

# Counting women to make women count in Bengaluru, India





## About MobiliseHER

MobiliseHER is a project co-funded by EuropeAid under the Directorate General for International Partnerships (INTPA). The project's main goal is to create safer cities for women and gender and sexual minorities in India. This is done by increasing the involvement of civil society organisations in transport planning and governance and promoting gender-responsive planning. The project also aims to raise awareness and jointly implement gender-sensitive, low-carbon urban transport systems.

MobiliseHER is active in three major Indian cities: Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, and Cochin. The goal is to expand the project's results to 10 other cities nationwide.

This three-year project began in April 2024 and is being implemented in partnership with the Urban Electric Mobility Initiative (UEMI), WRI India, the CEPT Research and Development Foundation (CRDF), and Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA).

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## Context

Transportation is a cornerstone of India's ambition to become a \$5 trillion economy by 2029 (Hindustan, 2025). Efficient and accessible public transport systems are vital for economic growth because they enable people to access jobs, education, and healthcare. As India rapidly urbanizes, demand for reliable and inclusive public transport continues to grow.

Public transport in India forms a diverse ecosystem ranging from buses and auto-rickshaws to suburban trains and metro systems. Cities across the country are increasingly investing in mass-transit solutions to address congestion, pollution, and the growing need for connectivity. Metro systems have emerged as game-changer mobility solutions that offer fast, efficient, and sustainable transport to millions of commuters.

With over 1,013 km of operational lines, India has the world's third-largest metro network and continues to expand rapidly across cities such as Bengaluru, Delhi, Mumbai, and Chennai (Press Information Bureau [PIB], 2025). This growth represents significant progress in sustainable public transport but also raises critical questions: Are these systems designed to be gender responsive? Are they inclusive and equitable for all commuters, especially women and marginalized groups?

## Namma Metro in Bengaluru

In Bengaluru, the poster child of India's rapid urbanization, understanding these dynamics is increasingly important. The city faces unique challenges in balancing economic aspirations with the need for sustainable and inclusive mobility solutions. In 2023, the city and state introduced free bus services for women to improve transport access and boost bus ridership. Metro ridership has also increased sharply, and demand for better mobility options continues to grow.

Bengaluru Metro, also known as Namma Metro, began operations in 2011 and now spans 96 kilometers, carrying over 750,000 passengers daily (The New Indian Express, 2024), making it the second-largest metro network in India after Delhi (The Hindu, 2025).

Namma Metro frequently receives passenger complaints regarding overcrowding and operational chaos. Reports highlight packed coaches, long queues spilling onto platforms, and commuters waiting through multiple train cycles to board, particularly at major hubs (Times of India, 2024), even after the introduction of loop services during peak hours (Kumar, 2025). Women, despite having dedicated coaches, continue to experience overcrowding in general compartments, raising concerns over safety and accessibility. The Bengaluru Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL) defines peak hours as 8:00 AM to 12:00 PM and 4:00 PM to 9:00 PM on weekdays, with train frequencies of 3–5 minutes during peak periods and 8–10 minutes during non-peak hours. Consequently, many women travel during periods of reduced service, leading to longer waiting times and less reliable access.

This challenge is partly linked to the lack of gender-disaggregated data on Namma Metro ridership. Do women and men use the metro equally? Are there specific times or stations where ridership patterns differ significantly by sex? These questions highlight the need for targeted data collection. Identifying or examining such patterns can provide valuable insights into how different groups experience the system and inform more inclusive and responsive transport planning.

## Disaggregated Gender Counts

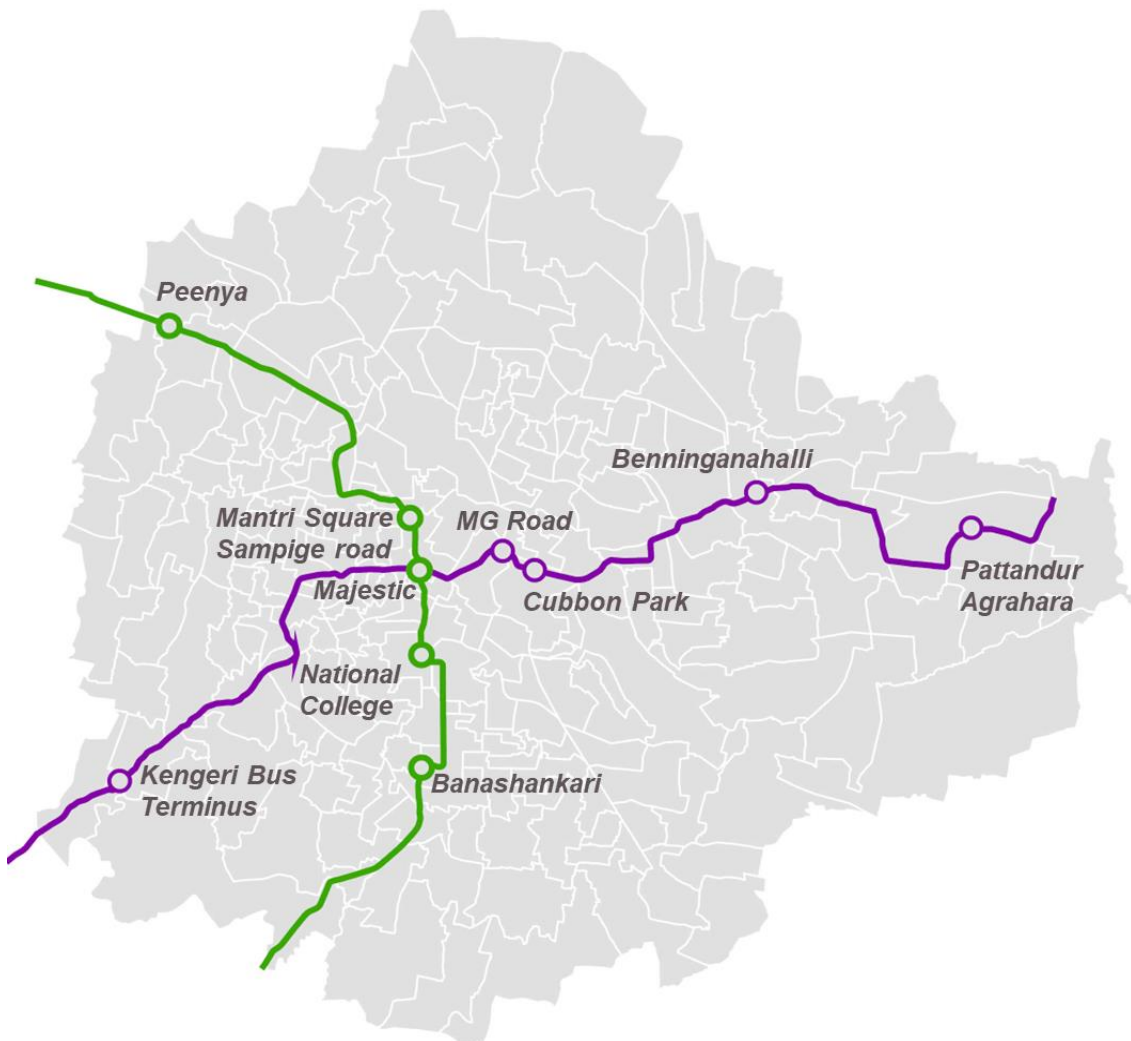
To understand gender-disaggregated metro usage, WRI India conducted manual counts as part of a data collection exercise for MobiliseHER. Researchers counted the number of men and women arriving at and departing from ten metro stations, representing a mix of high- and medium-ridership stations linked to land-use contexts across





the city. These included interchange hubs, government and private office districts, and residential neighborhoods across the Namma Metro network. The selected stations were Nagasandra, Mantri Square, Sampige Road, Nadaprabhu Kempgowda Station-Majestic, National College, Banashankari, Kengeri Bus Terminus, Cubbon Park, Mahatma Gandhi Road (MG Road), Benninganahalli, and Pattandur Agrahara. Counts were conducted for two consecutive days at each station between 8:00 AM and 8:00 PM.

**Figure 1: Stations selected for the gender disaggregated count survey**

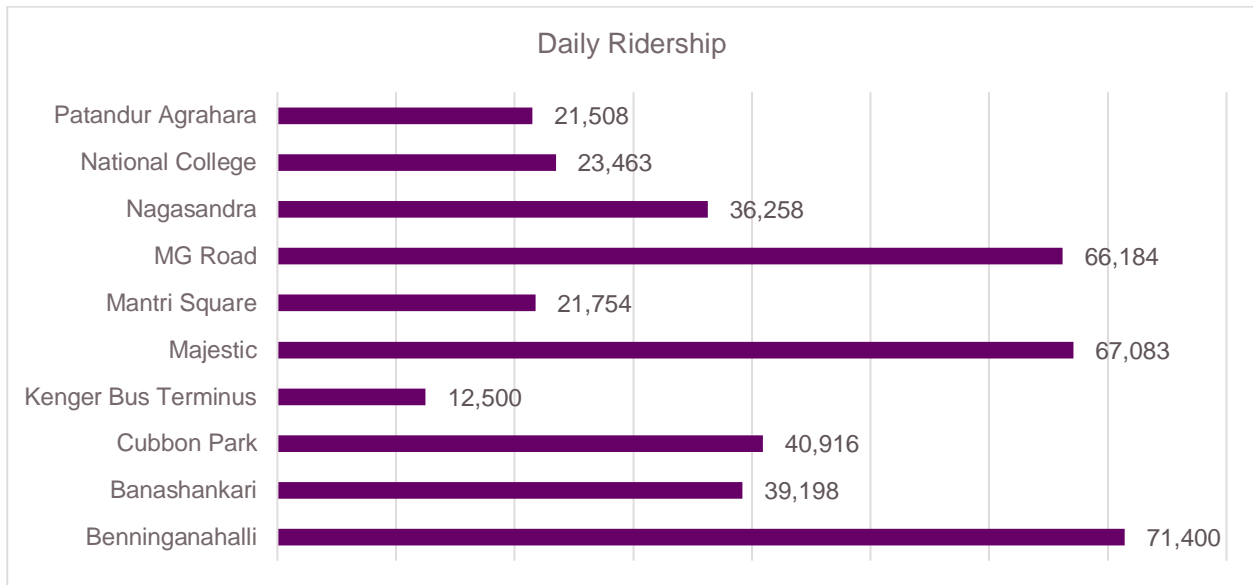


Ridership across these stations reflects differences in surrounding land use and their roles as transit hubs or destinations. Stations such as Benninganahalli, Majestic, and MG Road record the highest footfall, driven by their proximity to commercial areas and job centers. Meanwhile, stations such as Cubbon Park and Banashankari, which serve as residential neighborhoods and recreational areas, experience moderate ridership. In contrast, stations such as Kengeri Bus Terminus and Pattandur Agrahara, located in less densely populated or developing areas, recorded lower ridership among the selected stations.



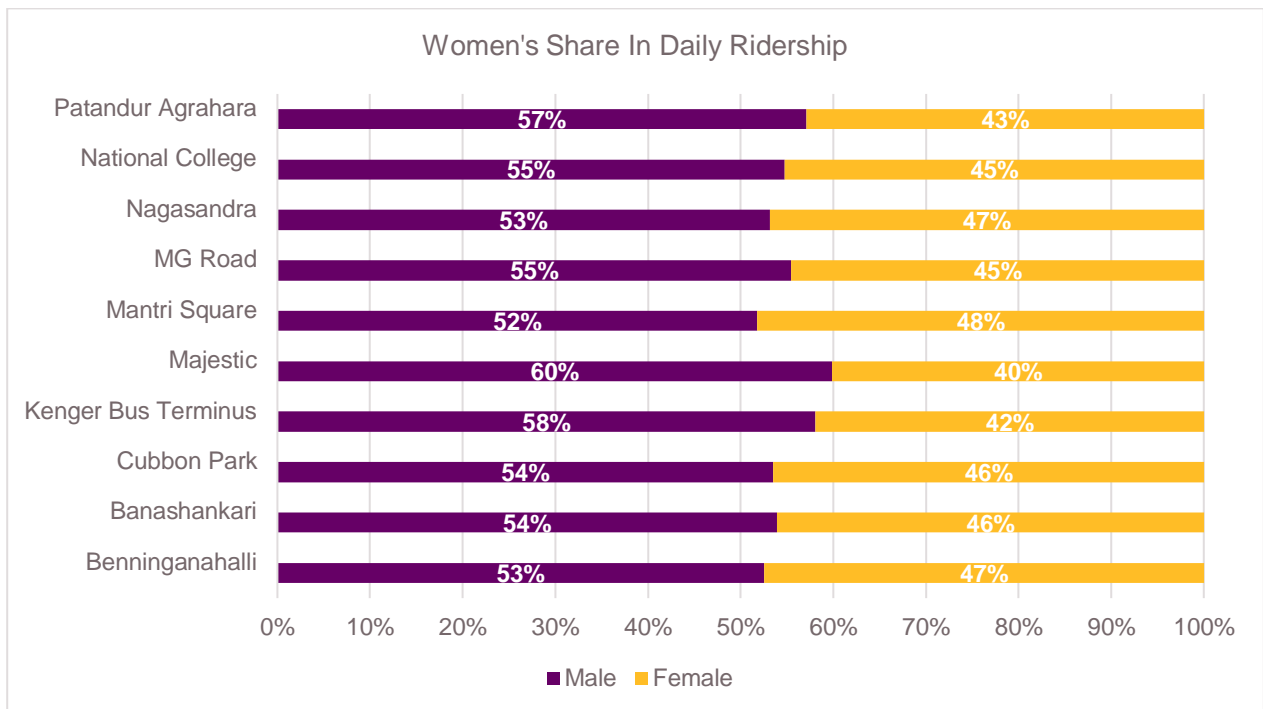


**Figure 2: Daily ridership across selected stations**



On average, **women comprise 45%** of the daily ridership across the ten stations.

**Figure 3: Women's share in daily ridership across selected stations**



Stations such as Mantri Square (48%) and Benninganahalli (47%) show higher female ridership, likely because of their proximity to commercial areas, residential areas, and workplaces. In transit-heavy hubs such as Majestic (40%) and Kengeri Bus Terminus (42%), lower proportions are recorded.

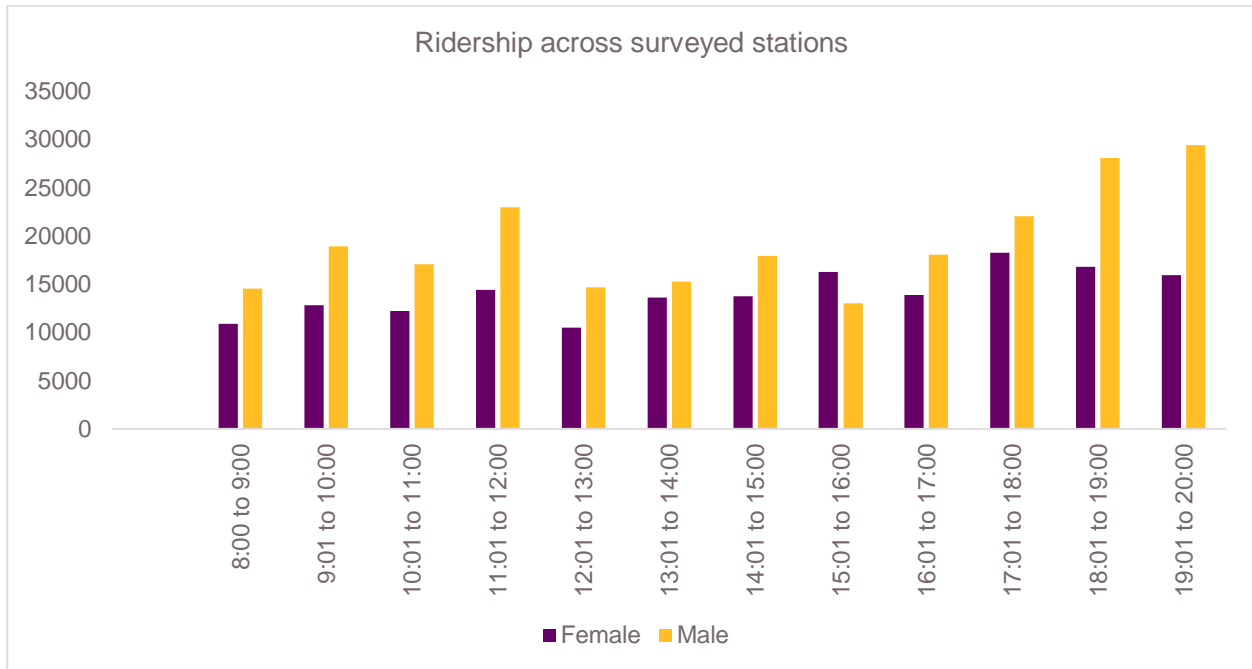




## Hourly Counts

Aggregate hourly counts across the surveyed stations show that women’s ridership remains relatively consistent throughout the day, unlike men’s ridership, which spikes in the morning and evening.

**Figure 4: Aggregate hourly ridership across surveyed stations**



At the station level, hourly ridership patterns show no uniform profile. Instead, each station exhibits a distinct peak period shaped by its immediate land-use mix and surrounding activities. The morning peak period occurs between 8:00 AM and 12:00 PM, and the evening peak occurs between 4:00 PM and 8:00 PM; however, the peaks are not sharply defined, indicating a staggered travel pattern. The absence of well-defined peak hours underscores the need for transit planning that accommodates flexible and dispersed commuting patterns.

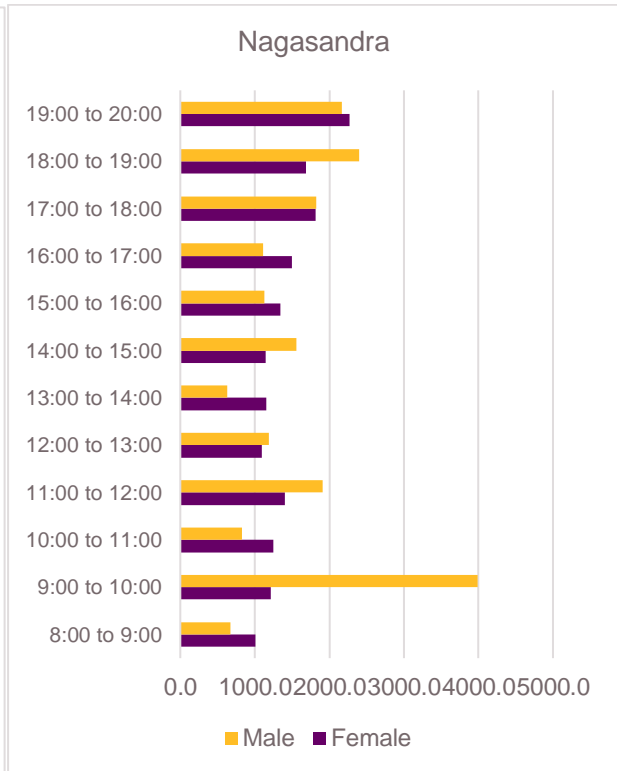
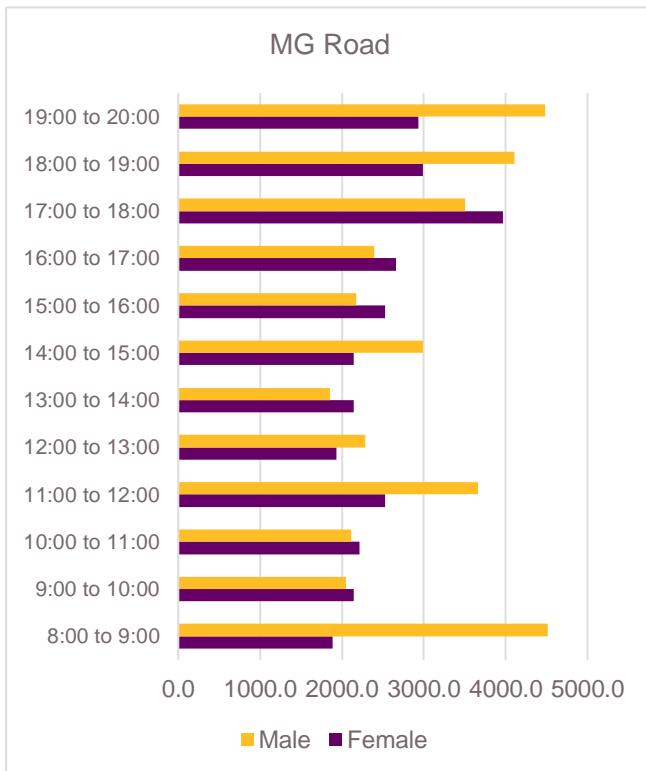
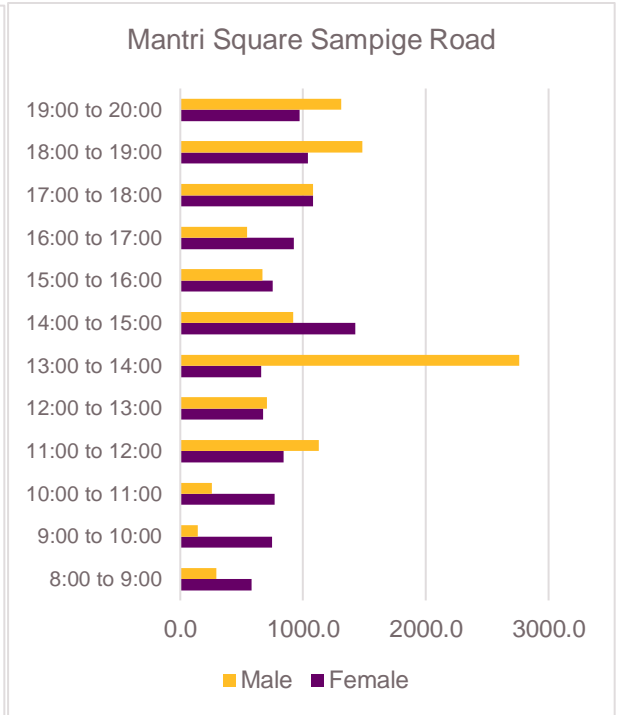
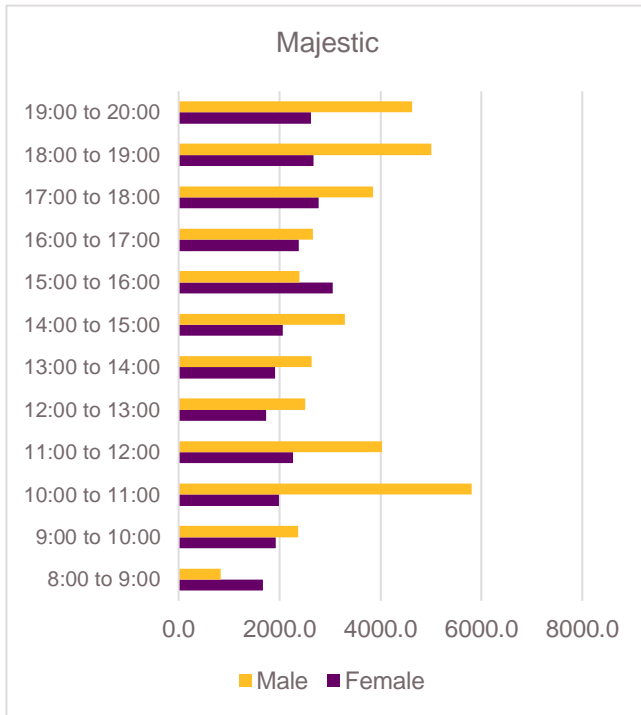
Although aggregate data suggest that women maintain relatively steady ridership throughout the day, station-level trends reveal significant variations. For example, stations such as Benninganahalli, Mantri Square, and Pattandur Agrahara show higher female ridership than male ridership during certain hours or off-peak periods, a pattern masked by aggregate numbers. These micro-level differences are important because similar patterns may cluster across specific station typologies or corridors. Identifying such patterns could inform targeted service strategies such as loop trains, enhanced frequency during specific off-peak windows, or station-area safety and accessibility improvements aligned with women’s travel behavior.

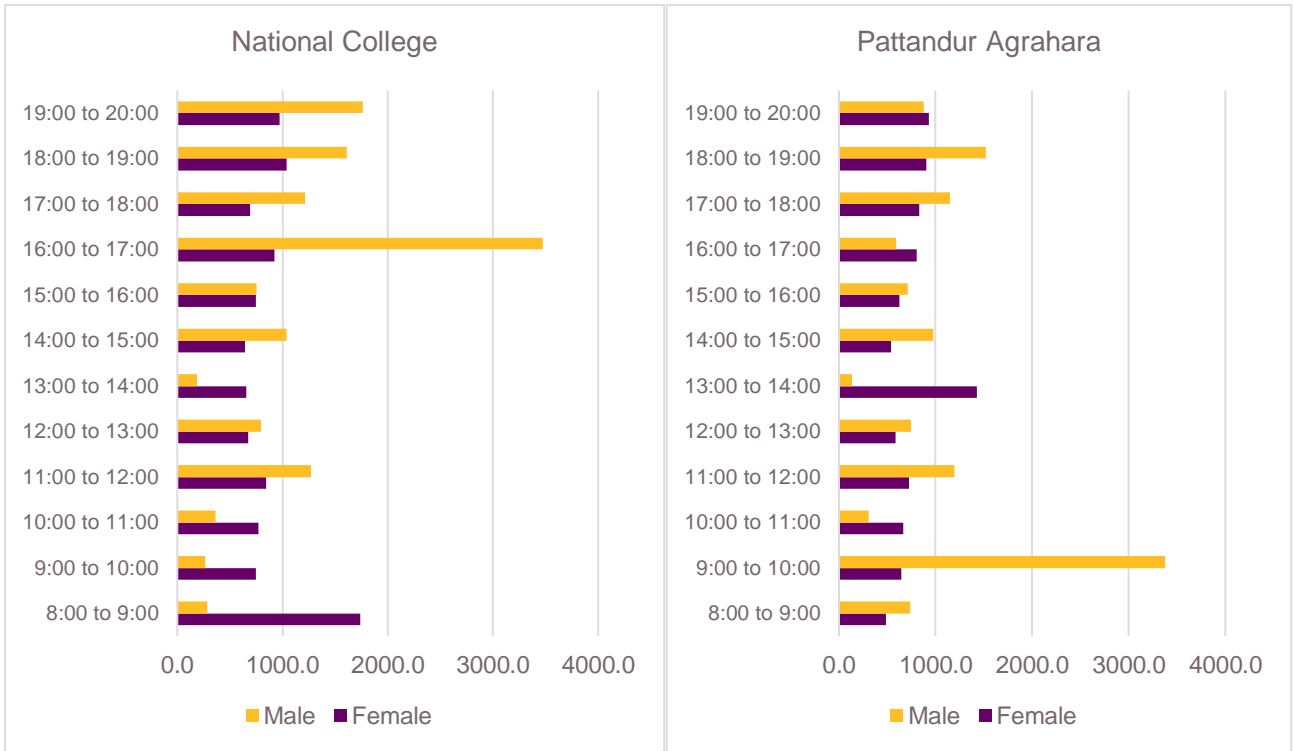




**Figure 5: Hourly counts across the surveyed stations**

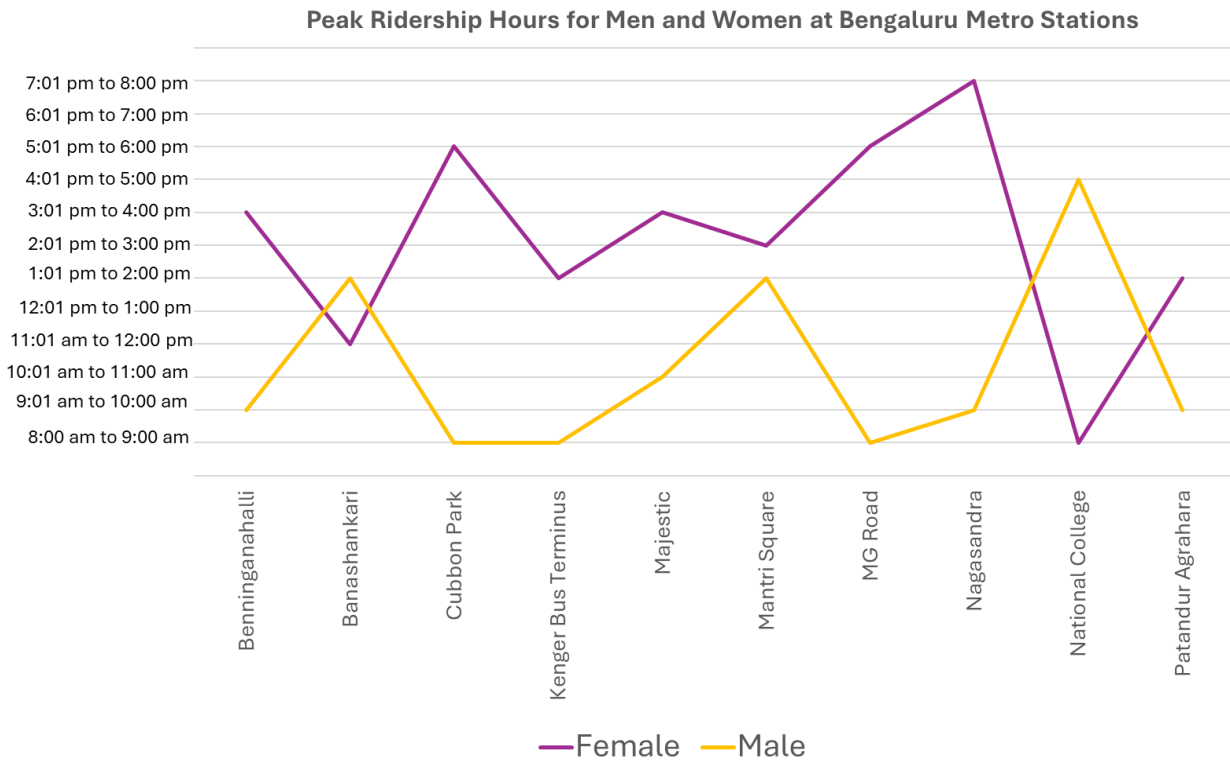






Station-level ridership patterns show that men’s travel peaks are concentrated during two distinct intervals: 8:00–10:00 AM and 5:00–7:00 PM. In contrast, women’s ridership peaks are more dispersed across the day, varying by station and often occurring between mid-morning and early afternoon. These patterns reflect a mix of work-related and essential non-work trips, such as caregiving and errands.

**Figure 6: Peak ridership hours for women and men**





Evidence from this gender-disaggregated count survey can help agencies prioritize where to investigate barriers to access or safety and explore policy responses tailored to different times of day or specific stations.

Overall, the station-level and time-based analyses underscore the importance of granular gender-disaggregated ridership data for operational planning and ensure that transit services respond to diverse mobility needs across the network.

## London: A Model for Institutionalizing Gender-Responsive Transport Planning

Transport for London (TfL) is one of the few transit agencies that systematically collects and publishes gender-disaggregated travel data. Recognizing that traditional transport planning often prioritizes the needs of solo, peak-hour commuters, typically men, TfL adopted a more inclusive approach by studying how different groups, including women, use public transport.

TfL's findings are drawn from the London Travel Demand Survey (LTDS), a combined household and passenger survey conducted annually. TfL also works with market research companies to conduct passenger surveys on its behalf. These surveys are conducted continuously across the London Overground, Elizabeth Line, Docklands Light Railway, and Bus & Tram networks (Transport for London, 2024).

Based on gender-disaggregated data, key gender-response service measures undertaken by TfL include ( Transport for London [TfL], 2019; Brown, 2020)

- **Service Design Adjustments:** Data insights revealed that women frequently travel outside peak hours for caregiving and part-time work. In response, TfL has improved off-peak service frequency to reduce waiting times.
- **Integrated Fare Policies:** Understanding that women often "trip-chain" (combine multiple short trips for errands and caregiving), TfL has explored ways to make multi-leg journeys more affordable by integrating fares across transport modes.
- **Station-accessibility Improvements:** Gender-sensitive audits showed that women, particularly those traveling with strollers or shopping bags, faced barriers at stations. This has led to increased investments in step-free access, additional elevators, and improved station wayfinding.
- **Commitment to Policy Change:** TfL has embedded gender considerations within its broader transport policy framework, ensuring that equity and inclusion are measurable objectives for planning and infrastructure investment.

By institutionalizing gender-disaggregated data collection and analysis, London has moved beyond one-off studies to a system in which gender equity is an ongoing and measurable priority in public transport planning.





## Looking Ahead

Findings from the gender-disaggregated commuter counts provide an initial step toward understanding gender-specific metro usage patterns in Bengaluru. The analysis highlights peak-hour variations and station-level trends, underscoring the need for comprehensive gender-disaggregated data. In the absence of consistent gender data, addressing challenges related to safety, accessibility, and convenience for women becomes difficult. Robust gender-disaggregated evidence can inform decisions regarding service planning, safety interventions, infrastructure design, resource allocation, and overall performance, ensuring that metro systems respond more effectively to the mobility needs of women and other vulnerable groups.

More detailed analysis is required to translate this evidence into action, including deeper insights into commuter experiences, last-mile connectivity, station accessibility, land use, service design, and the barriers women face at different times of the day. It is equally important to determine how gender-disaggregated information can be systematically collected and integrated into transport planning and system design.

As India's metro networks continue to expand through significant public investment and international partnerships, the focus must shift from infrastructure expansion toward creating systems that are inclusive, safe, and accessible to all.

By leveraging these tools and embedding gender-responsive metrics into routine data systems, Indian cities can move from one-time studies to institutionalized, real-time, and actionable evidence, ensuring that metro systems evolve to meet the needs of all commuters.





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