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**Adeline Ginn** [Become a fan](#)  
 Founder of Women in Rail, General Counsel for Angel Trains,  
 barrister

## Why Aren't Women Interested in Rail?

Posted: 24/07/2014 12:41 BST | Updated: 2 hours ago



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As women we have fought for years for equality. We read constantly how as a gender we are striving to break the glass ceiling and change perceptions. But what if a whole industry was actively crying out for more female CEOs, managers and employees, but very few were accepting the offer?

As a woman, if you were to think of a dynamic, creative and rapidly growing industry that could take you places (excuse the pun) - the rail industry probably isn't the first, second, or even third industry that would spring to mind. The UK makes more than a billion passenger railway journeys each year - but despite that it's an industry that few of us actually know much about.

It's also an industry we begin to form preconceptions about from an early age. Some of the nation's most treasured books, such as Thomas the Tank Engine depict our railways controlled by a stoic male - the Fat Controller. As we get older this image is reinforced - we learn about the history of the nation's steam railways from Stephenson's Rocket onward, while being shown images of burly men covered in coal. Although the rail industry has rapidly changed since then - those male dominated images remain with us.

In reality, it's one of the most dynamic and exciting industries in the UK to work in at the moment. At a time when many sectors are struggling, Crossrail and HS2 are experiencing billions of pounds of investment. The Transport Secretary Patrick McLoughlin has just announced a HS2 investment programme in to rail worth an additional £1.3 billion for the British economy - creating more than 14,000 new jobs for workers in Birmingham, with the ripple effect of 2,000 new homes to be built in the area. This is particularly significant as Government figures show that Birmingham has one of the highest unemployment s in the UK. The rail industry will be at the forefront of helping to turn the city's fortunes around.

Opportunity is knocking - but many women are not answering the door to us. But why? Recent research from the train drivers union ASLEF shows that, although our rail networks are transforming, our perception of the sector is not. Their study shows that we still largely associate railways with the historical concept of grimy men in physically demanding jobs. This is something that we find in our day-to-day discussions with women and girls outside the industry. It's not surprising then that Department for Transport studies show that currently fewer than 20% of people working in the rail sector are women. But we're on a mission to change this.

We've created the Women in Rail Group to raise awareness of the vast and diverse range of opportunities available to women in Britain's cutting edge rail sector. From CEO's to train drivers, Treasurers to HR - there are a huge number of roles available for people with the skills to match. Many people overlook the sector as a whole without thinking what goes on behind the scenes day in day out. The industry is crying out for talent in customer support, finance and payroll, engineering and design, PR and marketing.... the list of potential opportunities is almost as long as long as the new tracks we are laying.

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As an industry, the rail sector is working hard to change its image - we've broken the glass ceiling and see Women in Rail as a catalyst to help women put their best foot forward in their career. As a society our attitudes are changing too. From the first female train drivers in the 80's who saw men refusing to get on trains when a woman was at the helm, to today, where the Minister for Transport Susan Kramer is part of the team calling the shots for the whole industry.

Like HS2 and Crossrail, we are going full speed ahead in to a time of exhilarating change - both on the train tracks and in our offices. Senior management, both male and female at all major train operators and companies are dedicated to encouraging new blood into the sector. We need to inspire more people to get on board and bring their unique skills and perspectives along, ensuring our industry's structure is as modern as our world class trains. Rail is a sector that can really take you places - women, we invite you to buy a ticket!

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