

# Dialogue for Women in Blue-Collar Transportation Careers

## FINAL REPORT

### September 21, 2011

#### Introduction

The Dialogue for Women in Blue-Collar Transportation Careers was conducted over a four week period, from July 11, 2011 through August 5, 2011, in response to a roundtable convened at the United States Department of Transportation on June 3, 2011. During the roundtable, representatives from 25 national transportation organizations met to discuss for the first time the unique challenges faced by women working in skilled, blue-collar transportation careers. As part of the discussion, Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood emphasized the importance of women in America's transportation workforce and encouraged participants to work together to address key challenges that exist for women throughout the transportation industry.

Following the roundtable, a national, online dialogue was conducted in two parts to gather ideas, suggestions and best practices related to women working in blue-collar transportation careers.

**Part One** (July 11 – July 22): Focused on image of women working in blue-collar transportation careers, and in particular on the question: *“How do we best describe and promote women working in skilled, blue-collar transportation-related careers?”*

**Part Two** ( July 25 – August 5): Focused on recruitment and retention for women working in blue-collar transportation careers, and in particular on the questions: *“How do we leverage existing programs that promote the recruitment and hiring of women working in transportation-related careers?”* and *“What ideas, suggestions or strategies do you have for retaining and advancing women’s talent within your industry?”*

#### Participation in the National Dialogue

In total, the Dialogue for Women in Blue-Collar Transportation Careers included 178 individual participants, who collectively offered 49 unique ideas, 143 comments and 614 votes. Of the 178 individual participants, 121 participants in the dialogue completed the demographic question related to their transportation field. Of these, Figure 1 shows that participants represented a broad range of transportation careers.

Mode	Number	Percentage
Air	7	6%
Waterway/Ports	3	2%
Transit	17	14%
Motor Coach	0	0%
Trucks	19	16%
Roads/Bridges	14	12%
Pipelines	3	2%
Rail	6	5%
Other	52	43%

*Figure 1: Types of Transportation Careers Represented*

Of the 121 participants who completed the demographic questions, 93% of all participants were identified as female, and 7% were men. The online Dialogue yielded diverse geographical representation, with 34 states represented and 99 unique zip codes from across the United States (Figure 2).



*Figure 2: Geographic Representation in the National Dialogue*

### **Ideas and Themes Identified during the National On-Line Dialogue**

Of the 49 unique ideas posted throughout the dialogue, the five most popular ideas were:

- 1) *Participate in Community Outreach:* Talk about your work at neighborhood or local elementary or secondary school career events. (44 votes, 7 comments)
- 2) *Educate:* Educate both women and men on how to work together with respect towards each other both as individuals and professionals. (41 votes, 11 comments)
- 3) *It's a career, not just a job:* Promote the fact that these careers offer a variety of opportunities and advancement, along with great benefits. Women need to understand the long term opportunities blue collar transportation careers offer. (30 votes, 13 comments)

- 4) *Mentoring*: Publicize, in addition to the high-profile roles, the "less glamorous" and often unseen roles women play in the spectrum of transportation through mentoring youth and young adults in our schools and communities. (30 votes, 3 comments)
- 5) *Be honest*: When recruiting women into these occupations, educate potential workers about the overall scope of work, what's expected of them on a daily basis, and what it takes to be successful long term. (29 votes, 9 comments)

## Themes

From an analysis of all of the ideas, comments, ratings, and tags, four themes emerged from the dialogue. Below is a summary of themes and key ideas of dialogue participants:

### **Theme One: Conduct outreach and awareness targeted for young women and girls about blue-collar transportation careers.**

- *Create ad campaigns and recruitment material specifically directed toward young women.*
  - Include positive images and inspirational stories of successful women.
  - Submit individual stories of successful women to career-oriented and general interest magazines and other news media.
- *Directly engage women in recruitment events within communities.*
  - Begin reaching out to girls as early as elementary school, and reach out to guidance counselors, teachers, and textbook writers.
  - Conduct outreach activities with, and provide recruitment material for high schools, community colleges, community organizations, and churches.
  - Personally connect with members of local communities to share the positive images of women's success within the transportation industry.
  - Organize 'hands-on' recruitment opportunities, including job-shadowing and experiential sessions.
- *Promote the image of transportation careers as a positive alternative to traditional four-year college career pathways.*
  - Emphasize opportunities for advancement within the industry.
  - Be honest and open about the benefits of working in the transportation industry.
  - Create specific certification programs in high schools, career centers, and community colleges that emphasize opportunities for careers, not just jobs.
- *Engage existing female employees as a recruitment source.*
  - Take advantage of women who are passionate about their careers to help recruit women to similar jobs.
  - Use pre-existing networks as a source for outreach.
  - Offer incentives to women already working in transportation for their help in increasing the job applicant pool.
- *Designate specific staff within public and private transportation employers dedicated to increasing women's recruitment and retention within the transportation workforce.*

## **Theme Two: Introduce skills training for women in blue collar transportation careers.**

- *Improve and increase opportunities for women to receive skills training.*
  - Offer non-traditional skills development training, including mock job interviews and job-coaching.
  - Offer skills training opportunities for women to overcome traditional cultural differences in their skill sets as compared to men, such as engine mechanics, truck drivers or construction workers.
  - Prepare women to be more assertive in a male-dominated industry and offer role-playing training sessions to address potentially confrontational situations.
- *Provide scholarships for women interested in receiving skills training, whether they are interested in beginning a new career or want to advance within their current field.*
  - Be aware that women may be interested in receiving skills training but do not have money to pay for training on their own.
  - Create scholarships in addition to WIA and ITA grants that are specifically directed toward women already in trades as full-time employees.
- *Create clear and structured career pathways for women to advance up the ladder in the transportation industry.*
  - Prepare women career advancement and provide directed outreach to make women aware of potential opportunities.
  - Coordinate career advancement opportunities with access to skills training.
  - Encourage women to continue to seek higher-paying jobs within the transportation industry.
  - Expose women in office and field work to different aspects of the transportation industry.
  - Provide opportunities for women to maintain their income while training for new positions.

## **Theme Three: Create a healthy and respectful work environment that recognizes women in transportation industry.**

- *Lead by example.*
  - Emphasize awareness among women transportation professionals that they represent women across the transportation industry.
- *Recognize that the transportation field provides opportunities for careers, not just jobs.*
  - Offer opportunity for advancement and encourage women to become more competitive within their industry.
  - Encourage women to take pride in their work.
  - Increase women's awareness of and access to opportunities for skills training.
- *Increase awareness of incidents of discrimination and exclusion within the workplace.*
  - Prepare women to responsibly and successfully address problems through non-traditional skills training and support systems.
  - Provide training for management and blue-collar men and women in transportation industries that highlights and addresses discrimination concerns

- Ensure that training programs are implemented at all levels to teach diversity training, team building, and respectful behaviors.
- *Recognize and address potential concerns for women regarding their family/work life balance.*

**Theme Four: Coordinate efforts across the transportation industry.**

- *Educate women honestly about what to expect from a career in transportation.*
  - Ensure women understand what will be expected of them in their job responsibilities, including long hours on the road, heavy lifting, and other duties related to specific jobs.
  - Prepare women to understand the possibility that they may experience feelings of isolation or exclusion while working in a male-dominated career field.
- *Help women identify mentors who can honestly and openly discuss their own experiences in transportation industries.*
  - Work together to provide women the same opportunities and information that men have traditionally passed down among themselves.
  - Portray women in successful transportation careers as positive role models.
  - Provide support for women when they encounter discrimination or isolation within the male-dominated industries.
  - Create support networks to obtain counseling, support and education within specific public or private transportation employers for women interested in career advancement.
- *Create and coordinate support organizations and their resources for women across the transportation industry.*
  - Promote and support leaders who will represent women across the transportation industry.
  - Facilitate the coordination of training, resources, and messaging to promote women in transportation careers across the transportation industry.
  - Work together to address equity issues for women, including pay, benefits, and working conditions.
- *Coordinate resources across public and private entities.*
  - Encourage unions to coordinate outreach, job development, mentoring, and skills training.
  - Identify opportunities for public/private partnerships to enhance recruitment efforts for women in transportation with both funding and vocal support.

**Next Steps**

Upon completion of the online dialogue, a second meeting for representatives from national transportation organizations has been scheduled for October 13, 2011 to review the analysis, discuss the results of the dialogue, and determine opportunities to address the themes identified from participants across the country.