

Online dialogue explores transport industry transformation, inclusivity

The transport industry is willing and eager to transform. Bringing more female commercial drivers into the industry makes business, economic and social sense. To do this successfully, however, requires a concerted drive: with proper planning and a sustained approach.

This was one of the key messages that emerged from the inaugural online dialogue titled *Women in Transport: Unlocking Opportunities for Female Truck Drivers and Couriers* on 17 March 2021.



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Hosted by the Commercial Transport Academy (CTA), the event was supported by a number of industry organisations and attended by representatives from operators, OEMs, government departments, state-owned enterprises and industry service providers.

The online dialogue explored issues comprising:

- Human resource policies that support the development of female commercial drivers by overcoming barriers and unconscious bias.
- Best practices for employing and developing female commercial drivers.
- Developing an ecosystem to support women drivers and inspire transformation.

Key highlights included:

- Change management and driving change from the top (ie. leadership) are key success factors in bringing more women into the industry as commercial drivers.
- Transformation needs to be actively pursued; change will not just happen.
- The industry needs to actively partner on training and development initiatives for women. such as those the CTA has championed.
- Preparing the workplace for women and having the measures and plans in place to do this is vital.
- Developmental plans need to be compiled for roles within short-haul industry services where women can be placed as a matter of urgency.
- Infrastructure and facilities such as truck stops need to accommodate women.
- Some interesting key findings arising from online polls conducted during the session include:
 - Seventy-five percent of respondents said that drivers, line managers and fleet managers were not properly trained to work with female commercial drivers.
 - Sixty-seven percent of respondents believed there were not enough opportunities for women to pursue careers as commercial drivers.
 - Ninety-four percent of respondents were of the view that female drivers are safe, reliable and at least as hard working as male drivers.
 - Eighty-one percent of respondents believed that women were not aware that commercial driving was a viable career choice for them.

"This online dialogue confirmed that we need to work together as an industry to bring about real, meaningful and lasting transformation," said Nicci Scott, the CTA's founder and champion of the initiative. "We call on the transport industry to engage with us so that we can work together to address this. Together, we need to build an eco-system for women to thrive."

Industry partners such as the Transport Education and Training Authority which participated in the event explained how funding could be sourced for such programmes. TETA confirmed that the focus on women, in particular, was one of the pillars amongst the key imperatives of the National Development Plan.

The CTA aims to empower South African women who either wish to participate in or who are already employed and wish to be empowered within the transport and logistics sector. "There is a severe shortage of women in the industry and this skills gap needs to be addressed urgently," continues Scott. "Globally, in countries such as Australia and the USA we have seen women at the forefront, breaking through barriers and forging a place for themselves in commercial driving careers."

"The response and support for this initiative has been overwhelming," she concludes. "We will be hosting another three sessions throughout the year to continue the dialogue and develop and implement an action plan."

"Research is a core focus of this initiative, as data will inform policies and practices of organisations. The lack of data available regarding women in the trucking and courier industries is a barrier to transformation. It is imperative that this be done."

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