

A report for the TPS Bursaries 2008,  
18<sup>th</sup> November 2008

***“We now have a female Secretary of State for Transport, with female Shadow Ministers from both the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats. Yet we have a transport profession that has traditionally been male dominated. Is it now necessary to have a more female inspired agenda? If so, what should it be? Or are male and female transport needs the same?”***

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## 1.0 Introduction

1.1 Increasingly there is concern with achieving equality in society particularly between men and women. One area which has seen the focus of academics in recent years is the differing roles that gender has on transport. To do this, the paper looks briefly at how the impacts of gender have changed over time, and whether there is the need to focus on a female inspired agenda, through the views of the women who are already playing a leading role within the industry.

1.2 Transport has long been a key component in daily life, during the Industrial Revolution workers would live near to their place of work with some high profile developments built specifically for workers such as Cadbury and Bournville. In 1893 George Cadbury bought 120 acres of land near to the Cadbury factory to build a village for employees. Even before this in 1888, William Lever starting building Port Sunlight for employees of the Lever Brothers Soap factory. Here workers lived within close proximity of their place of work. In 1848, however, richer businessmen chose to locate in places such as Lenzie and Bearsden in East Dunbartonshire, places which were built to cater for the needs of the Glasgow business community who wanted to live in a pleasant country environment close enough to travel daily to work. Increasingly the nature of getting to work is changing due to changing land-use patterns, the ability to live increasing distances away from the workplace and the changing nature of commuters themselves.

1.3 Now the nature of travelling, both to the workplace and socially is increasingly more complex than it has previously been. Journeys are frequently grouped together to provide maximum efficiency of time, in a process called trip-chaining. However, is this necessary just attributable to one sex? I would argue that with increasingly complex social lives that this is not so. With increased

pressures on free time people are increasingly seeking to maximise the efficient use they make of their time, even though they might not necessarily realise this, it is more of a subconscious behaviour. Although the propensity towards trip



Woman commuting, taken from  
[www.veer.com](http://www.veer.com)

chaining is most pronounced for females in households with children, supporting the household responsibility thesis (Sermons and Koppelman 2001). This also supports much earlier work by White (1977) and Fanning-

Madden (1981) who believed that not only was there a difference between male and female commutes but that these differences were more complex with differences in wages, working hours, household responsibilities and the dynamics of the housing and labour markets impacting directly upon the fact that women have shorter commutes than men.

## 2.0 Needs

2.1 The National Travel Survey 2005 provides details of personal travel information in the UK and is part of a continuous survey which began in July 1988. As regards public transport women of all age groups used buses more than trains, with men between 30 and 39 making slightly more train journeys. This reflects work by White (1977) and Fanning-Madden (1981) with these trips showing the more widespread use of trains for longer distance journeys by commuters. The survey also reinforces the study carried out by Sermons and Koppelman, with men being more likely than women to go directly home after a work or business trip rather than conduct another task within this trip. Walking

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trips were highest for males aged 17-20 but higher for women in all the other age groups. These walking trips are most likely to be a result of the fact that women are less likely to have a car or access to a car “sometimes reflecting men’s use of the family car for travel to work purposes” (DfT 2007: 15).



**Women are less likely to have access to the car, but is this the way forward? The view of female bike commuters taken from [www.bikecommuters.com](http://www.bikecommuters.com)**

2.2 Does this necessarily mean that it is always women who are responsible for all household tasks? Certainly in the past this might well have been the case but now this argument is becoming increasingly redundant with more single parent households and men taking more of a proactive role in the household. As time has progressed and more research is being conducted amongst human geographers as well as transport specialists research has taken two main forms: “the constraints resulting from fear of male sexual violence, and the characteristics of women’s travel to and from employment” (Law 1999). This is seen as a main theme in government transport policy with the Department for

Transport (2007:6) stating that “women often have the primary responsibility for childcare or for looking after older, sick or disabled relatives. More often than men, they work part time, particularly if they have dependent children. A smaller proportion of women than men hold driving licences. Women are also more concerned about personal security than men, although men are statistically more likely to be the victims of crime on the transport system. The DfT’s Gender Equality Scheme 2007-2010 also reports that:

- Women who have responsibilities for childcare and work prefer to travel by car;
- Women experience problems of physical accessibility when escorting children, the reliability of services, access to information and concerns over safety and security;
- Women’s relative lack of access to a private vehicle can limit their access to employment opportunities;
- Transport difficulties can impact upon access to health care.

2.3 Whilst this paper is focussed upon gender it is much more a case of accessibility for all. The above list of bullet points could easily be applied to disabled people, people from different ethnic minorities, those of different employment status/social standing etc.

2.4 The nature of society itself is changing and therefore its integration with transport is also changing, and it is necessary that professionals respond to these societal changes. However, it is impossible to categorise transport and travelling behaviour into groups because society, by its very nature is not homogenous, and thus it is important for transport to try and cater for as many people as possible.

### **3.0 Profession**

3.1 Does the changing nature of society mean that more women need to be involved in the world of transport? Women have been playing an important role in the world of transport for many years, but many people might not necessarily attribute some things which we take for granted to women. For example, Barbara Castle was the Minister of Transport from 1965 to 1968 and was only the fourth woman in British history to hold a position in cabinet. Whilst her achievements are unknown to many in the current times her legacy includes the introduction of the breathalyser to combat the rise in drink driving, paving the way for the first government subsidies for socially necessary but unprofitable railways in the Transport Act 1968 and legislation decreeing that all cars had to be fitted with seat belts. There is now a female Secretary of State for Transport and a female Shadow Secretary of State for Transport, both of which were approached to give their views for this paper as they play pivotal positions within transport. Unfortunately both declined to give their thoughts which was disappointing as these women are ultimately key figures within the industry and it is their standpoint and that of their parties which ultimately influences and impacts upon everything a transport planner might do. Since Barbara Castle's position in office the role that women play in the politics of transport has drastically improved, paving the way for further involvement of women in the profession.

3.2 Ruth Kelly has now resigned from her position as Transport Secretary, citing wanting to spend more time with her family, bizarrely taking place at 3am, not exactly a family friendly time of the day. A stereotype which many may associate with women in the transport industry and is something which needs to be broken through. Kelly's replacement has now reverted to being a man, Geoff Hoon so the potential need for more female influence has increased.

3.3 It is not just politics where women are accounting for an increasing number of positions, it is in the transport related professions too. Is there enough women in the industry? Do those in the industry feel as though they come up

against unnecessary problems? Again, this is difficult to answer as every one person has a different view and so there will be no one general consensus on any issue. Although trends do seem to appear in people's views, with the majority of young professionals I spoke to feeling that age was more problematic and created more difficulty for them than being female.

3.4 To understand the views of key professionals within the industry I contacted a range of women, representing a cross section of disciplines across the world of transport planning. There appears to be an increasing number of women who are working within the world of transport planning. One agency, specialising in the recruitment of professionals into the world of civil engineering with a particular focus on highways and transportation in the past six years indicated that the proportion of its clients which were women is 23.8%<sup>1</sup>. This highlights a lack of women entering the industry through this particular route. To contrast with this figure, I sought to obtain data from a selection of the universities offering Transport Planning courses to see if a low level of female participants could be carried across into the profession. Unfortunately, due to a combination of the Data Protection Act and an exceptionally busy enrolment time when I contacted them I was unable to obtain official data from them. However, unofficially it has been suggested that the number of women taking Transport Planning courses is increasing and, of course, this will filter through into the industry as time passes.

3.5 Within professional organisations, the most recent data available for gender split was for November 2006 highlighting the gender composition for a range of institutions:

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<sup>1</sup> Figure courtesy of Esemplio Ltd



	% of male members	% of female members
Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI)	71	29
Transport Planning Network (TPN)	75	25
Transport Planning Society (TPS)	81	19
The Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS)	89	11
The Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport (CILT)	92	8
Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE)	92	8
The Institution of Highways and Transportation (IHT)	94	6

3.6 This shows that for all of the main institutions to which transport planners could belong the majority of members are in fact male, although the new President of the ICE is female, Jean Venables. This cannot be used as exact figures for the gender split in the industry overall but gives a good base figure to work from. More recently, specifically for the Transport Planning Society in 2008 71% of members were male, which shows an increase in female members of 10% over two years. In the Welsh branch of the TPS as of July 2008 there was an almost even split of 55:45, male to female. This shows an increasing trend with more women becoming members of professional organisations, so with this trend and organic growth is there really a need to promote more women to come into the industry? Some figures would suggest yes, some would suggest no.

3.7 Attendance at courses also highlights the gender gap in Transport Planning. For example “a count of attendees at this year’s Confederation of Passenger Transport annual dinner, for example, showed that out of 650 people, 74 were female” (Rambissoon 2008:14). Clearly there is a visible difference, however times have changed significantly as when Vanessa Kovacevic started her career she was one of few women studying engineering at Cambridge University (there was a total of 6 in 1969, beating the record of 5 set in 1908!) and frequently the sole female attending conferences at the start of her career. Now she is approaching retirement she acknowledges that things have changed but that the world of transport, both planning and engineering is likely to have limited appeal for women and is only likely to appeal to those who were a bit of a tom-boy as a child!

3.8 The Women’s Transport Network (WTN) was set up in 1995 ‘to promote transport systems and pedestrian environments that are safe and accessible for all and to encourage women to enter and progress in the transport industry’. The latest issue of the WTN newsletter was published on the Department for Transport website in 2004. Vanessa worked for the Department for Transport (Highways Agency) from 1992 to 2006 and had never heard of the WTN in this time. Since the publication of the last newsletter in 2004 the WTN appears to have near to disappeared from the professional world and thus there is a distinct lack of a body to promote the industry to women. Although key figures within the world of transport are trying to encourage the Department for Transport to revitalise the WTN, including Kris Beuret, the Director of Social Research Associates. Revitalisation of the WTN is key to being able to support and encourage women in the industry already and into the industry. The Women’s Transportation Seminar (WTS) London appear to be a much more proactive organisation, although their focus is in London and this could be problematic for many working elsewhere in the country. The WTS promotes the success and

advancement of women in transportation and is the first chapter of WTS International which will be based in Europe. The expansion of this group, from its current 150 members will help provide support and training opportunities to women in the transport industry.

3.9 Revitalisation of the WTN is key to being able to support and encourage women in the industry already and into the industry. There is more active support currently in Australia where there is a proactive group called Transport Women who work towards women becoming better known in logistics and warehousing in Australia. The group believes that women are accepted much better in the transport industry these days although they are aware that ‘there are a few dinosaurs around who believe that women should not be involved in any aspect and that it is a man’s domain’. This is the main area in which the Transport Women group aim to give support to any women who may feel prejudice in their workplace or area of expertise.

3.10 More recently a special interest group has been set up by ITS-UK which is the UK’s Intelligent Transport Society. The chair of this new group is Sharon Kindleysides who is keen to point out that women and men use intelligent transport systems in entirely different ways. The aims of this group are, in the short term, relatively simple for example compiling a list of names and contact details for all senior women in the sector so that young professionals can have a key point of contact as their careers progress. Events will also be held where senior figures are accessible on a face to face basis for young professionals to meet those with more experience in the sector. Kindleysides believes it is important not only for the industry to be aware of female needs but also the needs of women working within the world of transport, particularly as regards childcare for example.

3.11 Marjory Rodger is the Director of the Confederation of Passenger Transport, with 20 years experience in the bus and coach industry who, in a recent interview in Transit magazine (the magazine for bus, rail and light rail sectors), spoke about how careers advice in the past did not cover transport as an option, particularly for women. Things are progressing now and on a regional basis there are events taking place which are there to support women in the industry. For example there is the Women in Construction Action Network which is run by the Centre for Construction Innovation North West. Various Continued Professional Development (CPD) sessions are run across the North West, followed by networking events. The Women and Work programme is part of a £25 million government investment in the training and development of 25 000 women across a range of industries in which women are felt to be under represented.

3.12 As part of my research I chose to seek the views of key female professionals in the industry, and one of the first to respond was Pat Baxter, the Head of Transport at Reading Borough Council, who said the following:

“I have to say that I don’t really think about it [transport planning being a male dominated industry]. Admittedly my engineering colleagues are usually male but a lot of my Transport Planning Colleagues are female, perhaps not at my level yet but certainly the next generation is more balanced. Yes [male and female transport needs are the same], the job is a job not a gender specification and I believe very strongly that you are either good at your job or not, regardless of gender”. Having put this view across to male colleagues in the industry, there is a general consensus with this opinion and that a person’s ability to carry out a job does not relate at all to their gender, more simply their technical ability.

3.13 However, some women in the transport industry have conflicting views, although it must be emphasised that the overwhelming majority of

correspondence I have had with individuals in the transport industry has been entirely positive, and the only kind of discrimination that may have been experienced appears to be more due to age than to gender. One woman working in TfL who I spoke to found difficulty being a woman in the industry, with the main emphasis of her comments being related to recognising that 'one size does not fit all' and that the same people have different requirements and different emphasis at all times depending on journey purpose, mood etc as well as perceptions and attributes about suitability and quality. She feels that this may be a reason why more diversity is needed in the transport planning profession but questions whether this is necessarily simply just a more female inspired agenda.

3.14 This is the key statement which this paper revolves around. Whilst there is clearly a male bias in the transport planning industry, and a decreasing one at that, is a over-arching, encompassing approach to transport planning going to be achieved simply through a more female inspired agenda? I doubt so. With more and more women making a natural progressions towards transport I feel that a more female inspired agenda will be inevitable but do not think it is necessary to have an entirely female inspired agenda. I believe it more to be a case of ensuring that those in the transport planning profession regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation or disability should be more aware of the issues that all people face in using the transport system. Transport professionals should be aware that everybody needs to be catered for as much as possible and Nicola Shaw, the Managing Director of First Group, provided me with a prime example of this recently. First UK Bus surveyed female passengers in a few cities last year (2007) to ask them specific questions about how they used the bus and whether or not any specific changes could be made to make it easier for the company to retain women passengers in their 30s (a key group which First has seen a reduction in patronage amongst in recent years). This survey resulted in a number of changes being made to service provision and the design of vehicles. Such surveys, not only will help to keep bus patronage high and be

of financial benefit to operating companies but also open up the transport network to potential users who might feel discouraged from doing so otherwise.

3.15 Another key professional consultant was Katherine Agong, one of the first people in Wales to receive the new TPP qualification. Through several conversations with Katherine I gained an accurate idea of what it is like to progress as a woman in the transport planning profession as well as a working mother travelling with a child. As a professional Katherine feels well respected, which is inevitable with her breadth of experience and qualifications. She also feels that women do see things from different angles to men, which extends into professional life and that is why encouraging more women into the industry is necessary. Historically transport planning is a male dominated industry and there is a gap for more women to be encouraged into the profession to highlight women's transport needs more. For example, the needs of children and transport would be dealt with in a better way. Katherine cited bad experience booking train tickets online and getting assigned to a quiet carriage which was problematic being with a screaming 6 month old baby. It was also very difficult to change trains when at the train station. She feels that not enough thought was put into the development of the booking system which is something that should be dealt with at the grass roots level before a system is used to prevent people from being discouraged from using the system. Unfortunately it is little oversights such as this which might prevent some women from using the transport system, but also men who happen to be travelling with small children. Encouraging a wider range of people into the industry will enable whatever is designed to be more applicable to more people.

## **4.0 Conclusions**

4.1 The role of women in transport has clearly changed over recent years and now women are playing a much more active role in the world of transport

planning system and the utilisation of the transport system. With more women becoming transport professionals women are being catered for more adequately in the transport network. Is there the need for a further female inspired agenda? Personally, I think that natural change is meaning that more and more women will enter the profession anyway. I think that it is not necessarily the need for a more female inspired agenda, but a more aware agenda encompassing many issues such as gender, disability and age. Focussing on one element will not improve transport for the majority of people and this is what needs to be done, with the focus spreading widely across gender, disability, employment status, location and many factors.



***The Mobilistractor Suit***

4.2 Transport planners could learn lessons from other sectors as Capita Symonds has recently been working in conjunction with Skanska, pioneering new ideas in disabled design by using a suit called “The Mobilistractor” which restricts the movement and vision of the person wearing it, enabling planners and designers to gain an appreciation of the capabilities of elderly and disabled people with mobility problems”. By encouraging all transport professionals to open their eyes to the needs of every potential user, highlighting the diversity of society can we take a better stance on transport issues and best provide

for present and future users.

4.3 What has become clear through writing this paper has been that male and female transport needs do differ, but also that transport needs differ beyond the realms of gender too. I do not think there needs to be a more female-inspired agenda, as organic growth will encourage more women into the industry. From

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personal experience, and those I have spoken to, I feel it is the case that bias against women is far less in reality than general perception. However, I do believe that transport planners must think beyond their remit, in Doreen Massey's (1993:63) words "conceptualising space, mobility and access in a more socially imaginative way...might enable us to confront some of these issues rather more inventively". Hopefully by encouraging professionals to take notice of the wider picture, that the transport network and profession can meet the needs of more people encourage a wider range of people into the industry.

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