



## Board Report

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**Agenda Number:** 13.

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**CONSTRUCTION COMMITTEE  
MARCH 19, 2025**

**SUBJECT: FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN PROJECT LABOR AGREEMENT/CONSTRUCTION CAREERS POLICY CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS**

**ACTION: RECEIVE AND FILE**

**RECOMMENDATION**

RECEIVE AND FILE the Construction Workforce Disparity Study report and response to Board Motion 29 (Attachment A).

**ISSUE**

On February 23, 2023, the Board passed Motion 29 - Attachment A (Directors Horvath, Mitchell, Bass, Solis, Hahn, and Dupont Walker) directing staff to: commission a refresh on the construction workforce disparity study and report back on (1) study findings and recommendations; (2) the potential application of cultural competency requirements in contractor and staff training, as well as similar qualitative metrics that can be used in Metro's proposal evaluation and contracting processes; and (3) the feasibility of creating bid preference incentives that can be applied to increase the number of women working on Metro funded construction projects, supporting working parents with the availability of dependent care spending account benefits in addition to access to child care; and working with organizations such as Women In Non-Traditional Employment Roles (WINTER) to apply best practices in future contracts. This provides a report back on the aforementioned items.

**BACKGROUND**

In 2019, Metro undertook a critical study to explore the disparities in the female construction workforce. The study's findings were reported to the Metro Board in September 2019. This study assessed female participation levels in various trades and discussed obstacles hindering recruitment and retention of women in construction roles.

Since the initial study, to further advance opportunities for women in construction, Metro has launched several groundbreaking initiatives, including outreach efforts to high schools that promote careers in construction. The Women Breaking Ground website, launched in March 2024, serves as an essential one-stop resource for prospective female workers and has successfully provided information and support to over 900 individuals eager to start a career in construction. Additionally, Metro's ongoing partnership with Women in Non-Traditional Employment (WINTER), a nonprofit organization dedicated to workforce development for women, reinforces our commitment to this

cause by offering employment assistance to its graduates.

In September 2023, staff provided an update to Metro’s Board on the progress of the study. This update included a timeline for engaging a third-party consultant, the procurement process, as well as details regarding contract approval and award. Additionally, during the May 2024 PLA/CCP quarterly update report to the Board, staff shared further progress on the study, including the expected report completion date and plans to present the findings in March 2025.

The 2024 Female Construction Workforce Disparity Study analyzed data from 2019-2023 to assess the availability of females in the construction industry, identify barriers, and provide recommendations to increase females in the construction trades.

## **DISCUSSION**

Metro is unwavering in its commitment to empowering women in the construction industry through robust, results-driven initiatives. Programs such as Women Build Metro LA (WBMLA), the implementation of a report card system to measure female participation among Metro’s PLA/CCP contractors, and the Women in the Trades Resource Guide exemplify Metro’s leadership in recruiting, employing, and retaining women in this critical field.

### **Construction Workforce Disparity Update: Key Findings and Strategic Recommendations**

In April 2024, Metro commissioned a “Female Construction Workforce Disparity Study” (study) to determine the availability and participation of female workers to meet the demand for future infrastructure projects in support of Metro’s projects, including others throughout the Los Angeles Region (Attachment B). The study includes an overview of the current state of the construction workforce, including forecasted workforce supply and demand in the region, with a focused look on the availability of women in the skilled trades. Additionally, the study includes a landscape scan of initiatives from regional agencies and organizations, such as Los Angeles World Airports (LAWA) and Women in Non-Traditional Employment Roles (WINTER), that are being conducted to recruit and retain female workers in the trades.

As outlined in the study, female workers remain significantly underrepresented across regional infrastructure projects throughout Los Angeles County and the Greater Los Angeles Area. As illustrated in Figure ES-1(Female Participation on Construction Projects) between the study period of 2019-2023, the average participation on Metro construction projects was 3.6% compared to 1.9% of the Greater LA Area.

As the only agency in Los Angeles County to establish a 6.9% female participation goal within its Project Labor Agreement/Construction Careers Policy, Metro is setting a precedent for meaningful workforce inclusion. This commitment highlights the importance of diversity in our workforce and paves the way for more significant opportunities for women in construction and related fields.

It is noteworthy to mention that female participation in three trades is above the regional average: surveyors, inspectors, and teamsters. These trades are not as physically demanding in nature, which

leads more women to join.

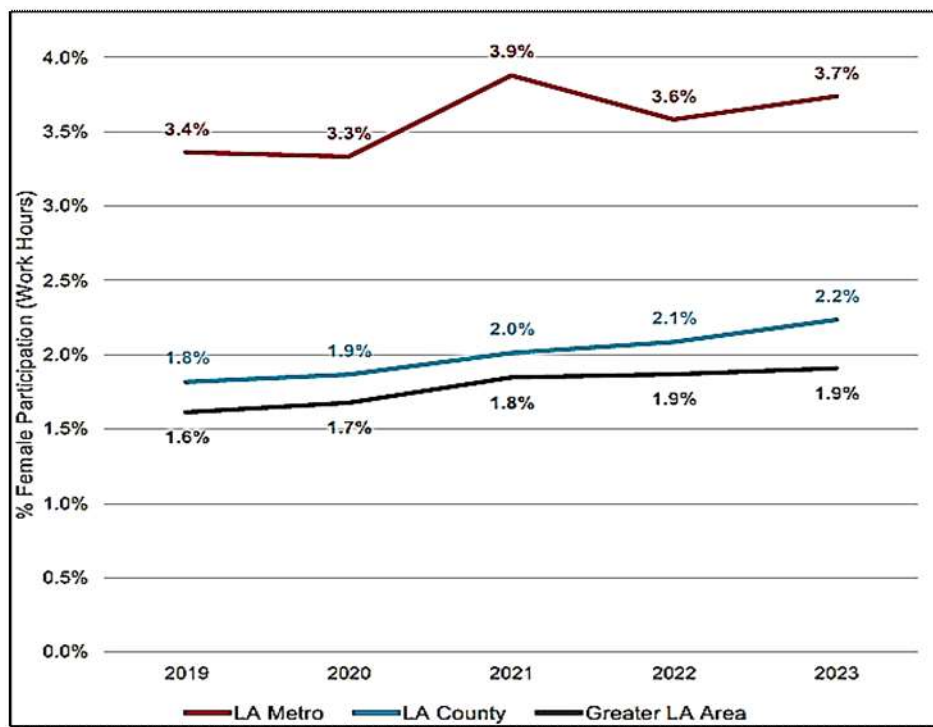
During the study period, due to the increase of construction activities within the LA Region, there were increased options for female workers, which led to a dip in the share of Metro female work hours from 24.6% to 17.5%. Due to staff's outreach activities, collaboration with the LA/OC Building and Construction Trades Council, and Jobs Coordinators, Metro was able to achieve a much higher female participation compared to the Greater LA Area.

Looking forward, with the advancement of construction on major projects, such as the East San Fernando Valley light rail transit project and the Southeast Gateway Line will increase the demand for construction workers.

**Key Findings:**

- Between 2019 and 2023, Metro's female participation averaged 3.6%, exceeding LA County's 2.2% and the Greater LA Region's 1.9%, which includes Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Ventura counties.

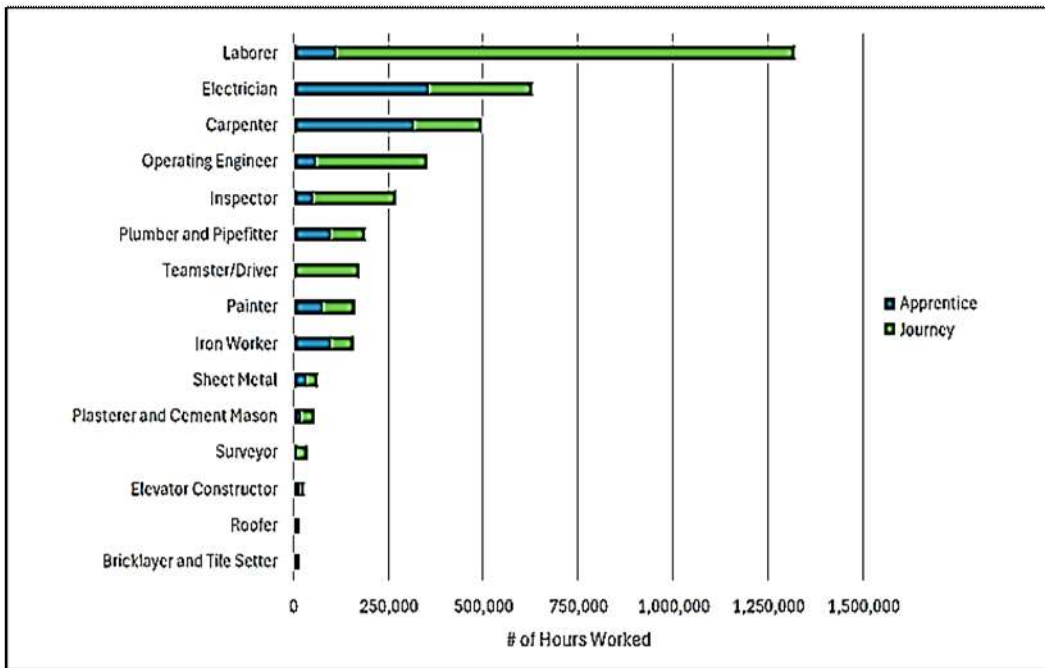
Figure ES-1: Female Participation on Construction Projects (LA Metro, LA County and Greater LA Area)



- The trades with the highest utilization rate of estimated Female Construction Work Hours (Figure ES-2), including both journey workers and apprentices in the Greater LA Area, were Laborers, Electricians, Carpenters, and Operating Engineers.

Figure ES-2: Female Work Hour Utilization on Construction Projects at Metro and in the Greater LA

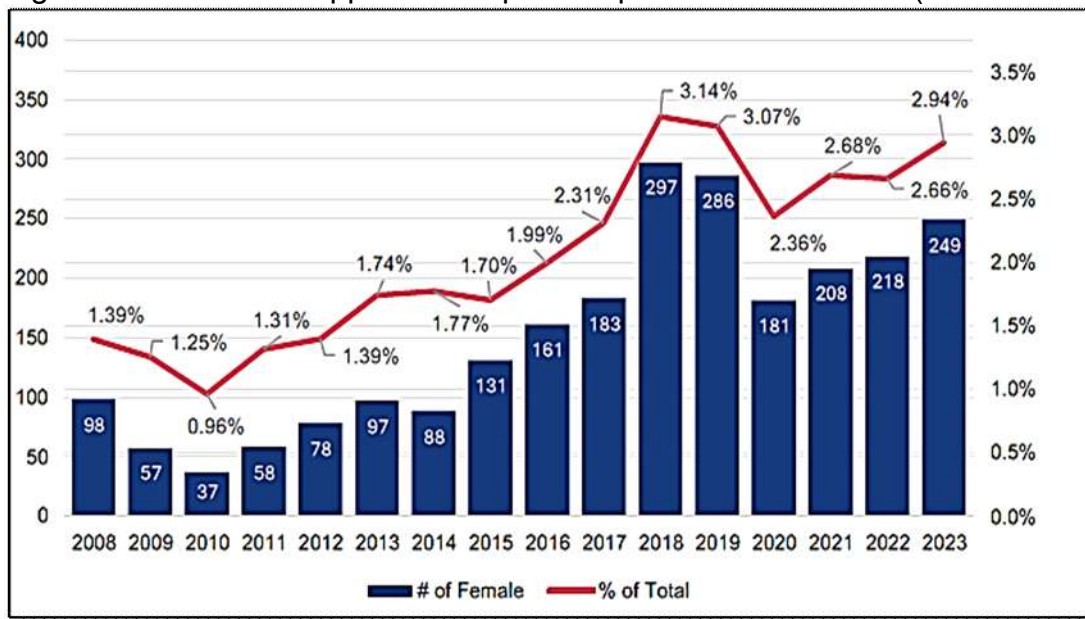
Area by Trade (2019-2023)



- Female participation (Figure ES-8 Female Apprenticeship Participation in Greater LA) in

apprenticeships has been on a positive trend through 2019 but decreased significantly in 2020. From 2020 to 2023, the female apprentices have been trending positively but have not reached pre-pandemic levels.

• Figure ES-8: Female Apprenticeship Participation in Greater LA (Start Year 2008-2024)



- The availability of female construction workers has been impacted by a nearly 10% decrease in younger female workers, while the share of older female workers has increased by over 10%. This underscores the urgent need for targeted outreach and media campaigns to attract young women to construction careers.
- Systemic barriers, including childcare accessibility, reliable transportation, and supportive work environments, continue to hinder women’s retention and career advancement in construction.

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The analysis indicated that, under moderate growth, Metro could achieve a 5% female participation rate by 2043, while rapid supply growth could reach a 6.9% rate by 2040. These projections depend on ongoing efforts to increase female participation in the construction industry.

**Recommendations:**

The study outlines additional recommendations for consideration based on the findings outlined in the report and a review of the best practices in the construction industry. The recommendations were cultivated for Metro to consider creating stronger employer demand for women on construction projects and can be advanced within the near term.

**1. Strengthen Accountability on Female Hiring Goals**

- a. Require contractors to provide documented evidence of good-faith efforts in meeting female participation goals.
- b. Foster collaboration between contractors, compliance teams, and oversight committees to ensure accountability.
- c. Expand partnerships with community organizations and training providers to support inclusive hiring practices.

**2. Invest in Supportive Services, Including Childcare**

- a. Address childcare accessibility as a major barrier to long-term employment.
- b. Develop solutions to mitigate the "benefits cliff" that disqualifies low-income apprentices from public assistance once they earn higher wages.
- c. Explore opportunities to expand childcare options and reduce waitlists in the Greater LA Region.

**3. Establish a Regional Collaborative for Systemic Change**

- a. Facilitate a joint effort among the region's public agencies, trade unions, and workforce development organizations to reduce barriers for women in apprenticeships and create further career opportunities.
- b. Develop a strategic action plan to increase female participation through targeted outreach, additional supportive services, and shared resources.
- c. Introduce a focused social media campaign, *Built By Her*, designed to highlight opportunities for women and girls in construction while promoting mentorship. This initiative aims to inspire and engage a broader audience, encouraging more individuals to explore careers in the field and strengthening the industry's talent pipeline with greater diversity.

Metro will lead the implementation of these recommendations through a regional collaborative approach. In partnership with the Los Angeles County Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO), LA/OC Building and Construction Trades Council, union trades, other public agencies, and industry stakeholders, Metro will convene a roundtable discussion to develop a strategic action plan. To further bolster efforts, Metro will host a Women in the Trades Regional Summit to bring together public agencies, trade unions, workforce boards, and academic institutions to drive innovation and commitment to female workforce participation. Additionally, Metro will establish a Construction Female Advisory Group composed of experienced women in the trades to provide mentorship, share best practices, and dismantle systemic barriers in the field.

Additionally, Metro has already taken significant steps to advance the study's recommendations, demonstrating its commitment to breaking down barriers for women in the construction industry and fostering a more inclusive workforce.

- Metro has engaged in discussions with the Association of General Contractors - Los Angeles Region (AGC-LA) to participate in a regional collaboration focused on developing a strategic action plan to address challenges faced by women in construction.
- Metro has partnered with the Los Angeles County Justice Care and Opportunity Department (JCOD) and Women in Non-Traditional Employment Roles (WINTER) to sponsor an all-female Pre-Apprentice Construction Training pilot program. This program, set to launch in Spring 2025 at the JCOD Calabasas campsite, will benefit from WINTER's Equal Representation in Construction Apprenticeship (ERiCA) grant, which provides critical supportive services for participants.
- Metro is also working closely with the Los Angeles County Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) to establish a regional cohort of agencies that will lay the groundwork for the Workforce Subcommittee for Infrastructure Los Angeles. This subcommittee will focus on workforce development strategies to support infrastructure projects across the region.
- To further drive awareness and action, Metro has distributed the Female Construction Workforce Disparity Study to public agencies, community-based organizations, and industry stakeholders, ensuring a broader understanding of the urgent need to increase female participation in construction.

Metro has received support letters (Attachment C) from the LA/OCBCTC, DEO, and the Los Angeles Workforce Development Department expressing their support for the regional approach and their commitment to participating in the efforts.

## **Enhancing Cultural Competency Standards and Implementation**

The study recommends refining Metro's Cultural Competency Plan requirements by:

- Establishing clear community benefit and workforce equity components.
- Ensuring workforce development activities align with Metro's broader workforce equity goals.

Metro will strengthen its Cultural Competency Plan requirements to explicitly integrate Community Benefits and Workforce Equity components. These enhancements will include targeted staff training to foster a more inclusive work environment for women and reinforce Metro's commitment to gender equity in construction. Additionally, Metro's Project Labor Agreement/Construction Careers Policy already mandates that prime contractors submit an Employment Hiring Plan outlining their strategy to meet workforce requirements.

### **Feasibility of Bid Preferences to Boost Women's Participation in Metro Construction**

Metro has explored the feasibility of implementing bid preferences to promote female participation. However, Proposition 209 prohibits preferential treatment based on sex, race, or ethnicity in public contracting. Proposition (Prop.) 209, passed by California voters in 1996, states that the state and local public agencies, like Metro, shall not discriminate against, or grant preferential treatment to, any individual or group on the basis of race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin in the operation of public employment, public education, or public contracting. California courts have consistently held that state and local public agency policies and procedures that give special advantages to minorities and women violate this constitutional prohibition. While Metro cannot implement direct bid preferences, the agency will continue employing robust outreach strategies to increase participation within the parameters of existing law.

Additionally, Metro is evaluating ways to incorporate commitments that align with workforce initiatives for RFP procurements. This will reinforce the importance of proactive efforts by our contractors in ways that increase the number of women in the field on our projects.

### **IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS**

Metro's Project Labor Agreement/Construction Careers Policy (PLA/CCP) supports strategic plan goal #3 to enhance communities and lives through mobility and access to opportunity.

### **EQUITY PLATFORM**

Metro has continued ongoing efforts undertaken by staff to increase female participation, including outreach to women in construction to obtain insight and best practices for contractors and female workers in the construction industry. In addition, Metro helps the Construction Building Trades unions to increase their female membership by encouraging Metro contractors to hire/sponsor females into the construction trades and working with Women and Girls Governing Council (WGGC) to continuously uplift women into the construction industry.

Conducting the study has given staff additional information on the makeup of female worker representation across the Greater LA Region and has assisted staff in recognizing barriers to recruitment and retention, as noted above. Utilizing the study and considering the recommendations will help build towards Metro's goal of diversifying the construction workforce, increasing the female utilization on Metro's major capital construction projects as Metro prepares for the upcoming Olympics in 2028, and will bring increased awareness to the discrepancy of female worker representation for other public partners in the Greater LA Region.



## **VEHICLE MILES TRAVELED OUTCOME**

VMT and VMT per capita in Los Angeles County are lower than national averages, the lowest in the SCAG region, and on the lower end of VMT per capita statewide, with these declining VMT trends due in part to Metro's significant investment in rail and bus transit.\* Metro's Board-adopted VMT reduction targets align with California's statewide climate goals, including achieving carbon neutrality by 2045. To ensure continued progress, all Board items are assessed for their potential impact on VMT.

While this item does not directly encourage taking transit, sharing a ride, or using active transportation, it is a vital part of Metro operations, conducting the Female Construction Workforce Disparity Study has given staff additional information on the makeup of female worker representation across the Greater LA Region and has assisted staff in recognizing barriers to recruitment and retention. Utilizing the study and considering the recommendations will help build towards Metro's goal of diversifying the construction workforce, increasing the female utilization on Metro's major capital construction projects. Because the Metro Board has adopted an agency-wide VMT Reduction Target, and this item generally supports the overall function of the agency, this item is consistent with the goals of reducing VMT.

\*Based on population estimates from the United States Census and VMT estimates from Caltrans' Highway Performance Monitoring System (HPMS) data between 2001-2019.

## **NEXT STEPS**

Staff will take the following actions to expand opportunities for women in the construction industry:

- **Expand the Cultural Competency Plan requirement** to integrate Community Benefits and Workforce Equity components. Staff will identify mechanisms to embed workforce commitments-such as increasing female participation-into RFP procurements, ensuring alignment with Metro's broader workforce initiatives.
- **Establish a regional roundtable** with the Program Management Office (PMO), general contractors' associations, contractors, the Los Angeles Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO), LA/OCBCTC, union trades, and other key stakeholders. This forum will develop a strategic action plan to enact meaningful, lasting change in the construction industry.
- **Conduct a Women in the Trades Regional Summit** to bring together public agencies, trade unions, workforce development boards, and academic institutions. The summit will foster collaboration, share best practices, and drive commitments to increase female participation in the construction workforce.
- **Establish a Construction Female Advisory Group** composed of experienced women in the trades. This group will provide mentorship, guidance, and best practices to help dismantle barriers for women in construction, fostering a more inclusive and diverse workforce.
- **Launch a targeted social media campaign (Built By Her)** focused on women, youth, and

mentorship opportunities. This initiative will inspire and engage more individuals to pursue careers in construction, helping to build a stronger and more diverse pipeline of talent.

Staff will provide an update on the progress and development of key recommendations as indicated in this report in 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter FY2026.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment A - Board Motion #29

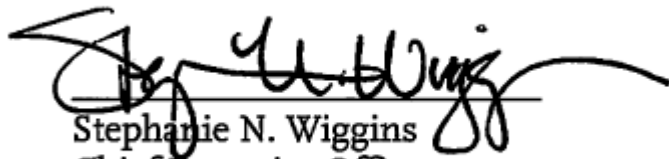
Attachment B - Construction Workforce Disparity Study Report

Attachment C - Support letters

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