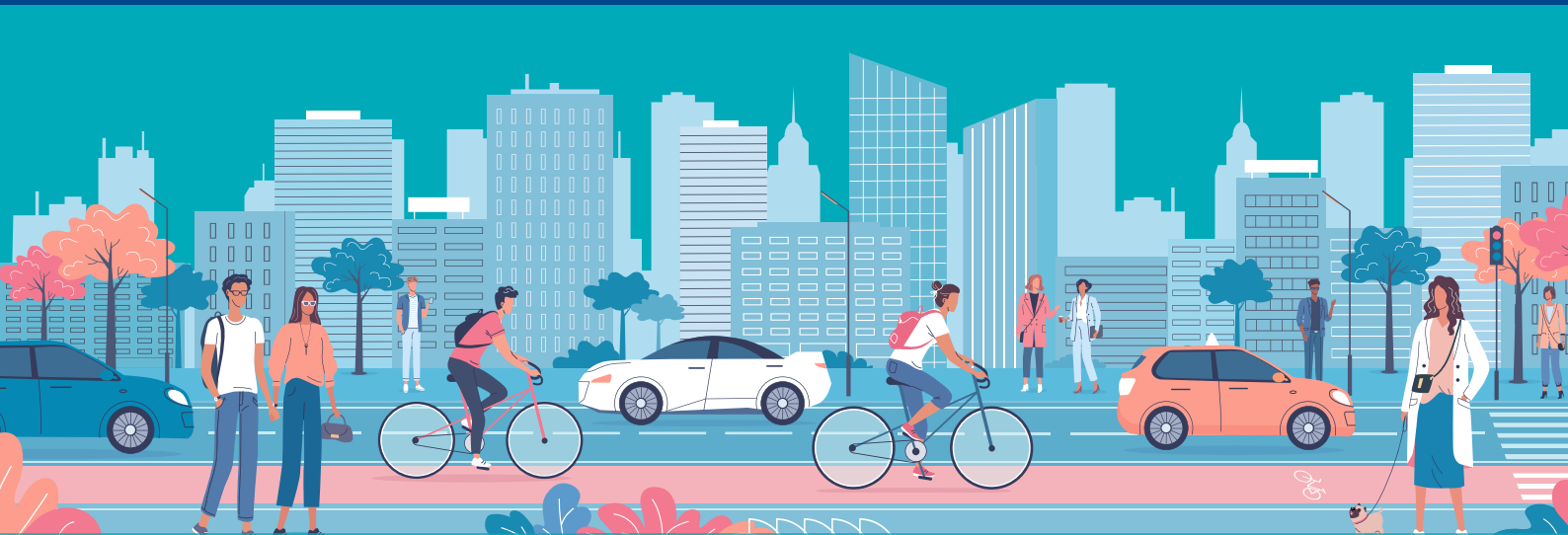




Employment trends: How highways and transportation professionals see their future careers



CIHT REPORT 2025

Employment trends: How highways and transportation professionals see their future careers

In this first of its biennial reports tracking employment trends and key skills issues, CIHT has gathered information from a wide selection of people in the UK's highways and transportation sector. It reveals key insights on the sector, and how it will cope with the challenges of new technologies, the climate crisis and wider economic trends.

Disclaimer

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Executive summary

This report, based on the 2025 CIHT Sector Employment Trends survey of 975 professionals, highlights the state of play in employment in the highways and transportation sector

A battle for talent is brewing in the highways and transportation sector. As many organisations plan to expand, they may struggle to find recruits from a largely satisfied workforce, most of whom plan to stick with their current employers in the next year. Those competing trends, combined with ongoing expectations of pay rises, will put increased strain on growth plans – and could force employers to make increasingly attractive offers to hire fresh talent.

The trend, set out here in the results of the 2025 CIHT Sector Employment Trends survey, takes place at a volatile time for the jobs market. The deployment of artificial intelligence tools and an acceleration of net zero efforts are placing new demands on staff, while many in the industry have deep concerns for the UK economy and its ability to deliver significant national projects such as HS2, Heathrow's third runway and the Lower Thames Crossing.

Thankfully, there are key ways to keep up with the pace of change. The survey of 975 professionals, including hundreds who have worked in the sector for more than 20 years, highlights the ongoing importance of training and Continuing Professional Development. It also shows what CIHT has to offer, with senior staff more likely to be members and members more likely to expect a salary increase in the next year.

The next 12 months could bring increased competition between employers – but there are ways to stay ahead. This report reveals key ways to attract new staff, including the top benefits that workers seek when changing role. It also shows widespread optimism about employers in the sector, with respondents much more positive about their economic prospects than the UK economy as a whole.



Key findings:

- Nearly half of respondents (48%) say that their employers are proactively looking to recruit additional employees, while more than half (54%) of senior staff report that their organisation is growing
- Most of the surveyed professionals report a high level of satisfaction with their current roles (87% are either 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied). Unsurprisingly, 70% of the total are 'not very' or 'not at all' likely to change employer in the next 12 months
- Seven out of 10 (70%) expect to see an improvement in their pay and benefits over the next 12 months
- Almost half (47%) of respondents are 'not very confident' that the sector will achieve net zero by 2050. And 64% of respondents are 'not very' or 'not at all' confident that the sector will achieve net zero by 2050
- Senior staff are more likely to say that AI is having an impact on their current role: 14% 'strongly agree' and 43% 'somewhat agree', compared with 9% and 37% respectively of all those surveyed
- 69% of respondents are either 'not very' or 'not at all' confident in the UK government's ability to deliver significant highways and transportation projects over the next five years
- Almost half (45%) of respondents believe their employer's economic prospects for the next 12 months are excellent or good, while only 16% said the same about the wider UK economy
- While respondents have short-term confidence in the prospects for their own organisation over the next 12 months, there is less positivity about the sector as a whole, with only a third (32%) anticipating growth over the next five years

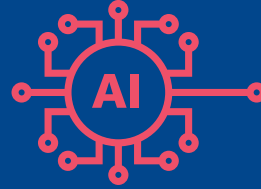




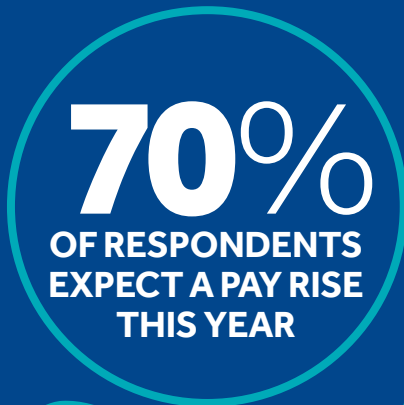
THE SURVEY OF
975
PROFESSIONALS

In numbers...

A snapshot of the stats on working in the highways and transportation sector



57% of senior leaders agree that AI is having an impact on their role



48%

SAY THAT THEIR
ORGANISATION IS
GROWING AND
LOOKING TO RECRUIT
ADDITIONAL STAFF



83%

OF RESPONDENTS CLAIM THEIR
EMPLOYER ABIDES BY SPECIFIC
CARBON REDUCTION POLICIES
HOWEVER, 23% ARE NOT
CONFIDENT THAT THESE
PLEDGES WILL BE MET

£40,000 to £59,999

A THIRD OF RESPONDENTS ARE IN THIS SALARY BAND



In depth: Talent war on the horizon

This year's CIHT Sector Employment Trends survey reveals plenty of positives for the highways and transportation sector, but also a possible skills shortage

Many respondents say their organisations are prospering and looking to grow over the next 12 months, with nearly half (48%) – and 54% of senior staff – saying their employers are proactively looking to recruit additional staff. A further 16% of respondents say that their businesses are growing without increasing their headcounts.

The majority (74%) of survey respondents have received a pay increase in the past year, and a similar number (70%) expect to see an improvement in their salary and benefits in the coming 12 months. The most common salary band is £40,000 to £59,999, accounting for a third (34%) of respondents. One per cent of respondents earn more than £170,000, and 6% of respondents say they earn between £100,000 and £129,000.

Even people working at organisations going through a downturn are more likely than not to have had a pay rise in the last 12 months, with seven in 10 receiving a salary increase in the past year (70%). While this is undoubtedly good news for employees, it reveals some incoming challenges for employers.

With respondents confident about their prospects of receiving a pay rise in the next 12 months and a high percentage of organisations looking to fill new positions, employers will likely need to maintain salary progression across the board to ensure staff retention.

High levels of satisfaction with current roles among respondents (87% are either 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied) could allay those fears, with 70% 'not very' or 'not at all' likely to change employer. However, this could bring challenges. A largely satisfied workforce could affect employers' expansion plans, forcing them to increase their pay and benefits offers to attract new recruits and making competition between firms more intense as they have a smaller pool of professionals to choose from.

When considering a new job, 46% of respondents see salary as the most important factor in making a decision, adding pressure on employers to deliver financial incentives. The other top benefits sought when moving role are flexible working, diverse and interesting work, location and job security.

While more than half (53%) of respondents are 'optimistic' or 'very optimistic' about a good supply of quality, fulfilling jobs in the sector over the next five years, not everyone has such a rosy outlook. Of the 37% reporting pessimism, almost two in five (38%) are in London or the South East, and 41% work in local government.

Looking at the sector as a whole, almost half (47%) believe that it will stay roughly the same size over the next five years, while almost a third (32%) think that it will grow.

Attracting new talent is vital either way. While respondents did not identify one stand-out strategy to encourage new recruits, they did say that visibility of the sector in schools, colleges and universities, clearer career paths and enhanced perceptions of the sector's value can all be effective.



Building expertise

In such a dynamic jobs market, it is vital to stay up to date with the latest knowledge and trends through CPD opportunities

New technologies, net zero and wider economic trends will all put pressure on the sector in the coming years, but professionals can keep ahead of the pace of change by regularly completing Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

Thankfully, our survey respondents are well aware of the training opportunities available, and the vast majority are taking advantage of them. Some 88% actively undertake some development opportunities, rising to 90% of senior staff. Only 13% of respondents do so through a planned programme with employer support, however.

Of the small proportion of people that do not take part in CPD activities, two-thirds (66%) say they work in highways, suggesting that there is more to be done to offer useful opportunities to that sector. Of those respondents who work in the highways sector, 20% are CEOs, directors or in

senior management, 17% are engineers and 12% are transport planners.

Most respondents have university degrees, with 77% holding either an undergraduate or a master's degree. Beyond that, 53% have no formal professional qualifications. People in senior roles are slightly more likely to have professional qualifications (47% have none) and are more likely to have a university education, with 83% reporting an undergraduate or master's degree. The figures suggest a nuanced mix of industry experience and accreditation contributing to career advancement.

Senior staff are more likely to be CIHT members, showing another benefit of membership. Of all respondents, 43% say they are 'not a member/don't know', while 39% of senior staff say they are 'not a member/don't know'.



Gloomy outlook on net zero

Can a confident and adaptable highways and transportation sector deliver on reducing emissions?

Net zero is the defining issue of our time. Faced with a future of rising sea levels, failing crops, huge biodiversity loss and extreme weather, all of society needs to rapidly reduce, then eliminate, its contribution to the climate crisis – and industries associated with high emissions have an even bigger role to play.

The survey paints a gloomy picture of the sector's ability to meet net zero, however. While 83% of respondents (and 86% of senior staff) claim their employer abides by specific carbon reduction policies and 72% report corporate key performance indicators related to sustainability, there is much less confidence that organisations will be able to meet those goals – 23% are either 'not very' or 'not at all' confident (senior staff report 28%), while only 15% are 'very' confident that these pledges will be met.

This anxiety deepens around the UK's pledge to hit net zero by 2050. Almost half (47%) are 'not very confident' that the sector as a whole will meet this target, and 17% are 'not at all confident'. Only 4% are 'very confident'. Worryingly, senior staff are even less confident, with 53% saying they are 'not very confident' of meeting this target.

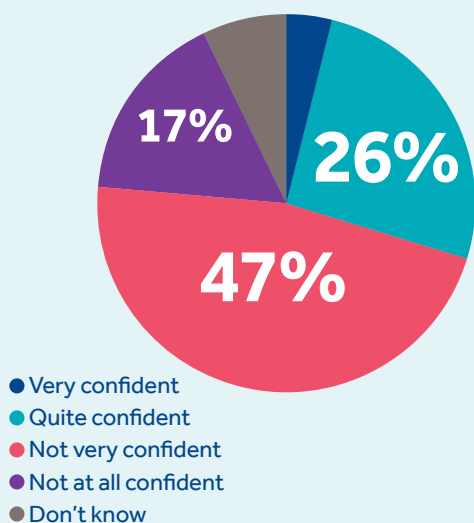
Failure to make a meaningful dent in emissions, either at home or abroad, leaves the coming decades at greater risk of climate chaos. On that point, however, the survey did find some optimism – almost half (48%) of respondents are either 'quite' or 'very' confident that the sector is capable of dealing with major environmental challenges, with only one in 10 'not at all' confident.

Falling short of net zero is likely to have major environmental consequences, but a confident and adaptable highways and transportation sector can minimise some of the worst effects for society.

“Almost half (48%) of respondents are either 'quite' or 'very' confident that the sector is capable of dealing with major environmental challenges”

Pessimistic views on hitting environmental targets

Confidence in net zero by 2050*



*How confident are you that the highways and transportation sector will be able to reach the UK government net zero target by 2050?

AI is just getting started

Is the sector making the most of artificial intelligence tools?

It is hard to think of a more revolutionary set of new technologies than the artificial intelligence (AI) tools flooding into both our personal and professional lives. From predictive maintenance to passenger monitoring, traffic management to workflow optimisation, AI programs can bring streamlined new capabilities to highways and transportation, while chatbots and virtual assistants can speed up everyday tasks.

The sector is yet to make the most of AI's full potential, however. The survey reveals a near-even split between those who 'strongly' (9%) or 'somewhat' (37%) agree that AI is having an impact on their current role and those who 'neither agree nor disagree' (28%), 'somewhat disagree' (12%) and 'strongly disagree' (11%). Of those who 'strongly disagree', three out of five work in highways (61%) and more than two in five (43%) are in local government.

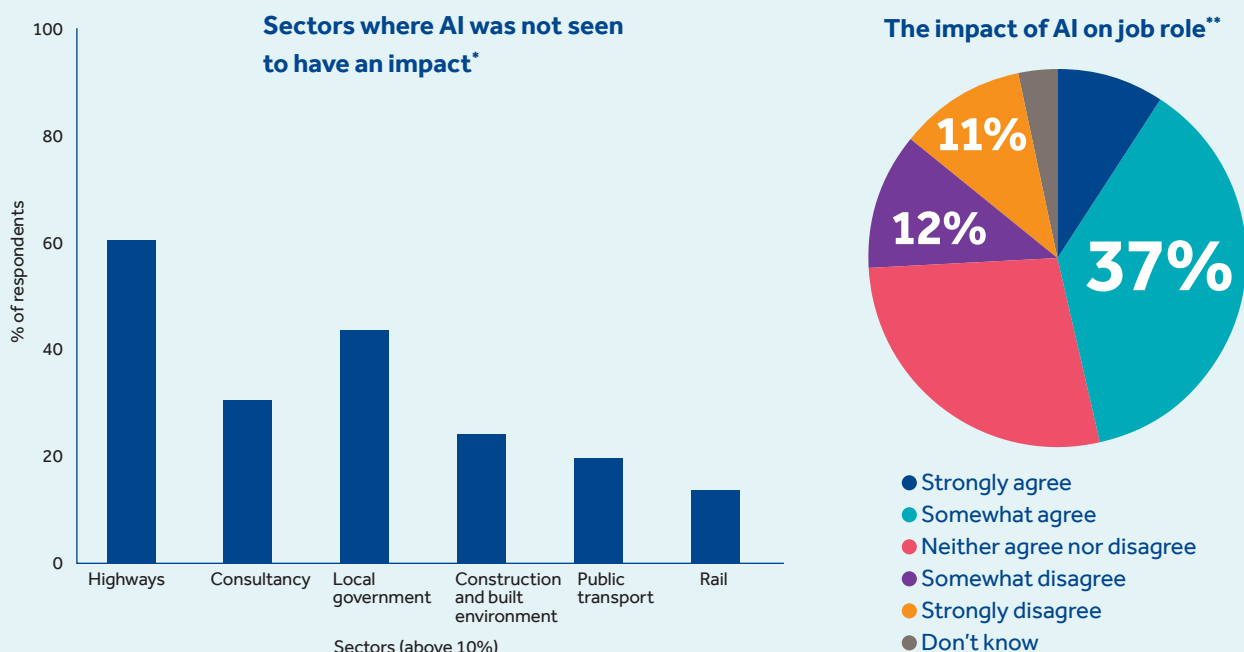
"37% believe a lack of understanding of the technology is the single biggest barrier to wider adoption"

Interestingly, AI is having a stronger impact on the work done by senior staff, with 14% 'strongly' agreeing that AI is having an impact on their current role and 43% 'somewhat' agreeing. Only one in five (21%) 'neither agree nor disagree', showing greater certainty among bosses.

Respondents' split experiences of AI show the technology is yet to reach maturity. A lack of understanding of the benefits of the technology is the single biggest barrier to wider adoption, according to 37% of respondents. This is followed by lack of regulation (13%) and fear of data breaches (12%). Senior staff are more concerned about the lack of understanding of the benefits the technology can bring, with 44% naming it as the biggest barrier.

Employers will be keen to address those barriers in the coming years as they strive to meet productivity, growth and sustainability goals.

Charting the perceived effects of artificial intelligence



Mixed outlook for the UK

While demand for highways and transportation expertise is high, can the UK government deliver on expectations?

After decades of uncertainty, the picture for some of the biggest projects in the UK is finally becoming clearer. From HS2 to Heathrow's third runway and the Lower Thames Crossing, there is considerable ongoing demand for highways and transportation expertise.

However, the UK government's ability to deliver those significant highways and transportation projects over the next five years is in question. General confidence among respondents is low, with 69% either 'not very' or 'not at all' confident that it can get the job done. The recent history of delays to HS2 and other projects suggests the sentiment is likely well founded.

There is similar pessimism about the UK economy as a whole, with only 16% of respondents reporting an 'excellent' or 'good' outlook for the next 12 months.

But while many are downbeat about the country's prospects, they are much more positive about their own chances. Two in five (40%) say their personal outlook is 'excellent' or 'good' in the next 12 months, and 46% of the total are just as optimistic about their own employers (this falls slightly to 44% of senior staff).

Of those forecasting a downturn in the next 12 months, almost half (47%) work in local government, and two out of five (40%) work in highways. Almost a quarter (23%) are CEOs, directors or senior staff, and the same proportion are transport planners.

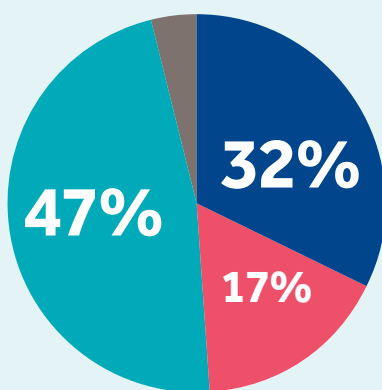
When it comes to funding of local highways authorities, there is slightly greater confidence that devolution changes will have a positive impact. Of respondents, 29% are 'quite confident', although a larger proportion (36%) are 'not very confident'. This rises to almost two in five (39%) of senior staff.



Mixed outlook for the UK

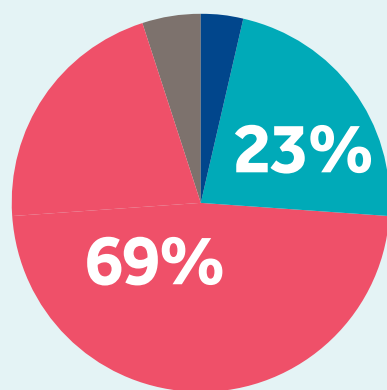
Prospects for the sector and the economy as a whole

5-year outlook for the sector*



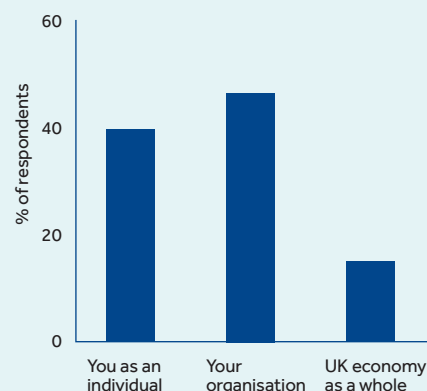
- Grow
- Shrink
- Stay the same
- Don't know

Confidence in the government to deliver over the next 5 years**

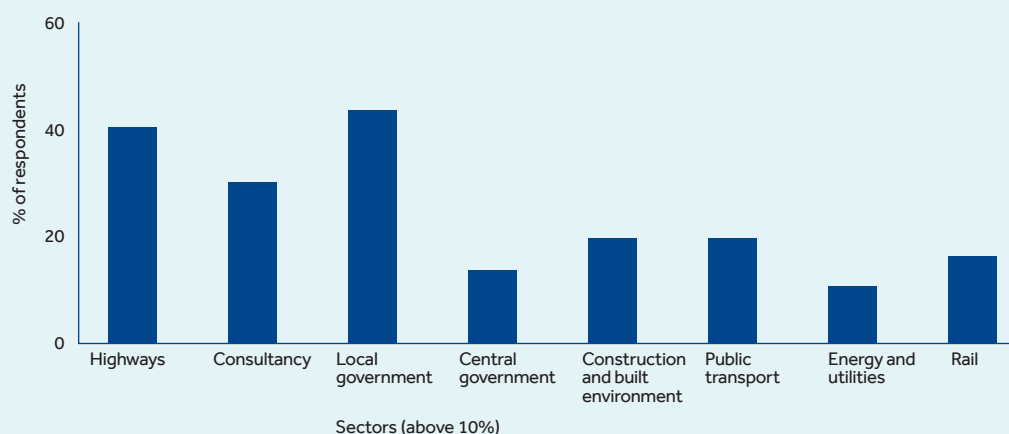


- Very confident
- Quite confident
- Not confident
- Don't know

Reporting 'excellent' or 'good' economic prospects for the next 12 months***



Sectors reporting a downturn in the market****



* In your view, do you think over the next 5 years the highways and transportation sector will: grow, shrink, stay the say, don't know. **To what extent, if at all, are you confident in the UK government's delivery of transport and highways related projects over the next 5 years? ***In your view, what do you consider the economic prospects to be over the next 12 months for: you as an individual, your organisation, the UK economy as a whole? ****Sectors where respondents have reported 'my organisation is experiencing a downturn and making redundancies' or 'my organisation is experiencing a downturn, but is not making redundancies'.

Diverse goals

The highways and transportation sector is working hard to progress equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI), leveraging inclusion as a strategic imperative for financial growth

Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) initiatives have a vital role in ensuring all members of the profession can reach their full potential.

The highways and transportation sector does have room to improve in terms of diversity, according to respondents. Ranked out of 10 (where zero is 'not at all' and 10 is 'completely'), respondents rank the sector at six out of 10 for both diversity and inclusivity. That perception is similar to/the same among ethnic minority groups¹ and the overall sample, 81% of whom are white.

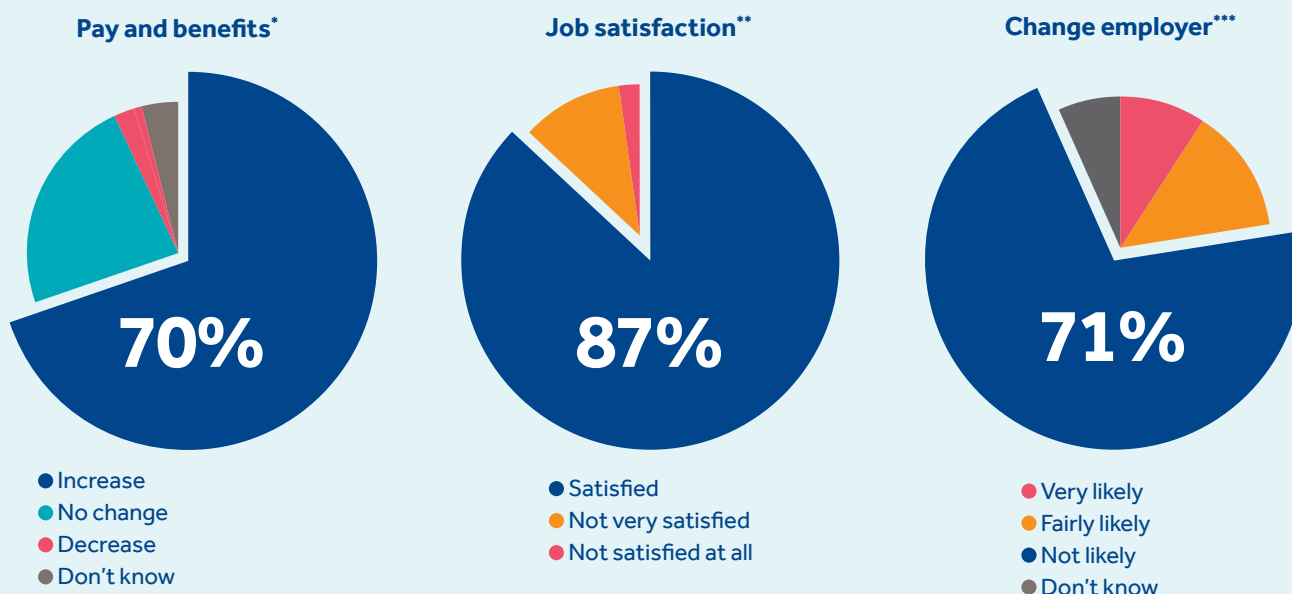
Advocacy, outreach and positive role models top the list of strategies to improve on those benchmarks. Almost all suggestions are popular, although unconscious bias training is the least accepted option.

Respondents who identify as women² (301 out of 975) are more likely to express satisfaction with their current role (90%) and are less likely to expect a change of employer over the next 12 months (75%) than the overall sample base. They are equally likely to have received a pay increase over the past 12 months (74%) as the overall sample, although are marginally less confident of a pay increase in the next year (66%, compared with 70%).

1. This terminology is used as a reference to a large cohort of people. When referring to individuals or smaller groups we encourage the use of specific ethnicity: see [Writing about ethnicity – GOV.UK](#)

2. This refers to gender identity rather than binary sex, and reflects how respondents completing the survey may identify beyond binary male/female.

Majority express satisfaction with pay and conditions



* To what extent do you expect your pay and benefits package to increase or decrease in the next 12 months?

** To what extent, if at all, are you satisfied with your current role? *** How likely, if at all, are you to change employer in the next 12 months?

Skills for the future: Building a skilled workforce for the highways and transportation sector

Delivering the UK's ambitions for a resilient, low-carbon transport network depends on having the right workforce to make it happen. Engineers, planners, project managers, technical specialists and road safety professionals are central to achieving our national priorities

In a rapidly changing world, our highways and transportation workforce need the right skills to adapt to new challenges and technologies as they arise.

The survey data shows that current professionals in the sector are broadly positive about their roles (87% say they are satisfied). However, it also found a fragmented landscape for training and development, where employees are often left to their own devices.

We found only 13% of employees developing their skills as part of a planned programme of work set by their employer. Some 38% of respondents say that they are supported on an ad hoc basis by their employers as opportunities arise, and a further 25% are left to develop their own skills as a personal goal in their own time.

There is a huge opportunity here for the government to work with CIHT and others in the sector to set a clear plan for national highways and transportation skills, delivering a framework that will encourage businesses to support their staff in a structured, responsive way.

Such a plan should be built on four pillars

- **Embedding workforce planning in all national and regional infrastructure strategies, giving employers the certainty they need**
- **Investing in technical education, ensuring apprenticeships and lifelong learning are accessible and adequately funded**
- **Requiring professional competence and ethics across the profession, ensuring that qualified professionals are part of every delivery team**
- **Supporting equality, diversity and inclusion through recruitment, progression and training that reflects the UK population**

It is only by building capacity, attracting diverse new entrants and sustaining professional excellence that the UK can create a transport infrastructure that enables positive change, drives economic growth, encourages sustainable travel and creates healthier communities.



CIHT provides strategic leadership and support to help our members develop, deliver and maintain sustainable solutions for highways, transport infrastructure and services that:

- Address the challenges of climate change
- Support the economy
- Help address societal inequalities
- Reduce environmental degradation
- Respond to a changing world

We bring members together to share, learn and feel confident about addressing these challenges through the application of good practice, by embracing innovation and by acting with integrity. It is through this and our values that CIHT can demonstrate and deliver on thought leadership to shape the highways and transportation sector for the public benefit.

Whether you are a student, apprentice, work in the private or public sectors or are a company director, CIHT has a place for you and a commitment to fulfilling your professional development needs throughout your career.

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