



International Women's Day Event Series

7 March - 14 March 2023

About Roads Australia

[Roads Australia](#) (RA) is the peak body for roads within an integrated transport system, representing an industry that contributes \$236 billion annually to the economy and supports 1.4 million jobs. RA brings industry, government, and communities together to lead the evolution of Australia's roads, integrated transport and mobility.

RA's members include all of Australia's transport agencies, road owners, major contractors and consultants, material suppliers, service and technology providers, and other relevant industry groups.

RA's policy focus extends across five activity streams: Safety, Capacity, Transport Reform, Customer Experience and Sustainability. Diversity and Inclusion are a commitment across each stream.

Event Summary

RA is committed to building a transport sector industry that attracts and retains a more diverse workforce for the future. To further build on this, RA held a series of lunches around the country between the 7th and 14th of March to support 2023 International Women's Day.

Each lunch included a keynote speech from inspiring women in the industry followed by a diverse panel discussion.

Key Points

- Construction and transport sit alongside mining as the most male dominated industries in Australia.
- Increasing the participation of women in transport and construction will unlock economic benefits and address the critical skills and labour shortage it is facing.
- Quotas and targets are part of the solution, but not the whole answer.
- The culture of the industry is a barrier to women entering the sector and it must be changed to improve diversity.

Questions to take away

- How can industry and government accelerate the culture change to encourage more women's participation?
- What innovative steps can the transport industry take to provide more flexible workplaces?
- How can we use storytelling to encourage more women to join and stay in the transport industry?

Gender equality in transport

Achieving gender equality is a moral imperative.

“Gender equality is not only a basic human right, but its achievement has enormous socio-economic impacts.”

- [United Nations Women Australia](#)

Gender equality is crucial to diversifying the workforce and ensuring everyone is provided with the same opportunities, regardless of their gender. Gender equality is not unique to the transport sector, it is a global issue.

In Australia, the split of the population between women and men is almost equal but the participation of women in the transport workforce is low. Aneetha de Silva outlined that the transport sector is male-dominated with only 12% of the workforce comprised of women.

Therefore, there is an opportunity to attract more women into the sector and alleviate the substantial labour and skills shortages it currently faces.

Across RA’s International Women’s Day lunches speakers told stories from their experience in the transport industry and called for the sector to continue striving toward a more diverse and representative workforce.



Looking back on the history of female involvement in the sector, progress has been made.

At the Sydney event, Silje Troseth reminded the audience that in 1927, Transport for New South Wales (TfNSW) required female employees to resign upon marriage, independently of their role or contribution to the organization.

Compared to the situation 100 years ago, the industry has made meaningful progress. However, there is still more work ahead to achieve gender equality.

Without transformative change, it will take 100 years to achieve gender balance in CEO positions across the ASX’s top 300 companies, of which many have a significant influence in the transport sector. Business as usual is not an option but it appears that transformation to achieve gender equality is not happening fast enough.

“Throughout any career, men and women, we can all face hurdles, but I do think broader society and this industry are changing for the better.”

- Camilla Drover, Transport for NSW

If the industry wants to create a sustainable workforce and retain talent, it cannot wait another 100 years to achieve gender equality.

Throughout the event, speakers emphasised the importance of modernising the sector and the need for women in the industry to be seen, supported and respected to normalise their participation.

Creating a sustainable workforce

“We are facing critical skills and labour shortages.”

- Aneetha de Silva, RA

Australia is delivering the largest and most ambitious pipeline of transport projects in history.

These are vital projects that will increase productivity, improve our cities, reduce road injury and trauma and move freight more efficiently.

However, this rapid growth in the project pipeline has occurred in an increasingly challenging national and global environment.

Since 2020 there has been a significant deterioration in the economic, geopolitical and social climate. Moreover, a workforce shortage is a reality today for the roads' sector.

Infrastructure Australia, in its [2022 Market Capacity Report](#), found that as of October 2022, public infrastructure projects face a shortage of 214,000 skilled workers.

Now more than ever, it is critical that the industry has a sustainable workforce given the high demand for staff in the construction sector and a strong infrastructure pipeline over the next decade.

And more women in transport projects could enhance the sustainability of the workforce.

For the sector to deliver this project pipeline and gain the full value of these investments, it must utilise the full available workforce in this country.

Equal gender representation is the key to accessing an increased pool of prospective employees but encouraging women's participation in the industry won't just fill roles, it will improve the industry.

There is a wealth of evidence that shows women's leadership and workforce participation benefits economic prosperity.

In a 2020 report, [Diversity Wins: How inclusion matters](#) McKinsey & Company found that diverse companies are more likely to outperform less diverse organisations on profitability.

There was also research undertaken on [The Role of Gender in Team Collaboration and Performance](#) which concluded that team

collaboration is improved greatly by the presence of women in the group.

By embracing gender diversity and creating opportunities for women, the industry stands to benefit from their unique perspectives, skills and contributions, ultimately leading to improved outcomes and success.



Cultural shift

“We all have a role to play in welcoming the people we work with and making them feel connected.”

- Rebecca Want, GHD

The culture of the industry was identified by speakers as a significant barrier preventing women from joining the industry.

A major culture shift is required for the industry to help attract and retain women.

Work is underway to change the culture of the industry, led by the [Construction Industry Culture Taskforce](#) (CICT).

The CICT is working to improve productivity and offer a great workplace experience for employees in the construction sector.

Since August 2018 CICT has been working to develop a new Culture Standard. The objective of this policy is to lift the productivity and performance of construction and address the major issues holding back our industry – excessive work hours and fatigue, poor mental health and failure to attract a diverse workforce.

The Culture Standard is now being piloted across jurisdictions and a range of project and contract types to strengthen the evidence base for its adoption.

Along with improving the working conditions and mental health of employees in the sector, speakers identified the importance of the work by CICT and called for the industry to diversify its way of thinking.

Historically, the industry has had prescriptive and inflexible experience and skill requirements for roles.

LinkedIn produced a [Gender Insights Report: How women find jobs differently](#), after examining the job search behaviour of its users.

Findings from the report outline that women are less likely to apply for positions they viewed on the website and less likely to apply for positions that were more senior than their current position when compared to men.

On average, women already apply for fewer positions and specifically fewer senior positions than men.

By explicitly advising job seekers that the full criteria for the role do not have to be met to apply and by promoting gender equality in the advertisement more women can apply for positions in the industry.

Growing female representation in the industry requires a shift from existing conceptions of who is the best fit for the role to being open to diverse experiences and skills.



“Take a chance on someone.”

- Camilla Drover, Transport for NSW

Co-creating change

“So much change has occurred because brave conversations are happening everywhere, workplaces, worksites and dining tables.”

- Nicole Stoddart, Rail Projects Victoria

International Women’s Day celebrates and puts the spotlight on women, but women alone cannot achieve gender equality.

Across the events, there was a clear message from speakers that we’re all on this journey together and all learning how to do things differently.

The female speakers also placed a strong emphasis on the influence of male allies in the industry and how they influenced their careers for the better.

Without them, their achievements and success in the industry may not have happened.

Importantly, if we want to change the balance, everyone must change the balance.

Together, women and men need to change how they see their roles. If only women are changing, we are just asking them to do more, not participate equally.

All speakers during RA events agreed on the importance of challenging incorrect assumptions rooted in gender stereotypes.

Belinda Virant outlined one of Arcadis’s strategies to tackle this issue is to train their leaders to recognise and confront unconscious bias.

This proactive approach aims to create a more inclusive and equitable environment by addressing biases that may exist unconsciously.

By actively working to disrupt gender stereotypes, the industry can foster a culture that values diversity and promotes equal opportunities for all.

Fostering productivity with flexibility

“Women are still largely the main carer for children, but this should not mean they have limited opportunities in the workplace.”

- Judith Formston, Department of Infrastructure and Transport

Across all the events, providing more flexible workplaces was a key conversation topic.

Despite evolving societal expectations, women still face barriers to securing a career that is consistent with managing other personal commitments, particularly for those supporting young families.

Although the responsibility of personal commitments commonly falls to women, flexible workplaces don't just benefit women.

A flexible workplace empowers all employees, creating an environment for them to have a balanced life without sacrificing their careers.

Part-time work and role-sharing are examples of how organisations can offer flexible workplaces.

Flexible workplaces offer significant benefits to both employees and organisations. They serve as a valuable tool for attracting and retaining talented individuals, enabling skilled workers to remain employed even when they might have otherwise been forced to leave their positions.

These arrangements allow organisations to retain valuable expertise while providing employees with the flexibility they need to balance work and personal commitments.

“Focussing on performance, not focussing on hours.”

- Rebecca Want, GHD



In a tight labour market, employers who fail to provide flexible working arrangements will place a further hurdle in front of achieving a gender-diverse, representative and sustainable workforce.

While there is still work to be done, a speaker acknowledged the significant progress the industry has achieved toward flexible workplaces. It wasn't that long ago that paid parental leave didn't exist.

Belinda Virant shared her personal experience of transitioning from parental leave to part-time work in the industry.

After their first child, Belinda successfully returned to work, taking on a lead role in a major project while working four days a week. However, when returning from parental leave the second time her project manager refused the request to continue working four days part-time citing project constraints.

Ultimately, Belinda revealed she did not secure the part-time role, but her story shed light on part-time work and that it can be a viable and effective option in the industry.

Belinda's story underscored the fact that the level of workplace flexibility often depends on individual managers.

Change industry perceptions through storytelling

However, it also emphasized the need for a broader shift, where flexible working becomes the norm rather than the exception. By embracing flexible work arrangements, the industry can empower employees to maintain their careers while balancing personal responsibilities, fostering a more inclusive and supportive working environment for all.

In an industry heavily driven by timing and cost considerations, the feasibility of flexible workplaces is an ongoing concern.

A speaker addressed this by emphasising that despite these fixed constraints, solutions can always be found to accommodate flexibility.

The industry has seen and continues to see the successful implementation of flexible work arrangements.

The key to making the industry a more flexible workspace is through recognising and valuing the importance of flexibility in the industry while investing in technology and systems that support a flexible and dynamic work environment.

If the value is placed on the concept of flexible workplaces, the industry can foster an environment to ensure flexible arrangements are successful and a reality.

With common barriers to female career progression including external commitments, the importance of providing flexible working environments cannot be overstated.



“Stop talking about roads just as pavement – you can do anything in the transport sector.”

- Anne Moffatt, Department of Transport and Mains Road

A focus for the keynote speakers and panel discussion was the need to change the perception of the industry and its available career pathways for women.

Right across the transport and construction industry, recruiting and retaining the skills necessary to deliver the nation’s infrastructure pipeline is an ongoing challenge.

While the industry has modernised over several decades, outdated perceptions are proving resistant to change, creating difficulty in recruiting talented, young and diverse individuals to the workforce.

Speakers and panellists mentioned the perception that a career in transport is not often perceived as inclusive, exciting, or flexible, a view both public and private organisations are working hard to transform.

“Telling the story of the broader picture of what we’re actually doing as engineers and designers and in construction and that’s building these really thriving and beautiful cities, connecting people and making our lives better for the future”

- Leigh Grant, WSP

Through increased partnerships with the education sector, from secondary school job fairs to tertiary education events, there is a strong desire to reshape perceptions and communicate the endless career opportunities across both the construction and transport industries.

Achieving this change can be done by partnering with schools to break down the perception that STEM fields are not suitable for women before their careers begin.

Growing female representation

“The target shouldn’t drive the outcome; it should assist the outcome. Having a mentor or seeing a role model is really important.”

- Judith Formston, Department of Infrastructure and Transport

All speakers acknowledged the efforts of the industry in driving change and improving gender-diverse recruitment and retention across the transport and construction sectors.

While historically the focus for achieving gender equality was targets and quotas, it was widely acknowledged by speakers that they are only part of the solution.

Targets are important and a good measurement tool since what gets measured gets done. If nothing else, quotas encourage decision-makers to think about diversity. Targets are an opportunity to show progress or lack thereof toward gender equality.



However, all speakers urged the industry to move beyond checkbox exercises and instead strive for long-term initiatives that will create meaningful and lasting change.

“We can’t truly shift the dial on getting more women into infrastructure and transport if we wait until they’ve left school to try and attract them.”

- Nicole Stoddart, Rail Projects Victoria

Another strategy is to facilitate girls-only events which a speaker said emboldened them to pick up the tools and participate, instead of observing.

We also need to help women already in the industry see that there are career pathways for them. Work must be done to retain them. Speakers highlighted the need for leadership teams to build a solid base of retention, which can be done by providing quality training, coaching and mentoring.

Achieving a true women-representative workforce will not be done organically, with perceptions of the sector needing to change. The opportunity is, then, to plan with strategies that are longer-term, are properly followed by quotes and indicators and ensure efforts to shift the image of the sector focused on those choosing careers at their early stages of their professional life.



RA would like to extend its thanks to all speakers who participated in the International Women's Day event series across Australia.

Adelaide

Judith Formston, Deputy Chief Executive, Department of Infrastructure and Transport

Kate Gilchrist, Director of Transport Major Projects, WSP

Sarah Elliott, Chief People Officer, John Holland Group

Ana Guzman, Regional Executive, Transport & Geotechnical, SA, WSP

Brisbane

Anne Moffat, Chief Operating Officer, QLD Department of Transport and Main Roads

Hollie Hynes, General Manager, Laing O'Rourke

Rebecca Pickering, Interim Chief Executive Officer, Australian Rail Track Corporation Limited

Emma McCaughey, Bid Manager QLD & PNG Business Unit, CPB Contractors

Evelyn Storey, Managing Director QLD, Aurecon

Hobart

Her Excellency the Honourable Barbara Baker AC, Governor of Tasmania

Denise McIntyre, GM State Roads at Department of State Roads Tasmania

Yvonne Rundle, Director, Metro Tasmania

Harrier Christopherson, General Manager – Pre-Contracts Australia, McConnell Dowell

Nicky Pollington, CEO, pitt&sherry

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Duncan Elliott, Chief Executive Officer, North East Link Program

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Camilla Drover, Deputy Secretary, Infrastructure and Place, Transport for New South Wales

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Belinda Virant, Business Area Director – Mobility, ARCADIS

Rebecca Want, Market Leader Transport, GHD