

Written evidence submitted by Women in Transport (RDF0025)

1. INTRODUCTION

This submission constitutes the response from Women in Transport to the House of Commons Transport Select Committee inquiry into the road freight supply chain.

2. BACKGROUND TO WOMEN IN TRANSPORT

2.1 Women in Transport is a not-for-profit that empowers women to maximise their potential. Membership provides exclusive access to a varied events programme including unique experiences, professional development, networking and annual mentoring. Members also benefit from access to our annual Advance mentoring programme, our Lead programme that supports women into leadership roles and the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Women in Transport, of which we are the Secretariat.

2.2 In June 2020, we marked 15 years of advancing women in transport. Since rebranding to Women in Transport in September 2017, our network has grown from just 120 members in London to over 800 nationally. We have North East (2019) and North West (2020) regional hubs, supported by Nexus and Eurovia respectively, and we launched a West Midlands Alliance in March 2020. Our Scotland hub launched on 25 March 2021 supported by Momentum Transport Consultancy, Network Rail and Transport Scotland. Our strong social media presence reached almost a million people in 2020.

2.3 We have supported cross sector campaigns and research including the Year of Diversity in Transport and Logistics, The Duck Project, Gender Balance in Major Projects and TfL's Cycle your City. We are also supporting an initiative led by the Department of Transport to bring together industry to look at the barriers preventing women from joining and progressing in the sector.

3. BACKGROUND & REASON FOR SUBMITTING

3.1 The structural problems that have been plaguing road freight have been known to many in government and industry for a long time. The Select Committee documented some of the issues in their 2015 report 'Skills and Workforce Planning in the Road Haulage Sector'. Even at that point problems like an ageing workforce lacking diversity and unsociable working hours had

been an issue in the sector for too long. The recent heavy goods vehicle (HGV) driver shortage crisis has brought these issues to the forefront of the public conscience and shown that the industry is no closer to fixing the problems than it was when the Select Committee published their report in 2015. As will be discussed, the crisis has also shown the Government's tendency to favour short-term fixes to problems which require longer-term solutions.

3.2 In preparation for our response, we invited feedback from Women in Transport members who currently work in, or have worked in, the road freight industry as well as others who are knowledgeable of the industry. Insights provided by our members form the basis of this response.

3.3 Where necessary we have also supported our response with reports and papers from other organisations and academics. These are referenced as footnotes throughout.

4. THE POTENTIAL EFFECTS OF THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICIES AND REGULATIONS ON THE EFFICIENT OPERATION OF THE SUPPLY CHAIN, INCLUDING CABOTAGE RULES AND DRIVERS' HOURS

4.1 Working hours for some freight jobs are very long, particularly those that are the best paid. However, this is not always the case, and the perception that all freight jobs require working long and unsociable hours is incredibly restrictive for the sector. The road freight industry will struggle to attract any employees if the jobs are viewed as having long or inconvenient hours, but especially women, who are particularly likely to value a good work-life balance.¹ The onus should be on government, and industry, to promote roles within the industry like driving a skip or grab truck, which offer more lucrative work during family-friendly hours.

4.2 Despite 4.1, there are still too many jobs with extensive hours, which are off-putting for many women. Any policy or regulation affecting worker standards must understand and appreciate this, ideally looking to offset it in some way. Drivers' hours should be as flexible as possible allowing workers to choose a situation that best suits their needs both at work and at home.²

4.3 One response to the recent crisis from the Government was to extend the hours of existing drivers. This makes sense in the short-term to try and face up to the immediate challenges of ensuring there are sufficient supplies of

food and fuel. But, at a time where the sector desperately needs to attract younger workers from a diverse background, this policy is self-defeating as we know this is exactly one of the reasons why people are put-off from becoming a driver.

4.4 4.3 speaks to a wider concern around the need to have a long-term plan in place for the sector which aligns with other governmental departments like the Department for Education, the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. A siloed approach is unlikely to yield the best results particularly when the crisis cuts across so many departments in the way it does.

4.5 Regulations for drivers are very dependent on where they drive (Europe, devolved nations, separate counties within the UK). This leads to both increased compliance costs for employers, which are often then passed down to employees, as well as operational inefficiencies in the system. The goal should be to minimise these barriers as much as possible. We recognise this is not solely up to the national Government and will take significant collaboration with several governmental bodies in the UK and beyond.

5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNMENT POLICY IN SUPPORTING RECRUITMENT, RETENTION AND A DIVERSE WORKFORCE IN THE ROAD HAULAGE INDUSTRY

5.1 Our research for the APPG for Women in Transport found that many women still believe the transport industry has a 'macho culture',³ and the HGV sector is no exception to this. Within this macho culture, there also exists the feeling that the sector is a 'boys' club', which explicitly excludes women from the opportunities (white) men can capitalise on. Our research also shows the sector has an image problem and that there is a particular stereotype of someone working in transport, i.e. an 'older, white male'.⁴ To attract a younger, more diverse workforce the industry needs to alter its image; to retain existing and new workers it needs to transform its internal culture. The Government needs to help industry facilitate these major shifts, e.g. through working closely with industry associations, resourcing EDI campaigns and initiatives and setting up a designated taskforce.

5.2 Some women fear they will be excluded from opportunities, but also that men will actively make life hard for women to thrive in their roles.

5.3 A problem that the industry has been struggling with for a long time now is its ageing workforce. The industry is losing workers through retirement and other factors much quicker than it is attracting younger, more diverse drivers.⁵ Policy needs to recognise the need for a younger workforce, perhaps borrowing from other industries which are also trying to overcome this challenge like the bus sector.⁶

5.4 However, the approach to target bus drivers as potential workers for the HGV industry is a short-term fix to structural problems. Policies should attempt to identify the root of the problem rather than search for quick fixes that may hamper other industries, particularly the bus industry which has been struggling with worker retention itself.⁷

5.5 Indeed, rather than taking a siloed approach, there is opportunity for the road freight industry to learn best practice from the bus industry. Schemes at an individual operator level such as Go-Ahead's Women in Bus could be translated widely to road freight through support and/or incentivisation from the Government. TfL have established a minimum wage for bus drivers, retention payments for those who remain in their roles, and a scheme that protects individuals' pay grades when they move between operators. This demonstrates what interventions are possible at a local authority or national legislative level. While there are unique problems facing the road freight sector, there are still opportunities to evaluate and learn best practice from other parts of the transport industry.

5.6 There is an assumption in many HGV roles is that it requires strength and physical fitness to cope with the heavy lifting. While this is true for some jobs it is not always the case. Many roles within the industry require a level of fitness that is resemblant of a gardener or a horse rider. Again, it is a matter of perception. When advertising and recruiting for HGV roles, this assumption should be challenged where necessary. Many women will be put off by the image that the role is too labour intensive.

5.7 A lot of the shortage in the UK has traditionally been made up of international workers, and predominantly EU nationals. Following our exit from the European Union, it's essential we put into place a mechanism that allows both EU workers, and international workers, to fill positions in the freight industry in a quick and efficient manner.

5.8 HGV drivers are charged every year for their license. This is unsustainable and undoubtedly acts as a barrier to entry for potential drivers, as well as a barrier to existing drivers remaining in the industry. There are obviously costs involved with licensing, but these should be minimised for the driver as much as possible, particularly as drivers have been underpaid for years.⁸

6. THE POTENTIAL EFFECTS OF THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICIES AND REGULATIONS ON ROAD SAFETY

6.1 Extending drivers' working hours will have serious negative consequences for the safety of HGV drivers and other road users. It is essential that HGV drivers are properly rested, alert and fully focused on the job at all times. HGV vehicles are the most dangerous on the road if not properly controlled and can cause life-threatening collisions. Extending hours will increase the chances of these sorts of incidents.

6.2 The Government should also be mitigating the effects of fatigue by ensuring a good standard of roadside facilities for drivers to rest when necessary. This means consistent facilities supplying basic needs such as fuel, food, drink and toilets as well as stops which can accommodate for the more complex needs of lorry drivers. The more sophisticated facilities must include sufficient parking, which is an absolute essential for drivers making longer trips where stops are a legal requirement after a certain number of hours.⁹

6.3 The Government should also be supporting measures to ensure the safety and security, and perceptions of safety and security, of roadside parking lots.

7. WORKFORCE SKILLS, TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

7.3 Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) training should be mandatory for all members of the freight industry. It is imperative that workers within the industry understand, appreciate and look to tackle EDI issues in the workplace. Mandatory EDI training is also an effective tool to counter the perception that the industry possesses a macho culture, as potential workers are aware of the processes in place to make the workforce a more inclusive space.

7.4 The same can be said for sexual harassment training. Firstly, a policy of mandatory sexual harassment training will decrease the number incidents that occur in the workplace.¹⁰ Secondly, it serves the same purpose of altering the image of the industry as a boys' club with a macho culture. Potential employees

can tangibly see what the sector is doing to make it a desirable place to work for everyone.

7.5 To fill the shortage of drivers, particularly skilled drivers, which is where most vacancies lie within the industry,¹¹ we need to invest in training schemes to encourage and facilitate an uptake in employees. We welcomed the £17 million committed by the Government to HGV skills bootcamps. However, this money is predicted to train 5,000 drivers, whereas estimates of the number of drivers the UK need reach up to 95,000.¹² The funding that was committed to training in the immediate aftermath of the crisis was a good start, but it must be sustained and built into a longer-term plan.

7.6 Included in a long-term training strategy must be an effort to promote training courses to the younger generation to offset the ageing workforce. Schools, sixth form and colleges are all potential gateways for the industry looking to appeal to youth, and there are opportunities to promote the sector as an attractive career choice through the Careers Hub network. A 'Year of Transport' – akin to the Year of Engineering in 2018, which was hugely successful in making engineering appeal to a diverse range of young people – could incorporate a focus on road freight. Training courses should be tailored to specific roles within the road freight industry, and offer a clear, accessible path into the most skilled jobs in the sector to make them as attractive and lucrative as possible.

7.7 Training and development are both integral parts of attracting a younger, diverse workforce, but they must be accompanied by increases to pay. Recent Logistics UK membership surveys have revealed the importance of increased rates of pay to driver retention.¹³ Ultimately, if the average HGV job pays more, and is seen as being a well-paid job by potential employees, your chances of attracting and retaining drivers is going to increase drastically.

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Endnotes

¹ E.g. <https://www.businessleader.co.uk/new-research-finds-women-prioritise-work-life-balance-over-salary/>

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https://www.researchgate.net/publication/260219489_Impact_of_Flexible_Working_Hours_on_Work-Life_Balance

³<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59773e3edb29d6ba1e61186d/t/60de31d509a3c07993b4c2>

[63/1625174489655/WIT_APPG_REPORT_07.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59773e3edb29d6ba1e61186d/t/60de31d509a3c07993b4c263/1625174489655/WIT_APPG_REPORT_07.pdf)

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⁵ <https://logistics.org.uk/CMSPages/GetFile.aspx?guid=86764e99-6b36-4517-a93d-f567ebfa0ada&lang=en-GB>

⁶ <https://www.go-ahead.com/sustainability/our-approach-sustainability/better-teams>

⁷ <https://www.unitetheunion.org/media/4234/21-11-09-bus-shortage-survey.pdf>

⁸ https://www.unitetheunion.org/media/3925/9486_a5-drivermanifesto_3.pdf

⁹ <https://d3cez36w5wymxj.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/26114826/Take-a-break-roadside-facilities-July-2016-FINAL.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1046/j.0038-4941.2003.08404001.x>

¹¹ <https://logistics.org.uk/CMSPages/GetFile.aspx?guid=86764e99-6b36-4517-a93d-f567ebfa0ada&lang=en-GB>

¹² <https://inews.co.uk/news/emergency-visas-hgv-drivers-too-little-and-too-late-stem-disruption-industry-bosses-1218808>

¹³ <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/3078/pdf/>