

Choosing Transportation: Attracting Women to the Profession

Conference Summary - March 19, 2015



Southeast Transportation
Workforce Center

SETWC

at the University of Memphis



Activity Summary

The following is a summary of the breakout session discussions held during the Choosing Transportation Conference, hosted by the Southeast Transportation Workforce Center (SETWC) at the University of Memphis on March 19, 2015. SETWC appreciates the support of its summit sponsors: CN and Vaco Logistics as well as the Intermodal Freight Transportation Institute and the Society of Female Transportation Professionals.



Breakout Sessions and Facilitators

Attracting Professionals to the Transportation Industry	Page 3
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Career Retraining/ Reentry in the Transportation Sector	Page 3
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High School Pathways to Transportation Careers	Page 4
Rachel Allen, Transportation, Distribution, & Logistics Consultant, Division of Career and Technical Education Tennessee Department of Education	
Ladders of Opportunity – Private Sector	Page 5
Julie Ellis, Senior Counsel Butler Snow LLP Jen Frank, Certified Professional Coach Jen Frank Coaching	
Ladders of Opportunity – Public Sector	Page 5
Stephen Edwards, Design Engineer City of Memphis	
Military and Veteran Transition to Transportation Industry	Page 6
Bobbi Wells, Managing Director Business Planning and Analysis FedEx Chris Fears, Veterans Resource Center University of Memphis	
Post-Secondary Pathways to Transportation Careers	Page 6
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High School Student Leadership Workshop	Page 7
Meredith Powers, Career Coach University of Memphis	

Attracting Professionals to the Transportation Industry

A major challenge faced in recruiting professionals to transportation careers is the lack of a national framework that outlines overall employment data, baseline metrics, the economic case for diversity, and progress toward diversity goals. The availability of such a framework would create a great deal of value for individual companies and provide them with a resource for identifying best practice, developing metrics for measuring success, and creating a coherent strategy for increasing the number of women in the transportation profession. Other key barriers identified in this session include a lack of diverse training and educational programs and a lack of communication and training regarding various opportunities within transportation. Some examples of programs that should be promoted broadly to increase the number of women in transportation include:



- USDOT Women in Transportation Initiative,
- International APEC Women in Transportation (www.dot.gov/APECWomen),
- SETWC (www.memphis.edu/setwc) and the National Network for the Transportation Workforce,
- STEM and transportation education and training,
- Transportation YOU (www.transportationyou.org), and,
- www.fastforwardtransportation.com.

At the local level, the following examples are promising for increasing awareness and attraction to the industry:

- Female transportation networking groups like the Society of Female Transportation Professionals and the Southern Automotive Women's Forum.
- Increased outreach to transportation companies from institutes of higher education to develop career pipelines.
- Increased opportunity for career shadowing.
- Conferences such as Choosing Transportation that highlight the importance and role of women in the industry.

There is a significant need for the diversity and value that women can bring to the transportation industry. Women can better position themselves within this field by using informal networking and mentoring. Those in the industry suggest not waiting for mentorship to begin, and instead proactively seek out mentors within the field. Incorporating career ladder awareness and showing how women in entry-level positions can climb the ladder we will ensure a profession's candidates are aware of transportation career opportunities. Additionally, it is essential that men be involved in the conversation and effort to increase the number of women in transportation. Men play a vital role in encouraging, supporting, and providing mentorship to women who are seeking career advancement. Finally, marketing initiatives showcasing top level females within transportation organizations will also raise awareness of the opportunities for success and value of women in the industry.

Career Retraining Reentry in the Transportation Sector

A lack of collaboration is a major challenge facing female populations seeking career retraining/reentry in the transportation sector. More specifically, there are many barriers that education and industry need to work through in order to truly make a difference. A dedicated support system throughout the reentry process that provides resources for help with resume writing, the hiring process, job readiness, work/life balance, the first 90 days on the job, and finally long-term support will be essential to creating a pathway to success. A good example of these practices at work is the program *Go Wyoming* that helps women with children on welfare find suitable jobs.



In an effort to create these types of partnerships and programs to help overcome the challenges faced by women reentering the transportation sector we need to look toward funding community efforts, contacting career leaders, having industry provide "ride alongs" and site visits to potential professionals, and developing an image outreach team to show women that the transportation industry has much to offer. Also, establishing best practices through collaboration to develop programs that assist women in job readiness and development and ensure continued success in the career field is essential. We need to strengthen dual enrollment programs by defining needed programs, identifying and enrolling partners between industry, educational resources, trade organization, etc. Some action steps for moving forward can be seen below:

Action Items for Industry

- Create an image team to develop a showcase of women in their various roles (including realistic videos and a thorough description of various jobs).
- Interview a panel of female truck drivers who could do "ride-alongs."
- Create a one-page document to encourage elected officials to visit your facility and discuss workforce needs.
- Promote educational support systems.
- Develop and provide equipment designed for women (uniforms, seating, ergonomics, etc.)
- Identify best practices to help find the right fit for women based on skill aptitudes.

Action Items for Education

- Create a resource that provides awareness of the available career paths.
- Promote dual-enrollment.
- Connect high schools and post-secondary institutes to help shed light on the various transportation career pathways.

Action Items for Women in Transportation

- Develop "A Day in the Life" videos.
- Promote training programs.
- Serve as a speaker for organizations serving women seeking career retraining/reentry to help women understand opportunities in the profession.
- Acknowledge barriers and promote discussion to address them.

High School Pathways to Transportation Careers

Challenges exist in offering Career and Technical Education programs in transportation and logistics broadly across high schools. Some examples of these challenges include lack of student interest, student/parent perceptions, lack of awareness of transportation careers, difficulty in the placement of qualified instructors, student preparation/performance, lack of resources, etc. Other issues identified include an inability to offer relevant transportation curriculum in every school, difficulty incorporating industry participation and collaboration, and underexposure to the wide variety of career opportunities within the transportation industry.

Engagement with higher education partners (technical schools, community colleges, universities) can help to advance STEM/transportation pathway initiatives by providing real-world exposure earlier in a student's education, emphasizing parent participation and providing awareness of transportation career paths. Top priorities for moving forward include:

- Promote exposure to numerous of transportation areas by connecting schools with industries and business partners and encouraging high schools to foster these connections.
- Make sure schools attain and provide all the necessary resources and information regarding transportation career pathways through collaboration with relevant partners.
- Encourage education leaders to participate in awareness broadening activities.
- Examine best practices in school, industry, and community engagement partnerships.
- Offer courses in transportation in high school (a good source for this: www.state.tn.us/education/cte).



Ladders of Opportunity – Private Sector

A significant challenge faced by women in regard to career advancement within the private sector is balancing multiple responsibilities at home and at work. By learning from the experiences of the people facing similar challenges they may be able to mitigate these barriers. Members of this session recommend the following strategies for success:

- Seek personal growth and positive attitude (embrace challenges, stay active and involved, and learn from situations and the people around you).
- Surround yourself with men and women who support you.
- Don't be scared to bring up salary issues when appropriate.
- Ask for help when you need it.
- Keep an open mind and communicate.
- Network at a young age.
- Have a mentor, but realize the responsibility is your own for this relationship.
- Keep your resume up-to-date.



Ladders of Opportunity – Public Sector

The most significant challenges faced by women in regards to career advancement within the public sector include a lack of available leadership positions and necessary soft skills, imaging and branding issues influenced by gender discrimination, and a generational gap that stifles diversity within the transportation sector. Some programs and strategies that are available to mitigate these challenges include:

- Networking Organizations,
- National Summer Transportation institute (FHWA),
- Education programs that provide awareness of STEM and transportation career paths (Girls Experiencing Engineering at the Univ. of Memphis),
- Internships and/or co-ops within the Public Sector, and
- Mentorships opportunities within the Public Sector.



Additional programs or resources that are needed to support women in climbing the ladders of opportunity include:

- Internships,
- Opportunities for cross-training in different areas,
- Certification programs,
- Tuition reimbursement programs,
- Continued government sponsorship of the Women in Transportation programs,
- Career training opportunities (both internal and external), and
- Improved data collection and accountability for grant funded initiatives to document impact and identify best practice.

Military and Veteran Transition to Transportation Industry

One of the major challenges faced by military members and veterans is the difficulty transferring their unique skill sets to the public and private sectors. Though many skills developed through military experience such as discipline, structure, and a willingness to get the job done are desirable to any sector, some military members have a difficult time selling themselves to future employers and transitioning from military to civilian jobs. Some suggested solutions include the development of resources to:

- Enhance interview skills and résumé development.
- Improve soft skills including written and verbal communication.
- Provide information that clearly shows links between military service and transportation industry jobs and elucidates potential career pathways.



One example of progress in this arena is the University of Memphis's new veterans' resource center that aims to aid the transition from military to civilian life and to help students identify the most relevant major and career opportunities pertaining to their military experience.

Post-Secondary Pathways to Transportation Careers Summary

There are significant challenges faced by post-secondary educators within transportation related programs. These issues include attracting good business partners, obtaining reliable funding, getting young women interested in the industry, and breaking down the social stigma that comes along with transportation related careers. Another major issue surrounding post-secondary educators is conveying the importance of day-to-day social interactions of professionals.



By collaborating and properly aligning the educational pipeline (K-12, technical schools, community colleges, universities) we can overcome some of these challenges. Collaboration including all potential partners would increase awareness of transportation related jobs and allow for a shift in perception regarding how to train future transportation professionals. This shift includes exposing students to all facets of the industry within the first year, thereby allowing students at an earlier point to more readily identify their interests. An accelerated Master's program in transportation would also allow for more industry specific focus at an earlier age.

By creating sustainable and effective partnerships between industry and education we can help to increase students' awareness, interest, and pursuit of/retention in transportation education pathways with the ultimate goal of careers in transportation. In order to move forward, concerted focus on education, leadership, highlighting career potential, and relationship building will be needed. Improving the pipeline through collaborative efforts provides the opportunity to create a career ready and right-sized workforce within the transportation industry.

Leadership Development Workshop for High School Students

Students in this session appreciate the necessity of transportation, identifying that “transportation is essential to society” and recognizing transportation jobs in their day-to-day lives. For example one student remarked, “Everything we use in our day to day lives arrived on a truck or by some other mode of transportation. There are multiple modes of transportation including road, river, rail, and runway.” While students appreciate the importance of the transportation industry, the overwhelming opinion was that they had yet to consider a transportation career pathway because they were not aware of the industry until the opportunity to participate in the Choosing Transportation conference, and lacked understanding of the variety of opportunities within the sector.

When asked, “What resources would help you better understand transportation career options?” the following strategies were suggested:

- Increase access to professionals working within in the field.
- Encourage social networks to provide connections and professional contacts to younger students.
- Continue hosting mixed-attendance conferences (students and professionals) like Choosing Transportation.
- Create social media campaigns to better inform young people of the wide set of options within transportation.

Additionally, students suggested that options such as career shadowing, college programming, and mentorships opportunities offered to high school students would allow them to gain relevant exposure to the variety of opportunities that exist within the transportation industry.

