

WIN ADVISORY BOARD SUBMISSION: Te Waihanga - 30yr Infrastructure Strategy Consultation Review

Introduction

This submission is made by the WIN Advisory Board, part of the Women's Infrastructure Network (WIN) and an Advisory Board to Infrastructure New Zealand (INZ).

The Women's Infrastructure Network (WIN), was launched by Infrastructure New Zealand at the Building Nations Symposium in October 2016 and now has some 2200 members across the Infrastructure sector. The WIN Advisory Board established when the network was launched provides strategic direction and input into the shape and direction of the Network and assists INZ with diversity and inclusion, and in particular gender based, issues. The Network has seven chapters across New Zealand (in Northland, Auckland, Waikato, Wellington, Christchurch, Otago and Queenstown) that administer the network at a regional level and run local events for members. They are now largely self governing but have been supported by a secretariat within INZ. WIN NZ is also connected to the global WIN network, operating in Canada, the USA, UK and Australia.

The purpose of the group is to increase the number of women in leadership roles, grow the visibility of women, and to provide a networking and support group for women in the infrastructure sector. The Network hosts events, advocates for greater representation of women in the sector, and provides opportunities and tools, such as a group LinkedIn site to disseminate information articles etc. The network is regarded as having a future focus insofar as it grows the visibility of the sector in the eyes of women making career choices and also enhances female retention rates in the sector.

Much of the time the Network is furthering an agenda or strategic direction set by INZ, although in this instance this submission is made by the WIN Advisory board without any specific direction or request from Infrastructure New Zealand.

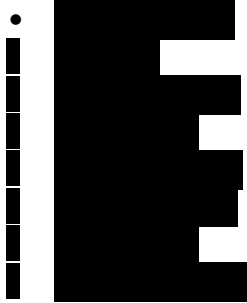
Board members have reviewed the strategy consultation document and made comments on matters relating to gender which might not otherwise be raised.

We consider that infrastructure strategy, policy, design and delivery would all benefit from a greater number of women being involved at all levels in the organisations making such decisions (including the Infrastructure Commission itself). A greater representation of the 51% of the population that identify as female within the sector will result in

- a better understanding or the needs of the ultimate end users of Infrastructure;
- reduce group think;
- enhance decision making and innovation;
- help address labour force and capacity constraints of the sector;
- increase recruitment and retention rates alleviating some of the capacity constraints the sector faces.

We have included commentary only on those aspects that we consider have a particular gender nuance and agree with the observation that poor infrastructure doesn't impact everyone equally.

This submission has been authored by the WIN Advisory Board members <https://infrastructure.org.nz/WIN> as follows:



Submission Response

Q33. What could be done to improve the procurement and delivery of infrastructure projects?

- The Consultation Document makes a number of valid observations including the need to address a lack of skills, knowledge and experience in the industry. However, there is little [no] mention of the importance of diversity in solving these issues.
- The need to develop more competent capability at all levels is clear, from roles on the tools through to senior leadership. Unless the industry focuses on attracting all potential talent pools it will not be able to deliver – there is a strong untapped talent pool for infrastructure – it is women. Efforts are being made to encourage young women to pursue STEM in their studies and early careers, which needs to continue to build a future resource pool. Equal effort needs to go into identifying and supporting women further through their career, as a means of filling the infrastructure leadership gap. We would like to see more focussed pathways for women to enter and remain in the infrastructure sector long term and for there to be focus on changing the culture of a sector that is currently less than receptive to persons other than heterosexual males.
- Infrastructure is being planned to meet the needs of a different NZ than the one that exists today or existed yesterday (not all of that is demographic changes, societal changes are also relevant). Canvassing views from different dimensions of diversity (gender, ethnicity, age, all) – that use infrastructure – would yield insights into consumer preference and lead to innovation. The presence of “other” will help prevent group think.
- The strategy appears to assume a perpetuation of current working patterns with large groups of people travelling to a central working space and the existence of time based rush hours. That approach does not fully address the alternative approaches to working that have become more common during Covid and the patterns of women who tend to bear a greater proportion of household chores, childcare and school time drop off and pick ups and often work more flexibly. There is a bias in analysis to those working full time. Transport pattern analysis will establish that journeys to and from a CBD represent in some cases less than 20 % of the trips taken in any given day but remain the predominant focus of analysis. A focus just on peak demand/peak flows can skew analysis.
- One opportunity to improve project procurement is to use the procurement exercise itself to secure broader outcomes and better value for the customer and for the community, for NZ

Inc. While there is reference to broader outcomes it is notable that when assessing options and approaches there is a default reversion to economic factors only in such assessments and at no point is return on investment which is not economic in nature mentioned. Not all wellbeing outcomes are able to be quantified economically, but Treasury has indicated through its Living Standards Frameworks that all of the capitals and a range of outcomes are relevant.

- Procuring authorities have the opportunity to drive more diverse resource mixes in evaluation criteria – gender as well as age, culture. There is a lack of metrics in tenders to drive education across dimensions of diversity. Metrics will drive the commercial requirement for organisations to make change.
- If procuring agencies keep asking for (and most positively evaluating) the most experienced candidates (and those that mirror the criteria of past leaders and what has been done before) then nothing will change, the same type of leadership characteristics and behaviours will be perpetuated including the gender and ethnicity and diversity dimensions of our existing construction sector participants. Allocating the highest marks to people with most experience is limiting the potential resource pool and preventing capable candidates from developing.
- There appears to be an approach of changing the existing system rather than a wholesale reimagining of what might be possible. We regard this in short as a lack of systemic change mandate – we must consider optioneering and mode agnostic behaviour. Let's go back before the business case for the built asset when we are considering all of the options and possibilities.
- The concept of the Academy is a good idea, but how can we ensure women are fairly represented there. Given there are not enough women currently delivering projects, if the pool of candidates to put through the Major Projects Academy is restricted to existing PMs then this will further exclude women. Training can be a tool to encourage new people, different people. There is an opportunity for a Major Projects Academy to be a “Change delivery” vehicle. The skill development must go wider than purely technical, to the valuable EQ and collaborative skills that will be required.

Q35. What could be done to improve the productivity of the construction sector and reduce the cost of delivering infrastructure?

- Productivity of the sector cannot be improved while there remains a resource gap. Capacity needs to be improved. Please refer points made above relating to Question 33 regarding the inclusion of women and criteria for assessment. Women are a largely untapped talent pool.
- Consideration also needs to be given to changing workforce dynamics – more part time, flexible options are needed to improve capacity of the sector – traditional rigid site hours do not work for people with family commitments and our aging workforce who need to be retained part-time to help facilitate and effect knowledge transfer. There are also significant benefits to the sector, and the economy more generally, in all these classes of workers remaining productive and engaged (including averted health costs).

- The report has identified the work that the Construction Sector Accord is doing re diversity but those are not the only workstreams that need to be considered – there is other work going on with industry bodies and agencies that should be considered and amplified. ConCoVE Workforce Development Councils, Diversity Agenda, WIN, Engineering NZ, ACENZ, IPWEA, NAWIC etc etc. The focus must also not just be on ground roots individuals working on the tools so to speak but work at all levels. Better planning and better pipeline would allow the construction sector to more actively work on and invest in their talent pipeline.

What other comments would WIN like to make on the overall Strategy Consultation Document?

- WIN has a platform and a network – if Infracom want/need feedback from women in the infrastructure there are 2200+ in the network that we can tap into. We also have an Advisory Board of senior women in the sector operating at a strategic level that can assist. Te Waihanga has a Local government reference group and the Te Ao Māori Testing Panel – the WIN Network and Advisory Board can assist with bringing the missing gender lens.
- It must also be noted the platform and a network represented by the Infrastructure NZ Emerging Talent network and other young professional groups within the various professional and vocational group in the sector should also be considered. In this way Infracom would be incorporating the voices of future generations that will bear the impact of the decisions being made today.
- WIN sees an opportunity for Infracom itself to lead the way on diversity by demonstrating this itself within the organisation, showing other organisations how this is done. This diversity needs to be at all levels of the organisation including senior management.
- There is real risk particularly when we operate at speed and without transparent criteria for appointment for the default to be made to existing governance structures where perhaps there are less women and “other” represented. In doing so we can inadvertently perpetuate the biases of the past in terms of who is involved in decision making, and more importantly what is considered relevant to decision making. Why is that bad? because to design really impactful, valuable and resilient assets you want decision makers that are diverse, that mirror the population demographics of the users of infrastructure. Real people within the communities that infrastructure serves. Such groups are less susceptible to group think and more likely to generate innovations because they are not the incumbents wedded to how it's always been done.
- There is also the ethical issue around representation as RBG (Ruth Bader Ginsberg) said women should be in all the places that decisions are made. While you can substitute diverse representatives for women, women are a great place to start.