

Gender diversifying transport essential to industry's future, MPs say

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Today, industry leaders and parliamentarians highlighted the importance of improving women's representation in the transport workforce to ensure the industry's sustainable future.

Marking International Women's Day at a meeting hosted by a cross-party group of MPs and Peers, Wendy Morton MP, Minister of State for Transport, commented on the need to access untapped pools of talent to address transport's skills shortages.

The Minister said: "As Rail Minister, I know only too well the challenges facing women in this male dominated industry and I'm absolutely determined to work with colleagues across the sector to remove these barriers and increase representation.

"Developing the huge untapped potential of girls and women will be vital to ensuring transport remains sustainable for the future and I look forward to working with the APPG to make sure this happens."

The Minister's comments come amidst an ongoing 'skills gap' threatening the industry through a shortfall of skilled personnel, from HGV drivers to engineers.

Shadow Minister for the Railways, Tan Dhesi, noted the importance of having women's voices shaping the direction of the industry.

Dhesi said: "Historically, like other transport sectors, rail has been incredibly male dominated. That means men setting the agenda and making decisions in a sector there to serve us all.

"We need to make sure a diverse range of voices are heard in rail – and across other transport sectors – to challenge, shape and improve our industry's direction of travel.

"Representation at all levels is key, yes, but crucially we must focus on ensuring senior roles, where decisions are made, are filled in a way which reflects the makeup of our society."

The MPs' comments were made at a virtual meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Women in Transport, a group of parliamentarians committed to tackling the underrepresentation of women in the industry.

Lilian Greenwood MP, APPG officer and meeting Chair, said: "With only around 20% of the whole transport workforce being women, it is clear far more must be done to ensure underrepresented groups know the industry is for them, and have clear routes in.

"As well as recruiting a diverse array of people, tackling underrepresentation is also about retaining people who join the industry. Research carried out by the APPG in 2021 showed not enough is being done to create inclusive working environments that encourage retention. That has to change."

The virtual meeting also heard from industry leaders in the maritime, rail, aviation, and automotive sectors, who outlined the importance of improving diversity and inclusion in their sectors.

The panel suggested improvements could be made through initiatives such as women's networks, apprenticeship schemes, and mentoring programmes.

Jo Field, president of Women in Transport and Secretariat of the APPG, said: "Today's event demonstrated the weight of support behind gender diversifying the transport workforce from parliamentarians and the industry.

"Bringing together so many sectors has shown what we have in common, and how solution-sharing can help the whole industry move forwards together.

"We hope to continue this dialogue between transport sectors, and between industry and Government, on these issues."