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Understanding the role of transportation in combating human trafficking in California

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

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A B S T R A C T

Human trafficking, a form of modern slavery, is the recruitment, transport, transfer of persons using force, fraud or coercion to exploit them for act of labor or sex. According to the International Labor Organization, human trafficking is the fastest growing organized crime with approximately $150 billion in annual profits and 40.3 million individuals trapped in slave-like conditions. While it is not compulsory to involve transportation for human trafficking, the transportation industry plays a critical role in combating human trafficking as traffickers often rely the transportation system to recruit, move or transfer victims of human trafficking for either sex or forced labor. Recognizing the importance of transportation, multiple anti-trafficking stakeholders in California have started initiatives to address the problem. This project investigates the role of transportation in combating human trafficking in California by conducting a survey followed up with semi-structured in-depth interviews with key stakeholders. The project aims to: 1) assess the knowledge about current policies, trainings, public awareness initiatives and partnerships about transportation among anti-trafficking practitioners, 2) highlight gaps and opportunities for identifying counter-trafficking strategies, best practices, data collection, information-sharing, collaboration, and legislative and administrative changes.

Introduction

Human trafficking, a form of modern slavery, is the recruitment, transport, transfer of persons using force, fraud or coercion to exploit them for act of labor or sex. According to the International Labor Organization (2017), human trafficking is the fastest growing organized crime with approximately $150 billion in annual profits and 40.3 million individuals trapped in slave-like conditions. Out of 40.3 million, 24.9 are in forced labor. Vulnerable populations like, women and girls, children, and migrant, are impacted disproportionately. In the United States (US), California consistently appears to be highest number of human trafficking cases in the National Hotline statistics.

The transportation industry plays a critical role in combating human trafficking as traffickers often rely on the transportation system to recruit, move or transfer victims of human trafficking for either sex or forced labor. For this reason, the transportation industry has initiated many efforts to develop and implement policies, trainings, public awareness initiatives and partnerships to combat human trafficking. Examples include Transportation Leaders Against Human Trafficking (TLAHT) program, training state department of transportation employees and Blue Lightening Initiative for aviation industry training.

Having the highest numbers of human trafficking cases reported in the nation continuously, having unique borders and being a transportation hub, California plays a gateway in combating human trafficking (Greer, 2014). Recognizing the importance of transportation, multiple anti-trafficking stakeholders in California have started initiatives to address the problem. Starting January 1, 2021 AB2034 requires transit agencies to train their personnel on human trafficking.

Despite the potential, there is limited research on the intersection of transportation and human trafficking. As a first of its kind, this project investigates the role of transportation in combating human trafficking in California by conducting a survey followed with semi-structured in-depth interviews with multi-disciplinary key stakeholders. The project aims to: 1) assess the knowledge about current policies, trainings, public awareness initiatives and partnerships about transportation among anti-trafficking practitioners, 2) highlight gaps and opportunities for identifying counter-trafficking strategies, best practices, data collection, information-sharing, collaboration, and legislative and administrative changes.

The rest of the paper is organized in the following structure: In

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Section 2 provides an overview of human trafficking and transportation related efforts and the stakeholders involved. In Section 3 presents the research methodology. Section 4 demonstrates the initial results of the multi-stakeholder analysis while Section 5 provides specific recommendations for the transportation industry. In Section 6 concludes the paper with final remarks.

Review

There is very limited academic literature on the role of transportation in combating human trafficking. Haberman et al. (2021) investigates the role of state and local department of transportation (DOTs) to disrupt human trafficking. They summarize four main roles: 1) provide awareness, 2) conduct training, 3) partner/assist regionally, and 4) collect frontline empirical data. Noize et al. (2021) present the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT)’s USDOT Advisory Committee on Human Trafficking (ACHT) efforts to combat human trafficking in collaboration with partners and stakeholders in the transportation industry, especially after the Department of Transportation Advisory Committee on Human Trafficking (ACHT) report in 2019. In addition, A 2014 Urban Institute study that focuses on understanding the labor trafficking shows that out of the 122 labor trafficking victims 71% were trafficked by flight and 52% were trafficked by car or van (Owen et al., 2014). A 2018 Polaris Polaris (2018) study, which includes a survey of 127 survivors of human trafficking and a focus group with 26 survivors, is one of the few examples of data. This study shows how transportation intersects with the different stages of human trafficking and modalities of transportation used as well as recommendations to the transportation industry.

However, the efforts to combat human trafficking within the transportation sector, especially from the USDOT, increased in the last decade. In this section, we discuss about these efforts in the United States and California specifically. In 2012, the USDOT launched the TLAHT partnership with representatives of aviation, buses, ports, rail, transit, trucking, and other transportation stakeholders to optimize the impact of transportation sector’s anti-trafficking efforts. An example of the TLAHT efforts is the awareness campaign titled “Put the Brakes on Human Trafficking”, which is the first collective effort within the transportation industry to combat human trafficking.

USDOT joined the President’s Interagency Task Force to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (PITF) in 2012. This task force is responsible for coordinating the US governmentwide anti-trafficking efforts. As a result, USDOT coordinates with other agencies such as Department of Homeland Security (DHS). An example of such coordination is the Blue Lightning Initiative, which is a USDOT, DHS and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) training initiative specialized for aviation industry. Another important human trafficking effort from the USDOT is the directive to train employees.

Multiple legislation efforts were involved in the transportation to combat human trafficking dedicated to different modalities. Among these, 2018 Combating Human Trafficking in Commercial Vehicles Act requires establishing an advisory committee. As the first of its kind, Department of Transportation ACHT report provides a detailed overview of combating human trafficking in the transportation sector to guide the stakeholders within the transportation section. The report summarizes the federal and state level human trafficking legislation specific to transportation, data, technology, best practices and stakeholder-oriented recommendations and implementation guides.

Other efforts include the USDOT efforts include the expanding the funding to include anti-trafficking efforts through grants and awards. For example, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) allocated $5.4 million to 24 organizations in the United States ranging from local transportation agencies to non-profits to prevent human trafficking. Another recent funding effort is the Annual Combatting Human Trafficking impact award, which is inducted to create incentives to combat human trafficking in the transportation sector. As human trafficking is a hidden crime, data is extremely hard to obtain. In order to close the data gap, United Against Slavery, the first ever recipient of the USDOT Human Trafficking Impact Award, has developed a National Outreach Survey for Transportation to collect frontline data. The survey includes three parts 1) survey to transportation industry personnel 2) services providers 3) survivors. This study is also first of its kind to collect information about the awareness of human trafficking in the transportation industry as well recommendation to the different stakeholders.

Along with these federal efforts, California is unique for its key stakeholder efforts to combat human trafficking in transportation through awareness, legislation, funding as well as research. For example, the state mandatory transit training bill, AB 2034, was modeled after the Santa Clara Valley County Transportation Authority (VTA)’s human trafficking training program for its employees to know the signs of human trafficking ahead for the Superbowl 50, which took place in Levi Stadium in 2016. VTA worked with the Santa Clara Human Trafficking Coalition for this effort, which is an exemplary partnership of a local transportation agency with a multi-disciplinary local collaborative model. VTA also is one of the 24 recipients of the FTA grants in 2020. Sunline Transit Agency is also another recipient of the FTA grants to combat human trafficking. Moreover, multiple Californian transit agencies such as Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) and Los Angeles Metro, are recognized in the ACHT report and by American Public Transit Association for their anti-trafficking initiatives. In addition to the transit efforts, Californian stakeholders are also making significant efforts in other modalities. Airport Initiative, which was developed by Bay Area Anti-Trafficking Coalition, have trained many airport personnel since 2014. In addition, this research funded by the USDOT is another exemplary distinguished California effort.

This study expands the existing literature on the transportation and human trafficking through semi-structured interviews with a wide range of multi-disciplinary anti-trafficking stakeholders in California. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to incorporate multi-disciplinary perspective in this intersection, including anti-trafficking practitioners with transportation knowledge as well as transportation personnel with anti-trafficking knowledge.

Methodology

This paper focuses on the findings from the USDOT funded study titled “Understanding the Role of Transportation in Combating Human Trafficking in California”. The project started in December 2020 and is currently being finalized. The research aims to understand the role of transportation in different stages of human trafficking, human trafficking in California (both general and transportation related characteristics), and the role of transportation in forced labor. The project also highlights awareness, gaps and recommendation on different efforts ranging from legislation, training, public awareness, data, technology, partnership, and others. (Please note that this paper only focuses the intersection of transportation with tracking in person as a result does not include all the findings from the grant work.)

The PI aims to close the gap in the intersection of human trafficking and transportation by conducting a mixed-method study, which employs surveys followed by semi-structured in-depth interviews with the key anti-trafficking stakeholders, which was defined as “anyone interested in combating human trafficking, such as not limited to law enforcement, service provider, government personnel, medical provider, and volunteer, etc”. The scope of participants was kept broad to ensure perspectives from different roles and backgrounds. The experience with transportation industry was not a requirement.

The project as well as the survey and the interview protocols were significantly shaped by the author’s expertise on grounded human trafficking problems and her interactions in the anti-trafficking efforts in the recent years. Some examples of her local, state and national involvement include serving in the local human trafficking committees.
such as Los Angeles (LA) Labor Trafficking Subcommittee and South Bay Coalition to End Human Trafficking, where she regularly interacts with a wide range of multi-disciplinary experts, serving as the Forced Labor Working Group Chair and the Analytics Working Group Member in the NOST under the USDOT Human Trafficking Impact Award, where she interacts with individuals from both transportation industry as well as anti-trafficking advocacy groups, and involvement in the local GTA project, similarly where she interacts with both transportation as well as anti-trafficking experts.

The survey and the interview questions were reviewed and tested by 10 multi-disciplinary experts who are knowledgeable about human trafficking in California and/or human trafficking and the transportation and human trafficking intersection. Based on the feedback from these experts, the protocols were updated and the institutional IRB approval was obtained.

The initial identification of potential list of the key stakeholders were selected in the following ways 1) multi-disciplinary human trafficking task forces 2) statewide anti-trafficking agencies and reports 3) key transportation personnel. The main channel to connect with the anti-trafficking practitioners was through the multi-disciplinary human trafficking task forces in California to ensure to represent efforts from across California as much as possible. Multi-disciplinary collaborative model, which gathers wide range of anti-trafficking stakeholders such as law enforcement, victim service providers, governments and advocates, is the state-of-the art model to combat human trafficking (Richie-Zavaleta et al., 2021). The list of collaborative models and statewide efforts in California was accessed from the California Against Slavery and Department of Health and Human Services. When possible, contact persons from the taskforces, generally the chairs/co-chairs, were reached out with the study information and asked to distribute among their members and any other potential expert. When activities of task forces such as conferences and webinars listed particular individuals, those names also were added to the list of potential participants. Key anti-trafficking agencies and reports in the state-wide efforts were also reviewed (Harris, 2012; Little Hoover Commission, 2020a, Little Hoover Commission, 2020b). Finally, in order to have a comprehensive view, key transportation stakeholders were added to the list of potential contacts such as state level transportation authorities as well as the local level authorities. The survey, prepared in Qualtrics, was sent in April, June and August 2021. A total of 72 responses were collected. The participants were given the option to select any question they would like to answer. Thus, some questions might have fewer number of responses compared to the others. Survey participants include a wide range of roles from anti-trafficking practitioners as well as transportation industry personnel who are interested in human trafficking. Some examples of participants from the latter include law enforcement in transit agencies, transit operator, management personnel at transit agency, flight attendant, and Transportation Security Administration (TSA) representative at a large airport, and a port personnel.

Majority of the survey questions were intended for frequency and analyzed with using charts. Participants were asked about their thoughts on the role of transportation and their recommendations in open ended questions. These questions were analyzed using thematic analysis. The small scale of the survey participants serves as a first step in exploring the intersection of human trafficking and transportation, to generate interest in the topic, and provide potential recommendations and it is not intended for comprehensive results (Jennings, 2020).

Survey participants who volunteered for participation in a follow-up interview was contacted to schedule their interviews. Twenty-five semi structured interviews took place July 2021 and February 2022 via Zoom and phone. The list of participants includes a diverse set of backgrounds and role such as law enforcement, city attorneys, district attorneys, anti-trafficking coordinator, survivor, government personnel, advocate, etc. The list also includes individuals with multiple roles and backgrounds including some with transportation and human trafficking intersection. For example, one of the individuals is a flight attendant who is also an anti-trafficking advocate working in a non-profit to educate other flight attendants. All twenty-five participants are located and/or operating in California. Another participant who is a survivor of human trafficking is now overseeing anti-trafficking efforts in a large healthcare center. Table A.1 demonstrate the characteristics of the interview participants.

Interviews were audio recorded (except from one interview) and transcribed. Transcripts were reviewed for accuracy and coded by the author, who is the sole PI of the grant and the interviewer, using the software program NVivo. For the unrecorded interview, interviewer notes were used. A hybrid approach of thematic coding and categorization was employed to analyze the data as outlined and implemented in (Gibbs, 2018). The construction of the codebook started with a set of codes based on the interview questions and followed by the newer themes/sub-themes appeared during the analysis.

Role of transportation in human trafficking

Survey first asked an open-ended question about participants thoughts on the role of transportation in combating human trafficking. Out of 72 participants, 58 answered this question. All agree that transportation plays an important role in facilitating as well as disrupting and preventing human trafficking. Some of the roles listed include transporting victims, recruiting victims, allowing victims exit through either serving as safe place or identifying victims, isolating and controlling victims, preventing human trafficking, supporting victim/survivor healing through access to services and collecting information.

They have the potential to recognize and stop or prevent human trafficking. Checkpoints, rest stops, routine traffic stops. As a survivor, I had contact with law enforcement, Department of Agriculture, DOT, and highway patrol and none of them recognized me as being in a trafficking situation. Those were 5 opportunities for rescue. (Survey Respondent 18)

Among the interview participants the most common description used was “transportation personnel are eyes and ears of the community”. One of the interview participants nicely summarizes the role of transportation in combating human trafficking and adds the role of educating the public.

I think there’re a couple of roles transportation can play one, it can intervene, because in the process of a bad actor recruiting an individual because they operate in just you know all times of day and oftentimes you know the mode of transportation is less expensive and accessible to folks so really we feel that the transit agencies, through their buses and through their light rails and trains are our eyes and ears of the community and the transit operators in particular can see suspicious activity and can intervene at that point so that’s one role. The other role that it can play is to educate and also prevent this activity from happening, so if there is someone at risk on the mode of transportation, educational materials can be located on the buses. For example, in with car cards or even on the trains with car cards we’ve used that strategy to educate folks on what human trafficking is and, furthermore, how to get assistance if they feel they are at risk and then what we’re trying to establish is that it is a safe haven for those at risk and that message is yet to be fully developed yet... the project (with a transit authority) meant to increase that connection for
fears that it can be a place of refuge and assistance in time of need. Those are a few ways that I feel transportation can play an effective role during the recruitment process of human trafficking. (Interview Participant 22)

Transportation in different stages of human trafficking

According to the survey participants seen in Fig. 1, transportation is mostly used in the trafficking operations, then in the recruitment of the victims. The semi-structured interviews go in depth about the role of transportation in different stages of human trafficking, recruitment, trafficking operations, exit attempt/victim identification and post-exit.

Recruitment

Traffickers utilize various modes of transportation for different purposes in the recruitment. In this stage, it is mostly utilized to facilitate initial in-person encounters, whether to start the grooming process or relocation post online encounters. Whether it is the promise of romantic relationship, posing to provide help or the promise of better job opportunities, the tactic is common and it is highly utilized in big states like California, where there are a lot of opportunities in the entertainment industry and huge transportation hubs at the local and city levels.

- Transportation as recruitment grounds:

Multiple participants mentioned traffickers targeting vulnerable populations at the public transportation for recruitment. Participants state that during recruitment most common vulnerable groups of targets are younger girls, LGBTQ youth, homeless, and anyone who might seem lost or disoriented which can be used as indicators.

I definitely have seen recruitment happen and I’ve been told by youth that I’ve worked with where they’ve interacted first on buses, on Bart, on light rail systems, on Metrolink. Definitely recruiters approach a minor usually looking for somebody or an adult looking for someone who seems a little lost or they might need to go something and might not have means or looking like they’re out of place or just sort of new to the area arrived in town, certainly if it’s a minor, certainly if somebody who’s a runaway. So, I know that recruiting happens there. I’ve known that transport happens there especially in cities, where people are less probable to have a car, you know definitely sort of like more common in San Francisco or more common in Oakland. (Interview Participant 13)

- Transportation used to transport victims to their traffickers

Different modes of transportation are utilized to bring victims to the trafficker, mostly after online encounters for either fake relationships and/or false job opportunities. Most common examples are buses and rideshares for shorter distances (mostly for sex trafficking) and airplanes for longer distances (both sex and labor trafficking).

What we have seen for sex trafficking for the recruitment is after an online chat the trafficker will send a bus ticket for the soon to be victim to come visit or the trafficker says “Hey why don’t I come down to San Diego and we’ll hook up” and so the trafficker or victim themselves sometimes takes a bus down to San Diego. We know on the labor trafficking side, what we have seen, which I don’t mean to say like we’re not seeing everything right on labor trafficking, is coming in from Asia into San Diego and I don’t know exactly if the port is LA or New York. (Interview Participant 19).

- History of transportation and/or multiple transportation as a tactic

In some cases, especially for the international victim recruitment, history of travel is used as a trafficking scheme to ensure successful admission to US. In domestic trafficking cases, some traffickers utilize multiple transportation, such as multiple ridesharing services and combination of transit with rideshare, before the initial encounter to reduce risk getting caught.

Before the “sex workers” come into the United States, many of them are told to walk their passports, because they have to show that they’re well-traveled and they’re coming for leisure so when they prove that they’ve already been to Singapore or Hong Kong, it shows that they like to travel, they have the money, and the experience to do this and they’re going to come back to Thailand, because they have done so in the past. So, usually these places are places that the Thai passport can travel without having to apply for a visa. I had a client who was sent to the UK and then came back to Thailand and then travel to United States, they’re getting really tricky and they’re investing a lot in walking these passports so that, once they get to the US Embassy, the official sees that this person just likes to travel and they can afford it and so it’s like a very long term process, so there are those kinds of trips too that don’t immediately result in trafficking but are part of the trafficking scheme. (Interview Participant 4)

Trafficking operations

While transportation is not required for human trafficking, majority of the industries and types of trafficking involve transportation at some point of victimization. All types of modalities were reported to be utilized during human trafficking operations. The modality of choice depends on the type of trafficking (whether it is for sex or labor), geography (in-state, interstate, international), nationality of the victim. In most cases, combination of modalities is utilized for many different reasons. During victimization, transportation is mainly used for 1-moving victims from and to location where the service is extracted whether it is the act of sex or labor 2- controlling the victims 3- serving purposes in the recruitment. (Interview Participant 22)

![Fig. 1. Transportation in human trafficking (N = 58). Other Not applicable/do not observe (6).](image-url)
- **Transportation for Moving the Victims**

The most common use of transportation during victimization is to transport the victim from and to the “work” location where the sex or labor act is extracted from the victim. In the case of the sex trafficking, the trafficker’s vehicle is most commonly used method to transport victims between “dates”, especially for closer “date” sites. Next, ride-sharing has been very popular which also provides some sense of security and anonymity to the trafficker. When the distance increases, vehicle choice also starts to change. Amtrak and Greyhound are chosen most likely due to less supervision and documentation. Airlines and rentals are the preferred method when the distance is much longer.

Traffickers take the victims on to their dates with john’s. They’ll take them to the hotel rooms and they’ll stay in the car victims finished the day or just taken from city to city, from state to state in a vehicle because it’s obviously more private, there’s no borders, there’s no sense of identification or anything like that so that’s how we see a lot of the vehicles in play with that. Airplanes and Amtrak greyhound as well greyhound is very, very popular because again greyhound is not being as kind of as supervised, so they require the least amount of documentation and we know a lot of survivors have been on a greyhound and on Amtrak with a trafficker or with the bottom girls someone who is obviously you know, forcing them to get on these transportation vehicles. (Interview Participant 8)

Vans and busses, especially school busses or company owned busses, are listed as most common methods to move victims from and to work for labor trafficking. Airlines are mostly used when groups of victims, such as the case of migrant/seasonal laborers, are transported between crops, farms and or other temporary work locations across states.

- **Transportation for Controlling Victims**

Traffickers utilize transportation to keep control of individuals for both sex and labor trafficking. This mostly happens concurrently with the purpose of transporting the victims. For example, for both sex and labor trafficking, some traffickers arrange the pickup and drop off and even wait until the service is extracted to reduce exit opportunities. This is observed more for sex trafficking where the pimp and/or the transport wait in the car outside of a hotel or at truck stop while the victim is on a “date”. Another common control strategy is the frequent transportation of victims to different location to disorient the victim by distancing them from communities of support/comfort.

What we heard about was that they have very limited access transportation, and so transportation was a means of control, so it would be taking somebody from where they were housed to the work site and back. A victim who were brought in legally through the agricultural visa, they were forced to extend their stay and became illegal, but through all that transportation was used to keep him. They are very strictly limited from their workplace, they were isolated where they were working on an agricultural field and transportation was used to bring them to where they were residing...Another victim that I talked to she didn’t have transportation, she was working in the health care facility and was living in the facility. She was stuck on site, I think she got here by plane where she came on a legal visa. Actually, everybody I talk to come here legally. Mostly what I heard about from their experiences, how denying transportation was a tool to keep people. (Interview Participant 3)

- **Transportation Vehicle as the Trafficking Operation/Exploitation Location:**

For sex trafficking, vans and trucks are stated examples of vehicles where victims might be forced to perform the act. For labor trafficking, the most commonly expressed examples are the ships and fishing boats where fishermen and other personnel are forced to work on the sea. Typical exploitative indicators are confiscation of their documentation or improperly prepared documentation. Also, forced begging and salesman crews are observed in the trains and busses. Generally, the handlers watch the begging and salesman crews while working to control them.

I have a big case that fishermen were brought to the US... they go to Australia first, they go to somewhere and then they stopped in Hawaii and then they start working in Hawaii so they came to the bay area through the means of fishing boats and while they are on the fishing boat, of course they have to work more than 10 h per day. They were being paid except the situation of their work is really bad and they got sick and they got injured but they continue working so and, eventually, they escape. (Interview Participant 11)

**Exit attempt/victim identification:**

Transportation and its personnel play a role in exit attempts and victim identification. Majority of the interview participants mentioned the role of transportation personnel in identifying victims as the eyes and ears of the society through various modes of transportation. Most commonly mentioned personnel were transit operators, trucking personnel, ride sharing personnel and the airline personnel.

I’ve been alerted from my fellow flight attendants what they see on aircraft or on their flight has often been what they think is a trafficker with young children or with a young woman or men, sometimes in groups and sometimes just an individual. Often, I hear and I have witnessed and reported things myself, where you see an individual young person on a flight that seems afraid, maybe they’re drugged or malnourished or afraid to look you in the eye or a fear evident fear of someone in uniform. Or maybe they are not dressed appropriately for where they’re going and maybe if asked simple questions they don’t know how to answer. Or are they traveling with someone and under their control, and so you see these signs and sometimes that’s often what I hear being reported from flight is there, seeing signs of victims and possible traffickers with the victim. I have seen it going through security, I have reported situations that I have seen just witnessing behavior that doesn’t line up with the normal feeling and environment so I’ve seen it in many different levels of that process. (Interview Participant 18)

Lack of safe transportation is listed a barrier to escape for victims who are trying to leave their trafficker/exploitative environment. Depending on the type of the trafficking, especially in the domestic work and labor trafficking in secluded areas/industries such as farms, access to transportation is a huge challenge. Additionally, many of the victims might not have proper identification or necessary funds to pay for transportation. In some cases, the victims are able to have a history of contact with trusted individuals, community members or victim services. For those cases, private cars from trusted individuals, ride share, airplane, bus ticket with password, designated community drivers, vans are utilized. One participant mentioned having a survivor who stole the car of their trafficker to escape.

We’ve put victims on planes to get home and taxis and Ubers to get them to a shelter. People leaving the hospital by vehicle all the time and we have also bought bus tickets and train tickets for people to ensure a safe discharge will purchase tickets, on behalf of patients. (Interview Participant 20)

**Post-exit/victim support**

Transportation is used to first ensure that victims/survivors can access the services that they need such as but not limited to meeting with service providers for any immediate health needs, immigration services, etc. Without access to safe transportation a victim cannot heal and reintegration to society.

Most common victim support is the vouchers/transportation cards
provided to the victims and ridesharing access prepaid by the service provider. Another common role is transferring the victim to a safe location or reunification with the family and/or loved ones, which can appear in multiple modalities based on the needs of the victim/survivor. Most common modality stated for reunification is airlines. Victim support depends on many factors including the survivor needs as well as the availability of them. While transportation is a must to continue post-exit life, organizations might not have budget allocated to transportation due to grant restrictions. Moreover, each survivor might have different transportation needs based on their location, safety and how and where they would like to pursue their life post-exit. For example, the needs might change in an urban vs. rural setting where there are more transportation options available. Similarly, when the trafficking is an international scheme, a survivor might want to go back to the country of origin, which requires more resources from organizations as well coordination.

In our organization, we provide vouchers if they’re needed so it’s really on a case by case. It’s really about meeting the needs of the clients… Once they’ve escaped will purchase the tokens for them to use the train and so that they can come to our center, they can go to their place of worship or wherever and we’ll even train them on how to use that, provide an Uber or a Lift because some people have no sense of where they are, they have no communication like they can’t speak English at all…. But through the Metro we’re able to also get some discount on those vouchers and then we work very closely with IOM to make their relatives, they can come into the country IOM books those commercial flights travels in a group has an escort for them so that they can transition appropriately at each airport and meet them in the US, so that there’s more air travel for the family and once they arrive we integrate them into the society and make sure they can use the public, transit and provide the vouchers again so that they can use the metro and the bus if it’s available to them, but we also provide them with we’ve provided gas cards before, because some people live in rural communities where there is no public transit and we only do that if that’s the only option, so that way they can get around in their community. (Interview Participant 4)

**Human trafficking in California and transportation**

In this section, we present the use of transportation modalities in California with respect to type of human trafficking, geographical characteristics, industries, routes and role. Fig. 2 shows that private vehicles along with the ridesharing and taxis are the most common modalities used in human trafficking in California.

Fig. 3 shows the characteristics of human trafficking per modality type in details. Fig. 3a shows that while private vehicles and ridesharing are still the most common modalities for sex trafficking, private vehicles and busses are observed as the most common modalities for labor trafficking. While private vehicles dominate the in-state and interstate

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**Fig. 2.** Transportation modalities in the State of California for transportation in human trafficking (N = 51). Other Not applicable/do not observe (4).

**Fig. 3.** Characteristic of Human Trafficking Per Modality in California

Fig. 3a. Use of transportation modality by type of trafficking (N = 50), Fig. 3b. Use of transportation by geography of the trafficking (N = 50), Fig. 3c. Transportation Modality by Different Industry (N = 46). The frequency for each modality is listed in the Appendix Table A.2-A.4.
human trafficking, airlines dominate the international cases of human trafficking (Fig. 3b). When the type of modality is further investigated by industry, as seen in Fig. 3c, we observe that private vehicles and ridesharing dominate escort services, strip clubs and illicit massage parlors (main sex trafficking venues), busses are most commonly used in domestic work, agriculture and restaurants and food services (main labor trafficking venues). Other industries noted include healthcare, cannabis, and forced begging. Fig. 4.

All interview participants agree that California’s unique geography with its state borders as well as international borders, being a transportation hub, makes it important for transportation industry’s role in combating human trafficking in California. Participants mention that California acts in many different transportation (roles, origin, destination, hub) depending on the location, type of trafficking and background of the victims. The circular trafficking for sex trafficking was most commonly mentioned as a transportation trend in California for human trafficking among the interview participants. While there are multiple circles mentioned, the most common circles mentioned in the state are Bay Area and up and down with mainly private vehicles and ride shares as the preferred. The larger interstate circles mainly include Las Vegas and sometimes up to Oregon and Washington. Though the circular trafficking routes was less frequently mentioned for labor trafficking, it is observed more commonly among the certain industries. Predominantly mentioned industries were farm labor where victims are transported by vans or busses around different farms and crops for in state and airplane for farms in other states.

Unless it’s specifically through California, it goes from Las Vegas all the way through California, all the way up to Oregon and Washington, so that I find is huge in that, and obviously that passes that’s going to pass through LA also and so having all of that space. (Interview Participant 9).

Awareness of policies and current efforts

Awareness of policies in place

Survey participants were asked about their awareness regarding policies in place in California as well as federally with respect to transportation to combat human trafficking. The details of the legislation are provided in the Appendix.

Mean (µ), variance (σ²) and total count (N) for each subpart is listed consecutively as i) 1.34, 0.22, 50 ii) 1.65, 0.23, 51 iii) 1.6, 0.24, 50, iv) 1.34, 0.22, 50. In the mean calculation, YES accounts as 1 while NO accounts as 2.

Three participants also mention the Senate Bill 1193 added Section 52.6 to the Civil Code which requires specified businesses and other establishments, as of April 1, 2013, to post a notice informing the public and victims of human trafficking of telephone hotline numbers to seek help or report unlawful activity. One survey participant mentioned their concerns about the application of the policies.

“I am glad to hear there are bills in place. But I doubt any are being enforced, including law enforcement and other government agency training.” (Survey Participant 49)

The interview participants knowledge was similar, the trainings for the aviation and the transit industry were the most known policies. Two interview participants mentioned “safe place” policy for their districts.

In our county, our community has adopted the safe place program sponsored by our local domestic violence, sexual assault human trafficking nonprofit organization and it basically has a gold sign kind of a diamond shape sign, but basically it says safe place and if that logo is posted that lets victims know that their safety is the top priority of that organization... and they have a protocol established that if a victim jumps on the bus and says “I need help”, it launches the safe place protocol, where the bus driver will secure the bus and then keep the bus rolling for the victim’s safety. They’ll either contact law enforcement to meet the bus or they will contact the transit hub, to send out a shuttle to pick up the person and transport them to safety. (Interview Participant 17)

Awareness of initiatives

Fig. 5 show the awareness of anti-trafficking practitioners about the different awareness in partnership, federal initiatives as well as Californian initiatives.

Mean (µ), variance (σ²) and total count (N) for each subpart is listed consecutively as a) i) 1.27, 0.20, 51 ii) 1.22, 0.17, 51 iii) 1.37, 0.23, 49, iv) 1.32, 0.22, 50; b) i) 1.66, 0.22, 47 ii) 1.24, 0.18, 51 iii) 1.82, 0.15, 17; c) i) 1.74, 0.19, 43 ii) 1.81, 0.2, 43 iii) 1.72, 2, 43 iv) 1.62, 0.24, 47. In the mean calculation, YES accounts as 1 while NO accounts as 2.

One or more of the public awareness initiatives, such as the posters on the bathrooms, business, and busses, were mentioned by all the interview participants. Especially the signage on the busses and airports were frequently cited. Trainings from Truckers Against Trafficking, transit agencies and ridesharing agencies were also highly mentioned by different practitioners across California. Awareness trainings and initiatives before big events, such as Superbowl, was mentioned by 10 interview participants.

The reason I started the trafficking training with the bus drivers was that we got funds during the Superbowl before that no one paid attention and... during one of the trainings the offer up a several operators came up to me and said we wish we’d had this sooner. (Interview Participant 16)

Data and technology with regards to transportation

Out of 63 survey participants who answered this question 40 participants state that they do not collect transportation related data. Among the types of data collection, modes of transportation during victimization was the most frequently reported data to be collected followed by temporal and geospatial data about the trafficking incidents (Fig. 6). Also, Figure A.1 in the Appendix shows the awareness of data and information technology use in transportation for human trafficking.

Three survey respondents shared how the survey triggered them to think about how scarce the data about transportation in their operations and how to collect more information in the future.

Several of the questions prompted me to think that we should more formally track certain data. (Survey participant 17)

Multiple interview participants also mentioned the lack of and importance of data and technology to combat human trafficking via transportation industry.

I would say for transportation industries, the use of technology, like that APP is very big and I hope that more people will take advantage of that so things like that on airline and an airport, things like running media even a rolling video about this and how to report human trafficking on airplanes showing something maybe ahead of movies. It doesn’t have to be long but
implementing technology that people are already using to speak to them and alert them. (Interview Participant 18)

Among the 25 interview participants, eight pointed out potential human trafficking in the transportation industry in two ways: 1)
transportation industry personnel and/or personnel on the transportation modalities as victims of human trafficking and exploitation 2) transportation personnel as perpetrators of human trafficking.

**Transportation industry personnel as potential victims of human Trafficking.**
In the first case, truck drivers, ship operators, boat operators and ridesharing drivers are provided examples for potential human trafficking, indentured labor and exploitation in the transportation industry. Multiple participants recalled the potential exploitation and human trafficking in the trucking, especially long-haul truck drivers, news in the Los Angeles area in the last decade. Also, victims working in ride-sharing for livelihood was pointed out.

Uber drivers I’ve heard anecdotal stories about victims becoming drivers in their spare time. I have heard accounts of survivors, saying that they had to work all the time, if it wasn’t time to provide to be exploited, then they had to be out stealing and returning the products to make money and or you know, whatever they could do to make money that’s what they do so. (Interview Participant 20)

**Transportation personnel involved in human trafficking.**
Six participants raised their concerns about the active involvement of transportation personnel in the human trafficking crime. Trucking and ridesharing are provided as examples where transportation personnel participates in the crime of human trafficking either as a buyer or facilitator in the case of sex trafficking while bus driver involvement was noted for the case of labor trafficking. Potential examples of facilitation were recruiting riders and transporting victims (knowing that they are a victim) between locations where the act (sex or labor) was performed. While some of these concerns were through anecdotal accounts, others were through victim services and confirmed cases of human trafficking.

I have heard about obviously when we talked to survivors they always talk about how they were required to work truck stops up and down the state, as they were being transported and so I know that sometimes the truckers are the perpetrators or the purchasers (Interview Participant 17).

**Recommendation.**
In this section, we present the recommendations for transportation industry from the experts, especially from the interview participants.

**Education, training and awareness.**
Among the 72 survey participants, 64 provided recommendations to transportation industry. 30 of these recommendations are about education, training and awareness. All 25 interview participants agree that education, training and awareness efforts in transportation are key to combat human trafficking. Education and training throughout the transportation industry creates opportunities for awareness and serves as a great tool for victim identification.

It really goes beyond airports, it goes beyond the flying experience and the actual transportation. At some of our trainings we have representatives from car rental facilities, from Uber Lyft they’ve had initiatives combating this as well, and even hotel people that work in the hotel… but as far as the transportation, whether you’re at a rental car facility and you’re seeing something an exchange or something there that alerts you or you’re at a hotel and you’re seeing something there or you’re in an airport or you’re on the plane or you’re in a food court or restaurant, these are opportunities that every layer of the travel of your transportation line. Every layer and step have to be aware and train, because if we all are, it creates layers of defense where if it gets through one way maybe someone in the security line or TSA will see it and put a stop to it, but if we have all layers that are there in place trained and aware, with the tools and resources to know what to do. (Interview Participant 18)

Many different key points were raised for consideration when building comprehensive education, training and awareness programs. For example, initiatives should.

- Consider safety and security of all
- Be inclusive of all types of human trafficking
- Include a reachable contact information
- Be survivor informed Be clear and include correct
- Be culturally and linguistically appropriate
- Be strategically planned
- Be repeated multiple times and updated

**Safety and security.**
Trainings should emphasize the safety and the security of the victim, the transportation personnel and the community members. While the intentions of the transportation personnel are good, intervening a suspicious activity should be done with caution otherwise it might put the involved parties in danger and/or risk the exit opportunity of the victim.

Creating toolkits for drivers to learn about what human trafficking could look like and how to properly provide tips to law enforcement if they think that their route has been used as a means for human trafficking as well as safety for them if they think that someone in their car is being trafficked? … what is a safe way to intervene? how do you stay safe as a driver and why it’s important for drivers, not to do certain interventions and try to be a hero. (Interview Participant 5)

**Clear and detailed representation.**
Human trafficking can be hard to identify and react to, especially when the trafficker or the perpetrator is present with the victim. A person who wants to help needs to be able to assess the situation and apply the appropriate steps. First of all, correct representation of human trafficking should be used. This includes the images used as well as forms of human trafficking to make sure the victim, transportation personnel as well the public understands the notion correctly. There should be a step by step guidelines with different examples so when one encounters with suspected human trafficking cases, they know which actions to take in which order. Moreover, support mechanisms should be in place and emphasized to ensure survivor informed, victim centric and trauma informed approach (will be discussed more in section 5.4). Also, in some cases good intentions might actually put the victim in more danger. For example, in the case of child trafficking, without the necessary support mechanisms the child might be put back into their daily setting which might be the resource of their exploitation.

They have a sign, a girl with chains, which I do not like that side because chains are not the way that it does happen here but it’s a very, very small percentage that happens internationally. Human trafficking or sex trafficking in California, or in the US looks completely different and it’s usually grooming and friendships is what happens… If their perpetrator or their family who’s trafficking them get on a bus, what does the bus driver do? … sometimes a child’s put right back in the situation that they shouldn’t be a part of. So I think transportation needs have to step by step, almost a playbook if this happens do this, like a flow chart so that is not something so academically written that it takes a PhD to explain the details, but something very user friendly. (Interview Participant 14)

**Culturally and linguistically appropriate initiatives.**
One of the most common recommendation from the experts is to ensure that the initiatives are culturally and linguistically appropriate. This is important for the victim to be able to recognize the signs of human trafficking along with how to ask for help as well to the transportation personnel and the public to be able to react to. This requires decision makers to analyze the population and make sure to include alternative languages.
I had an operator tell me, because the buses are the place where you can shelter in place safely, so this woman ran onto the bus and she was like in tears and screaming but she only spoke Thai and the bus driver didn’t know how to help her, and so, in my training there were other management and they said, “well, we have this language line, you could have called OCC, the Operation Control Center, we could have got you the language you could have talked to this person.” (Interview Participant 16)

Strategic planning and execution
The initiatives should be strategically planned and placed based on the interactions of the transportation personnel as well as the community needs. In addition to the language, the initiative should assess the potential vulnerabilities and common practices and beliefs in those cultures. Awareness and education before and during major and rare events, such as sports events and COVID-19, was also highlighted to understand the vulnerabilities and interdiction opportunities. The initiatives should also incorporate all types of human trafficking not just sex trafficking. While sex trafficking is more widely known in the media as well as public, initiative should also incorporate the labor trafficking as well. The initiative should ensure information about contact options, phone and/or text so that victims, public and transportation personnel can report the incident.

Buses travel agencies things like that they’re going to be very important hotspots. Obviously airplane airports airplanes having the flight attendants be aware, but also the TSA folks will check the luggage, they may know something like that. Those people who are there at these transportation areas transportation hubs like greyhound so on if they’re trained to spot. It’s not just spotting sex trafficking it’s spotting labor trafficking as well. So, having these posters posted in languages with a telephone number to contact would be extremely useful at those locations, employment agencies, travel agencies, Greyhound, bus stops metro, you name it, it’s if these strategic locations have a telephone number and with the right messaging I think that’s going to be an important. (Interview Participant 1)

Collaboration/coordination partnership
Along with education, training and awareness initiatives, partnership, collaboration and coordination was second most suggested recommendation (24 out of 25 participants). Many forms of partnerships and coordination were suggested ranging from survivors to industry wide coordination among the same as well as different modalities. One interesting partnership that was raised multiple times was the partnership with celebrities as an outside the box strategy to raise awareness in general public as well as raising issues in the entertainment industry both as victims and perpetrators.

• Partnership with survivors
  I believe partnerships are very important, and I believe survivor leadership again is really key in these programs towards helping to inform with their lived experience how to best reach those that are being trafficked. I believe bringing that lived experience into training for airlines and for airport workers is key. (Interview Participant 18)

• Partnership with local human trafficking task forces
  Transportation industry should get involved with their local if there’s a community-based task force addressing human trafficking. I think they should get involved to send a representative or at least on a national level, someone from their system or corporate office be involved. (Interview Participant 20).

• Partnerships with non-profits
  We also have a partnership with the Alliance for Girls and the other community-based organizations that they are involved in. … They help us both on the policy and training side on how we can better respond, but they also provide us with community resources that could be referred to a potential victim if they didn’t want to get involved. (Interview Participant 7).

• Partnership with local governments and law enforcement
  I think it’s good to not only have partners within the other government agencies, the city agencies, those people that are going to be touched by this kind of stuff should definitely be at the table we are discussing, not only for San Francisco but other law enforcement agencies within the Bay area, because we know that some things are the same, some trends are the same, some recruiters are the same as we say, bus or train or as Bart. As we know Bart is here that they can be transferred from one place to another and then those are really good that you have these outside law enforcement aids so we can share this information about what we see and if someone is saying the same grooming techniques, one of the best ones are probably when you have two individuals or more that don’t even know each other, you never met and they tell you the exact same story of how they got groomed, I was standing on the bus stop and this person came to me and the other person says yeah I was standing near the bus stop and this person came up to me. And this is what happened during exactly the same well either that confirms what you’re saying is that it happened or to have that coincidence is rare, and then you have say now 35 people telling you the same thing. (Interview Participant 10)

• Partnership and coordination among other transportation entities in the same modality or across modalities
  I think the more networking that can be done between various transportation modes so that they’re not in isolation that they can connect with one another and say what are your best practices and what can you do to eliminate this but I don’t know if there’s any networking done between these various modes of transportation like between BART and between VTA and/or the VTA’s of various cities I don’t know what’s happening versus in San Francisco or even the ferry system, what is happening in the transportation industry across the bay. So I guess that would be a key question I would have is are there connections between like the cab services and the various other services that go from airports does the airport have anything to say about the policies of that do they network with them about what’s going on (Interview Participant 12)

• Partnership with celebrities
  Think out of the box and try to get more awareness and get different partners. Pitch stories about you know transportation human trafficking and things like that to sort of. You could reach out to the Writers Guild and see if you could make a presentation to writers about the issue in order to raise awareness (Interview Participant 6)

Technology, data and analysis
Third area commonly recommended is the efforts to collect and share data with regards to human trafficking in the transportation (22 out of 25 interview participants). Participants mentioned the need for data for understanding parties involved in trafficking, both victims as well as the perpetrators, to see how transportation is used in human trafficking and how it can be used to combat human trafficking. Seven interview participants share their desire to learn more about perpetrators, how they use transportation and how they update their tactics to alert the transportation personnel.
I think just doing research is really important, and then I think, just for like case management, knowing the new, latest tactics is important. Who knew many years ago pimps were targeting bus stations, like greyhound bus station, but there was a trend that kept coming up “Oh, I came to greyhound that’s where he recruited me”... so they have tactics and strategies on how they recruit so if anything comes up that has to do with transportation, I want to know about it, so I can pass that on just for safety measures for the women that I serve. (Interview Participant 15)

Many uses of technology are suggested for combating human trafficking, such as 1) how to collect potential surveillance data 2) how to report and track reported cases 3) enable access to training and tracking of the results. One participant specifically points out the need for responsible data collection practices.

I think, making reporting easier so through technology as, as you know what we’re trying to implement with our local VTA is a big advantage or possibility. (Interview Participant 22)

Emphasis on survivors

18 out of 25 interviews emphasize the importance of survivors and building practices in the transportation industry that are survivor informed and survivor centric. This requires involving survivors in the trainings and any program development as well as providing necessary support mechanism to survivors to become leaders. For example, when planning trainings and/or outreach events having survivor leaders present to learn from their lived experiences is a gold standard. Another suggestion was to empower survivors through opportunities via transportation industry. Examples include hiring survivors in the transportation industry and support for professional development.

• Victim centric support

It will take a coordinated effort with agencies outside of transportation services and with various other within the transportation system itself... depending on where you’re at private transportation services would be appropriate, or it may be in rural communities having certain hours that are dedicated that are for like a safe space for individuals that maybe need transportation or even working with on task forces and law enforcement and providing transportation for during and after operations ... if law enforcement had a partnership with a trained individual that is a taxi driver Uber drivers on that could come and just transport individual from one place to a safer place that is pre-arranged great and then they’re not showing up in a cop car and that to me would be more of a victim centered approach. (Interview Participant 24)

• Empowering victims through professional development

Shared Hope Conference is the primary sex trafficking conference in the nation if transportation industry would partner with Shared Hope and make sure that every survivor that wants to go there as transport for nothing from where they are in the United States, then that would be a huge healing aspect for the survivors. (Interview Participant 21)

Policies, their implementation and support

Experts also highlight the importance policies and their implementation for transportation industry to combat human trafficking. The policies recommended range from policies regarding the victims/survivors, transportation personnel and general decision makers.

Transportation as a safe harbor/heaven

Six interview participants suggest transportation industry implement safe haven protocols and harbor programs across different modalities and local regions to ensure successful exit attempts. Different types and mechanisms of safe harbor programs are proposed including designated vehicles and designated support mechanisms to enable safe and free transport for the victim. These require partnership across different stakeholders for victim centric transportation and funding to support these programs.

Intervention protocols maybe a safe harbor program whereby I’m being beaten up by my exploiter. I can flag a taxi no money in my pocket or my you know or my wallet and they can charge an 800 number, and the only thing that they have to be able to give is. I don’t know some kind of identifier so it’s not abused, but something that says yeah there was an incident going on here. These kind of Safe harbor programs could be really amazing across all forms of transportation. (Interview Participant 23)

Screening of the employees for potential perpetrators

Transportation industry can have policies around screening employees. For example, they can have a similar protocol as the policy around revoking motor vehicle licensing when charged with human trafficking where industry personnel cannot work when charged with human trafficking. Rules around these might be beneficial for certain sectors such as ridesharing.

There’s been a lot of reports of actual trafficking happening at the hands of an Uber driver or a Lyft driver and sexual abuses and things of that nature happening so there’s been more discussion about how do we qualify and/or screen our drivers and when there’s been a report of one of them doing something like that and sharing that data amongst the ride sharing community because they weren’t just let’s say you rape somebody and you’re working for Uber and then you just stop working for Uber and go over to Lyft. If they don’t share the data and so there’s another piece that needs to be kind of looked at as well. (Interview Participant 23)

Being accountable to their own employees

Three participants specifically mentioned the need for proper classification of transportation to ensure avoiding exploitation and human trafficking in the transportation sector.

Transportation has a lot of things, but one, I think it could start by cleaning up its own act, I think making sure that classification of people is done properly, especially in the drivers part of the equation both the warehousing and as well as drivers. They need to properly be classified as employees not independent contractors, this is one of those things where everything could be it doesn’t just go to the side of you know, transporting products but, if you think about Uber and Lyft, they are employees. Compliance rate in the industry itself who’s actually being listed as independent contractors at that I think is a telltale sign of the problem itself with it the transportation industry. (Interview Participant 1)

Policies for vulnerable populations

Policies about vulnerable populations, particularly for children, was mentioned by multiple participants. Checking for documentation when travelling with minors, especially for flights, can be beneficial when combating child trafficking. Others mention an Amber alert system for missing children during transportation.

I never really understood, for instance, as a parent when traveling with a minor, and I find it blows my mind that I don’t have to provide documentation for children when we’re traveling through the United States and that just blows my mind. One of our consultants was transported through multiple different situations and checks and was never identified. When, as a young black girl and a white woman is like transporting her through these locations and she doesn’t have the proper documentation and that’s never like caught or never addressed, even though I think there was a screening at one point and the trafficker was asking multiple questions, but I still feel like there should be some more additional checks.
for that, especially for flights, you know that could take place in the transportation industry. (Interview Participant 25)

Support for implementation of policies

Policies around human trafficking are essential to combat human trafficking in transportation industry. For the successful implementation of these policies, transportation industry personnel need support such as assistance with training materials and sharing best practices.

I think the availability of training material that can be provided to agencies is critical, because once they’ve been given a mandate to train employees, it’s very difficult for each agency to create their own training program so there really needs to be standardized training programs that maybe could be modified, . . . it so works for their employees and in a format that is deliverable because some agencies prefer online training some agencies prefer in person training scheduling . . . I think a deadline to have to be realistic, to say tell transit agency within the next year, you have to have 100% of your employees trained for small agency that might not be difficult, for a large agency like us that’s very difficult. . . . I think it’s important that when the regulations are sent to industry that there’s feedback from industry on what will make this work before the regulations implemented, and I think that rulemaking process really needs input from stakeholders both from victim advocacy people from the law enforcement side from the victims themselves and from the criminal justice system and from whoever the effective industries are in the transportation industry, (Interview Participant 7)

Conclusion and future directions

While transportation is not necessary for all human trafficking cases, it plays a significant role on combating human trafficking as traffickers often rely on transportation for different stages of human trafficking. This study focuses on the role of transportation in combating human trafficking in California, which is a transportation hub and has the highest number of human trafficking cases reported in the US through multi-disciplinary anti-trafficking survey followed by expert interviews. The set of participants cover a diverse set of individuals from different backgrounds, roles, locations and expertise level.

The results from the survey and the interview conducted in this study show that transportation have many roles when it comes to combating human trafficking, such as transporting the victims, informing the public and serving as an exit mechanism for victims. Experts state that transportation is used in all stages of human trafficking but it is mainly used in trafficking operations to transport and control victims. Sometimes transportation vehicle is actually the place where the exploitation takes place. The choice of modality changes based on the type of trafficking, location, industry and the stage of trafficking.

Awareness and training are crucial components to combat human trafficking. While majority of the experts are aware of AB2034, the main transit effort legislation in California, awareness on transit agency efforts is low among the multi-disciplinary practitioner group. Collaboration with and among transportation agencies is also important. Currently, there is almost no data is collected with regards to transportation. Thus, there is a huge gap in baseline understanding before any improvement.

Limitations and future research

The results from this study are to present the general picture from California through multi-disciplinary expert input. To the best of our knowledge, it is the first of its kind research to address the human trafficking and transportation intersection through multi-disciplinary input in any geography. The limited geography, the new topic and the limited project time result in limited number of survey respondents. As a result, small sample size is the biggest limitation of this study as it does not have the sufficient power to extrapolate the statistical analysis results to the overall population. Thus, the results, at least the survey results, should be approached in caution and interpreted as a first step to understand the role of transportation in human trafficking.

While this study focuses on findings from only one state, we hope that it will provide important insights and directions for other locations due to California’s unique mix of characteristics that can touch upon many geographical, transportation modality, population mix, dispersion of cities, and industries. Moreover, the study covers anti-trafficking practitioners from diverse expertise levels, backgrounds, including personnel in the transportation industry, survivors, government, non-profits, etc. We believe that these multi-disciplinary set of experts provide a comprehensive overview of current awareness as well as future directions on the intersection of human trafficking and transportation that other states can benefit from. In the future researchers can duplicate the same methodology to other states to assess the role of transportation in combating in the rest of the US and other parts of the worlds. Having specific details for each state and geography will aid in representing a better picture of the crime of human trafficking and how transportation intersects with it. Particularly, how different transportation modalities partake in different geographies and how they can learn from each other to increase the effectiveness of current and future efforts.

Future research can also focus on using different technology and policy tools to start and improve data collection methods with respect to transportation and human trafficking. Effectiveness of data collection and reporting from both anti-trafficking organizations as well as transportation agencies should be studied. Another important related topic is the analysis of relevant transportation related information to understand the current reporting mechanism, such as the use of alert systems on different transportation modality for reporting human trafficking and related crime. 6.2 Directions and Implications for Transportation Organizations

 Conversations with the multi-disciplinary stakeholders highlight many strategies for transportation organizations to combat human trafficking. We summarize the key findings based on frequency that they are mentioned.

1. Educate, train and raise awareness among the transportation personnel and public for the signs of human trafficking, how to recognize and report them to ensure the safety of the victims/survivors, transportation personnel and the community.
2. Create strategic partnership in the community, especially with local human trafficking task forces, and other transportation agencies.
3. Utilize data, analysis and technology to increase the effectiveness of identification, reporting, sharing and interdiction strategies, such as tracking victim, driver and perpetrator information.
4. Have survivor leadership in all these efforts to ensure they are survivor-informed, culturally and linguistically appropriate, inclusive for all types of trafficking, tailored down to the needs of the modality, population and location.
5. Develop and successfully implement policies such as safe haven policies.
6. Be accountable for their employees and make sure that transportation industry personnel are not victims or perpetrators of human trafficking.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

The authors are unable or have chosen not to specify which data has been used.
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Appendix A. Supplementary data

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