

## Free Metro Rides for Women

### What is the issue?

Women may soon get to travel for free in buses and metro trains in Delhi as announced by the government. This has divided people into factions.

### What are the differences in opinion?

- This is a **gender-based** public transport fare subsidy programme which hasn't been tested anywhere in India in the past.
- **Proponents** - The policy will protect and liberate women.
- **Critics** - The policy 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 has any merit.

### What is the situation in India?

- **Less common** - Urban transport fare discounts are
- **More common** - The concessions for seniors, students, and other socio-economic groups in government-operated flights and railway services.

### Why is the scheme needed?

- **Article 13** in the UN' Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognises **freedom of movement as a basic human right**.
- **A Study in Delhi** - College girls, compared to boys, chose lower ranked colleges with safe and reliable transport access.
- **2011 Census** - 60% of women workers in India choose to work from home or at a place which is less than a km from home.
- **World Bank Study** conducted in Delhi - The remaining working women tend to rely excessively on public transport.
- **RTI application** in 2013 - Only 13% of Delhi driving licences were issued to women.
- **Wage discrimination** and **gender segregation** in employment, and household labour divisions.
- The **lopsided rationing** of household transport budgets results in women taking **slower commute options** to save on expenses.

- **Compromises on education and jobs** for travel purposes.

### What are its benefits?

- Women may take up **jobs for which they're better suited** but are further away from home.
- Women can **engage in a range of activities** that promote their well being.
- **Brings more women to public spaces** and consequently, make those spaces safer for women.
- **Makes public transport truly public** as some people are at a relative disadvantage in urban transportation markets.
- Revenues from appropriately charging personal transport can make public transport cheap.

### What are the examples in other countries?

- Singapore - Offers a discount to rail commuters who are willing to travel before the morning rush-hour.
- Estonia - Public transport is free for residents.
- Luxembourg -Public transport free for people under the age of 20.
- Hong Kong - Public transport fare concession 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.

### What are the questions which are unanswered?

- Who will pay for the subsidies aimed at the transportation-disadvantaged?
- Will such subsidies make it difficult for public transport to achieve its other major goal — reducing car use and cleaning up the air?

### How can these questions addressed?

- The **personal motorised vehicle** travel is highly **subsidised** globally, including in India which makes driving cheaper.
- So, Indian cities must consider **pricing interventions** such as congestion charges, mileage-based road use charges, etc so that private driving costs better reflect full social costs.
- To **discourage driving** can help governments generate funds for improving and operating cleaner transportation alternatives.
- Women who feel this policy treats them as lesser citizens should have the **choice to opt out**.

**Source: The Hindu**

