

# Women Marching to the Top of the Transportation Industry

March 2021

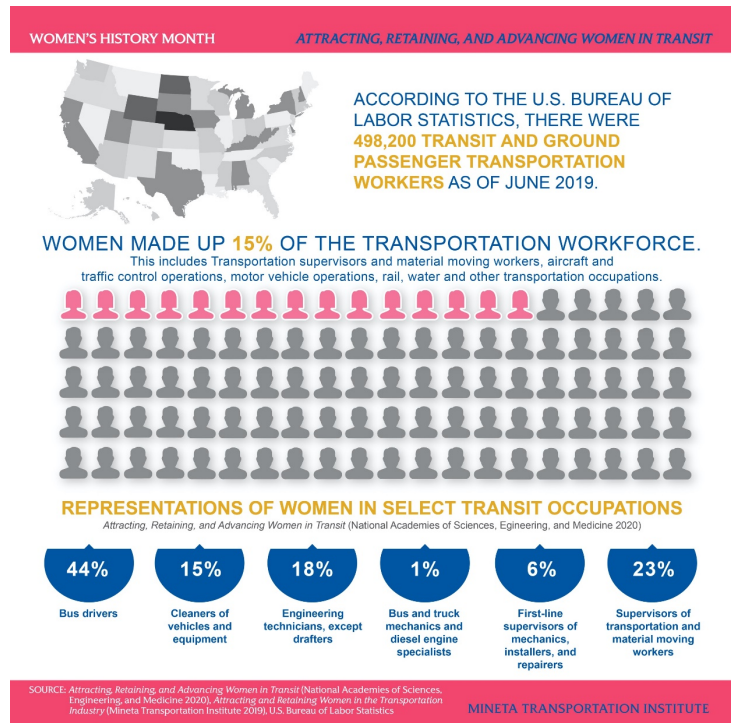
Did you know that research shows that company profits and share performance can be close to [50 percent](#) higher when women are well represented at the top?

Why?

[Gallup research](#) on the benefits of gender diversity shows that men and women’s different viewpoints, ideas, and market insights enable better problem solving, which ultimately leads to superior performance at the business unit level. Gender-diverse workforces also possess wider industry knowledge, have access to more sources of information, and can more easily attract and retain talented women.

However, women have been historically underrepresented in the transportation industry, especially leadership positions. March is International Women’s Month and an ideal moment to review how this disparity affects the industry and people of all genders.

More than half of the U.S. population are women, and more than [50%](#) of transit passengers too—but a 2019 [report](#) from the Mineta Transportation Institute revealed women make up less than 15% of all transportation workers, and the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics reports women made up [24.1%](#) of the “Transportation and Utilities” category in 2020—which includes sectors like trucking (12.4% women), air transportation (31.6%), and rail (7.4%), among others.



[Research](#) from the McKinsey Global Institute found that in the American *workforce as a whole*, for 100 men promoted to manager, only 85 women were promoted—with a much larger gap for women of color (58 Black women and 71 Latinas). At the highest tiers of the industry, the disparity in leadership is even more marked, with women making up only 12.9% of executive officers and 13% of board members.

Again, why?

**WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH** *ATTRACTING, RETAINING, AND ADVANCING WOMEN IN TRANSIT*

**ATTRACTING**

**BARRIER**  
The general lack of effort toward advertising and outreach for job opportunities in transit to women is a significant barrier for women seeking employment in this industry. Similarly, the perception of limited career development is another challenge in attracting women applicants.  
Attracting, Retaining, and Advancing Women in Transit (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2020)

**STRATEGIES**

- Promote educational and career opportunities, focusing especially on minority recruitment efforts
- Connect with young people to promote the industry as a desirable career option
- Improve the image of transit as a career
- Create a gender-balanced panel for all final decisions pertaining to hiring

**RETAINING**

**BARRIER**  
The barriers that arise from being part of a transit organization with an overtly masculine culture result in negative conditions and stress for women in these nontraditional occupations. This results in making it more likely for women to leave this line of work.  
Attracting, Retaining, and Advancing Women in Transit (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2020)

**STRATEGIES**

- To ensure effective cultural improvement, change must occur at every level of an organization
- Provide training and developmental support
- Develop and adhere to a defined succession plan to ensure there is no bias in promotion decisions
- Ensure policies allow employees to take earned time off without fear of retribution upon return

**ADVANCING**

**BARRIER**  
The lack of mentorship for women in transit makes retention and development more challenging.  
Attracting, Retaining, and Advancing Women in Transit (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2020)

**STRATEGIES**

- Encourage participation in professional organizations, especially leadership participation and networking event attendance
- Provide opportunities to learn and be challenged
- Develop internships, apprenticeships, and pre-apprenticeships focusing on women

SOURCE: Attracting, Retaining, and Advancing Women in Transit (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2020), Attracting and Retaining Women in the Transportation Industry (Mineta Transportation Institute 2009) **MINETA TRANSPORTATION INSTITUTE**

While the explanation for the gender gap in the industry is of course complex and multifaceted, [research](#) has shown the main factors contributing to this disparity include general lack of outreach to women, social factors like a masculine-dominant work culture, safety and health concerns applicable to women, and challenges accommodating responsibilities outside of work. This last factor is especially significant in our current economic climate.

The events of 2020 have blurred the lines between home and work and left many families—including those in the transportation industry—worried about their finances as well as their health. But in the U.S., women—especially women of color—have been hit particularly hard. McKinsey research indicates women’s jobs are [1.8](#)

[times](#) more vulnerable to the financial crisis than men’s jobs. Put in other terms, in the United States women ended 2020 with [5.4 million](#) fewer jobs than they had at the beginning of the year, before the pandemic began—while men lost 4.4 million jobs over that same time period—a significant 22.7% difference.

Furthermore, with most schools across the country providing only virtual curriculum, parents (mostly mothers) are burdened with the emotional and financial choice of finding alternate childcare or staying home to care for the kids. Part of this disproportionate impact on women is the persistent cultural and social expectation that leaves them doing significantly more housework and childcare than men—meaning mothers working full-time jobs are essentially working double shifts. Decades of [research](#) indicate women consistently spend more hours in the day than fathers on housework and childcare, and mothers are more than three times as likely as fathers to be responsible for most of the housework and caregiving during the pandemic. Even more revealing, U.S. employers cut [140,000 jobs in December 2020](#), and women accounted for [all the job losses](#)—losing 156,000 jobs, while men gained 16,000. Almost all of these losses were jobs held by Black and Latina women. These women disproportionately work in sectors that have been most negatively impacted, such as [hospitality](#), in roles that already frequently [lack](#) paid medical and family leave.

International women’s month in 2021, therefore, creates an unparalleled opportunity to address a multitude of disparities in the way women are attracted to and treated in the U.S. workforce, including the transportation industry. If companies seize the opportunity to make significant investments in recruiting, retaining, and promoting women and in creating a flexible, inclusive work environment, they can empower women to gain equal opportunity in the workplace and reap the many benefits of diversity and gender equity. Research has shown that benefits of increasing gender diversity in the workplace include a variety of organizational performance [improvements](#) such as increased sales revenue, more customers, and greater relative profits. Additionally, promoting women lays the groundwork for more opportunities as mentoring has been shown to help overcome gender and diversity barriers, and senior-level women are more likely to mentor women of color.

Our industry, and the economy, cannot afford to lose women. Gender equity is good for all genders, the economy, and society. Addressing existing intersectional gender inequities in the transportation industry has the potential to positively influence the way we move people and goods, and the way we understand and empower women—and everyone.

WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH ATTRACTING, RETAINING, AND ADVANCING WOMEN IN TRANSIT

**PROGRESS TOWARD GENDER PARITY REMAINS SLOW NATIONWIDE.**  
**THE BIGGEST OBSTACLE WOMEN FACE IS THE FIRST STEP UP TO MANAGEMENT.**

For every 100 men who were promoted to management...  
 ...only 72 women were promoted in the U.S.

If women are promoted and hired to first-level manager at the same rates as men, we will add **1 million more women** to management in corporate America over the next five years.

**OCCUPATIONAL LEVELS OF TRANSIT POSITIONS WOMEN HOLD**

- 11-21%** Corporate management and supervisory positions
- 12.9%** Executive officers
- 13%** Board of director members

One study, however, found that when looking at transit CEOs, **women were poorly represented.**  
Attracting, Retaining, and Advancing Women in Transit (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2020)

**COMPANIES CAN'T AFFORD TO LOSE WOMEN LEADERS.**  
 If women leaders leave the workforce, women at all levels could lose their most powerful allies and champions.

**Women in the Workplace 2020 study finds that:**

- 1** The financial consequences could be significant. Research shows that company profits and share performance can be close to 50 percent higher when women are well represented at the top.
- 2** Senior-level women have a vast and meaningful impact on a company's culture. More than 50% of senior-level women say they consistently take a public stand for gender and racial equity at work, compared with about 40% of senior-level men.
- 3** Women are more likely to mentor and sponsor other women: 38% of senior-level women currently mentor or sponsor one or more women of color, compared with only 23% of senior-level men.

SOURCE: Women in the Workplace 2020 (womenintheworkplace.com), Attracting, Retaining, and Advancing Women in Transit (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2020)

**MINETA TRANSPORTATION INSTITUTE**

MTI Executive Director, Karen Philbrick, PhD