

*Standing Committee on Women's Issues in Transportation (ABE70)*  
*Dawn Hood, Chair*

## **Women's Issues in Transportation**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The Standing Committee on Women's Issues in Transportation (ABE70) seeks to identify emerging technical and career issues that address women's transportation patterns and concerns; to define transportation research needs related to these issues, and to stimulate, synthesize, and disseminate research findings on these issues. The Committee has always actively sought the contributions of both practitioners and academics at all stages of their careers and to women and men interested in these efforts; as a result the Committee has always had a large, diverse, and committed group of members and friends from North America and around the globe who commit substantial efforts to support the Committee's activities. The Committee has always and continued to provide solid support to all of TRB's Critical Issues in Transportation 2019 report; its research efforts over decades have withstood the most critical scrutiny. ABE70 faced enormous opposition over the decades as a TRB committee. Overcoming that opposition, and the Committee's substantial research activities, constitute our proudest accomplishments.

### **YESTERDAY**

ABE70, the Standing Committee on Women's Issues in Transportation, became a formal committee in 2000, after its earlier inception as a subcommittee of the Standing Committee on Safety Data, Analysis, and Evaluation in 1994. That subcommittee, originally led by Carol Popkin and later by Gloria Jeff and Susan Herbel, applied for and was granted Task Force status in 1997. The Task Force recommended the formation of the TRB standing committee on women's issues in transportation. There was opposition to creating the new standing committee in spite of its firm basis in research and data; some researchers did not respect work on women's travel issues and there were concerns that the committee would focus not on research but on advocacy.

The first Chair of the new Standing Committee was Gloria Jeff, then the Deputy Administrator of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Jeff was succeeded by Miranda Carter (then of the UK Department of Transport) and then by Co-Chairs Marsha Anderson-Bomar and Heather Rothenberg. Dawn Hood of the University of Minnesota chairs the Committee today.

This Committee's foundation in safety and data was especially appropriate given the very clear and documented gender differences in crash risks, rates, and outcomes. The Committee was

justified by global research documenting the major and enduring differences between women and men in travel behavior, preferences, and attitudes; crash risks and outcomes; responses to the construction and operation of various transportation and freight vehicles; concerns about safety (crashes and falls) and personal security (crime and harassment) in all transport modes; responses to transportation and related public policies, incentives, and sanctions; and participation and experiences in various sectors of the transportation labor force. The Committee's goals and objectives reflect a targeted focus on the planning and policy implications of these significant travel differences between the sexes, controlling for income, employment status, race and ethnicity, and increasingly immigration status, life cycle, and household role.

Interest in women's transportation issues and the Committee's activities was spurred and more broadly legitimized over the last two decades by support from the travel behavior and modeling community and a series of increasingly more impactful international conferences on women's travel issues that addressed a wide variety of transportation topics from multiple perspectives. The conferences stirred controversy, nevertheless, even as the array of papers presented at each continued to show the important knowledge gained by comparing the travel patterns and behavior of women and men, as well as comparing between sub-groups of women. The earliest conferences were widely criticized for attempting to take advantage of "normal" differences between the sexes and for having a political rather than research agenda. The *first* conference in 1978 was sponsored by the U.S. Department of Transportation at the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) building. The political commentator, George F. Will wrote a column in *Newsweek* critiquing the conference while conference organizers received anonymous notes complaining that it was a waste of public money (some came from internal DOT mail). The Proceedings of the first conference were available only in hard copy (U.S. DOT, 1978); a few libraries have copies today (see the notes in the reference list).

The *second* conference was not held for another seventeen years, possibly because of this kind of backlash, although the growing importance and value of gender studies in transportation became ever clearer over the almost two intervening decades. The *second* conference was held in 1995 in Baltimore, Maryland; it was sponsored by the Federal Highway Administration and organized by the University of Arizona and Morgan State University. It was the first of the Committee's formal conferences to have a small number of papers and presentations from international researchers. The two volume conference proceedings are available on the FHWA website (FHWA, undated, a and b).

The *third* conference on women's travel issues in Chicago (IL) in 2004 was the first sponsored by TRB and ABE70. Even the third conference faced some opposition; there was still concern that it would not focus on "legitimate" research topics issues but rather on topical political concerns. Some members of the TRB Executive Committee (which must approve all TRB conferences) were concerned that the conference might politicize research findings. The third conference was the first, however, to have a very large number of financial sponsors, including several offices in the Federal Highway Administration, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the Federal Transit Administration, the United Kingdom Department for Transport, General Motors, Oak Ridge National Laboratory, and four state Departments of Transportation—Iowa, Michigan, New Mexico, and Washington State.

The Conference Proceedings include a wide variety of papers whose topics range from crime against women in public transit to the crash worthiness of vehicles for pregnant women (TRB, 2006 a, b), each of which more than demonstrate the value of the gender lens. The

Chicago conference was notable for a significantly enlarged international presence, including attendees from the Global South (the less developed and developing nations of the world, all of which are in the Southern Hemisphere).

The next, *fourth*, conference on women's travel issues was again sponsored by TRB and the Women's Issues in Transportation Committee and held at the National Academies' Beckman Center in Irvine, California in October 2009 (TRB, 2011a, b). This conference too was supported by a wide array of universities, including the UC Transportation Center representing the Berkeley, Irvine, Los Angeles, Riverside, and Santa Barbara campuses as well as UC Davis and METRANS, a consortium of the University of Southern California and California State University, Long Beach. Other sponsors included the Federal Highway Administration, the Federal Transit Administration, the United Kingdom Department for Transport, the Swedish Government Agency for Innovation Systems, WTS, and the New Mexico Department of Transportation.



Photo 1 – Irvine Conference Steering Committee Meeting in Seattle.

The Fifth International Conference was sponsored by TRB and the Standing Committee on Women's Issues in Transportation in partnership with the Federation Internationale De L'Automobile (FIA-the French equivalent of the Auto Club), IFSTTAR (the French Institute of Science and Technology for Transport, Development, and Networks), and the U.S. Bureau of Transportation Statistics. The fifth conference was the first truly international conference. It was



held in April 2014 in Paris France, in conjunction with the bi-annual conference of the European equivalent of TRB, the Transportation Research Arena (TRA). The conference proceedings give definitive evidence of the wide array of topics that benefit from a gender lens (FIA and US BTS, 2014).



Photo 2 – Marquee Dinner, Paris 2014 WIIT, held at the historic library of the Federation Internationale De L'Automobile.



Photo 3 – Sandi Rosenbloom, Maryvonne Dejeaumes, and Susan Herbel were honored for their contribution to the Conference and the Standing Committee.

Each of these conferences over the last 42 years has established a clear rationale for the research questions that motivate the committee and provide a scholarly rationale for the wide range of activities that the Committee sponsors and supports. The research basis of the Committee has come to firmly rest on recognizing that large differences in the travel behavior of women and men around the world have not disappeared over the years (even as more women have obtained driver licenses and participate in the paid labor force). Women almost universally continue to make more trips and travel fewer miles than men in comparable households, reflecting the domestic responsibilities that keep them closer to home but force them to combine employment and family trips to a greater degree than comparable men. Women at all ages are more likely to make “serve passenger” trips than comparable men, taking a child or aging parent or family member to someplace they themselves don’t need to be. Older women drivers are more likely to reduce and ultimately give up driving at earlier ages than comparable men drivers. Although, older women drivers are statistically much safer drivers. Women in fact drive more safely (and soberly) than men at all life stages but suffer greater injury in crashes of comparable severity. Disasters—floods, hurricanes, and earthquakes—may disproportionately challenge women. And women’s travel in both industrial and developed nations is inhibited and challenged by the lack of neighborhood accessibility (well maintained and well-lit pedestrian facilities for example) and the burdens of sexual harassment and crime in all travel modes.

Those travel differences that might be “explained” by more traditional variables such as age, income, or access to a person vehicle—rather than gender per se—remain intensely gendered. Older women who do not drive, have little income or retirement funds to pay for travel, and live alone without a household member to provide them with rides, substantially outnumber men of comparable age in almost every nation. Women are ten times as likely to be single parents and live alone with their children than comparable men; women at all ages are

significantly more likely to be poor and less likely to be rich than comparable men which substantially impacts their travel choices. Given how tenaciously gender is linked to personal and household characteristics that predict travel behavior, it makes little sense to argue that traditional variables alone can better explain differences in travel than gender.

Women around the world, but particularly in the Southern Hemisphere, suffer substantial barriers to mobility due to sexual harassment and assault; they are confined to less efficient and effective travel modes when they make trips. Women also continue to encounter barriers to full employment in many transportation industries and to face unique challenges on-the-job in many transport sectors. These long-term differences in the travel patterns and behavior of women and men still raise a number of critical planning and policy questions that the Committee continues to address.

## **TODAY**

The Committee has always had and continues to have an active role in TRB and the larger research community with members and friends from many disciplines at all stages of career development; the Committee has always had a substantial international presence. The Committee today focuses on a wide range of emerging and topical issues that cross the boundaries of many TRB standing committee activities; they include the role of women in various transportation industries, women's personal security (crime, harassment) when traveling on public transit and as pedestrians; women's use of sustainable and active modes like biking and walking; evacuation challenges facing women and children during disasters and disruptions, the distribution of transportation resources between the sexes and the implications for social and economic equity; and human factors research, particularly vehicle configurations and the location of safety equipment in a range of transportation vehicles (its efficacy for pregnant women, for example, or where airbags are situated to be effective for women and children).

The Committee co-sponsors multiple sessions at the TRB Annual Meetings and organizes and co-sponsors a variety of activities with many other standing Committees, including a series of Workshops at subsequent Annual Meetings that address "bridging the gender gap" targeting long standing challenges to conducting and publishing research on women's issues in transportation and mainstreaming data collection and research on gender.





Photo 4 – 2019 TRB Annual Meeting Committee Meeting.

The Committee is in the process of organizing the Sixth International Conference on Women's Travel Issues, to be held at the Beckman Center of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine in Irvine, California in September of 2019. The conference (WiT 2019) will bring together scholars, practitioners, policy analysts, and public officials from around the globe to explore women's unique transportation perspectives, challenges, achievements, and opportunities. WiT 2019 is guided by an evaluative framework of three lenses: ***Insights***, ***Inclusion***, and ***Impact***.

- ***Insights***: What have we learned about women's travel behaviors; safety and health considerations; technology, engineering and infrastructure impacts; and policies? Are new directions in order?
- ***Inclusion***: How has our emphasis on women's issues in transportation ignited an interest in broader gender oriented research?
- ***Impact***: In what areas has there been measureable progress, how has this been achieved, and how do we position the next generation of researchers and policymakers to learn about and adopt methods to better serving a major community of transportation users.

The conference has already received substantial funding from a variety of sponsors including the Federal Highway Administration, the American Public Transit Association, Uber, and several Universities. The Conference Steering Committee will use the generous contribution of these and other potential sponsors to lower registration fees for early career scholars and practitioners, to provide travel scholarships for international participants, particularly those from the Global South, to commission papers and reviews on crucial conference topics, and to invite special guest speakers. All evidence shows that this will be the most well-attended and perhaps the most international of all the Conferences in this important series.

## THE FUTURE

The Committee will continue to assess transportation and research environments for relevant topics that will be augmented and improved by a gender lens. The Committee will adjust its scope and activities to remain current and impactful. The Committee's work, targeting topics that include health, safety, and personal security; transport policy; transportation patterns and mobility; sustainability; and career impacts on transportation and vice versa, will continue to be structured around three specific sets of activities:

- **Research:** The Committee will identify additional research initiatives based on the 6<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Women's Issues in Transportation and promote new work on the highest priority issues, developing ways to disseminate conference research and encourage cross-cutting sessions at subsequent Annual Meetings.

- **Outreach:** The Committee will develop effective ways to communicate the Committee's work and the state of knowledge on women's travel issues across a range of relevant TRB committees.

- **Education:** The Committee will identify subject issues that matter but don't receive the attention that they deserve and create a variety of venues within and outside TRB to disseminate that information to researchers and policy makers in a variety of modes and substantive transportation arena.

The Committee will continue its multi-disciplinary focus which creates many collaborative opportunities with a wide range of other TRB standing committees promoting research, encouraging papers, and organizing joint conference sessions and meaningful workshops at the Annual Meeting.

The Committee's activities and focus will continue to interact with and significantly support all of the 2019 (and future) Critical Issues reports:

- Transformational Technologies and Services
- Serving a Growing and Shifting Population
- Energy and Sustainability
- Safety and Public Health
- Equity
- Governance
- System Performance and Asset Management
- Funding and Finance
- Goods Movement
- Institutional and Workforce Capacity
- Research and Innovation

The Committee explicitly addresses many of the issues raised by TRB's Critical Issues in Transportation 2019 report, and will continue to identify the ways in which research efforts on these broad issues benefit from gender research and perspectives. Poor maintenance of critical assets and breakdowns in *system performance and asset management*, for example, may be felt more by women because they are juggling multiple household responsibilities and providing rides to children and elderly parents and in-laws even as they maintain full time employment. These travel patterns, and the family obligations embedded in them, may make it less possible for women to forgo auto travel and use alternative modes, impacting *energy and sustainability issues*. Women may be less likely to take advantage of *transformational technologies*, like



shared ride services, because of fear for their personal security or because they are traveling with too many children to accommodate. Many **safety and public health** issues inherent in transportation system characteristics and performance affect women differently and arguably more negatively than comparable men; these issues bear on how well transportation systems **serve a growing and shifting population**. Women face sometimes major challenges in entering into and advancing in various aspects of the transportation industry, public and private, seriously impacting both **institutional and workforce capacity** and **governance** issues. Women continue to be most disadvantaged by their unequal access to better modes of transport in developing and developed nations raising significant **equity** concerns; women for example are more likely to use public transit than cars in developed countries, less likely to have access to wheeled or motorized modes of transport in developing countries. Women in two worker households make ever-increasing use of home delivery of goods and services, substantially impacting **goods movement**; employed women with children who face severe time constraints may find toll roads to provide the most cost-effective transportation option even if they struggle with paying for those services, showing a clear link to complicated conversations about **funding and finance**. Finally, continued resistance to viewing crucial and topical research issues from a gender lens has profound implications for **research and innovation**. There is simply no critical issue that does not benefit from a clear and consistent gender focus in all research efforts.

ABE70's research and other activities have been pivotal in illuminating the importance of gender differences in all aspects of the transport sector for over four decades. The Committee's past success in raising and evaluating critical transportation issues from a gender perspective provides a clear indication that future efforts will only further enhance the study of critical transportation issues, those that exist today and those that arise over the next 100 years of TRB's groundbreaking work. The Committee's previous efforts have been successful even if our goals have not all been met; we move forward confident that we will bring the best resources of many minds, disciplines, and professions to bear on the crucial transportation questions of today, tomorrow, and the decades to come.

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