

# Broadening Workforce Participation in Transportation: Challenges and Strategies

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Project 2422

October 2025

## Introduction

The transportation industry is incredibly diverse—from the multiple modes it encompasses to the range of roles that are required. There are numerous challenges associated with female representation in the transportation industry workforce. State of practice research highlights reasons why this lack of diversity in the workforce occurs. Fortunately, there are also identified strategies for alleviating the lack of diversity. This report highlights measures that transportation organizations can take to combat some of the workforce diversity challenges they are facing. When organizations are willing to have candid conversations and invest in meaningful progressive policies, this can accelerate a shift in the trust and culture within an industry, making that industry more attractive to the diverse talent pool that exists.

## Study Methods

In recent years, workforce pipeline challenges have emerged as one of the most critical issues faced by the transportation industry. At the same time, the complexity of problems that must be solved to ensure safe, efficient, and sustainable transportation operations and infrastructure also continues to increase. These factors have led to transportation leaders increasingly recognizing the importance of diversity, not just for attracting the number of needed workers but also for supplying the range of backgrounds and perspectives necessary for developing robust and innovative solutions.

The focus of this research is on examining the current state of gender diversity in the transportation industry and identifying strategies for creating a more inclusive model for workforce development. The research includes a comprehensive literature review along with deployment of an industry survey and series of interviews. The findings are intended to serve as a resource for transportation industry leaders that will support inclusion initiatives and policy advocacy to move the industry toward gender parity.

## Findings

While the percentage of women in the transportation industry has increased in the past decade, women remain underrepresented throughout the industry, including being underrepresented in leadership roles. The literature confirms that while some sectors of the transportation industry have better female representation than others, most modes within the transportation industry remain male dominated, and in many cases the data is not even available to fully measure this lack of representation. There are incredible motivations for greater gender diversity within an organization, as it is linked to reduced employee turnover of both men and women, increased attractiveness to potential recruits, and greater job satisfaction, among other benefits. Despite the motivations that exist, there remain challenges to achieving gender parity within the industry. A lack of awareness of the benefits and opportunities in the transportation industry, a decreased sense of belonging that exists due to minimal gender representation, and challenges with intersectionality continue to hinder gender diversity efforts in the transportation industry.

Despite the undeniable challenges, there are successful strategies for increasing gender diversity in transportation that were identified. Outreach to encourage future generations to choose transportation career paths is repeatedly recognized as a beneficial strategy to increase gender diversity. A sense of belonging is a key aspect determining whether a person chooses to remain in the industry in which they are currently employed, and thus mentorship and employee resource groups have been touted as beneficial investments in fostering a culture of inclusivity and belonging among employees. As the diversity of the population continues to increase, the workforce should also increase in diversity, leading to increased opportunities for improvement in the future. Harnessing the ever-changing landscape of the transportation industry as a driver of diversity has the potential to benefit the transportation workforce

significantly. These findings outline the business case for gender diversity, key barriers, and potential strategies to accelerate more inclusive representation in the workforce. Notably, organizations must approach gender balance with intentionality and with a holistic strategy to achieve the greatest success. However, while a significant body of literature exists regarding the experience of women more broadly in the workforce, more insight is needed for the transportation industry specifically.

### Key Takeaways

Interview findings are mostly focused on the primary barriers to achieving more balanced gender representation in the transportation industry and the strategies or initiatives for attracting and retaining diverse representation. However, one interesting observation from the collection of responses related to each participant's journey into and throughout the transportation industry is the general similarities that most women reveal regarding how their careers transition from student to more senior roles, including careers that flourish despite self-doubt and sponsors that have served as champions for them when they weren't in the room to fight for themselves. These similarities among successful women serve as proof to the next generation of women leaders that success does not rely solely on self-assurance, and capabilities consistently surpass personal expectations when coupled with support and guidance. The conclusions and recommendations in this report are derived from the extensive literature review, responses from the survey of the transportation industry, and responses from interviews with various transportation professionals. The literature review indicates that while representation of women has increased over the last several decades, women remain underrepresented throughout the industry, especially in leadership roles. The literature confirms that while some sectors of the transportation industry have better female representation than others, most modes within the transportation industry remain male dominated, and in many cases the data is not even available to accurately measure the lack of representation.

### Policy/Practice Recommendations

Organizations must have a sincere commitment to establishing a culture of inclusivity. This means clearly communicating a business case for DEI and

its importance to organizational values and ensuring leaders demonstrate these commitments through their actions. Purposefully establishing an environment and expectations for behaviors and interactions within the workplace is necessary to limit microaggressions and other destructive practices to achieving gender parity. A culture of respect and value for all individuals in the workplace is essential.

Progress must be tracked and leadership at all levels held accountable for gender parity and cultural transformation to be achieved. Organizations must take intentional steps to ensure intersectionality is top of mind in developing successful strategies and interventions for increasing gender balance. Companies that are strategic and proactive in such efforts will capitalize on the opportunity to engage larger segments of the population. Recognizing the diversity in motivators and values for individuals is key to creating successful approaches to recruitment, retention, and advancement that result in greater representation of women and other underrepresented groups in the transportation industry. This must be reflected in how opportunities are promoted, incentives are designed, and individual value to the organization is communicated.

### About the Authors

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### To Learn More

For more details about the study, download the full report at [transweb.sjsu.edu/research/2422](https://transweb.sjsu.edu/research/2422)



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