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## Women in transport

12 June 2015

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Magdalena Olczak-Rancitelli, International Transport Forum



and truck drivers, and CEOs,  
and...

The role of women in the transport sector is something that needs to be addressed. Women account for only 17.5% of the workforce in EU urban public transport for example, and hold less than 10% of technical and operational jobs. In the United States, women comprise only 15% of transport and related occupations and only 4.6% of commercial truck drivers are women.

Changing these numbers to achieve inclusivity and gender balance in the transport sector is a very ambitious agenda. What is transport-specific about the gender issues? What are the catalysts for change? How can different stakeholders support this aim?

These questions were at the heart of a debate during the recent International Transport Forum's 2015 Annual Summit in Leipzig, Germany. Under the theme of "[Women Shaping Mobility for a Connected World](#)", transport ministers, business leaders, entrepreneurs, civil society and academics shared their experiences and good practices,

and emphasised the message that a strong transport system depends on a vibrant and diverse workforce which includes women and men.

Closing the gender gap in the transport sector is a priority for many governments. "People should succeed because of their training, ability and commitment. Transportation will always be a major factor for all nations around the world. We will need all skilled individuals to operate and manage our networks", highlighted the Canadian Minister of Transport, Lisa Raitt, for whom promoting women's leadership is of paramount importance. Half of the senior executives in the Canadian Ministry of Transport are women, and similarly, gender parity has been achieved across the boards under the Minister's responsibility.

For Susan Kurland, U.S. Assistant Secretary of Aviation and International Affairs, "Women bring a unique perspective to the issues facing a modernising global transportation system. When women are given an equal opportunity to succeed in transportation careers they unlock new pathways for growth and profitability." This reflects the strong engagement of the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT), at the highest level, to attract, retain, and advance the careers of women in the sector. The Department aims to build an economically compelling case by leveraging a growing body of research that outlines bottom-line benefits to transport systems that have greater numbers of women.

The USDOT is fully engaged in these endeavours at national level, and also international level, where it leads [APEC's Women in Transportation](#) (WiT) initiative to increase women's economic engagement in the transport sector throughout the region. A four-pillar approach is taken to achieve this: ensuring access to education, creating access to jobs, increasing retention, and providing a path to leadership. A data framework is being developed in the context of this initiative to enhance opportunities for women's employment in the sector, as well as to improve the sector's infrastructure and services to women as consumers. The results of the survey will be presented at the APEC WiT Forum and Transportation Ministerial in October 2015, in Cebu, Philippines.

But not only women are supporting stronger presence of women in the transport sector. New Zealand's Minister of Transport Simon Bridges indicated that his government promotes parity on boards: 30 % of board members of key transport agencies in New Zealand are women. Similarly, Tunisia's Minister of Transport, Mahmoud Ben Romdhane saw value in having more women as part of the workforce at all levels in transport, including at board level, and indicated he was proud to announce that he has appointed women as CEOs of two major transport companies – Tunisair and the national rail company SNCFT.

Also in the corporate world, leadership and role models are needed. Women in senior management positions can impact board dynamics and broaden a company's knowledge as well as raising its profile. The effect of more women on boards can also trickle down to management and other levels in the hierarchy.

Jessica Jung, Director of Corporate Social Responsibility of [Bombardier Transportation](#), pointed out that in order to increase the number of women in the male-dominated transport industry, it is crucial to set specific targets, develop road maps to reach these,

and implement regular monitoring. Setting targets in the recruitment process is also important. To avoid cognitive biases, Bombardier decided to ensure that a balanced gender mix of candidates is invited to the final interview round.

More women means bringing more talent to transport and a broader view conducive to innovation. For [Robin Chase](#) – founder of Zipcar, Veniam, and the author of the recently published book “Peers Inc” – diversity is vital for creativity. Robin provided the example of Lyft, a car sharing company, intended to be a more woman-friendly option than taking taxis. For Lyft, where 60% of passengers and 30% of drivers are female, gender diversity in decision making is critical to the company’s experience-based growth strategy. Fourteen of Lyft’s 30 executives at director level and above are women, and these include leaders in engineering and operations.

Women’s skills and perceptions are central to addressing different gender requirements in access to transport and mobility, as well as to safety and security. Silvia Maffii, Professor of Transport Planning at Milan Polytechnic, and co-author of the CIVITAS policy paper “[Gender equality and mobility: mind the gap!](#)” (pdf) showed how women and men use transport modes differently. Often, these differences have not been taken into consideration in transport planning, neglecting problems of accessibility and safety and thus limiting women’s social participation.

Moreover, neglecting women’s preferences of transport and mobility may also limit women’s economic participation. [A recent analysis](#) carried out by US researchers shows a negative correlation between commuting time and women’s participation in the labour force. An increase of 1 minute in commuting time in metropolitan areas is associated with an approximately 0.3 percentage point decline in the women’s labour force participation – reflecting women’s mobility patterns: they do not simply commute but do a lot of additional travel.

Gender sensitive mobility planning should be also seen as an opportunity to promote urban sustainability. [A study from Malmö](#) shows that women choose sustainable alternatives to a greater extent than men. Men use cars for 48% of their transport needs, while for women the figure is 34 %. If men started travelling like women, CO2 emissions would go down by 31%, particle emissions would decrease by 21%, nitrogen emissions by 25%, and the noise level would go down by 1 decibel. Reduced negative effects on the environment, accidents and noise imply annual savings of 300 million kronor (32 million euros).

This debate proved how rich the issue of women in transport is and that the enhanced participation of women, with their unique skills and perceptions, is an opportunity that the sector cannot ignore. Next year’s Annual Summit, “Green and Inclusive Transport”, will certainly be an occasion to continue this multi-stakeholder dialogue. So, mark your agenda: 18-20 May 2016, Leipzig, Germany!

## Useful links

Help shape APEC's WIT data framework by contributing your views as private sector stakeholders: [responses via survey](#).

Networking Breakfast "[Women Shaping Mobility for a Connected World](#)", International Transport Forum's 2015 Annual Summit in Leipzig

[OECD work on gender](#)

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