

SUBMISSION TO TRANSPORT CANADA

Strengthening One Canadian Economy Through Trade and Transportation

Trade corridors do not begin at a port.

They begin in Canada's communities, farms, classrooms, manufacturing floors, and workplaces.

Submitted by



Women in Supply Chain (WISC) Association

Calgary, Alberta — National Non-Profit Organization

Response to the discussion paper consultation under the One Canadian Economy Act
tc.canada.ca — Strengthening One Canadian Economy Through Trade and Transportation

Respectfully submitted by Cindy Clark, President, and Bryndis Whitson, Executive Director, Strategy, Policy and Partnerships

Transport Canada's discussion paper, *Strengthening One Canadian Economy Through Trade and Transportation*, is a good first step, in conjunction with the Budget 2025 and the 2026 Spring Economic Update.

The Women in Supply Chain (WISC) Association supports this direction. We submit that the proposed measures remain concentrated on ports, railways, and major infrastructure endpoints, while underinvesting in the foundational systems — rural roads, interprovincial regulatory harmonization, broadband, workforce mobility, domestic manufacturing capacity, and Indigenous economic participation — that determine whether people, communities, and small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) can actually reach and benefit from those corridors.

WISC's position is that trade corridor development should be treated as a complete economic ecosystem rather than a series of isolated transportation projects, and that the Association — as a national convenor spanning industry, education, government, and community organizations — is positioned to help government translate this discussion paper into implementable, inclusive outcomes.

Women in Supply Chain Association Perspective

Women in Supply Chain (WISC) was founded to recognize, elevate, and support women across Canada's supply chain, where representation has historically been limited and valuable talent has too often gone unrecognized. WISC is a national non-profit organization based in Calgary, Alberta, and its membership and reach extend across every province and territory.

WISC recognizes that this workforce challenge extends well beyond women. Across every industry, there are talented individuals whose contributions are defined by job titles rather than by the skills, knowledge, and value they bring to the supply chain. This includes youth, Indigenous Peoples, newcomers, underrepresented communities, experienced professionals without formal designations, and countless others whose potential deserves greater visibility and opportunity.

At WISC, we believe supply chain is not simply an industry or a job title. It is the network that connects every industry, every organization, every community, and every individual in this country. Whether someone designs, builds, sources, manufactures, transports, analyzes, finances, markets, educates, regulates, engineers, develops technology, serves customers, manages projects, provides healthcare, supports government, leads an organization, or simply makes a consumer decision, they are participating in the supply chain.

A 25-Year Vantage Point on National Trade Corridors

WISC's own history illustrates the value of this broader lens. The organization's founding mandate traces back to the Accelerator Project, a workforce study emerging from the Asia-Pacific Gateway strategy, which expanded the Ports of Vancouver and Prince Rupert and improved Trans-Canada Highway safety and capacity, while also catalyzing a wave of inland port development across Western Canada. This multi-decade experience demonstrates that a “tunnel vision” approach focused solely on major infrastructure is not in the best interest of Canadians. When communities

from across a region are engaged as active participants in a trade strategy, they become true beneficiaries of it. WISC believes the current discussion paper has the same potential, provided its scope is broadened to match.

A Broader Definition of Supply Chain

WISC defines supply chain not as a narrow transportation function centred on ports, railways, trucking companies, and major exporters, but as the complete economic and social system that supports the movement, production, transformation, use, recovery, and disposal of goods and services.

This system includes workers, students, entrepreneurs, Indigenous communities, rural and urban communities, SMEs, farmers, ranchers, importers, exporters, technology providers, and educational institutions – all of whom make trade possible, not only the ports, railways, and major exporters typically centred in corridor planning. A discussion paper that measures success only at the corridor's visible end points will systematically under-value and under-fund everything upstream of them.

This reframing carries a direct implication for the paper's central question: Canada cannot build efficient, reliable, and competitive trade corridors without first addressing the foundational economic, workforce, regulatory, technological, infrastructure, and community-level barriers that determine whether people and businesses can participate in those corridors at all.

Response to the Discussion Paper's Questions

1. Which proposed measure would have the greatest impact on making supply chains more efficient and reliable?

WISC's Position: The greatest impact will come from a coordinated national supply chain framework – one that connects infrastructure, people, communities, technology, regulation, and manufacturing capacity. The discussion paper's proposed National Trade Corridors and National Corridor Council are valuable; however, the Council's composition is too narrowly focused.

The advisory structure should explicitly represent every province and territory alongside a full cross-section of Canadian industries, including agriculture, energy, distribution, manufacturing, and port authorities, to ensure the corridor strategy reflects the country's regional diversity rather than a handful of major hubs.

In regard to the road and highway infrastructure alone, interprovincial carriers still contend with inconsistent road-weight restrictions, seasonal load limits, and cumbersome permitting for oversized and heavy-haul loads, all of which constrain the corridors the government intends to strengthen. Without addressing these first- and last-mile gaps, investment in ports and rail terminals risks benefiting only the businesses already positioned to use them.

2. Where would reducing administrative burden most benefit organizations and sectors?

WISC's Position: The jurisdictional limitations of the Canadian Constitution can create a measurable drag on the economy and the Interprovincial regulatory environment. Across Canada, the reduction of administrative burdens can be reflected in the following areas:

- There are inconsistent driver licensing and Mandatory Entry-Level Training (MELT) requirements, which differ by province; disproportionately affect small carriers and impact insurance requirements.
- Heavy-haul permitting, oversize-load signage, and weight-and-dimension rules vary from province to province, and each province requires its own permit; for example, to move a piece of equipment from Ontario to Alberta – a company would require a minimum of 4 separate permits.
- Lack of a single-window business registration system, which forces duplicate registration, licensing, and compliance processes in every province where they operate. Initiatives like the Canadian Trucking Regulations Hub (<https://cantruckhub.ca/>) have been a start of needed improvements to understand different requirements.
- Non-recognition of professional credentials and international experience, which excludes internationally trained professionals and experienced workers without formal designations from supply chain roles.

3. What opportunities exist to improve collaboration across trade corridors?

WISC's Position: Meaningful collaboration across a trade corridor is not possible where participating communities lack reliable connectivity or shared data standards.

While the large majority of Canadians now have access to broadband meeting the 50/10 Mbps universal service objective, this is mainly in urban areas. Rural and indigenous communities still struggle to meet this capacity. The CRTC's Broadband Fund has worked in over 318 communities, which includes 54,000 homes. However, with a federal target of 100% national coverage by 2030, this leaves a considerable digital gap in precisely the communities that trade corridor policy will serve.

Establishing regional corridor councils that include municipalities, Indigenous representatives, SMEs, workers, and educational institutions, and that are consulted before infrastructure decisions are finalized rather than after plans are set. Creating common data standards across ports, railways, customs systems, and logistics providers with trusted data-sharing protocols that protect commercial and personal information, so all corridor participants, not only large operators, can anticipate capacity constraints and disruptions.

WISC also notes that across Canada, ocean, sea, and lake ports operate under recognized governing authorities, while inland ports – the Prairie Economic Gateway, the Global Transportation Hub, CentrePort Canada, Canada's Western Gateway, Port Alberta, the Saskatoon Transportation Link, and other emerging hubs – do not share a comparable coordinated structure. WISC is not

recommending a new governing authority, but a more coordinated national approach to Canadian inland ports would strengthen the collaboration the discussion paper calls for.

4. How can government best partner with industry and Indigenous Peoples to support shared economic outcomes?

WISC's Position: Partnership must extend beyond consultation into full participation, procurement, and decision-making.

The gap between policy intent and implementation creates a broader concern that good frameworks without accountability mechanisms fail to produce inclusive outcomes.

By applying a capacity-building and participation lens to trade corridor infrastructure broadly, we must recognize that industry and Indigenous communities have differing priorities, geographic realities, and economic objectives that a single national policy cannot address. This same broader inclusion lens could extend to immigrants, internationally trained professionals, women, youth, students, persons with disabilities, and veterans.

5. What concerns, risks, or unintended impacts should be considered during implementation?

WISC's Position: There is a risk that if infrastructure investment is concentrated solely on major ports, rail hubs, and border crossings, the trickle-down effects will disproportionately benefit the largest, already-connected businesses while communities may face environmental, traffic, and infrastructure costs without proportionate economic return. WISC recommends that when implementing and investing in new improvements, the benefits to SMEs be considered.

Other risks include automation and digitization introduced without workforce transition planning, cybersecurity exposure from increased data-sharing, and overreliance on a small number of ports, railways, or telecommunications providers, which reduces system redundancy in the face of climate events or supply shocks.

The greater the risk that Canada builds a stronger corridor without building a stronger, more inclusive economy around it. Measuring success by tonnage moved, without also measuring who moved it and who benefited from moving it, will obscure this risk until it has already materialized.

6. How could the proposal be improved to reduce risk and support effective implementation?

WISC's Position: Implementing framework that includes adopting a broader national definition of supply chain; mapping Canada's complete supply chain ecosystem, including rural and Indigenous access points and telecommunications coverage; conducting community and regional readiness assessments before approving major corridor investments; harmonizing interprovincial permitting, credentials, and compliance systems; treating digital connectivity as trade infrastructure; building domestic manufacturing and value-added processing capacity; creating inclusive workforce pathways for underrepresented groups; requiring transparent reporting on who benefits from

investment by region, business size, and demographic group; and establishing mechanisms for continuous multi-stakeholder review of corridor strategy.

WISC recommends a phased, accountable national implementation framework that includes:

- Establishing a broader national definition of supply chain that reflects the entire economic lifecycle of goods and services — production, resource development, manufacturing, transportation, technology, labour, consumption, recovery, recycling, and disposal.
- Mapping Canada's complete supply chain ecosystem, including production and manufacturing capacity, agricultural and resource regions, rural and Indigenous access points, transportation and telecommunications infrastructure, workforce and training capacity, emergency routes, and areas currently disconnected from major corridors.
- Creating community and regional readiness assessments before approving major corridor investments, evaluating local infrastructure capacity, business participation potential, Indigenous involvement, and environmental risk.
- Harmonizing interprovincial requirements for commercial transportation, heavy-haul permitting, road-weight rules, professional credentials, insurance considerations, business registration, digital documentation, and compliance.
- Considering digital connectivity as a part of trade infrastructure, closing the rural and indigenous communities' broadband gap as a part of a physical corridor investment.
- Building domestic production and manufacturing capacity alongside transportation investment, linking corridor planning to the critical minerals and value-added processing buildout already underway.
- Designing inclusive workforce pathways for skilled trades, experienced workers without formal designations, internationally trained professionals, Indigenous people, women, immigrants, youth, students, veterans, and persons with disabilities.
- Developing Advisory Councils that include representation from communities, workers, small businesses, Indigenous peoples, municipalities, educational institutions, industry, and not-for-profit organizations.

Additional Considerations

Taken together, the responses above point to a single structural gap: Canada has invested consistently in the visible end points of trade while under-investing in the systems that connect Canadians to them. The condition of rural and last-mile roads, the inconsistency of interprovincial commercial vehicle rules, the absence of a national supply chain data standard, and the patchwork governance of inland ports are not secondary issues; they determine whether corridor investment reaches beyond the largest ports, carriers, and exporters.

WISC notes with concern that Canada previously operated the Canadian Centre on Transportation Data (CCTD) / Transportation Data and Information Hub, a resource WISC relied on to inform its research, policy work, and public messaging. Its discontinuation left a measurable gap in consistent,

reliable national transportation data. The discussion paper's proposal to create a regulatory authority requiring terminal operators and other port participants to produce performance, operating-agreement, and investment data is a welcome step — WISC strongly supports this measure, provided it is funded on a sustained basis rather than repeating the fate of the CCTD.

A trade corridor strategy is, at its foundation, a workforce strategy. Canada's supply chain sector faces a persistent gap between the skills employers say they need and the pathways available to students, career-changers, experienced workers without formal designations, and internationally trained professionals to fill those roles. Professional designations, while valuable, can also function as a gatekeeping mechanism that excludes individuals with equivalent or greater practical capability.

- Create coordinated pathways connecting students and emerging professionals to supply chain careers, rather than leaving this to fragmented, employer-by-employer efforts.
- Recognize prior learning, trades credentials, and international experience consistently, rather than relying solely on formal designations.
- Support women, youth, newcomers, veterans, and persons with disabilities entering supply chain careers through targeted mentorship and awareness initiatives — an area where WISC already has direct, national experience.

Technology adoption across Canada's supply chain sector is uneven, and the gap is not primarily about the availability of tools — transportation management systems, warehouse systems, automation, and AI-enabled forecasting already exist. The gap is about whether smaller businesses and rural or remote communities have the connectivity, cost structure, and digital literacy support needed to use them.

Potential Role of the Women in Supply Chain Association (WISC)

WISC's role in this national conversation should not be understood narrowly as representing women working within large corporate supply chain departments. WISC is positioned as a national convenor capable of bringing together individuals working across all supply chain functions, SMEs, entrepreneurs, students and educators, rural and urban communities, Indigenous businesses, immigrants and internationally trained professionals, and stakeholders across transportation, logistics, procurement, manufacturing, technology, agriculture, energy, construction, defense, and the public sector — including people who may not hold a traditional supply chain designation but whose work is essential to the system.

WISC is prepared to support implementation of this strategy through:

- Stakeholder engagement and community consultation support, drawing on WISC's existing national network.
- Workforce development, mentorship, and education initiatives connecting students and career-changers to supply chain careers.

- Public research and case-study development, including support for closing Canada's national transportation data gap.
- Cross-sector collaboration facilitation between industry, government, Indigenous communities, and educational institutions.
- Helping government communicate corridor opportunities to smaller organizations and underrepresented communities that traditional industry consultation channels often miss.

Conclusion

Trade corridors do not begin at a port, rail terminal, or border crossing — they begin in Canada's communities, farms, classrooms, and workplaces. The discussion paper's ambitions to designate National Trade Corridors, establish a Corridor Council, and improve data transparency are worthwhile; however, their success depends on parallel investment in interprovincial harmonization, rural and Indigenous connectivity, inclusive workforce pathways, and domestic manufacturing capacity.

WISC agrees with the concluding rationale of the discussion paper: Canada has one of the strongest opportunities in decades to grow its economy and strengthen its position in global trade. WISC looks forward to working with Transport Canada and other like-minded organizations, companies, port authorities, educational institutions, and governments to ensure this initiative does not become another discussion paper that is agreed to but never fully realized.

WISC is committed to improving dialogue and supporting initiatives across the chain and across Canada. We know that one conversation can spark an idea. One idea can create momentum. With momentum across the chain, it creates real impact.

Respectfully submitted,



Cynthia (Cindy) Clark

President, Women in Supply Chain Association



Bryndis Whitson

Executive Director, Strategy, Policy and Partnerships, Women in Supply Chain Association