



Audio transcript

## The Rail and Road Pod

### Episode 12: Women in transport and challenging gender bias

The topic of conversation this month ties in with International Women's Day on 8 March, the day which celebrates women's achievement and raises awareness against gender bias.

Our topic for discussion is women in transport, specifically how both the rail and road industries are changing to improve their culture to be more inclusive, flexible, and open and encourage more women into roles within the industry.

Hosted by Sneha Patel, Deputy Director of Highways at the Office of Rail and Road. We're joined by four guests: Annette Pass, Head of Innovation at National Highways; Christine Fernandes, Chair of Women in Rail; Erika Diaz, Talent Consultant at Network Rail; and Joanne Crompton a steam locomotive fireman at the East Lancashire Railway, Bury, and also at Llangollen Railway in North Wales.

We hear them talk about experiences, the challenges women face and how to create a more inclusive industry and why women should be encouraged to enter into the transport sector.

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**Joanne Crompton, steam locomotive fireman at the East Lancashire Railway, Bury, and also at Llangollen Railway in North Wales:** There are women in signal boxes. There are women in P-wear gangs. There are women in management, and it's getting that representation to them and showing that they can do that. They can see themselves in them positions.

**Dr Annette Pass, Head of Innovation, National Highways:** When I started at National Highways or Highways Agency, as it was then I was told when I was in quite a junior policy role that I actually wouldn't get anywhere, because I wasn't a civil engineer. The only people who made it within that organisation were civil engineers. Times moved on very significantly from that over 20 years ago.

**Erika Diaz, Talent Consultant at Network Rail:** As an industry now with GBR (Great British Railways), I would love to see more representation in those senior roles, because I think that's the key message that we need to say to people is, "You come and join industry, there is progression for you,"

**Christine Fernandes:** I think that there will be a big wave of change within the William Shapps Review that they refer specifically to EDI. We know in National Rail contracts, there are quotas that have to be achieved. I've got to say that in general, through my 30 years of experience, everybody seems to be actually on it.

**Dr Annette Pass:** You need a diversity of thought leadership. You need to be able to attract the talents into roles. If you're being very narrow-minded about what you think good looks like, then you really are wasting a lot of available talent that's out there.

**Sneha Patel, Deputy Director of Highways at the Office of Rail and Road:** Hello, you're listening to The Rail and Road podcast. The topic of conversation this month ties in with International Women's Day on the 8th of March, the day which celebrates women's achievement and raises awareness against gender bias.

Today's topic for discussion is women in transport, specifically how both the rail and road industries are changing to improve their culture to be more inclusive, flexible, and open and encourage more women into roles within the industry.

My name is Sneha Patel, Deputy Director of Highways at the Office of Rail and Road. We're joined by four fantastic guests today. I'll let the guests introduce themselves.

**Annette Pass:** Hi, I'm Annette Pass. I'm Head of Innovation at National Highways.

**Christine Fernandes:** Hi, I'm Christine Fernandes. I work for CAF and Business Development, but I'm here today in my capacity as Chair of Women in Rail.

**Joanne Crompton:** Hi, I'm Joanne Crompton. I'm a steam locomotive fireman at the East Lancashire Railway, Bury, and also at Llangollen Railway in North Wales.

**Erika Diaz:** Hi, I'm Erika Diaz. I'm a Talent Consultant. I work in Network Rail.

**Sneha:** Great. Thank you all for joining today. Before we get into the conversation, and hear a bit more about your experiences of working in the transport industry, I wanted to provide some context for our discussions with some recent statistics from a report published by Women in Transport. Women make up 47% of the UK workforce, yet account for only 20% of transport workers. The women in Transport report also found that 68% of women agreed or strongly agreed that transport is seen to have a macho culture, and 66% of women did not agree that women and men are treated equally in the transport sector.

Opinions were also mixed as to whether people felt that the transport industry is committed to achieving a more gender-balanced workforce, but most women agreed or strongly agreed that there is a wide range of opportunities in the transport sector. 83% of women felt proud to work in the transport industry. I think reflecting on some of those statistics, from my own perspective, both the rail and road sectors are very male-dominated, but I think times are starting to change. We're starting to see more women in the sector, and also more women in senior positions.

I personally feel very proud to be a woman working at the Office of Rail and Road, and to be part of that culture and environment that starts to see women coming into the workplace, and changing this state that we see. I'm keen to hear views from my guest today. What are your reflections on these statistics and maybe what do you see as some of these problems that are coming through? Annette?

**Annette:** I think they are very interesting statistics. One of the things is there's actually quite a lot of diverse career and job opportunities within the transport sector. I think that probably when you look at that mix, the gender balance is probably different across them. Certainly, within their construction and operative roles, there is a very heavy male bias to that. Within the more managerial positions, the diversity has certainly increased quite dramatically. That's what I've seen over the last 20 years or so working in highways.

**Sneha:** Christine.

**Christine:** I'll give a rail perspective, if I may. I've been in the industry some nearly 30 years. Looking at the statistics in rail, we're probably looking around about 18%

gender diversity, certainly in mid-range managerial roles, that significantly drops off. When you move to the executive positions, you're probably looking around about between 3% and 5% which is not great. On a positive note, I can say, my beginning as an undergraduate sponsorship, a student in engineering that the demographic is changing and beginning to change.

Not only that, I think that there's an acknowledgment that things have to change, and that each more individually, people are wanting to do their bit to try and improve gender diversity. It's about whether we look at changing, setting targets. Does that drive the right behaviours, or do we change the environment about how we can actually bring more women into the field, and certainly into the broader remit of transport?

**Sneha:** Erika, did you have any thoughts on this?

**Erika:** Yes, I agree with both point of views. In Network Rail, for example, this is the fifth year that we have reported in pay gap. We have actually see a slight increase in women representation. From the previous year where we have 18.4%, we have increased to 19%. Obviously, with the challenge of COVID and retaining and attracting more women into the rail industry is not easy, but it's positive to see that there have been some changes in our attraction and retention at Network Rail.

**Sneha:** Recognising some of the statistics and what you've all said, I guess an obvious question would be what attracted you to the industry in the first place, knowing that there isn't so much gender diversity and women are less represented? Christine?

**Christine:** Okay, it sounds dreadful, but my passion wasn't the rail industry. It was by default or stealth, should I say. I chose to do engineering at university. As part of that process, I looked at all the businesses that were offering some form of sponsorship scheme. In all honesty, I went for British Rail, because you've got a free travel pass, and it sounds absolutely dreadful, but do what 30 years on, I'm still here, and I think I've done the rail industry, a disservice by not genuinely taking on it as a number one solution when I was looking.

I didn't know what available, or what opportunity there was in the industry. I think that's one of the difficulties, it's not just about the stem subjects, but it's the whole diversity of opportunities that are there from IT, to statistics, you name it's, in the industry. We we've just got to actually be able to make people aware of that, and more so females aware of that, of what's available.

**Sneha:** Erika

**Erika:** Agree when I joined the rail industry originally from Columbia, so didn't know anything about trains or anything like that, and I work in London in finance. When I was looking to make the move finance to a different industry, I was looking for a company that had flexible working, because I just became a mum when I changed my career, and for me that was very important that I could join a company where I didn't felt judged.

As you said, it's the range of roles that you could do in the industry. I work in talent and recruitment, and HR, and it's obviously supporting the recruitment into engineering roles. IT roles is always saying to people, "You don't have to be wearing always the orange uniform that you see that in television, but all the different roles that you can contribute to the industry are important to highlight."

**Sneha:** Annette.

**Annette:** Yes, I'm another one who moved into transport quite by accident. I studied chemistry at university and studied for a PhD there. That did to me in the academic world, feel like a very male dominated environment. I was quite interested in public policy, maybe working for the civil service or a general public sector background, because it it's probably quite a strange attraction, but I actually quite liked the complexity and challenge of the trade-offs that you have in public policy.

It was quite by accident that I ended up in highways, but I actually really enjoyed that, because I think transport, it connects people. It's the economic lifeblood of the country. It's perhaps a bit like laundry sometimes, you don't notice it's working, but you certainly notice when it isn't working, and actually there are a lot of interesting challenges and interesting roles, and that's why and that's what's kept me here.

**Sneha:** Joanne?

**Joanne:** I fell into the roles that I participate purely by chance. I saw a steam locomotive at Preston rail station, and amongst all the males, the enthusiasts, the crews, and the support crews, and the fireman, the driver, there was not one female face. I watched the fireman, put his call on and I thought, "I can do that, and I'm going to do that." I found the nearest heritage railway, and I set off on the journey.

It was quite clear that this was a very male dominated environment. It's a heavy work, it's heritage. I set on the journey, then. I thought, "I'm going to pave a way here. We need to do this," and off I went and here I am, a qualified steam locomotive fireman, firing some very famous and very small engines, best thing to do.

**Sneha:** We've touched I think a little bit about how things are starting to change, but do you think that enough is being done to attract and retain women in the transport

industry? Are we starting to see maybe more flexible working, some new, policies or better recruitment that that's helping to support women in both rail and road? Christine, did you want to come in on that point?

**Christine:** I'm going to draw a bit of analogy. I work for a Spanish train manufacturing company, and their headquarters are based in Northern Spain in Beasain and interestingly, when we take our customers to that site, and they look at the engineering demograph, they're all a bit amazed, because there are probably 60% female engineers. I cannot for the life of me understand how we can't bring that across back to the UK.

Then I look at what, how they, our company has invested in those women in the flexible hours, and the network that they support to help them do that and to deliver a job. We need to be better at doing that, and I don't think we are, and I think we're getting there. I know individuals within the industry that wouldn't contemplate hybrid working, because A, they were afraid of technology.

They'd never experienced that, and B they had this view that if you weren't sitting at your desk, the old, you're not working. In this day and age technology and the output, I think needs to be flexible, and we're getting there, and we've had the impetus from COVID, but we're still not there. We've still got a long way to go.

**Sneha:** Erika, did you have any thoughts there?

**Erika:** Yes, I agree. I think it's not perfect where we are at the moment. I think we had done a lot of progress, and I think the technology's helping to reach more students, for example, at University and at school, to demonstrate what it's like to be a train driver, or engineering, or all the roles that we have in the industry. I think as you said, the flexible working and agile working is so important to obviously increase more representation of women.

Also being able to see in the last few years, lots of our leaders speaking about the importance of diversity, not just in women, but black, Asian, minority, ethnic as well, employees and how we can attract more people, and how also they feel like they belong. I think it's not just that we attract them, but what happened when they are within our industry, and how we retain the skills, and how we make them feel like they belong, and the culture is also welcome to different genders and backgrounds.

**Sneha:** I think Erika, just to follow up on that, I think Network Rail's done quite a lot of work in terms of promoting signaling jobs. Is that correct?

**Erika:** Yes. I personally led a campaign last year. What we did is trying to change the whole culture about recruitment, because when managers are recruiting for

roles, they just want to recruit tomorrow. We are trying to be a bit more proactive in the way we plan workforce planning to understand what are the gaps, and how we give time to our recruiters to actually plan the campaigns.

It is more targeted different channels for example. We did a lot of work around, we call it, we met millions when we tell people exactly in different, for example platforms like flexible working and works mums, telling about how it's like to work as a signaller, and bringing to life the roles that we had managers telling the stories about what it's like to be in these jobs, what it's like to be part of my team. That definitely helped attract more women into signaling roles.

**Joanne:** It's exactly how Erika says it's all about representation. You've got to get their minds when they're young, you've got to go to the high schools. You've got to sure that there are women in these roles within the mainline industries and the heritage industries. There are women in signal boxes. There are women in P-wear gangs. There are women in management, and it's getting that representation to them and showing that they can do that.

They can see themselves in them positions, and it's also encouraging the young men in the circumstances as well to have confidence, to encourage the females to come into those roles, and to give the men confidence, to support the women in those roles. I think that has to happen very early on, and demystify what is actually happening in the roles. Females don't have this, "Well, I can't do that. I'm not strong enough to do that. I can't, I don't have the mental capacity to do that."

Yes, you do. Yes, you do. This is what happens. This is what you can do. These do not limit your ability.

**Christine:** I'd like to add that as well. It's not about alerting to the younger fraternity. It's also about educating parents of those younger people. If I ask my mum and dad when I was younger, what should I do? They're all medics. You do medicine, end of, no discussion, because they had no vision, what a business world meant. I think if we reach out to parents as well, and to educate that, your daughter will be in quite a safe space in the rail industry.

There's arms around, and that there'll be an opportunity. She won't be overlooked for promotion. She doesn't need to be a hairdresser. There are lots of other roles within the industry that can broaden her talent. There's a couple of things to go out in terms of catching people in the pipeline, but both parents as well.

**Annette:** When I started at National Highways or Highways Agency, as it was then I was told when I was in quite a junior policy role that I actually wouldn't get anywhere, because I wasn't a civil engineer. The only people who made it within that

organisation were civil engineers. Times moved on very significantly from that over 20 years ago. Not just in terms of the fact that we've got much more, better representation at all levels of the company for women, but just really that understanding that actually there's a huge range of jobs.

There's behavioral scientists. There's data scientists, there's HR. There's a huge role within national highways and more widely within our supply chain. I think role models are incredibly important. We have quite an active women's network that organizes events, and so forth and is active on our internal social media challenge channels, and also graduates and apprentices network which is very active as well, and very keen to bring in senior role models, male or female, to really give that understanding of what that range of jobs is and to set real role models.

I think there's another point I wanted to make and that's actually I think there's a role for men, and a role for enhancing male jobs and job experience as well, because when you think about being a mom in the workplace, for example, traditionally, it was always the female parent that would go off and do the child pickups, or go home if the child was off called in from nursery sick, that sort of thing.

I've spoken to male colleagues who are very much, "Well, I come in late because I do the school run in the morning, because my wife does it in the afternoon." I think making it easier for men to do these roles is actually enhancing women's rights as well.

**Erika:** Totally agree. I think women can't do that alone, and I think as an industry, we need allies. This is where men come in to support that culture change. For example, in our company, we do a lot of training with managers. We call it inclusive by design, which is just really training them on how to recruit more women, how to even change the job algos that it sounds a bit more friendly to women because obviously, it's been recognised that women in rail, for example, that women, when you go to the job description, you have to tick all the list on it, otherwise you don't apply.

It's trying to change the basis of that, but also making sure that managers are there to support once they are on-boarded in the company, and having that policies about flexible working, parental leave but not only for women, but as you said, for men as well to support women into back to work.

**Christine:** Interestingly, that is very interesting because I just has taken at the role of Chair in October last year for Women in Rail, and we did reevaluate the mission statement, and we've actually put in there that it's not only for our female members, but our allies and partners within the industry. That's key, because we can promote women and do as much as we can for women, but without our allies, we're not going to achieve the target. We're not going to get there.



**Sneha:** Do you think that some of that is maybe around breaking down, doing some more work to break down those barriers around flexibility in roles or whether perceived that there's extensive hours with more senior roles perhaps, is there more do you think there needs to be done in those areas?

**Erika:** Absolutely. I think it's trusting and having confidence in women that they can lead big projects, and they can lead the industry, and sitting them on the table and be able that not that just that they have a voice, but they can use their voice and they can actually have an input in designing and leading the industry.

Obviously, as an industry now with GBR (Great British Railways), I would love to see more representation in those senior roles, because I think that's the key message that we need to say to people is, "You come and join industry, there is progression for you," but definitely, there's more to do.

**Christine:** Just to add to that and probably a bit of a pitch for women in rail, but we've looked at that analysis and we've seen the gap, that the transition from middle management into senior executive roles is difficult. A, because the jobs, you don't know the jobs are available, because it generally tends to be a bit of a silent handshake in more cases often than not. We do have what is called SWIFT and it stands for senior women in or formerly in transport.

That would go across the whole transport sector. That's it's going to be a membership based scheme, but it's primarily for senior executive women networking and connecting, getting them some workshops and coordinated approach to producing a talent pool for senior executive positions. Please, spread the word, get them to look at the Women in Rail website, and to participate in SWIFT.

**Erika:** I'm so passionate about this topic, because obviously is my area of expertise. I always think we do succession planning. The way it is obviously managers nominate people. They understand the talent pipeline for senior roles, but it's always who the manager knows, and I think it in Network Rail. I've personally doing a lot of work with the team to challenge the managers and say, "Well, let's do succession planning down further the line at all the work levels."

Even if you're knowing that succession pipeline for the next five years, we see how feasibility are encouraging managers to have this career conversations early. You identify that you have the potential and the aspiration to progress. Then we can early help you to progress down the line and not just focus in that ceiling of who are really a very senior level.

**Sneha:** Thinking about my own experiences and my professional career to date, particularly while working at the Office of Rail and Road, I've always felt very

supported in my career, and opportunities that I've had to date as well. I think particularly consider the periods of maternity leave that I've had. Two periods of being off for over a year, and coming back to work part-time. I've always felt that that's been fully accepted, and been supported to do that going forward.

Also, now I work part-time as well. I feel again, that there is that genuine acceptance, and support to carry on working, and to progress in my career. I think I can definitely put a positive there on that one, but I wonder if there's any thoughts across the panel?

**Annette:** Yes. Well, something I've definitely seen it in my 20 plus years at National Highways. Like you, I've had great experience in terms of having extended maternity leaves, coming back to work and always been very welcomed. I think what I've seen over the recent years is that where we always had equality, diversity and inclusion training, at first maybe it was a little bit more about ticking the box, or at least maybe some people saw it as that.

That, "Yes, we have to make sure we are upholding our legal rights," but I've seen it very much more now are really embedded in the culture. People really genuinely understand that actually, you need a diversity of opinion. You need a diversity of thought leadership. You need to be able to attract the talents into roles. If you're being very narrow-minded about what you think good looks like, then you really are wasting a lot of available talent that's out there.

I've definitely seen that now more embedded, and actually being involved in recruitment campaigns, where it's not just about gender bias. It's about personality bias or anything else really. Are we actually challenging our own presumptions about who we want in this role, and what they can offer?

I definitely think that's much more open conversation now than it was probably five, 10 years ago.

**Sneha:** Joanne, I want to bring you in, because you've obviously talked quite openly about your experiences, I think particularly early on in your career as part of the heritage railway. What are your thoughts on this?

**Joanne:** There's definitely progress beginning to happen. The heritage industry is behind the mainline rail industry. We can't get away from that fact. My recent speech, open lid on the box of the attitudes within the heritage industries, it's seen as a hobby industry, men. It's like an extension of the garden shed. That's what the heritage railway we used to be, but heritage has to evolve now. It's been brought into mainline standards on infrastructure and operationally, it has to evolve in all other aspects.

Heritage industry has to turn into an attraction. It's got to attract families. We are predominantly volunteer-based workforces. Why alienate 50% of potential workforces by not embracing females and women? Since the speech, a lot of heritage railways have started to look within themselves. We're starting to see a change in mindset, a change in attitudes. It's educating people to have that confidence that women can come into that male dominated role, which is heavy, hard work and they can do that role.

They have the strength to do that role and the ability to do that role. I'm beginning to see changes. Particularly in my own railways, for the first time this weekend, we run crews two days in a row, which were mainly female. That's never happened at the railway before, and that shows that there is a significant change in mindset from managerial level, right down to the coalface level. Yes, I would say we are beginning to see positive changes, but that positive change has to be pushed.

It has to be pushed forward with encouragement, rather than, "This behaviour will not be tolerated," it's all about education. "This is a better way to behave." You're dealing with mindsets that are fixed in 1970s beer era, and they are changing. There is a possibility to change, and it's really positive to see. We're seeing younger people coming in, younger women coming in. It's going to be slow but it's happening. Yes, I would agree that things are getting better.

**Christine:** To follow on from that, I think that's great, but I also think it's about, in addition to changing the mindset of those around, it's about giving women confidence, and providing them with a toolbox of elements or ideas or aspirations that they can use and take forward into the workplace. Most women is, Erika said that when they look at a job, they think if they can't do 110% of it. "Oh, my God," they won't apply but most men will probably say, oh, "Yes, 15%, 20%, yes, I'll try for that and give it a go."

It's all about in the mindset of women, isn't it? About how they think they're perceived, and confidence I think. It's about also helping women to become more equipped, and giving them the skills and men as well, but obviously, giving more availability to women, I think also, behaviours now, if you look at all the National Rail contracts that are being agreed.

**Erika:** I think that point is really important that is authentic, that it doesn't feel like it's a technical exercise, or you're playing the women's card now, because that behaviour is obviously doesn't help to change the culture, but also the women feel welcome into the environment, and I think that's what the leadership teams across

the industry to do more, that lead with authenticity that, "We are welcoming more women, and the value that they have in the workforce."

Rather than seeing it as a nice thing to do, and you make a really good point about confidence, it's having that confidence to challenge, and that's what I think about the allies in those behaviours is still with bias in the industry, that people feel confident, not just women to challenge those behaviours, to challenge practices are also for old fashioned.

**Joanne:** I think what Erika's just highlighted there, this goes right up to management level, and it's enabling management to be able to handle these situations in a sympathetic manner, without alienating everybody involved, and so this is where the education comes into it again, of not just at the bottom level, but at the top level. It's a whole area that needs tackling at the same time, and it's about education.

Again, it's about teaching people, giving them the tools to deal with difficult situations. You may have some conflict, and it's giving people the competence to go to a nominated person and say, "I'm having issues," and then dealing with that, rather than creating more conflict, and that's really important that you educate people in how to tackle conflict.

**Annette:** I can't remember whether it was Christine or Erika, that was talking about preparing people a few steps back from senior roles, and I think that's a really, really important point and equipping with them with the skills that they need in order to have that confidence to apply for the role. That you say rather than filling quotas, whether it's conflict management, or about having the confidence to apply or go into job interviews in a confident way.

Just recognizing that is actually something that women do tend to struggle with a little bit more, but giving them the training, and they open up to experience within the roles they currently got, to give them maybe experience of running a project, or doing a part of their role that's perhaps operating at a higher level. I think that's really important. It's not just about filling those roles to a quota. It's about actually giving people the skills to get them.

**Erika:** Totally agree and I think we need to be more creative as industry. For example, we are the first time we held our ties in a director role in one of our regions, as a job sharing, and that again, helps to flex and to be agile in the way we work, and giving women the opportunity to take more responsibility knowing, that you can share a job with someone, and it's been created, and it's been able to see things that we maybe do differently, how we can add value to our jobs and be more flexible. I think that's important as well.

**Christine:** I don't know whether I want to make this as a point or just an observation. In some of the jobs that I've looked at, that they mentioned about flexible working. There's not sometimes an awful lot of detail around the job for women at a starting point to be able to evaluate, "Will this organisation be supportive of, maybe I've got to do A, B, C and D, because I have childcare issues or support?" I've spoken to some women that won't apply for a job because what they're worried is starting that process.

Then at some point, asking for the T's and C's of the organisation of their company handbook about how things are operated, and whether they do this. They're afraid to ask about that. They would prefer if that information was up front in a job. Sometimes, we can't think well, actually can't that information be more transparent in the actual application before people go through that process? Then that might make women feel more comfortable.

**Sneha:** Recognising times is a changing and we need to do a little bit more in terms of education. What's your hope for the industry in the next say, five to 10 years? Do you think it's going to continue to be as inclusive and to continue to attract and retain women across the transport sector?

**Annette:** I think we're on a good trajectory at the moment. Certainly in terms of public bodies like, Network Rail and National Highways. I think one of these things we need to recognise certainly for National highways, we work in a very heavily contracted out environment, where a lot of the work that you see doing that is actually tends to be more male dominated is actually on road, the construction work is carried out by our supply chain partners.

Of course, many of them are very big well-known companies, who have EDI policies in place as well. Actually, those are the more challenging jobs to attract women into. What I can see changing in that is that actually, the construction industry is changing and modernising. There will be far more roles for data scientists, for people operating machinery remotely and so forth, which actually, I think will help tackle what we've probably not reached crisis point yet.

There's certainly going to be a skills gap within the construction industry, where we see a lot of people retiring. Actually those jobs are not particularly attractive to men either. I think if we're to be a step ahead of ourselves, then actually we need to think more holistically about how do we make those careers more enticing to women and indeed to men as well?

**Christine:** I think that there will be a big bow wave of change within the William Shapps Review that they refer specifically to EDI. We know in National Rail contracts, there are quotas that have to be achieved. I've got to say that in general,

through my 30 years of experience, everybody seems to be actually on it. Women in Rail have an EDI Charter in conjunction with RIA. I think this speaks volumes. We started off with having 84 signatories, we're now at over 180 signatories.

The impetus of that is growing. It's taking legs. Network Rail in conjunction with the GBRTT are also really focused on EDI. There is a willingness. I think there's going to be a bit of grappling about how we get there, but I think we're on the way. As I say, the trajectory does look good. I'm incredibly positive and very happy actually where we are at the moment.

**Erika:** There is hope. I agree with you. I think I've been part of a group across industry. We call it United by Inclusion. It's a representation across the whole rail industry of DNI list, talent list, to come together and make our leaders accountable for the DNI agenda, and to bring obviously, more women into work. I think that is the way to go that we don't just talk the talk, but act on the promises, act on the targets that we all put for the industry, and really keep driving it, and keep talking, and keep being innovative and sharing.

I think there's a lot of good practices across the industry in different companies. It's how we can come together as an industry and really share best practice, and make it the best for all of us.

**Sneha:** Joanne, I wanted to come to you. I think thinking around the heritage railway industry, is there any specific thoughts that you had around hopes of where that might be in five to 10 years time?

**Joanne:** I would hope that we'd have a bigger volunteer workforce really. We need heritage. Heritage is important, and it has a place within the rail industry. We see mainline charters. It does draw people in. Yes, heritage is important. I would like to see more youngsters coming in. We need youth. These youngsters don't remember BRC. They're not from the '60s. They've never seen a steam engine, half of them. We need them to come in. We need to teach them engineering skills. We need to teach them confidence. We need to teach them, "Let's do something different."

I would like to see the heritage industry expand, definitely. I would like to see better integration within the rail industry of heritage. I see great things for heritage. I will say that, because I'm biased. I would love to see more women come into operational roles within the industry. Heritage is slightly different, we have more women in managerial roles than you would probably expect. We have quite a few general managers of railway to a female is the operational side.

The physical side, women think, as you've we've already talked about they think. "I don't think I could do that. Or I don't want to get dirty." Things like that. I can come

into a station on the footplate. You will see all these families. They've got little children with them, little boys, little girls, and you see the faces change. They'll say, "Look, there's a lady there." They watch me intently at what I do. You can see the little pennies dropping. I think, "We're going to get you. You're going to have a membership in the next 10 years you're coming in."

I would like to see far more younger people coming in, because it looks great on CVs. If they're coming and do some volunteering, wherever it is, it looks great. Then it's a step into the mainline rail industry, because I do see a lot of youngsters come in. Then they come to me and they say, "I've managed to get on at Northern. I've managed to do this, I've managed to do that." I'm like, "Fantastic. Well done." Yes, that would be my hope, more younger people coming in, and the survival of heritage industry.

**Sneha:** I wanted to touch on one last area. I think it's more than just being successful, and probably being successful as a woman in the transport industry. Keen just to hear your views on what opportunities you've had that have helped you succeed in your career over time?

**Joanne:** Support. Support from males within my industry. I have to say that I came into the heritage industry, and it was a shock to a lot of people. They don't expect a woman to come in, to want to get dirty, to get up at stupid o'clock in the morning. Prepare a steam locomotive and get filthy. I turn up, five foot three, blonde, did not expect it. They've got used to it. I expressed the desire that I wanted to do it. I started to show the ability to do it. With the support of like-minded individuals, males, who pushed me forwards, who kept that encouragement. I needed that support.

I ended up going for the goal that I wanted to do. The day that I achieved that goal, the people who helped me stood and cheered. It was important. I needed that. I had my own dogged determination and stubbornness to do it, overcome all the hurdles, but support was the important bit. I couldn't have done it without support. Those people had the confidence to support. That's what we need to grow. That's what we need to draw on and encourage others. We need to spread that.

**Annette:** Yes. That's a fantastic perception. I think it can't start early enough, really. I think in my case, I was extremely privileged to have parents who never really, gender in terms of job choice and future role, never really came into it. I just never even thought about something was a male job or a female job. It was just a job. It was just what I was interested in. Within my career, I think that I've had the pleasure of working with a lot of men who were very open-minded, and never felt that the fact that I was female was an issue.

There's maybe been times in my career where I've noticed that I was the only female in a room, the only non-engineer in the room. I found the culture of the industry being quite inclusive with certainly what I've experienced. I think also having role models as well. Currently, we're looking off at National Highways to have some excellent women on our executive board. I had a role earlier on in my career supporting our then board in an administrative role.

Our chief highway engineer Jenny Clark, at the time. I was one of the first female chief highway engineer. I worked closely with her. She was a fantastic role model to see how somebody who's female can work her way up in a very male-dominated area. Having role models is important I think.

**Christine:** I'd agree with all of that, role models, male allies within the industry, but also in addition to that, we as individuals be it men or women, we are responsible for our own destiny. If you want to look into further education, it's not about waiting for someone to touch you on the shoulder, go and look, and do and find. I sourced out my MBA and then went to my employee and said, "Would you sponsor me?"

They said, "Oh yes, sure," and I was in a bag of knots thinking I wouldn't get that sponsorship, but we can do things ourselves to create opportunities, and doing things like that people say, "Oh, actually, she's looking to obviously progress, and do things for herself," and that's stood me in good stead, so we could all do that. Both men and women.

**Erika:** Personally, I agree with you. I think owning your own career is so important, and changing your mindset that it's your manager who has the responsibility to drive your development, and your career. It's owning it and finding opportunities, and use managers to guide you to support and to mentor you. I personally obviously have been from a different country, speaking a different language. It's all been a barrier for me to progress, but I've been lucky to have mentors around myself that have been able to bring my confidence, and to bring my strengths, and to really see a future for me that I never seen before.

I didn't have a mentor, so I will encourage everyone that would like to progress within industry to find someone that is there to guide, to support you. A role model as you said but also to drive and own it and to find opportunities, and to believe in yourself and have the confidence that you can achieve whatever you want, but find opportunities and own it is my message.

**Joanne:** It's absolutely imperative that you are your own cheerleader. It's really good to have other people cheering for you, but you must be your own cheerleader. You must drive yourself forwards. If you see something, you go for it, and there's nothing that you cannot overcome, even if you're on that Shetland pony, and you're charging



towards Bechers Brook and you think, "I am not getting over that," you will get under it.

You will get round it. There is always a way, so it's really important to be your own cheerleader, and by doing that, you then become somebody else's cheerleader, and it becomes an infectious way of getting things about. It's so important, have confidence in yourself, and own it as Erika said, you must own it.

**Sneha:** I think about all the women that are in the transport industry now, or those that are thinking of joining, what would be your one piece of advice that you would give them?

**Joanne:** Stay focused, push out all the other white noise, stay focused. Even when it's difficult, stay focused.

**Erika:** I think be confident. It's okay to say, "No," and stop changing that bias of that. For example, you are in a meeting, practical things, don't volunteer to take the notes, to bring the coffee, all these little things, start thinking when you're in a room, how do you want people to see you there? Even if you are in a leadership position, start believing that you're going to get there, and these little steps, being more confident in the room, you have an opinion, been able, and be brave to give your opinion, to ask questions and to challenge behaviours that you maybe see, not just for yourself, but towards other women, to challenge bias in the industry.

**Annette:** Absolutely. I think there's something in the adage, "Fake it 'til you make it." If you're not feeling confident, just go in there and act as if a confident person would be, and you might be quaking in your boots. Another thing I've found is that often how you get on in a job is not so much about how much you know about the role. It's how many questions you're prepared to ask, so it's about staying curious.

I've certainly been in situations where I was the least knowledgeable person in the room, and there is always a horrible moment when you've asked a question about, was that a silly question to ask, or was that a really insightful question? Most times they're insightful questions, but actually, like you say, it's about being confident, getting your voice heard, and just being your own cheerleader, going for it.

**Christine:** I'd say to add to that as well. You need to market yourself properly. In this day and age of all the digital platforms and media, be sensible about what you want people to see about you, because anybody can find out a ream of information about you, and certainly I know with my children, and they're always on the phones, and nothing is a secret. My advice would be market yourself properly. Be pure to yourself, and be you, don't try and be something different that maybe potential employers or your work environment might pick up on.

**Erika:** Definitely, and I would like to add something that I'd be encouraging a lot in my coaching conversation, which is you don't have to follow anymore a career path, think about all options that you find in the industry, and we call it a squiggly career. If you work in finance, and you work in IT and you work in HR, there is different roles that you can do in the industry, and don't be afraid to change, because change is always positive. You could learn lots of skills, you will meet new people, so don't limit yourself with just with like a career path.

**Sneha:** Yes, totally agree with all of those points. I think it is very much about being confident, being authentic and as we've said about owning it, and I think Erika, I'm going to come back to your earlier quote, but you think you said something, see it, be it. I love that. I think that is very much about what it should be, and taking that forward.

Unfortunately, that's all we have time for today. I want to say a huge thank you to all of my guests for joining and sharing their personal experiences. Thank you to Annette, Christine, Joanne and Erika. Thanks for listening to the latest Rail and Road podcast. I hope you really enjoyed our special episode for International Women's Day. Join us again for our next episode soon.



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