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## Kristyn Wong-Tam: Transit equity is about customer

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### Urban Scrawl

Imagine my surprise when I was named in the *National Post* by Terence Corcoran in his Feb. 23 column "Further off the rails" as it pertains to Toronto's turbulent stop-and-go transit history.

It appears my amendment to incorporate “a gender and racial equity lens” to Councillor Karen Stintz’s motion on the policy-making of the special advisory panel for Sheppard Avenue is causing Mr. Corcoran some discomfort.

He claims that my advocacy for the inclusion of gender and racial equity in transit planning is somehow a hindrance to the participation of urban and social planning professionals from the Toronto Women’s City Alliance and Social Planning Council to enhance the transit discourse; without them, the intelligence gathering and sharing of this expert advice is hindered.

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I do wish to thank Mr. Corcoran and the National Post for this opportunity to explain how gender and racial equity can be interwoven into Toronto’s transit planning.

Gender awareness has already been incorporated in service enhancements at the TTC, namely with the improved waiting areas, which improve safety on the subway platforms, as well as the request-stop programs that help women and girls to request bus drivers stop between designated stops after dark. These services have evolved, and will continue to benefit all riders.

New South Wales in Australia purposefully “design out” opportunities for sexual assault by constructing transit stations along major routes and monitored security in its transit infrastructure.

Mexico City also adopted a gender lens in its public transit planning by creating the program “Women Travel Safely on Public Transit.”

The United Nations and the World Bank have produced separate policy papers calling for gender awareness in transit for urban and rural populations. The TTC can continue its good work by ensuring the incorporation of a gender lens in future transit plans and by observing other cities.

Stanford University employs gender analysis using disaggregated data in its research. This led to the creation of the concept that studies travel patterns for women doing the bulk of the “care work” for their families. Care work includes taking a child to schools or extracurricular activities, visiting an elderly parent, shopping and other related functions. Because women perform the majority of care work, thus resulting in women having different transit needs.

UK’s London Underground has adopted a “Gender Equality Scheme” that created 47 step-free stations that provide access from streets to platforms to accommodate strollers, shopping carts, wheelchairs and other devices. By 2018, the Underground committed to converting, in total, 92 stations, or at least one-third of all stations, into step-free access. The Underground engineers have widened aisle gate access to some of their premier stations, such as Canary Wharf.

The Harmonized European Time Survey analyzed gender-disaggregated data in transportation usage for “trip-chaining” or multi-purpose trips is a more common travel pattern for women than it is for men who travel to work without the frequent stops required for care work. Sweden improved its subway lines and light-rail lines to accommodate multi-destination trips with the objective to create a “gender-equal” transit system.

Data disaggregation by gender alone produces incomplete transit policies. Variables such as race, class, and all intersects with gender should automatically be enshrined in our city's public transit plans. Unfortunately, my motion is still necessary.

An advisory panel comprised of policy experts should be qualified and ready to speak to transit planning perspectives, not just from conventional engineering lexicon. My opinion is that more perspectives are needed, not less.

By advocating the principles of social inclusion in mass transit planning, I am merely a proponent of great improved business model. Standing on any crowded TTC bus or packed subway platform, one can easily see that the needs of transit dependents are women and residents from racialized groups.

If a service provider — and in this case, the TTC — does not properly assess its customers' needs, then how do we justify service enhancements to identified ridership requirements? The costs to redesign the infrastructure after it is installed will be substantially higher than during the planning stage. Equity makes for a solid business case.

Mainstreaming gender and racial equity into our transit strategy is neither misplaced nor misguided. Belt and road social inclusion and rider equity could derail not just the dreams for a Sheppard transit plan, but also an improved modern Toronto.

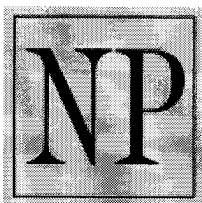
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