



Equity, Diversity and Inclusion as part of Health and Safety strategies

A guidance document by the All-Party
Parliamentary Group for Women in Transport

This is not an official publication of the House of Commons or the House of Lords. It has not been approved by either House or its committees. All-Party Parliamentary Groups are informal groups of Members of both Houses with a common interest in particular issues. The views expressed in this report are those of the group.

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Forewords: Ruth Cadbury MP and Jo Field



Ruth Cadbury MP

Chair of the Transport Select Committee; Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Women in Transport 2016-24

A site visit to High Speed 2 before the pandemic highlighted to me the importance of including Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in Health and Safety briefs.

Hearing real-world examples of how workers' wellbeing can be improved by taking into consideration their lived experience and intersectionalities showed how important this in male-dominated sectors as transport and construction.

As Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Women in Transport it was interesting to hear from people working in the industry at our latest roundtable highlighting the real difference integrating Equality, Diversity and Inclusion into Health and Safety could have for them and for the industry as a whole.

By recognising and valuing the unique experiences of every person, we can create a more resilient industry that is not only safer for our workforce, but empowers them to fulfil their whole potential.



Jo Field

President of Women in Transport and CEO of JFG Communications

As President of Women in Transport, I'm committed to championing inclusive practices across our industry - particularly where they intersect with Health and Safety. Too often, these areas are treated in isolation, but a more integrated approach delivers real benefits for both workers and employers.

Inclusive practices can transform working environments. From addressing inadequate Personal Protective Equipment and unsuitable facilities to ensuring safety briefings are accessible to everyone, there is still important work to be done to create safe, supportive spaces for all.

A recent roundtable hosted by the APPG for Women in Transport explored how embedding inclusivity throughout an organisation can significantly enhance employee wellbeing. The link between inclusion and better Health and Safety outcomes is both clear and compelling.

At a time when our sector faces a growing skills shortage, it has never been more important to prioritise Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, safety, and wellbeing on transport construction sites. Doing so will help us retain talent, attract a more diverse workforce, and build a stronger, more resilient industry.

Executive Summary

Purpose

Developed by the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Women in Transport, this document explores how fostering a more inclusive work environment on transport construction sites can contribute to improved health, safety, and well-being for all workers. The report highlights the importance of considering workforce diversity as part of broader health and safety strategies within the transport and construction sectors.

This report is informed by insights from a Parliamentary roundtable discussion held on Monday, 4th March 2024, during the previous Parliament. The roundtable was hosted by Ruth Cadbury MP (then Chair of the APPG for Women in Transport) and sponsored by West Coast Partnership. It also features case studies from Avanti West Coast.

Key findings and recommendations

1. Cultural norms in the rail industry pose significant challenges to health and safety and equalities integration.
 - a. Address microaggressions and unconscious biases, which can create a hostile work environment and hinder the inclusion of underrepresented groups.
 - b. Challenge existing practices and be willing to change norms.
 - c. Ask staff for their experiences, as lived experience holds an immense wealth of information.
2. Diverse teams with varied perspectives lead to better decision-making, improved productivity, and better outcomes for transport users.
 - a. Foster a culture where diversity of opinions is valued and encouraged.
 - b. Consider whether the decision making process enables individuals from diverse backgrounds to raise issues and points to improve.
 - c. Ensure that teams are reflective of the society at large, asking for the opinions and lived experience of people from diverse backgrounds.
3. Sharing best practices from other industries helps foster a more inclusive culture within the rail sector, encouraging broader acceptance of inclusion principles.
 - a. Collaborate with industries like technology, healthcare, and education to gather fresh perspectives and innovative solutions.
 - b. Share best practices and adopting successful models from other fields.

4. Early inclusion of diverse voices in the design process ensures safer and more inclusive outcomes for both workers and customers.
 - a. Consider diversity and inclusion from the outset.
 - b. Ensure that diverse voices are included in the design process and that equalities and inclusion are a core consideration when planning infrastructure.
5. Accessibility is a significant challenge that needs attention, particularly for disabled customers and customers with language barriers.
 - a. Implement technology like CCTV cameras on buses and trains which can enhance safety of both customers and workers, who might otherwise feel at risk of using public transportation alone.
 - b. Consult disabled people about how inclusivity in the transport sector can be improved.

Introduction

The roundtable informing this document explored *'The link between equality, diversity and inclusion and improved health, safety and wellbeing outcomes'*.

Workplace incidents are often preventable, and a growing body of research shows that these can often be linked to underlying socio-economic and environmental inequalities (Flynn et al., 2021).

In this context, transport construction sites are high-risk working environments where health and safety needs to be carefully considered. Historically, this has led to injuries and in some worse case scenarios, fatalities, on transport construction sites.

Macho culture is identified as an issue for the transport sector in one of our previous reports. *'Gender Perceptions & Experiences Working in Transport'* by the APPG for Women in Transport found that over two thirds of women surveyed believe that transport has a macho culture, and 82% of women surveyed agreed that unconscious bias against women is an issue they feel exists in transport (Field & Haddad, 2021). We therefore wanted to explore the link between EDI and health, safety and wellbeing and develop guidance that construction partners can follow.

The roundtable discussion summarised in this document included perspectives from both the government and the opposition, with the attendance of both the then Minister of State for Rail, Huw Merriman MP, and the then Shadow Minister for Rail, Stephen Morgan MP.

The other panellists of the roundtable, whose feedback informed this document, included:

- Richard Braham, Head of Stakeholders & Public Affairs at West Coast Partnership
- Ruth Cadbury MP (Chair), Chair of the APPG for Women in Transport 2016-24
- Jo Field, President of Women in Transport
- Katrina Lorenc, Mobile Crane Operator at HS2
- Pamela McInroy, Senior Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Manager at HS2
- Emma-Louisa Russon, Head of Safety Assurance at Avanti West Coast.
- Rhaynukaa Soni, Head of Health, Safety and Wellbeing at Thames Water
- David Whitehouse, Head of Safety and Security at Avanti West Coast
- Rebecca Young, Skills, Education and Employment Manager at HS2

The audience of senior transport and construction industry leaders also shared their views, which have been included in this report.

The case studies put forward aim to showcase examples of companies already taking this approach forward, which is resulting in improved health, safety and wellbeing of employees.

Section 1 – Summary of roundtable discussion

Cross-party agreement

Both the then Rail Minister, Huw Merriman, and the then Shadow Rail Minister, Stephen Morgan, agreed on the urgent need to improve diversity in the rail industry. They acknowledged the benefits of needing a transport workforce that's more reflective of the customers that use it, not only to drive innovation and productivity within workforces but also to improve outcomes for transport customers.

The role of safety was also highlighted as an essential component to increase the representation of women and ethnic minorities, as women only currently represent 16% of the rail workforce (Hayward, 2024). It was agreed that more inclusive sites are safer sites, and by creating an environment of safety and respect, more people from diverse backgrounds would consider a career in the industry.

Former Minister of State for Rail Huw Merriman emphasised how important a diverse workforce is in delivering a better service to customers, driving innovation and inputting new ideas into a well-established industry like rail.

Former Shadow Minister Stephen Morgan also agreed with Merriman, reflecting that the lack of diversity in the rail industry is ultimately hampering its workforce, making it less innovative and less productive.

These cross-party points of agreement serve as a good example of how necessary it is for organisations to nurture and support diverse workforces. Their willingness to listen to industry professionals also highlighted how these issues require a collective effort from legislators and industry.

Points of concern for the industry

- *Challenging cultural norms and diversity in the industry*

The roundtable discussed how it has become increasingly clear that diverse teams are more innovative, effective, and better at decision-making, leading to safer outcomes for all.

One of the critical points raised was the importance of having a diverse team when making safety-related decisions. As millions of people rely on the rail system daily, it is essential to have a wide range of perspectives when conducting risk analysis and scenarios.

When safety teams are composed of a single demographic, they can overlook the unique safety concerns of other groups. With a more diverse team, it is easier to

reach a consensus and create solutions that reflect the needs of a varied workforce and customers.

- *Learning lessons and early implementation*

The roundtable also highlighted the need for the transport sector to learn from other industries, where the implementation of inclusive practices has proven more successful such as technology. Participants highlighted how this approach would not only benefit the transport sector by learning the best practices from other industries but also to challenge established cultural norms unique to the transport sector, offering a fresh outside perspective.

In this same sense the unique challenge of implementing inclusion strategies early in the process was also discussed. Participants highlighted the implementation of inclusion practices during the first stage of construction, the design phase, as a crucial to the long term success of projects. By implementing these early and consulting a wide array of people with different experiences later mistakes can be avoided when projects are already built.

- *Practical challenges on integrating inclusion and health and safety*

Participants also discussed the practical aspect of integrating inclusion. The adoption of equalities and inclusion in health and safety procedures, audits, and campaigns has led to better health and safety performance, showing how including voices from diverse backgrounds led to a more comprehensive approach to safety.

This implementation can take different approaches as it could involve multiple onsite streams, some examples include:

- Translating briefings into multiple languages,
- Providing inclusive PPE,
- Recognising unique needs such as those of pregnant women, women with menopause or disabled people.

Industry professionals raised other issues such as modern slavery and other forms of discrimination that are also key concerns in creating a safe environment.

Conclusion of roundtable discussion

The discussions highlighted how integrating inclusion practices into health and safety strategies is a complex task that faces numerous challenges. To create diverse workforces and safe environments, a multi-faceted approach is necessary. This includes culture change, cross-industry collaboration, and a strong focus on inclusion from the earliest design stages.

Section 2 – Key findings and recommendations

1. Address cultural challenges in the workplace:

A key obstacle to integrating inclusion into health and safety is the deeply entrenched culture within the rail industry, often characterised by a lack of diversity and a reluctance to change. Changing the culture requires questioning long-standing norms and practices.

Participants pointed to a common attitude of "*this is how we've always done it*" as one of the main challenges to modernisation. Many expressed a desire for a more willing mindset open to new ideas and diverse perspectives. To challenge these pervasive attitudes it's necessary to:

- Address microaggressions and unconscious biases, which can create a hostile work environment and hinder the inclusion of underrepresented groups.
- Challenge existing practices and be willing to change norms.
- Ask staff for their experiences, as lived experience holds an immense wealth of information.

2. Foster diversity within teams:

Part of the obstacles to challenging the established culture within the sector lays within the structure of the teams themselves, the lack of diversity of teams within the rail industry makes it difficult for people from different backgrounds to challenge established attitudes.

Furthermore diversity within teams is essential for better decision making and also to improve the outcomes for transport customers, as staff which represents the customers is central to avoid preventable points of conflict within transport systems. To enable to benefit from a diverse workplace culture is necessary to:

- Foster a culture where diversity of opinions is valued and encouraged.
- Consider whether the decision making process enables individuals from diverse backgrounds to raise issues and points to improve.
- Ensure that teams are reflective of the society at large, asking for the opinions and lived experience of people from diverse backgrounds.

3. Cross-industry collaboration:

To break out of traditional norms, the discussions highlighted the necessity for the rail industry to learn from other sectors which have successfully integrated inclusion into health and safety. To foster a more inclusive culture within the rail sector, the industry can:

- Collaborate with industries like technology, healthcare, and education to gather fresh perspectives and innovative solutions.
- Share best practices and adopting successful models from other fields.

4. Implementation in design:

While a lot of the discussions centred around the integration in the build and operate stages, the design phase was also pointed out as a critical opportunity to integrate inclusion into health and safety. As retrofitting into existing projects can often be difficult and costly, it's necessary to:

- Consider diversity and inclusion from the outset.
- Ensure that diverse voices are included in the design process and that inclusion is a core consideration when planning infrastructure.

5. Accessibility and inclusivity:

Accessibility remains another significant challenge in the rail industry. It's essential to consider the needs of all customers and workers, including disabled people, language barriers, or other access requirements. Some ways to overcome these include:

- Implement technology like CCTV cameras on buses and trains which can enhance safety of both customers and workers, who might otherwise feel at risk of using public transportation alone.
- Consult disabled people about how inclusivity in the transport sector can be improved.

Section 3 – Case studies: the importance of gender diversity at Avanti West Coast

At Avanti West Coast, safety is not solely defined by procedures, it is fundamentally about people. Every day, thousands of our employees, contractors, and passengers travel along the West Coast Main Line, each bringing unique backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives. To uphold the highest standards of safety, it is essential that our teams reflect the diversity of those we serve, starting with gender representation.

Case study 1: Progress on gender representation in safety

In 2019, the Avanti West Coast Safety Team comprised four female employees. As of 2025, this figure has increased to 10, including representation at the leadership level resulting in a 50/50 gender balance across the department.

This advancement reflects a combination of strategic intent and a cultural shift towards greater inclusivity. Recruitment processes have been enhanced through the use of diverse interview panels, comprising individuals from different teams, backgrounds and genders, ensuring a more equitable and welcoming candidate experience, while broadening the talent pipeline.

In parallel, the implementation of a flexible working culture has supported improved work-life balance. Team members are empowered to manage their working hours independently, contributing to increased employee satisfaction and operational efficiency without compromising performance or delivery.

Employee spotlight: Emma-Louisa Russon's journey

Emma-Louisa's career at Avanti West Coast exemplifies the opportunities made possible by an inclusive and supportive workplace.

After completing undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in Ancient History and Archaeology, Emma-Louisa began her railway career in 2013 with Virgin Trains, working in the Wolverhampton booking office. In 2016, during her maternity leave following the birth of her first daughter, she applied for a role in the Safety Team as a Data Manager, a decision motivated by the need for more family-friendly working arrangements.

Despite her initial uncertainties, Emma-Louisa was successful in securing the role and began her new position shortly after returning from maternity leave. Within six months, she was promoted to Safety Performance Manager. Not long after this promotion, she learned she was expecting her second child.

“Initially, I was concerned about how it would be perceived,” Emma-Louisa explains. “But the support I received from the team and leadership was unwavering. They were positive, understanding, and fully supportive.”

Following her second maternity leave, Emma-Louisa returned with a renewed sense of purpose and commitment to her career. With the encouragement of the Safety Director and the broader team, she explored further development opportunities and continues to grow her career within the department. Emma-Louisa is currently the Head of Safety Assurance within the Safety team at Avanti West Coast.



Case study 2: Pulling in the right direction – driving gender equality in rail

In January 2023, Avanti West Coast launched *Pulling in the Right Direction*, a landmark campaign designed to increase the recruitment of female drivers and position rail as an inclusive, forward-looking career choice.

A centrepiece of the campaign was a tribute to Karen Harrison, one of the UK’s first female train drivers and a pioneering advocate for women in rail. Working with world-renowned street artist Akse P19, Avanti West Coast commissioned a striking 8m x 5m mural at London Euston Station. This visual celebration of Karen’s legacy pointed thousands of passengers and online users to Avanti West Coast’s careers site, driving awareness and engagement around the 2030 goal ‘for 50% of driver applicants to be female.’

Innovative recruitment tactics

Guided by gender-based insights, Avanti West Coast campaign identified two primary barriers preventing women from entering the rail industry, limited visibility of the profession and an inaccessible application process. In response, a series of innovative recruitment tactics were introduced to address these challenges. The approach aimed to create a more inclusive, approachable, and modern recruitment experience.

To support the campaign and modernise the recruitment experience:

- Avanti West Coast developed the rail industry's first social recruitment chatbot to guide and inform prospective applicants.
- The driver application window was extended from 24 hours to 7 days, creating more equitable access to opportunities.
- A targeted communications plan supported organic social media activity and strategic media engagement.

Results and impact

The campaign delivered exceptional results, both in reach and reputation:

- 1,500 female applicants since the campaign's launch (compared to 394 total from 2020–2022)
- Increase in female applicant share from 13% to 15%
- 14,349 completed chatbot sessions
- 285 total media articles, including 13 national and 7 broadcast features
- 99.7% positive sentiment across coverage
- 3.7 million total social media reach

Pulling in the Right Direction has become more than a recruitment campaign; it is a statement of intent. By combining creativity, innovation, and purposeful storytelling, Avanti West Coast is not only attracting new talent but also championing a more inclusive future for the rail industry.

Conclusion

At Avanti West Coast, we are committed to embedding gender diversity as a core element of our organisational culture. Our approach is centred on enabling all colleagues to succeed based on merit, capability, and equitable access to opportunity.

To sustain and build on this progress, we encourage the following principles:

- **Design Roles with Inclusion in Mind:** Job descriptions clearly outline working expectations and flexibility options, ensuring transparency and inclusivity from the outset.
- **Enhance Access to Development Opportunities:** Learning and professional development are structured to accommodate diverse personal responsibilities.
- **Modernise Working Models:** As the railway operates on a seven-day basis, flexible and adaptive working patterns become the norm. These models not only support staff wellbeing but also strengthen talent retention and attraction.

Looking forward

While we are proud of the progress achieved to date, we recognise that inclusion is a continuous journey. We remain focused on cultivating an environment where diversity is both valued and operationalised, contributing to a safer, more resilient, and forward-thinking railway.

By championing diversity within safety, we are not only enhancing organisational performance - we are reinforcing our commitment to the wellbeing of our people and the communities we serve.

Section 4 – Conclusion

The evidence heard at the APPG for Women in Transport’s roundtable discussion clearly demonstrates that embedding inclusive practices in the workplace is not only a moral imperative, but also a strategic one.

The challenges faced by the transport and construction sectors – be they skills shortages, safety risks, or resistance to change – can be addressed by adopting more inclusive practices that accommodate the diverse needs and experiences of all workers.

From entrenched habits that perpetuate exclusion to the practical barriers preventing equal access to safe working conditions, it is clear that the transport and infrastructure industries can do much more to build inclusion into every stage of the process – from design to delivery to operation. A more inclusive workforce is a more innovative and productive one, ultimately benefitting both the people who work within the sector and the millions who rely on its services.

The discussions, alongside the case study from Avanti West Coast, reflected the need for cultural change, industry-wide collaboration, and early intervention in design. Inclusive approaches, such as providing appropriate PPE and translating safety briefings, are already yielding positive results in progressive organisations.

To drive meaningful progress, inclusion must be treated not as a separate initiative but as a core component of health and safety strategies. With continued collaboration between Government, industry leaders, and frontline workers, we can foster a transport and infrastructure sector that is not only safer but genuinely inclusive, equal, and resilient.

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About

About the APPG for Women in Transport

The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Women in Transport is a cross-party group of MPs and Peers, launched in 2016. The Group provides a forum to discuss and overcome the under-representation of women in transport by promoting best practice examples of employers leading the way in gender diversifying their workforce and by being the voice for all women using our networks. Women in Transport acts as the Secretariat for the APPG and supports parliamentarians to deliver its activities.

The Group is Chaired by Elsie Blundell MP.

About West Coast Partnership

The West Coast Partnership is a joint venture between FirstGroup and Trenitalia to run existing intercity services on the West Coast Main Line and deliver future high-speed services.

We will use the experiences of FirstGroup in UK rail and Trenitalia's in Italian high-speed rail to be a trusted and flexible partner for the Department for Transport and HS2 Ltd. Our partnership is comprised of two businesses: Avanti West Coast – who run the existing high-speed services on the West Coast Main Line, and West Coast Partnership Development – who are the shadow operator for future high-speed train services.

West Coast Partnership have kindly sponsored this report.

About Women in Transport

Women in Transport is a not-for-profit that empowers women in the industry to maximise their potential. Membership provides exclusive access to events and professional development programmes.

Women in Transport provide secretariat support to the APPG for Women in Transport.

About JFG Communications

JFG is a public affairs and PR consultancy that is helping the transport and infrastructure industries to decarbonise and diversify their workforce. We work



with partners aligned with our purpose and together we engage, inspire and influence to deliver change.

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