



Progressive
RAILROADING

Inspiring Inclusion:

Women in Rail & the Equity Embrace

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Preface

More and more rail industry organizations are embracing gender equity strategies and goals — it's the right thing to do and it makes good business sense. Diversity, equity and inclusion goals foster innovation, research shows. Diverse perspectives enable organizations to approach problems from a range of angles, leading to quicker solutions. And inclusion begets a sense of belonging, relevance and empowerment.

March 8 was International Women's Day (IWD), a celebration of the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women across the globe. This year's IWD campaign theme: "Inspire Inclusion."

With this in mind, we reached out to two dozen women representing organizations that serve the rail industry. We asked:

- What does inclusion mean to you, personally, and how does it apply to your approach to work/ the workplace?

- What does inclusion mean to your organization? How is it reflected in strategies or approaches, from recruitment and retention to team-building and problem-solving to corporate culture development?

Sixteen women from 14 organizations responded to our call. Their words are presented here in *Inspiring Inclusion: Women in Rail and the Equity Embrace*.

Collectively, their words tell a story, one we're privileged to share.

We'll continue to seek diverse perspectives. And we'll continue to share them.

Thanks to the 16 women who contributed to this important (and ongoing) conversation.

- Pat Foran, Editor-in-Chief, *Progressive Railroading*



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League of Railway Women

Our purpose driven culture strives to create a more sustainable, equitable, and prosperous world.



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Diane Benck

Vice President of Operations
RCE Equipment Solutions
President
West Side Tractor Sales Co.

I'd like to be able to tell you that our two organizations became female inclusive because we thought it was a good idea or on the cutting edge of change, but if I'm truthful, it happened because the women in our family businesses wanted to have a seat at the table. So, being family, everyone decided to give it a try.

The men and women in our family learned through trial and error and discovered many leadership advantages by having a diverse team. Different perspectives create a much more balanced approach when considering sales, personnel, financial goals and marketing. Just as the studies have shown, diverse teams create better long-term returns and we've seen this in our own businesses.

The women's voices are sometimes the strongest ones when it comes to risk and the impact actions have on our employees and company culture. Without a motivated workforce and a healthy culture, no sales or financial goals can be achieved.

The men in our organization now champion the women more than the women do because working together has been normalized and, frankly, everyone likes the diverse thinking that it brings to us.

We have tremendous workforce challenges in the rail and construction industries. Due to changing demographics, it's essential that we become more welcoming to women and minorities and create more role models so those entering can see a vision for their future.

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Susan Bobb

Vice President of Operations
Loram

At Loram, inclusion is not a separate project or initiative, it is how we work, and embedded in our core values. Our strength and success are in our people worldwide. The sharing of culture, ideas and experiences in the work they do every day is critical for high performance. We know that a diverse workforce enables more innovation, robust decision-making, higher employee engagement and so many more benefits.

At Loram, inclusion is also foundational to fair and equitable company policy and employee programs, building diverse teams through our talent acquisition process, providing challenging opportunities for employees and recognizing those efforts. We provide support and encouragement for our employees to participate in community and charitable initiatives, a cornerstone in our social responsibility actions. We are on a journey of

continuous improvement and through employee feedback and embracing diverse perspectives, we challenge ourselves to be better — not only because it is the right thing to do, but we know it is essential to our global success.

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... through employee feedback and embracing diverse perspectives, we challenge ourselves to be better ...

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“Being a woman in the rail industry, I want to thank all of our customers for the 50+ years of support. We are proud to be suppliers to such a vital industry to the economic success in America and look forward to continuing our strong customer support for the next 50 years.”

– DANIELLE BROOKS, PRESIDENT





Virginia Borkoski

Transit Managing Director
Hatch

As the Transit Managing Director at Hatch, I find myself deeply committed to the cause of inclusion. It's more than just a buzzword; it's my personal mission. Let me share my perspective on this vital topic.

Inclusion, to me, is about creating an environment where everyone feels welcomed and connected. As a woman working in a traditionally male-dominated rail industry, I've encountered many challenges. But I firmly believe that women have a duty to continuously foster inclusion. It's not just about breaking barriers; it's about building bridges.

My most impactful moments have occurred within women-based organizations like the Women's Transportation Seminar. These spaces provided me with opportunities to learn, network, mentor and grow. Through these

connections, I've felt deeply rooted in the industry's history and progress.

Despite workforce challenges, I see positive changes ahead. The rail industry is at the cusp of transformation, thanks to digital technologies and AI. Universities are also actively rebalancing gender representation. These factors lead me to believe that inclusion and equity will flourish.

Hatch clients also play a pivotal role in this transformation. By setting an example and incorporating inclusion into contract terms, they inspire the entire industry. We must engage women at all levels — from entry positions to leadership roles. Opening doors for women isn't negotiable; it's essential. I am committed to hiring, advancing and supporting women within Hatch and beyond.

At Hatch, the commitment to inclusion isn't just lip service. Equity permeates all levels and actions align with our words. We don't just talk the talk; we walk the talk. And I urge others to do the same. Let's create a rail industry where everyone feels valued, respected and included.



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CELEBRATING WOMEN IN RAIL

Amsted Rail recognizes and thanks all of the remarkable women who have made an immense impact at Amsted Rail and across our industry, illuminating the path for future generations of women in rail.

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Erika Bruhnke

Chief Sales and Growth Officer
RailPros

I have been in the industry for 15 years now and am incredibly fortunate to say diversity and inclusion have been a prominent part of my entire career. Within the first month of being a trainmaster, my supervisor encouraged me to take on the role of diversity council management sponsor. Little did I know, the opportunity my supervisor had just presented me with was one of team leadership, and an environment to establish trust and respect with a group of like-minded people.

At this same time in my career, I was an active participant with the local safety committee. In being present with both entities, I had the unique perspective of recognizing the connection between these two. We believed that safety was not a “thing” that you did when you arrived at work; it was a part of who you were. If we are asking people to show up as their authentic selves, safety and all, we first must create an environment where people feel safe

to do so. Inclusion is safety, safety is inclusion. From that point on, I have remained an active member of the employee resource group community. Of course, I’ve had my fair share of naysayers along the way, a series of short-sighted characters who only see these initiatives at their literal face value. Inclusivity isn’t just about representation. Inclusivity is a powerful corporate advocate and by championing such environments, we create a workplace where individuals feel valued, respected and empowered to contribute their best.

The champion, for me, was a boss that encouraged me to speak up in an executive meeting. I wasn’t trusting myself, my knowledge or experience, doubting my own value in that moment. My boss simply said, “You were invited to be here, just like everyone else was — they want to hear from you.” I *found* my voice in that very moment and have never looked back. Imagine a workplace where we are able to unlock the true potential of every employee. The decision-making, problem-solving, innovation, and engagement we could achieve is inspiring!



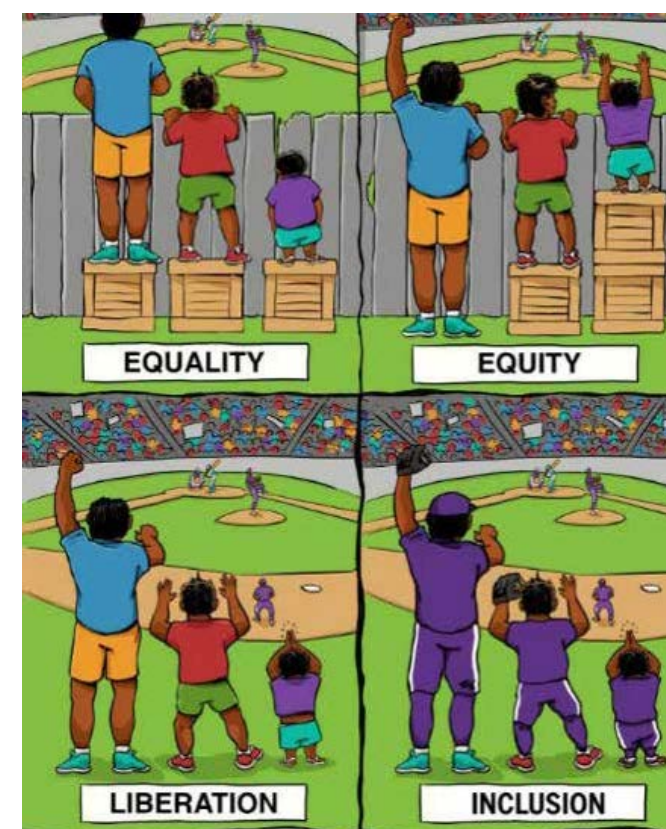
Tahira Dhanji

SVP Strategy and Corporate
Development
voestalpine Railway Systems
Nortrak LLC

Diversity, equity and inclusion are often viewed as one and the same. We have all heard the saying “a picture is worth a thousand words.” I saw an image recently depicting the difference between equality, equity and inclusion that really resonated with me (see image below right). Providing individuals specific support based on their needs and circumstances is equity. I believe we unlock our potential as a society, community or organization when we remove these barriers and move beyond equity to inclusion — helping us see and embrace different perspectives we might not have otherwise seen.

To me personally, inclusion is improving access to opportunities by removing or addressing the barriers in front of everyone, so we can benefit from different perspectives and lived experiences to move our world forward.

Everything we do is interconnected. I believe inclusion starts with representation — through diversity of thought, ideas, perspectives and experiences. No one person can have every answer. My approach in the workplace has been focused on bringing people together, including our customers and suppliers, to solve complex problems, which in turn improves the overall system. Sharing information and knowledge strengthens us so we can address the ripple effects of decisions and ideas ahead of time. I’m proud of our organization, the diversity of our team and more important, how we work together to improve every day. Hiring decisions, conversations and collaboration all play a part in making this a reality.





Amanda Florante

Director of Marketing and
Communications
RailWorks Corp.

There has been a positive shift in how companies view diversity and inclusion, and I'm proud to be a part of an organization that takes actionable steps into fostering an inclusive culture and enables employees to progress their careers within the company.

Since I came to RailWorks in 2022, I have seen firsthand how encouraging our senior leadership team is at implementing new ideas for a supportive work environment. This year, our Vice President of Human Resources Danielle Kandybowicz started the first employee resource group (ERG) at the company called Women@RailWorks, and I'm proud to be a founding member. The goal and mission of the ERG is to build an inclusive community that raises awareness of issues facing women in the industry and offers professional development resources, mentorship and networking opportunities. Women across all levels of the organization have been engaged in the group, and I know

Danielle is working on more ERGs for the company to further exemplify the inclusive and diverse culture at RailWorks.

I have been in the rail industry for 10 years now and it feels like night and day from when I first entered. Over my career I have gone from being the only woman in the room to now being surrounded by passionate women that are making a difference for everyone in our industry. I have been very fortunate in my career to have managers that always made sure to put me in the room during an important meeting or invited me to dinners with customers, which exposed me to different areas of our business. It gave me the confidence over time that my opinions do matter and are welcomed. Those supportive mentors are key to our success stories, especially for women.



Kari Gonzales

President and CEO

MxV Rail

As a female in the rail industry, I am grateful for the generations of women who carved a path for me to follow and grow. These women opened the doors to a new era of railroading that included dozens of women in the C-suite. But we can't stop here. There's still much work to be done to foster a community that supports diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging in all aspects of the global rail industry. We must remain committed to our networks, to creating opportunities and to developing the next generation of railroaders that will bring unique perspectives to our industry. At MxV Rail, that means we are a people-first organization, putting talented people in situations where they can thrive and exceed expectations.

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Katie Hope

Talent Acquisition Lead
Amsted Rail

Amsted Rail celebrates International Women's Day. As the Talent Acquisition Lead hiring globally, we are building a diverse and inclusive company culture that fosters engagement and retention by tapping into a pool of talent from diverse backgrounds. Diversity brings a variety of perspectives, ideas, and approaches, cultivating a dynamic and innovative work environment. We have so many remarkable women shaping our company's success!

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We are building a diverse and inclusive company culture that fosters engagement and retention by tapping into a pool of talent from diverse backgrounds.

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Barbara Jansen

General Manager, Sales and
Marketing, Rolling Stock
Progress Rail

possible for my career, and presented roles I never would have considered without their faith in me and coaching on what to tackle next. I am grateful to have had those opportunities and take the risk to try something new, although not easy.

Forging connections in rail takes a genuine commitment. Inclusion comes by being open to learning, honing skills through challenging and sometimes uncomfortable times, and a willingness to grow and persevere. As a woman, or anyone new to the industry, you earn respect by getting out in the field, listening to other team members with diverse backgrounds and determining what matters to customers. It can seem intimidating, but showing up every day and doing your part demonstrates a meaningful contribution. You can build strong bonds and fulfillment in this industry being part of a team you can count on and trust to achieve big goals for our customers.

Rail also presents opportunities for diverse career paths. My own began in communications, then marketing and now locomotive sales. Having mentors who offered encouragement and guidance helped shape what was



Stacey Schmidt

Chief Technology Officer
voestalpine Railway Systems
Nortrak LLC

Inclusiveness is about providing a safe place for all employees, colleagues and customers; ensuring a workplace where everyone feels that they can be themselves. It is about allowing each person the opportunity to be heard, contribute, be treated with respect and dignity and bring their different perspectives to the workplace. It is about working collectively.

I have a connect-the-dot theory in the workplace that I learned from my father: All of us should be aligned in achieving the next milestone, i.e., get to the next dot, and this objective should be transparent to the employees; however, the path each of us takes to get to the dot can be our own path. Inclusiveness is about welcoming those differences. It is about us accepting and understanding each one of us processes information differently, have our own ways of interacting with others and all of us bring our own life experiences, thoughts and views to the workplace. An

inclusive workplace welcomes and supports people with all kinds of differences.

When we focus on equity and not just equality, it creates a sense of belonging among co-workers. Equity requires us to see employees as individuals and recognize each person's unique needs. No two employees are exactly alike, so we shouldn't treat them as such. Once we have inclusion, this translates to greater productivity, better decision-making and team performance improves when the employees feel more connected.

Employees should feel they have a voice, feel valued and have a sense of belonging to ensure equal opportunities for everyone to succeed.



Louisa Stanlake

Global Product Manager,
Consumables

L.B. Foster

Inclusion is recognizing and valuing the diversity of individuals and creating environments where everyone feels a sense of belonging and value. As a mother of two young daughters working in a traditionally male-dominated industry, I see it as my responsibility to advocate for inclusion, showing them that gender should never limit opportunities. By supporting inclusive cultures, I aim to demonstrate to them the importance of advocating for equity in all aspects of life.

In my approach to the workplace, it's about recognizing diversity and ensuring every voice is heard and valued. I strive to create an environment where individuals are not only respected for their skills and expertise, but also for their individual perspectives. I firmly believe that a diverse team, comprising individuals from various intersections of society, facilitates improved innovation and problem-solving.

Embracing inclusion in the workplace encourages open communication and mutual respect, which are crucial for building cohesive working relationships.

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... it's about recognizing diversity and ensuring every voice is heard and valued.

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Lorie Tekorius

President and CEO

The Greenbrier Companies

Inclusion is embracing all people regardless of identity or background. It is the removal of barriers to ensure equitable access to opportunities and development among diverse individuals. Throughout my career, I worked with several women in leadership roles while at times being the only woman in the room at work. Industries with few female role models are not uncommon. However, lack of representation should not hinder our ability to create spaces where individuals feel respected and valued for their contributions.

The best example of how to do this in the workplace is through development programs. Development programs are critical to finding hidden pockets of talent within organizations and expanding opportunities for individuals who might have historically been overlooked. As individuals, we are not always fortunate enough to naturally find the right person who sees something in us and takes time to enhance

our visibility. Structured development programs expand the opportunity for growth, education and advancement to enrich our companies' talent pool and position our junior leaders for success.

Not only is inclusion about creating spaces to be seen and heard, but it also fosters a sense of empowerment among employees encouraging them to actively seek opportunities. It prompts employees to say "yes" when meaningful chances are offered and take full advantage of those moments to showcase talent and skills. I always encourage employees to seek the advice of more experienced leaders, find projects that inspire passion, and accept all opportunities to grow and learn. These are the values I have embraced throughout my career, and I work to reinforce as a woman in leadership.



Kristin Ward

Director of Customer Service
NARSTCO

As a North American manufacturer of sustainable steel ties, steel turnouts and “e” clips in North America, NARSTCO understands that inclusion and diversity are essential in today’s dynamic and evolving rail and manufacturing industry. People from different backgrounds and cultures give companies a greater balance of voices. It promotes diverse thoughts and encourages innovation, creativity and productivity, and leads to happier, more fulfilled employees.

As the rail industry grows and becomes more diverse and inclusive, NARSTCO’s goal is to attract, recruit and retain diverse talent at all levels. Supervisors and managers receive training to eliminate bias during interviews and hiring to facilitate inclusive onboarding. We offer programs such as parental leave to support employees. When employees feel included, they are more engaged and productive. This, in turn, boosts not only employee retention but profitability.

At NARSTCO, we believe in transparency and have eliminated working in “silos.” Decision-making and problem-solving happens in cross-functional teams at all levels. All members of our diverse workforce are encouraged to put forth their life and work experiences, ideas and perspectives in a collaborative manner that is welcome, respected and supported by coworkers and management.

NARSTCO believes in the dignity and intrinsic worth of every human being and we welcome, affirm and support all people. We strive to create a safe and inclusive environment that celebrates diversity and fosters positive relationships.



Tiffany Wenrich

Marketing Director
Holland

Last year, during a training session, one of my coworkers quoted diversity consultant and author Verna Myers, saying, “Diversity is being invited to the party: Inclusion is being asked to dance.” I’m grateful to be part of an organization where I have been asked to dance. My perspective being asked for in a meeting that I may have initially felt out of place in or to be part of a project outside of my comfort zone has been essential to my growth over the last seven years at Holland.

Holland has also recently focused more on cross-functional project teams, highlighting how different perspectives can improve processes, product offerings, etc. Employee resource groups like our Diversity Advisory Council offer all employees an opportunity for meaningful, engaged conversation while ensuring everyone is heard, respected and empowered. Support inside Holland is essential, and having an organization that supports diverse

representation in the broader industry is also crucial. Women from Holland play active roles on boards and committees for the League of Railway Women; Transit Rail Association for Canadian Contractors, Maintainers, Operators and Standards; and the National Railroad Construction and Maintenance Association, in addition to our male peers at many other industry associations.

Bringing more women into the industry is a high priority across the board. My team is actually all female, which I believe speaks to the value we place on inclusion. Organizations that actively create an environment where everyone feels seen, heard and respected will be more successful in recruiting and retaining women and other diverse talent, accelerating their success.



Maureen Werner

Vice President of Engineering
MxV Rail

Due to the amazing diversity of backgrounds at MxV Rail, there's a phrase that keeps coming up in internal meetings. There will be a pause in the conversation, and you'll hear, "I never thought of it that way." We want that kind of diversity in thinking and problem-solving, and it starts with people from diverse backgrounds and experiences, and professionals from all walks of life coming together in a shared sense of purpose. Having women at the table is an essential part of it. We are constantly improving in what we do, and that work will benefit the railways and future generations.

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... you'll hear, 'I never thought of it that way.' We want that kind of diversity in thinking and problem-solving ...

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Sarah Yurasko

President

League of Railway Women

Inclusion is providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized. Recent data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that 57% of women are in the workforce, but only 7.4% participate in the rail industry.

In order to maintain this existing percentage and to grow further, it is crucial that the industry provide opportunities and resources to women. I am honored to serve as president of the League of Railway Women, a professional organization connecting and cultivating the small percentage of women in rail. By providing opportunities for education, mentoring and networking, LRW helps women on their career journeys in our industry. Many studies show that companies benefit when women are well represented in the workforce. An increase in women in the industry will bring an increase in diversity of ideas and perspectives, improving innovation and business

results. I have grown in my own career thanks in part to the strong women role models and mentors that I have been so fortunate to have. I am so grateful to be able to give back and play a small part in promoting inclusion in the rail industry.

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