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Youth Perceptions on Careers in Transportation – Addressing Labour Shortages – Focus Groups with Youth

Executive Summary

Prepared for Transport Canada

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Prepared for Transportation Canada by Environics Research

December 2023

Transport Canada (TC) commissioned Environics Research to conduct eight online focus groups with Canadian youth, to examine the opinions and impressions that young Canadians (age 16-24) have of transportation sector jobs.

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Executive summary

Background and objectives

This study examines the opinions and impressions young Canadians (age 16-24) have of transportation sector jobs. The following research objectives were identified for this study:

- Understanding the perceptions youth have of jobs in the transportation sector in general, and if they can identify any potential challenges/barriers to entry.
- Examining the extent to which youth are aware of the job opportunities available in the transportation sector and gauge level of interest at their current stage of career planning.
- Exploring the perceptions of youth regarding the level of diversity and inclusion within the transportation sector.
- Identifying what might encourage youth to consider jobs in transportation, and what resources might be needed to facilitate this.
- Contributing to the existing knowledge about youths' perception of the transportation sector and exploring how these experiences can provide insights for attracting young workers to the industry.

The findings will support policymakers, industry stakeholders, and educational institutions in developing targeted strategies to address labour and skills shortages, promote the transportation sector as a viable career option, and meet the industry's workforce demands. Results will help to better inform communications planning, outreach, and education activities, and help improve engagement with Canadians in the transportation sector.

Methodology

Environics Research conducted a series of eight online focus groups in October 2023. The groups were composed of young Canadians aged 16 to 24 years across Canada. The groups were distributed across Western Canada, Ontario, Quebec, and the Atlantic provinces, with the goal of reflecting the diversity of youth in Canada. The two Quebec sessions were conducted in French and the other six were conducted in English. Conducted using the Zoom platform, each session consisted of between 6 and 8 participants and lasted 90 minutes. Environics recruited participants via industry-standard methods to ensure participation in all the sessions across all regions. Participants were offered a \$100 incentive to thank them for their time.

Statement of limitations: Qualitative research provides insight into the range of opinions held within a population, rather than the weights of the opinions held, as measured in a quantitative study. The results of this type of research should be viewed as indicative rather than projectable to the population.

Contract value

The total contract value was \$57,573.50 (including HST).

Key Findings

Important factors when choosing a career

Youth tend to think **pragmatically** about their future jobs. When asked about the factors they look for in their careers, financial security, job stability as well as growth and progression rise as the most important.

- Being **financially secure** goes beyond just survival. Youth want to feel like they can afford the necessities within an increasing cost of life, while still treating themselves to personal freedoms such as travel or being social with friends. Youth rarely quantified what a 'good' salary would look like, but often mentioned a healthy employer package, including benefits.
- Being **stable and secure in your job**, means that your employment is not subject to worldly events, such as the pandemic. With COVID-19 still top of mind for youth, many shared experiences of those around them whose jobs were greatly impacted by the pandemic. Youth are on the search for a career that won't be affected by supply and demand, or looming technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI).
- A **job with growth and progression** is one that offers other opportunities, interesting work, and skills that are transferrable. Growth and progression were deemed by youth as things that a 'good' employer would provide, who sees the values in their employees.

Other youth think in a more **aspirational** way about what would suit their personal passions, as well as what career would work for the "common good." This was top of mind for a notable number of youth participants.

- **Feeling happy and content** were marked as an important goal in their future careers. According to youth, being happy about your career comes from genuinely liking what you do, enjoying a good balance between personal life and work, getting paid what you deserve, having benefits, or simply enjoying the people you work with.
- **Personal fulfilment** often had to do with the idea that your career is serving the 'greater good' and that you are helping people. Those who wanted to teach, for example, often felt they were helping kids. Others wanted to go into firefighting or policing to help their community. Other youth were still deciding on how they might reach this goal, but knew it was worth reaching for.

Between the more pragmatic youth, and those more focused on personal passions and romantic endeavours, is the agreement that **work and life balance**, is key. Work and life balance is the belief that regardless of industry or job type, an employee should be able to return home at the end of the day, and not stress about their work. Many youth pointed out that their parents never found this balance, a realization that makes it pertinent to them.

In terms of the influences that youth feel when choosing their future careers, many are influenced by parents or family members who point them in a direction that feels natural. Other were influenced by teachers, guidance counsellors, or peers at school who were already confident in their choice. A number of youth, however, felt no influence, and were simply making choices based on what they liked doing.

Perceptions of the transportation sector

Awareness of transportation sector. Youth were likely to consider transportation jobs at the local level, such as public transit drivers, before considering those at a national scale. Jobs like bus drivers, taxi drivers and train conductors were often given as examples of jobs in this sector. Truck driving was also mentioned often. Youth, particularly those in Quebec, considered the transportation sector to be a “dirty” industry, due to the belief that it is one that creates lots of pollution.

Jobs facing labour shortages. Across all groups, a series of questions were asked to gauge awareness and interest of four jobs that are projected to face labour shortages. Those jobs included truck drivers, aircraft pilots, aircraft maintenance engineers, and seafarers. With only one or two participants seriously considering any of these career types, most youth had little awareness about the jobs generally or the education or training necessary to pursue them. When asked to brainstorm the advantages and disadvantages of these jobs, the following patterns arose.

- **Disadvantages:** Youth considered piloting, truck driving and seafaring to be three types of jobs that keep you away from home a lot, therefore not providing you with an ideal work and life balance. With the exception of truck driving, which was deemed pretty “straightforward,” there was a perception that the other three jobs would be high stress, with lots of responsibility and unpredictable work environments. This was viewed as undesirable for youth, who are looking for a job that wouldn’t require too much unpredictability. Getting into aviation as a pilot or seafaring would take a lot of money, time, and training to get into, which wasn’t ideal to youth.
- **Advantages:** Possible perks of becoming a truck driver, pilot or seafarer is the ability to see new places and meet new people during your travels. There is also the perception that these jobs must be paid well and offer good benefits, considering the circumstances of being far away from home for long periods of time. Becoming a pilot or truck driver was deemed ideal for certain personality types, who appreciate independence and solitude. An aircraft maintenance engineer was assumed to be a career with many transferrable skills.

Youth were asked to consider the reasons why these jobs might be facing job shortages, and why that might be the case.

- **Lack of awareness:** It was observed that youth do not have much knowledge about transportation sector jobs. From potential salaries to training requirements, there was a lack of general awareness about having a career in this sector.
- **Less interest in trades work:** Youth postulated that students get pushed in the direction of university more often than college. While this may be changing, participants mentioned that people their age might feel less ‘successful’ if they strive for trades work.
- **Culture of work is unappealing:** Youth often brought up the culture that surrounds jobs such as truck driving as being unappealing to those deciding on their careers.
- **Interest in flexible, work-from-home jobs:** Several of the transportation jobs discussed were perceived as having inflexible, unpredictable work environments. Participants were drawn to careers with work from home options within ‘conventional’ hours.
- **Finding a career with less barriers to entry:** Becoming a pilot or seafarer was perceived to be time consuming and expensive. Youth are drawn to jobs with less obstacles and barriers. Possible barriers of entry brainstorm, included:

- **Time-Consuming Schooling and/or Training:** According to participants, becoming a pilot or maintenance engineer requires lots of schooling & training, meaning more expenses before entering the field.
- **Awareness of skills needed:** Lack of awareness about these types of jobs means that youth aren't necessarily confident that their personal skills match those required of a pilot or seafarer.
- **Stereotypically "male-oriented" jobs:** Female participants were likely to note a lack in representation, where Transportation Sector positions are filled mostly by men.
- **Fear and anxiety:** It was observed that youth consider high-pressure jobs with lots of liabilities and responsibilities to be a disadvantage when deciding on a future career.
- **Perception of work and life balance:** Desiring a flexible career with freedom to work from home, the transportation careers discussed were imagined offering less time at home with personal freedom.
- **Other barriers of entry** mentioned included stigmas attached to choosing college as opposed to university, geographical conditions, and the ability/time to start a family.
- **Money and financial security:** Like adults, youth are cognizant of the rising cost of living. They are searching for careers with a high income and questioned whether jobs in the transportation industry would offer an income that meets their expectations. Note that youth never quantified/specified what a "good" income might be.

What might encourage youth to consider jobs in transportation

Youth postulated that Transport Canada could find creative ways to connect with youth. Recommendations to do so included:

- **Start building awareness early on – at school:** According to youth participants, transportation jobs with more training and schooling need to be introduced to students earlier in their school years, so that they have time to plan and visualize. An example of this, offered by many, is inviting professionals in the fields of transportation to speak at schools. This will increase visibility, as most youth participants had never met somebody in the transportation sector.
- **Stay current on social media trends:** By staying current on social media that youth actually use, Transport Canada can better connect with those they are hoping to communicate with. For example, youth turn to forums like Reddit to find information they don't have access to in their personal life. Another example are platforms such as YouTube and TikTok that are not only used for fun, but also act as avenues where youth can find information.
- **Provide simple, approachable information:** Provide youth with a very clear, simplified student-to-career roadmaps that highlight the training & education required for each career type. Include grants and scholarships that are required as part of this roadmap. Highlight transferable skills and how to get into the sector from different angles.
- **Ease barriers of entry:** Help youth to visualize themselves in these careers by facilitating mentorship programs and peer-to-peer activities. Provide grants and scholarships for jobs that require lots of time &

money (such as becoming a pilot).

Youth also spoke to the messaging that Transport Canada could focus on to better connect with youth, underscoring the importance of being transparent and highlighting the benefits, especially when the jobs discussed require a lot of compromise from personal life. Recommendations from youth participants included:

- **Be transparent** – To understand their own interest and aptitude for transportation jobs, youth need more clarity. To attract future truck drivers or aircraft maintenance engineers, youth need to know specifics about the job including potential salaries, possible benefits, and what scheduling would look like. Also, to be transparent about the training needed and amount of time required to fulfil such training, as well as which grants are available to lessen the financial toll.
- **Give them something to brag about** – Youth want their jobs to be and sound impressive. They need to know what about these careers is interesting, unique and might make others curious.
- **Highlight happiness, fulfillment, and mental health** – Unique to other generations, those in this age range (16 to 24), are deeply dedicated to their own mental health and well-being. Often, this is connected to work and life balance, as well as the personal fulfillment they gain from their career. Messaging should focus on what type of fulfillment is possible from these careers, and if their mental health would be prioritized.

Political neutrality statement and contact information

I hereby certify as senior officer of Environics that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the Communications Policy of the Government of Canada, and Procedures for Planning and Contracting Public Opinion Research. Specifically, the deliverables do not include information on electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate, or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leaders.

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