

Dr. Sigrid Evelyn Nikutta graduated from Bielefeld University and holds a doctorate in Psychology. She began her career in the management of a medium-sized company in Bielefeld, and joined Deutsche Bahn in 1996. In 2010 she left Deutsche Bahn to become Chairperson and Chief Operating Officer at Germany's largest public transport company, Berliner Verkehrsbetriebe (BVG). As the first female Chairperson, she made the company operate profitably for the first time. In 2019 she returned to Deutsche Bahn and now acts as a Member of the Management Board for Freight Transport at Deutsche Bahn AG and Chair of the Management Board and CEO of DB Cargo AG.

In your view, what is a feminist transport system?

Feminist mobility should, in fact, be a given. As I see it, mobility is open to all – and it considers the needs of society as a whole. We know that historically urban planning and transport are geared toward men, so simply saying, “Keep up the good work,” or “Do more of the same,” won't get us anywhere. Instead, the needs of all people requiring mobility must be actively integrated for all purposes: getting to school, traveling during leisure time, commuting to work, going on vacation. The important factors here are complete accessibility, the precise intermeshing of different means of transport, the resilience of service and safety of use.

Integrating all of this requires a long-term perspective. The feminist view thus has as its logical consequence sustainable mobility with environmentally-friendly zero-emission mobility services, such as bike sharing and alternative vehicles, or, for instance, the consistent use of electric mobility with green power.

An often-overlooked aspect of feminist mobility is its focus on the employees and co-workers who ensure good mobility.

Who is your feminist role model?

Rosa Parks, the American civil rights activist. She refused to give up her seat to white passengers on a city bus in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1955. Her resistance ignited the already ongoing civil rights movement in the United States, led by Martin Luther King Jr., among others and these acts of protest successfully led to the passing of the law abolishing racial segregation in 1964. Rosa Parks set an example through a single act of civil disobedience, and, in doing so, brought the problem of racism – a problem that has not been overcome to this day – to the public's attention. It is always the courage of individuals that moves the world. We are currently seeing this in the brave people of Iran who are courageously taking to the streets and fighting for their freedom to live the lives they want.

Have you had a transformative experience that has guided your work?

When I started working after finishing university nearly 30 years ago, I naturally assumed that women and men could and did achieve the same things equally, that gender has no influence on one's career. The higher I climbed the career ladder, however, the clearer it became to me that women's career ladders have more rungs or the distance between those rungs is greater.

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I consider it a great success that our society is changing. Mandated quotas are certainly helping. Being a woman is becoming ever more of an advantage, with women actively sought after for many roles, and that's a good thing. But the inevitable result, of course, is some people are starting to question whether women are only there because of the quotas. I counter that with another question: Have men not also been chosen for centuries because of their gender? In my experience, it is the best person for the job who is hired, regardless of their gender.

Do you have any advice for other people who want to be part of a feminist reshaping of the transport system?

Absolutely! Don't talk about each other – talk to each other. Then all users of mobility systems in a city will be involved from the very beginning. Mobility should always be thought of together with urban planning. Feminist urban planning and feminist mobility go hand in hand.