



STRENGTH IN DIVERSITY

EMPOWERING WOMEN IN THE TRANSPORT SECTOR

A NATIONAL CONVERSATION



National
Women in
Transport

Women Leading Transport



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Amplifying pathways in partnership

International Women's Day (IWD) provides an opportunity for us all to reflect on how far we've come in establishing a more diverse and inclusive culture across the transport industry as well as a chance to challenge one another to do more.

Construction and transport are industries with diverse career options, and major projects being delivered right across the nation. This year's IWD theme, as prescribed by the United Nations, is 'Count Her In: Invest in Women. Accelerate Progress.' This is based on the priority theme for the United Nations 68th Commission on the Status of Women. Globally, we're at a crossroads when it comes to gender equity outcomes, with significant improvement needed in several crucial areas to meet key UN Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

The theme is timely as the transport sector continues its journey towards an environment where women are not just accepted, but welcomed and sought after, from construction sites to boardrooms.

The transport and infrastructure sectors can play a key role in economically empowering women across the nation, while meeting the capacity and workforce constraints that are placing a handbrake on the timely delivery of Australia's infrastructure pipeline.

Labour force data from the ABS released in 2022 showed women currently make up around 27.4 per cent of the transport workforce in Australia, at a time when Infrastructure Australia has identified a shortfall of 229,000 full-time infrastructure workers in its 2023 Market Capacity Report.

Not only is there a lack of female representation in the overall transport workforce, but women are also lacking representation at a senior leadership level, with just 4.5 per cent of transport CEOs female, compared with a national average of 20 per cent.

At a time when the sector is facing an extreme labour shortage over forward estimates, increasing female participation in the transport workforce is not just a mechanism to bring a broader range of perspectives and skillsets to the industry but also an economic imperative for the nation as we work toward the delivery of a strong 10 year rolling pipeline of major infrastructure projects.

Further highlighting the importance of opening a national dialogue on the economic empowerment of women was the release of employer gender pay gap data from the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) for the very first time on the eve of IWD.

While progress is being made across the transport industry, construction remains one of the most unrepresentative sectors, with the low level of women in senior positions and overall participation numbers remaining low, the gender pay gap is a pressing challenge facing the industry.

According to WGEA, the median gender pay gap in the construction industry sits at 31.8 per cent, despite 71 per cent of employers having a policy for equal remuneration. The Australian Government is seeking gender pay gaps within all organisations of more than 100 employees to sit within the plus or minus five per cent range. There remains a large amount of work to be done by the construction industry to establish a truly representative sector. The WGEA data, which is now publicly available, increases accountability for the private sector and establishes an annual benchmark from which to measure the effectiveness of policies and procedures to address this issue at both a government and individual organisational level.

Last year, Roads Australia (RA) set an ambitious goal of achieving gender parity on its Board. Following a member ballot at the beginning of 2024, RA is pleased to announce that the Board has reached gender parity within just 18 months of this target being set, through an open and meritocratic process.

RA's Diversity and Inclusion Strategy is focused on three key themes, one of which is gender equality through attracting and retaining women in the transport sector.

While RA is pleased to have met its internal target, there is a large body of work to be completed to change perceptions about the industry and create a culture that welcomes and continually supports a diverse workforce.

As part of RA's commitment to supporting a future in which participation barriers and gender pay gaps are no longer hampering the economic capacity of the sector, lunches were held in every state capital city in the lead-up to IWD, bringing together senior leaders from across government and industry to share examples of best practice, challenge each other to do better and acknowledge the journey we're collectively on.

RA partnered with National Women in Transport for this IWD event series, an Australian Government initiative that aims to showcase, support and increase the number of women working in transport.

This initiative was first launched at an RA IWD lunch and is administered by the National Transport Commission. The National Women in Transport speaker bureau has grown from 15 speakers to nearly 80 today; a resource RA regularly utilises when forming panels for important events.

This report is a summary of the key topics that emerged from discussions across the nation, where common themes emerged as to what we need to do as an industry to change perceptions, attract and retain a diverse workforce and how this shared journey advantages us all.

“Getting women into our transport and infrastructure sector isn't just a nice thing to do. It is important for our social and economic fabric.”

Jessica Hall

Deputy Secretary

Department of Infrastructure,
Transport, Regional Development,
Communications and the Arts

A national conversation

**6 events
in 6 states**

**69
organisations
represented**

**1200+
attendees**

Whole of society effort

The Women’s Economic Equality Final Report shows that \$128 billion can be realised for the Australian economy by purposefully removing the persistent and pervasive barriers to women’s full and equal participation in economic activity.

While every industry is working towards removing these barriers, they’ve proven difficult to break through across the transport and construction sectors as evidenced by the gender pay gap data reported by WGEA.

A key theme emerging across RA’s IWD lunch series was the need for perceptions to be changed about the nature of work in the construction sector and the culture of the workforce.

Crucial to shaping this effort is not just focusing on the direct pathways into the industry through apprenticeships and traineeships, although important. Changing the misconceptions around the industry requires a whole of society effort involving enhanced community engagement, starting in schools and touching the broadest possible cross-section of society.

Across industry, this engagement has been a strong focus, with organisations like CPB Contractors running an immersive program for students on the Cross River Rail Project, which has exposed more than 2,800 students to the industry, career options and the reality of working on city-shaping infrastructure.

We have a long way to go, shifting perceptions about our industry being a place purely for men in hard hats but the hard work is underway, building from the ground up and ensuring the next generation of women know the industry is one that will welcome and include them, while providing economic opportunities difficult to come by in comparable sectors.

“To make the industry more supportive for women we have to rethink the way we do business.”

An Nguyen
CEO

North East Link State Tolling Corporation

Attracting women

The ability to attract women to the sector goes hand in hand with changing the perception of the industry across society.

With women increasingly looking at the sector as a viable career opportunity the next step is ensuring the recruitment process and training experience meets the requirements of a modern industry.

This work starts by tailoring job descriptions to a more diverse audience, highlighting the support available, training programs on offer and the flexible working arrangements to support women who are more likely to be balancing family, work and unpaid care commitments.

Once individuals enter the sector, important work remains to provide wraparound services to make the transition into the industry as simple and supported as possible.

This requires well-structured pathways with traineeship programs, internal training support, and ongoing investment from governments to support apprenticeships for women entering the sector.

An example of a program working to attract women to the sector is the 'Relaunch your career' initiative of GHD which supports individuals returning to work after a career break through a 10 week paid, flexible program with the potential and goal of ongoing employment. The flexibility of the program has supported many women returning to or joining the industry following a career pause.

Both the public and private sector have a large role to play in incentivising new demographics to enter the transport and construction industries, while communicating the diverse opportunities available, from engineering to community engagement and everything in between.

With such an array of careers on offer, once perceptions shift about the true nature of the industry, increased female participation will bring broader perspectives to decision making, help address capacity constraints and provide economic benefit to individuals, organisations and the Australian economy.

“Women should have the same opportunities to enter the industry and the same opportunity for promotion.”

Minister Simone McGurk
Western Australia Government



Retaining women

Retaining women in the transport sector is an ongoing priority for organisations represented across the IWD lunch series, with construction and transport jobs experiencing high rates of workforce attrition.

Recently released data from Wellness in Infrastructure shows us that anxiety, burnout, stress and depression are at above average levels across the construction sector.

In order to retain a high performing and diverse workforce, it is essential to continually improve the culture of the industry, particularly important in retaining talented women.

The Construction Industry Culture Taskforce is working hard to make construction an employer of success through a number of initiatives including the Culture Standard. This includes a commitment to wellbeing, time for life and diversity and inclusion policies.

Across the IWD lunch series, keynote speakers and panellists shared the extensive number of programs being invested in to support the retention of women. Examples include Jacobs' Women's Network which forms part of its Diversity and Inclusion work. This brings together women from across Jacobs' global network of employees to drive reform, bring gender diverse perspectives to the table and challenge norms.

Essential to retaining women in the workforce is an understanding that career progression is possible, unlimited by gender, with role models and senior leaders visible within organisations.

“The industry was pretty content that someone was going to solve this for us. Industry is now recognising the need to focus on gender equity.”

Peter Bennett
CEO
Clough

“If you're visible it means people see you, hear you and your contribution is acknowledged.”

Roberta Constantin
VP
Energy and Resources Bidding Department
Clough - Webuild Group

Visibility of women

Given the historically low level of women involved in the transport sector, the number of females in infrastructure leadership positions is well below the average when compared with other industries, with this senior representation continuing to be a lagging indicator.

Keynote speakers and panellists across the nation all touched on the importance of having champions, allies and role models within the industry and individual companies to encourage women to see the career progression opportunities available and have the confidence to put themselves forward for new roles and promotions.

Quotas and gender equity targets within some companies have fast tracked women into leadership positions, bringing new perspectives to crucial decision-making forums.

One of the major initiatives bringing attention to the number of inspiring senior women is the National Women in Transport speaker bureau, which is a publicly available online resource with a listing of senior female transport officials.

This bureau includes senior leaders from both public and private sectors. Speakers are senior leaders across different modes and specialties. The website is free to use and enquire.

In addition to National Women in Transport, there are initiatives like Women in Rail, (Australasian Railway Association), National Association of Women in Transport and Women in engineering, (Engineers Australia) that are shining a spotlight on the importance of having more women involved in the infrastructure sector.

As with the attraction and retention of women in the transport sector, greater visibility of women in diverse roles within the sector was continually highlighted as a key pillar in empowering women to grasp the economic opportunities that come with a career in transport.

“Companies and economies with excellent diversity of gender and culture perform better.”

Katie Cooper
CEO
Metro Tasmania



Recognising international experience

In order to deliver a record rolling 10 year \$120 billion pipeline, the infrastructure sector requires hundreds of thousands of additional workers, with the most acute shortages in skilled fields like engineers.

Part of establishing a modern, diverse and representative sector is not just appropriate gender representation but also cultural diversity.

A greater recognition of qualifications across borders not only economically empowers women but provides a boost to Australia's major project delivery.

Many migrant workers find their international qualifications are not recognised in Australia, particularly highly skilled workers in STEM fields. This has the dual effect of stalling the career progression of credentialed women and the infrastructure sector more broadly not benefiting fully from the skills of workers supporting the nation's infrastructure pipeline delivery.



Next steps

The challenges facing our industry in truly representing the broader society in which we operate are clear. We must challenge one another to do better, to acknowledge the issues and take action to create a sustainable workforce that actively supports women at every level of operations and every part of the transport supply chain.

RA will continue to provide policy forums, both publicly and behind closed doors, to act as the conduit between government and industry, sharing concerns, supporting important reform work, ensuring the on the ground concerns of industry are heard by government and aligning public policy with industry capacity. This also includes working collectively with other peak bodies to find opportunities for alignment, collaboration and reform.

As an industry, we must all support the important work being undertaken to create a more diverse and safer sector for all, including through initiatives like the Construction Industry Culture Workforce.

RA's Diversity and Inclusion strategy aligns with these priorities with a three-pronged focus on the voice of youth, engaging and retaining women and Indigenous participation.

This includes RA's Fellowship Program and Future Leaders's Programs which bring together the future leaders of our industry, supporting their career development and changing the face of the industry's senior leadership level.

Reforming our industry will take time, the journey has well and truly started and the time for excuses is over. We can and must do better and RA is well placed to support industry and government alike in creating a more inclusive industry.

“Watch your biases, don't blame anyone, we can do better.”

**The Right Honourable
Dr Jane Lomax-Smith AM**
Lord Mayor
City of Adelaide

“Without acknowledgement, there's only going to be hollow celebration.”

Erica Smith
Bridge Lead WA
BG&E



National
Women in
Transport


Women Leading Transport


Roads Australia
A national conversation 2024

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The National Women in Transport Initiative brings government and industry together to increase the number of Australian women working in transport.

www.womenintransport.gov.au

