

Breaking New Tracks: Bonnie Leake and Her Historic Journey as UP's First Female Locomotive Engineer

This Women's Month, the Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transit (SMART) is proud to continue our "Women In Transit" initiative, where we celebrate the exceptional women who have broken barriers and paved new paths in the public transportation sector. A pivotal figure in this narrative is Bonnie Leake, known for her groundbreaking achievement as the first woman accepted by Union Pacific (UP) to train as a locomotive engineer.

Bonnie Leake's story is one of determination, skill, and trailblazing courage. Her journey to becoming the first female locomotive engineer at UP marked a significant milestone in the railroad industry, which had long been a male-dominated field. Leake's acceptance into the locomotive engineer training program in the late 20th century was not just a personal triumph; it was a historic moment for women in transit.

Leake's pioneering role at UP was more than just symbolic. It was a testament to her technical prowess and her ability to excel in a challenging and demanding profession. As a locomotive engineer, she was responsible for operating large and complex trains, a role that required a deep understanding of mechanics, an unflinching attention to safety, and the ability to make critical decisions under pressure. Bonnie Leake met these challenges head-on, proving that gender was no barrier to succeeding in one of the most pivotal roles in the railroad industry.

At SMART, Bonnie Leake's journey resonates deeply with our commitment to fostering diversity and empowering women in the transportation sector. Her pioneering spirit reflects our own values of inclusion and equality, as we strive to create an environment where every individual has the opportunity to achieve their full potential, regardless of gender.

Leake's impact extends beyond her personal achievements. By stepping into the cab of a locomotive, she challenged stereotypes and opened doors for other women to pursue careers as locomotive engineers. Her journey has been an inspiration to many, demonstrating that with the right skills, determination, and opportunity, women can excel in any aspect of public transportation.

Our "Women In Transit" campaign celebrates the legacy of trailblazers like Bonnie Leake. As we honor her historic contribution to the railroad industry, we are also reminded of the importance of continuing to advocate for gender diversity and representation in all areas of transit. Leake's story is not just a chapter in the history of railroads; it is a narrative that continues to inspire change and progress in public transportation.

As we commemorate Women's Month, let's reflect on the profound impact of Bonnie Leake and the many women who have followed in her footsteps. Their contributions have not only reshaped the landscape of public transit but have also paved the way for a more inclusive and dynamic future in the industry. At SMART, we are committed to honoring this legacy, ensuring that our services and our workforce reflect the diversity and strength of the communities we serve.