

Head of the Mobility Secretary of the State of Oaxaca, Mexico. Claudina de Gyves Mendoza is an architect focusing on urban planning and sustainable mobility. As co-founder and former general coordinator of Liga Peatonal, she advocated for pedestrians' rights.

Claudina de Gyves Mendoza

SECRETARY OF MOBILITY OF THE
STATE OF OAXACA

MEXICO

In your view, what is a feminist transport system?

From my perspective, a feminist transport system is one that considers the needs and desires of women, teenagers, and young girls in order to provide them with solutions for their daily life while moving around the cities. A sustainable system that allows them to live and enjoy their cities in safe conditions when walking, cycling, using public transport, or by any other transport means. One that also provides them with different options depending on their daily activities.

A feminist transport system should consider gender as a category of analysis, along with others, such as age, ethnic origin, economic conditions, and so on. This allows an understanding of women's everyday travel patterns and how they are connected to very specific life conditions and related to their role in the current hegemonic economic system that conditions their mobility. A feminist transport system should change the current approach of individual and linear mobility to analyze practices and patterns of everyday life activities, in the productive as well as the reproductive spheres.

Have you had a transformative experience that has guided your leadership in the field?

My transformative experience is linked to the personal decision I made around ten years ago when I decided to use a bicycle as a means of transport and discovered a whole new experience

of the city on two wheels. I realized that although we all must take certain precautions when going out into public space for our daily activities, for women, the issue of security goes a lot further, especially if you decide to cycle. Security becomes a personal subject involving choices made even before stepping outside. There is a mental checklist with questions like: What am I going to wear? How am I going to commute? Where do I go? What time will I come back? Will all my travels be alone? How will the weather be? This also goes without saying that on many occasions, our commutes are planned and conditioned by other people accompanying us to ensure a certain level of security.

Over time, I realized that I had to also learn to deal with the daily mental exercise of perception of others about my safety. Questions about and emphasis on all the extra precautions I should take because of my decision to cycle became an endless headache. Questions about the use of a helmet and of special equipment to go out that resembled a Christmas tree just to be visible. I realized that what for me meant a certain level of autonomy while commuting was seen by others as an added risk that I needed to solve.



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Being aware of this situation helped me realize that as a woman happy with my decision to travel by bike, I had to stand up and speak out about the risks but also about the benefits, especially the independence I gained in choosing a bike as transport. This also helped me prepare professionally for joining the transport field. I realized I needed the knowledge and tools to be assertive and make sure my voice is taken seriously as that of a specialist in the field, especially in this man’s world.

If you could go back in time, what would you tell your younger self entering the field?

I would acknowledge that, yes, the city is not designed for all. As long as there continues to be no safe conditions for women’s travels, we will survive by avoiding going out on some occasions, limiting our activities in others, or providing for ourselves what the city does not. Do not forget our ideal city and what we should be aspiring to – one where the only thing we have to do as women, regardless of the hour of the day or the clothes we wear, is to walk or cycle without worrying about anything. That the ideal city, the streets, the infrastructure, the transportation system, etc., would be able to mitigate the risks and possible eventualities and would offer us all the transport combinations to carry out our daily travels in a comfortable and safe way, according to our diverse needs.

I would say to myself that our ideal city does not exist yet, but that we are already on track, working hard with the help of women around the world to make sure each of us can have safe trips home.

Do you have any advice for other people who want to be part of a feminist reshaping of the transport system?

My advice is that they shouldn’t take the city for granted as a place designed for all people. The reality is that the city doesn’t know that a street without a cycle lane, without safe intersections, with dim lighting, without active facades, without intermodal and safe public transport, without sidewalks in good conditions, increases the risks in women’s commutes. Nor do the ones who planned it.

The solution for women is not to solve every single risk with car travel or provide the company of someone to ‘take care of us,’ a situation only appreciated when it’s our decision. What we need is a city that allows us to move safely and autonomously, to commute alone without depending on other people. What we need is for those planning cities to work collectively with us to create the conditions for autonomous travel, to provide a reality where we can move safely and independently.