compared to boys, chose lower ranked colleges with safe and reliable transport access. Similarly, an estimated 60% of women workers in India choose to work from home or at a place which is less than a km from home, according to the 2011 Census. The remaining working women tend to rely excessively on public transport, according to a World Bank Study conducted in Delhi. An RTI application revealed that, in 2013, only 13% of Delhi driving licences were issued to women. These findings are suggestive of gender differences in travel choices and patterns.

Wage discrimination, gender segregation in employment, and household labour divisions contribute to gender inequality in transportation. Because men's jobs are considered to be more valuable, they tend to own the household vehicles and com-

mute privately. This lopsided rationing of household transport budgets also results in women taking slower commute options to save on expenses. When Delhi Metro hiked fares last year, around 70% of women surveyed in a study suggested that they would have to choose a less safe travel option for work, or travel less. Compromises on education and jobs for travel purposes is one of the reasons for women earning less than men, leaving the workforce, and consequently being more cash-poor than men. Finally, limited money to travel also means that women are willing to forgo hospital visits, significantly affecting their health.

There may be a case for free or discounted public transport for women. A subsidy like this is most likely to benefit women who might consider taking up jobs for which they are better suited but are further away from home. Women can engage in a range of activities that promote their well being. Free public transport can therefore bring more women to public spaces, and, consequently, make those spaces safer for women.

**The high cost of free rides**  
Two questions remain. Who will pay for the subsidies aimed at the transportation-disadvantaged? And will such subsidies make it difficult for public transport to achieve its other major goal – reducing car use and cleaning up the air?

To address these questions, we

must first recognise that personal motorised vehicle travel is highly subsidised globally, including in India. Believe it or not, driving is cheap. Car and motorised two-wheeler users are not required to pay for the full costs their travel choices inflict on society in the form of traffic congestion, environmental pollution, and distortions in urban form. Promotion of cleaner fuels and vehicle-sharing can reduce but not eliminate the costs. Indian cities must consider pricing interventions such as congestion charges, mileage-based road use charges, parking charges, and higher petrol taxes so that private driving costs better reflect full social costs. London and Stockholm, for example, have been charging for congestion for over a decade. Such measures, in addition to discouraging driving, can help governments generate funds for expanding, improving, and operating relatively cleaner transportation alternatives such as public transport. Better public transport service is key to getting people out of cars, reducing air pollution, and making cities more liveable. It is possible that revenues from appropriately charging personal motorised travel will be sufficient to make travel by public transport cheap or free for the transportation-disadvantaged, without any additional public subsidy requirement.

Even if free public transport for women makes economic sense and seems fair, would all women support the policy? Informal surveys conducted after the Delhi government's announcement suggests that women are divided in their preference for the policy. Women who feel this policy treats them as lesser citizens should have the choice to opt out. Whether a free public transport pass for women should be income-based is unclear; means-testing for a public transport fare concession programme may not be worth the effort.

Finally, this debate is not for Delhi alone. It's time that all Indian cities crafted efficient, effective, fair, and context-specific public transport policies. Men and women do not enjoy equal freedom to move in India, and policymakers should act.

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# Whither the Congress Party?

Weeks after its electoral drubbing, the party is yet to reflect on why it is so out of sync with 'New India'



SMITA GUPTA

The Congress's many critics have long reviled the 'dynasty'. Many supporters, too, have expressed their discomfort with the dominant role played by the Nehru-Gandhi family in the party. Now, after the Congress's debacle in the general election again, party faithful have begun to question the advisability of Rahul Gandhi staying on as president.

Mr. Gandhi, on his part, has asked the Congress Working Committee (CWC) to select someone who is not from the 'family' as his successor. He has not withdrawn his resignation after members of the apex body, expectedly, asked him to take it back. But the frontal organisations have not mobilised any show of support for him, nor have party veterans nudged them to do so. Belatedly, some Congress functionaries resigned after Mr. Gandhi apparently expressed surprise that no one else was willing to take responsibility.

Contrast this with the situation in 1999, when Sonia Gandhi withdrew her resignation after party workers organised hunger strikes and wrote letters to her in blood.

However, despite the lack of enthusiasm for Mr. Gandhi, there has been no movement towards selecting a successor even as State elections in Maharashtra, Jharkhand and Haryana loom large. Over the last few days, Mr. Gandhi has met leaders of these States, and Chief Ministers of Congress-led States amid the continuing suspense over the presidency. Though this is a historic opportunity to change the party's dynast profile, there is no queue of contenders for the top job or behind-the-scenes efforts to place an alternative leader. The party appears paralysed.

**Fear of retribution**  
The lack of democracy in the party's functioning has meant that no Congress member has the courage to propose a name, lest he or she be later singled out for retribution. The example of Jitendra Prasad, who had once contested against Sonia Gandhi for the presidency, is being cited in this context. If a president is to be named from outside the family, that person must have the family's blessings. The fact is that the Congress has been so hollowed out, ideologically and organisationally, that the family has become the party, and the party the family. Worse, today, the family cannot decide on a common course of action. There is also a sense in

the CWC that poor leadership is the overwhelming reason why the Congress is in such a sorry state – and that it is up to the family to clean up the mess.

Ms. Gandhi, of course, continues as chairperson of the Congress Parliamentary Party; and five-time West Bengal MP Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, who is unlikely to challenge the family's authority, has been made the party's leader in the Lok Sabha. Given the belief in the Congress that the family is the glue that holds it together, many party seniors feel that Ms. Gandhi should once again take over the reins. She may have run out of ideas, but still enjoys wide respect within the party. But can she transform a family enterprise into a democratic modern party?

In 2014, the Congress was reduced to an all-time low of 44 Lok Sabha seats. Since then, there has been little visible effort to revamp the party organisation, give it a direction or marshal its forces for the serious, sustained ideological battle it clearly needed to embark on. Senior leader A.K. Antony's report in August 2014 had blamed the media for the party's defeat. However, a series of structured discussions in end-2014 led neither to a blueprint for revival nor a reorganisation of the Congress.

In end-2017, a reluctant Mr. Gandhi finally took charge of the party. Under him, the Congress reduced the BJP to less than 100 seats in Gujarat and regained Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan, but failed to build on those victories. In the election this year, the party suffered a wipe-out even in these four States.

**No analysis this time**  
This time, even the mandatory 'Antony Committee' has not been constituted. Instead, there has been in-house name calling. Mr. Gandhi has faced criticism for relying on data crunchers rather than on political professionals. There has been no analysis of why the party fared so poorly, on whether the Congress is out of sync with the 'New India' that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is building, on trying to understand why there has been a rightward shift among voters, or why a young leader like Mr. Gandhi cannot attract the 18-40 years demographic.

Regardless of who eventually heads the Congress, the next leader's first task must be to let all the voices in the party be heard. The 'Grand Old Party' deserves more than a stick of glue – it needs a transformational leader who has the confidence to hear all the bad news, and then find a way forward – if it does not want to wither away.

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# Violation of reservation in top posts at universities

They occupy only around 1% of top teaching posts

ANISH GUPTA & AALEYA GIRI

The introduction of the Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Teachers' Cadre) Ordinance, 2019, which is meant to "provide for the reservation of posts in appointments by direct recruitment of persons belonging to the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and the socially and educationally backward classes, to teachers' cadre in certain Central Educational Institutions established, maintained or aided by the Central Government", redresses the anomaly found in the recruitment of Other Backward Class (OBC) candidates at higher levels of teaching positions.

The ordinance indicates that reservation to OBCs shall be provided at all levels of teaching, leaving no space of misinterpretation by some universities that had arbitrarily restricted reservation for OBCs to the level of 'Assistant Professor'.

However, recent advertisements by 13 central universities are in clear violation of the ordinance. Of these, only Alahabad University and Dr. Harisingh Gour University have followed fully the reservation policy by earmarking positions for OBCs at all levels, while the Central University of Kashmir has reservation at all levels except that of 'Professor'.

**Representation of OBCs**  
Further, even after a clarification issued by the Ministry of Human Resource Development last month, only the Central University of Himachal Pradesh issued a revised notification providing OBC reservation at all levels of teaching.

Curiously, while the Indira Gandhi National Tribal University – Amarkantak has reserved positions for 'Economically Weaker Sections' (EWS) at the levels of 'Associate Professor' and 'Professor', it has no reserved positions for OBCs. The Tata Institute of Social Sciences, which is known for its commitment to issues related to social justice, too has no reservation at higher levels of teaching positions. The rapidity with which

the Central University of Rajasthan has almost reached the last step of recruitment is questionable.

Though OBCs account for about 50% of the country's population, their representation in all faculty positions in all central educational institutions is only 9.8%. According to a recent report by the University Grants Commission, only 13.87% of positions at the Assistant Professor level in central universities were occupied by OBCs. The representation became almost negligible at higher levels, i.e. those of Associate Professor and Professor, accounting for just 1.22% and 1.14%, respectively.

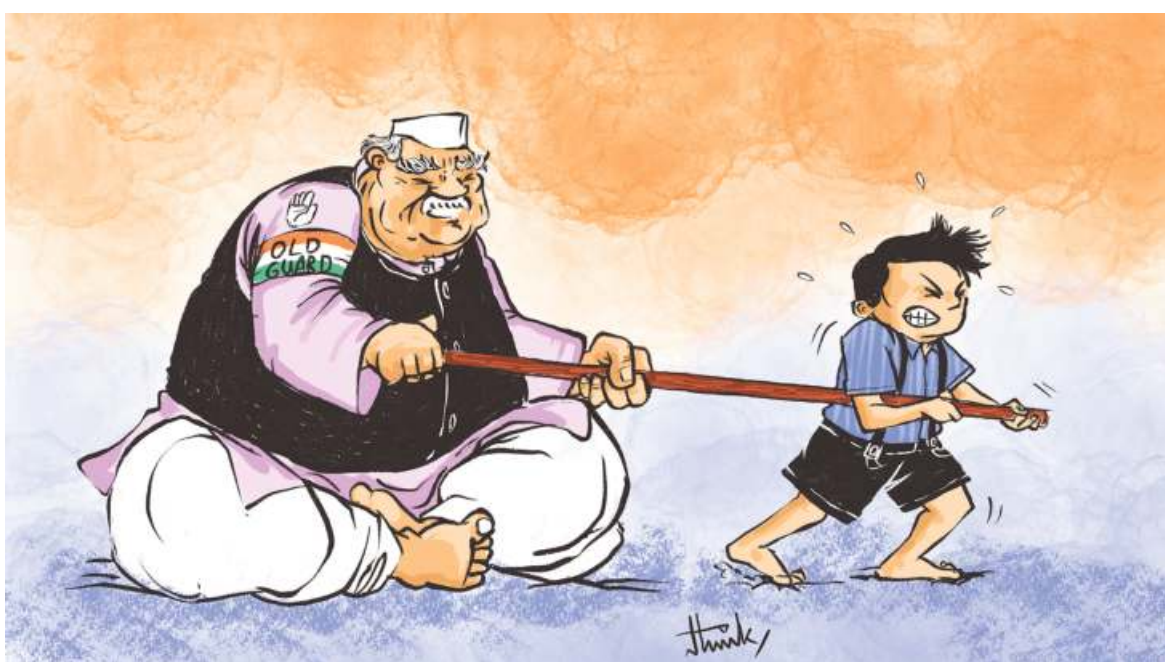
Noticeably, the representation of OBCs was less than that of Muslims at higher levels of teaching. Certain communities of Muslims are recognised as OBCs, and if we exclude them, the representation of non-Muslim OBCs in the institutions would become negligible.

**In case of violations**  
Generally, the decision-making power at universities rest upon the Professors and Associate Professors. Professors, who play a significant role in the recruitment process, at times misinterpret the constitutional provisions.

Even if a violation is found, the maximum a court does is to order a correction to the institution's advertisement, without awarding any compensation to the petitioner or punishment to the violators. Moreover, legal procedure is tedious and hence is generally avoided.

Noticeably, implementation of reservation for SCs, STs and OBCs in higher educational institutions funded by the Centre was delayed for more than 15 years after the announcement, while the same for EWS was done within a month of the announcement. Such differential treatment results in imbalanced representation of a social group at higher levels of teaching and decision-making.

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## DATA POINT

### Moving to Metro?

If the AAP government's proposal to make public transport free for women in Delhi comes into effect, a significant number of women who commute to work by bus instead of the more expensive Metro train may start using the Metro, data indicate. By **Sumant Sen** and **Vignesh Radhakrishnan**

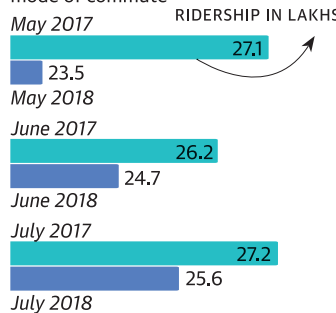
#### 1. Public transport

The table shows how people in Delhi commuted to work in 2011. Close to one-third of women used the bus, 5% used the train. Expansion of the Metro network and an increase in the number of coaches would have hiked Metro ridership in recent years eating into bus' share

Mode	Men	Women
On foot	25%	32%
Bicycle	12%	2%
Two-wheelers	19%	5%
Car/Jeep/Van	12%	18%
Tempo/Autos	2%	5%
Bus	25%	32%
Train	3%	5%

#### 3. The money speaks

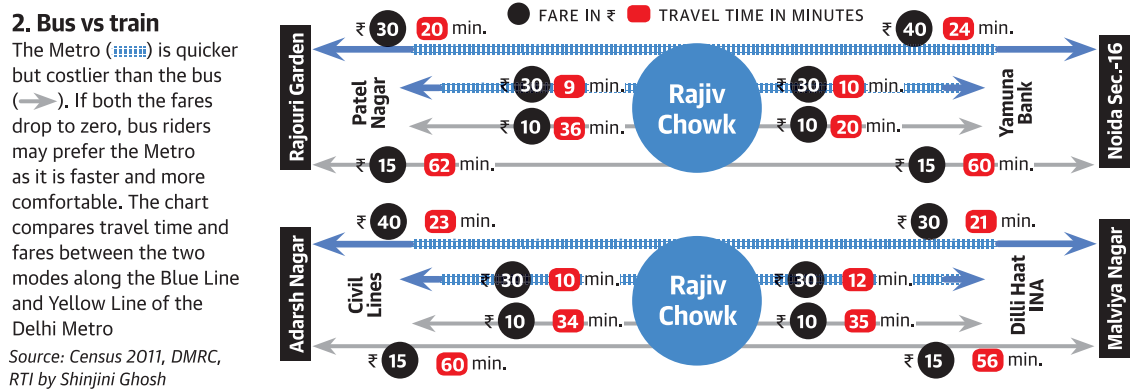
Metro ridership dipped in 2018 following sharp fare hikes in 2017. This shows that money spent on travel plays a big role in deciding the mode of commute



#### 4. Level of burden

The table shows the number of women who travel to work by bus/car/jeep/van/tempo/autos. If train rides become free, the Metro lines that criss-cross the south and north-western part of the city may register the biggest increase in ridership

Area	Women commuters
South	64,476
North West	60,600
West	55,427
South West	53,380
East	38,385
North East	16,580
North	12,026



#### 2. Bus vs train

The Metro (■■■■) is quicker but costlier than the bus (→). If both the fares drop to zero, bus riders may prefer the Metro as it is faster and more comfortable. The chart compares travel time and fares between the two modes along the Blue Line and Yellow Line of the Delhi Metro

## FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO JULY 2, 1969

### Charles crowned Prince of Wales

Queen Elizabeth to-day [July 1] placed a gold coronet on the head of her eldest son, Prince Charles, formally appointing him Prince of Wales and heir to the throne. The moment was the high point in an ornate ceremony by which the Queen presented the 20-year-old Charles to the 2,800,000 people of Wales as their own Prince – and as the future monarch of over 850 million subjects in Britain and the Commonwealth. Before an illustrious gathering of 4,000 in medieval Caernarvon Castle, and an estimated television audience of 500 million, the crowned Prince knelt and placed his hands between those of the Queen, clad in dazzling yellow. The Queen also placed a golden ring on her son's finger symbolising unity with Wales, handed him a golden rod, symbolising temporal power, and then wrapped an ermine cape round his shoulders, buttoning it in motherly fashion. After crowning him, the Queen and Prince exchanged the kiss of fealty – a tradition dating back to the middle ages to symbolise the recognition of loyalty.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO (FROM THE ISSUE OF JULY 2, THERE HAVING BEEN NO ISSUE ON JULY 2)

### On the Indian Situation.

A public meeting was held in the Town Hall [in Nagpur on July 1] under the auspices of the Provincial Congress Committee Provincial Association and the Home Rule League, Dr. Gour, President, Nagpur Municipality, presiding. Resolutions (1) strongly protesting against the Viceroy's decision refusing to suspend the executions of accused in the Punjab trials under Martial Law and appealing him to reconsider his decision, (2) endorsing practically the All India Congress Committee's resolution cabled by the Hon'ble Pundit Madan Mohan Malaviya and requesting the provincial land holders' constituency to reelect Rao Bahadur Bishun Dutt Shukul for the Imperial Council recognising his services in protesting against the passage of the Rowlatt Act were proposed and carried unanimously. [Separately], at a meeting held last Sunday, the Central Provinces National Liberal Association deeply deplored the decision of His Excellency the Viceroy in declining to postpone the execution of death sentences passed by the martial law commission pending intended appeal to the Privy Council and also protesting against the undeserved punishment on Mr. Kalinath Roy, editor of the 'Tribune'.