



Playing to the Crowd

Insight report
August 2025

Adapting matchday operations for
the next phase of women's football

steer

Record attendances are transforming women's football. To sustain this momentum, matchday operations must evolve. This report sets out the key areas where change is essential to support spectator experience.

With decades of experience, our team of specialists helps clients unlock opportunities that enhance capacity, revenue, and global visibility.

Our expertise spans:

- Venue and operations design
- Pedestrian modelling
- Strategy
- Planning and licensing
- Demand forecasting
- Major events expertise

Contact us to learn how we can support you

– from creating seamless spectator journeys to designing safe, sustainable, and commercially successful venues:

Simon Hall

Director - Sports & Major Events

simon.hall@steergroup.com

Contents	01.	Executive summary	04
	02.	Methodology	6
		Secondary research: Literature review	6
		Primary research: Stakeholder interviews	7
		Primary research: Arrivals profile analysis	7
		Internal expertise	7
		Analysis for key themes	7
	03.	Background	8
	04.	Fan demographics	11
		Geographical spread	12
Arrival profiles		13	
05.	Transport	15	
	Service availability	15	
	Transport cost to fans	18	
	Travelling confidently	18	
06.	Communicating with spectators	19	
	Tailored communications	19	
	Affordable tickets	20	
07.	Stadium design and operations	21	
	Safety and security	22	
	Toilet facilities	23	
	Seat configuration	23	
	Processing rates	24	
08.	Conclusion	25	
09.	Key reflections	26	
Case studies	CS 1.	Women's Professional League Limited (WPLL)	14
	CS 2.	Lionesses on-the-road	17
Figures	Figure 01.	Attendance growth - WSL & EUROs	9
	Figure 02.	Attendance growth in European leagues 2022/23 to 2023/34	10
	Figure 03.	Demography of UEFA Women's EURO 2022	12
	Figure 04.	Illustrative arrival profiles – men's vs. women's matches	13

01. Executive summary

Women's football is growing in popularity. 2025 gave us the most well attended UEFA Women's EURO tournament, with over 650,000 fans across the 31 matches, well above the 574,875 spectators attracted by the previous tournament in 2022.

In the UK in particular, this trend was already in motion - attendance at the Women's Super League (WSL) grew by 172%^[1] from 2021/22 to 2022/23.

This rise in attendance at women's games has seen a new demographic entering the stands with women's matchday widely attended by women and families.

Historically, matchday is orientated towards catering for large groups of male fans with established patterns of attendance. Operations and infrastructure across transport, spectator comms, safety and security, and stadium design are geared towards this demographic.

A 'business as usual' approach is poorly suited to the new demographic of fans attending women's games, many of whom are first-time or inexperienced attendees:

- 1. Transport:** Service availability and cost of public transport impact ability of family groups to attend match days.
- 2. Spectator communications:** Inexperienced fans and first-time attendees require a fresh approach to comms.
- 3. Safety and security:** The stringent security measures found at the men's game are unsuitable for women and families. Operations should be reframed to facilitate group entry and egress and be more responsive to the comparatively relaxed atmosphere.
- 4. Stadium design:** Stadiums are designed to a male specification in terms of average heights. This impacts seat configuration, sightlines, turnstile design and processing rates, and toilet facilities. Planning and design should account for different processing rates for women and families, and toilet provision should include a higher proportion of female facilities.

As more fans attend women's matchdays, it's becoming clear that existing

operations and infrastructure could limit their enjoyment. To deliver the best possible experience, a fresh approach is needed across these key areas.

Using expert knowledge, research, and interviews hosted with industry leaders, this Steer report explores in detail the barriers in these key areas and possible solutions to future-proof venues and operations. These areas provide a strategic framework for creating a more accessible and engaging environment for fans to support the sustained growth and success of women's sports.

The demographic shift accompanying the growth of women's football requires clubs, venue operators, event organisers, local authorities, transport operators, and other key stakeholders to adapt existing operations to accommodate the new face of matchday.

Maintaining existing operations could damage fan experiences (and therefore prospects of fan retention) because current systems may not meet the expectations, travel patterns, safety needs, and accessibility requirements of these audiences. Stakeholders need to take proactive steps to support the continued success of women's sports, and lasting engagement among fans.



02. Methodology

To inform the findings of this work, a mixed-methods approach was adopted, incorporating both primary and secondary research to build a robust understanding of the current landscape and future potential of women's sports, particularly football.

Secondary research: Literature review

A comprehensive desktop review was conducted, drawing on academic literature, industry reports, topical news coverage, and data from relevant organisations. The review focused on the following themes:

- The current state of women's football and wider women's sport
- Recent growth trends and contributing factors
- Strategies to sustain and accelerate growth
- International comparisons and best practice
- Broader societal shifts
- Barriers to continued growth

Primary research: Stakeholder interviews

We conducted interviews with high-level industry stakeholders across the sports sector who have specialist knowledge of women's sport. The discussions explored:

- Strategic vision for hosting women's sports fixtures
- Operational differences between women's and men's event days (e.g. transport management, security, communications, and Zone Ex operations)
- Key lessons learned and examples of experiential learning
- Changes to stadiums and infrastructure (seat configuration, toilet facilities)
- Definition of success and key performance indicators
- Success stories

Primary research: Arrivals profile analysis

In addition to the qualitative research, that makes up the bulk of our findings, we conducted some supportive quantitative analysis of arrival profiles to understand any differences between men's and women's fixtures. To do this, we reviewed stadium entry data for both women's and men's fixtures. By comparing the percentage of matchday attendees inside the stadium over time, we were able to assess differences in arrival profiles.

Internal expertise

This report also draws on Steer's internal expertise, incorporating insights from both the Sports and Major Events team and the Rail team. Their experience in transport planning for high-profile events added valuable context to the research.

Analysis for key themes

Following the collection of qualitative data and supporting material, we conducted a thematic analysis to identify key insights. The resulting themes are presented in the following section as a synthesised summary of findings drawn from the stakeholder interviews and supporting evidence.



03. Background

Women's football is growing in popularity. 2025 gave us the best attended UEFA Women's EUROs, with over 650,000 fans across the 31 matches, surpassing the 574,875 attendees clocked up by the previous tournament in 2022.^[ii]

UEFA Women's EURO 2022 significantly accelerated the growth of women's football in the UK, resulting in increased participation, viewership, and investment. In the UK, attendance at women's sport events exceeded 2 million for the first time in 2022^[iii], while 'depth of engagement' also increased with home spectators viewing over two hours of women's sport at the highest ever recorded in the same year.

The success of the Lionesses has led to record-breaking attendances in domestic leagues – the total attendance during the 2022-23 WSL season surpassed 680,000, a 172% increase from the year before. Attendance continues to grow as women's teams are being hosted in larger and more iconic venues with greater capacities, and WSL clubs are beginning to play their games in Premier League stadiums. The Lionesses' success through the UEFA Women's EURO 2025 competition looks set to continue this potential for further growth.

Internationally, the Google Pixel Frauen-Bundesliga in Germany saw a 6% rise in average attendance per game in the first half of the 2023/2024 season, reaching 2,894 fans per game. This indicates sustainable growth across the league's clubs. Liga F in Spain and Arkema Première Ligue in France have also seen increases in attendance: Spain's league recorded an 8% rise, while the French league saw a 14% surge in the same season.^[iv]

A global Nielsen Sports study found that 84% of sports fans, over half being men, are interested in women's sports. In the UK, USA, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Australia, and New Zealand, 51% of male fans follow women's sports. Overall, 64% of people in these countries have an interest in at least one women's sport.^[iv]

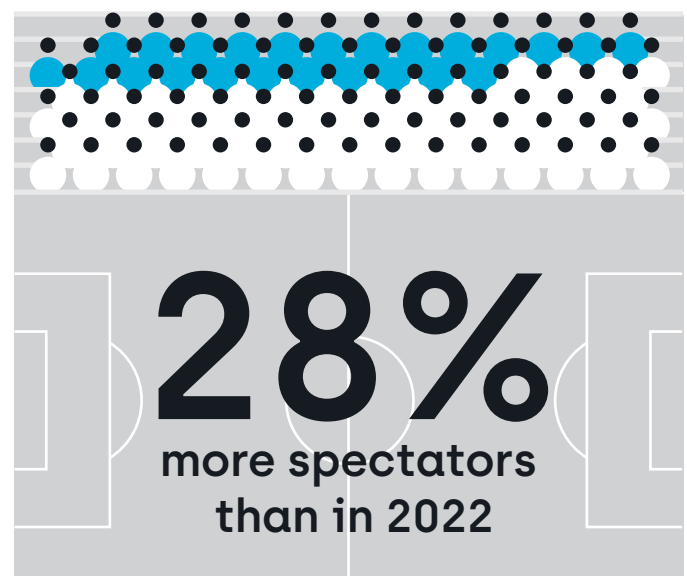
While there is an increase in attendee numbers internationally, England leads by a significant margin. It's difficult to pinpoint a singular cause factor as to why the UK is leading, but several factors have contributed, such as:

- The early professionalisation of the WSL in 2018;
- A concerted effort by the FA to encourage grassroots activity in girls football;
- The Lionesses profile-raising UEFA Women's EURO 2022 win; and
- A lucrative £8 million deal with the WSL and Sky Sports, as well as regular free broadcasting.

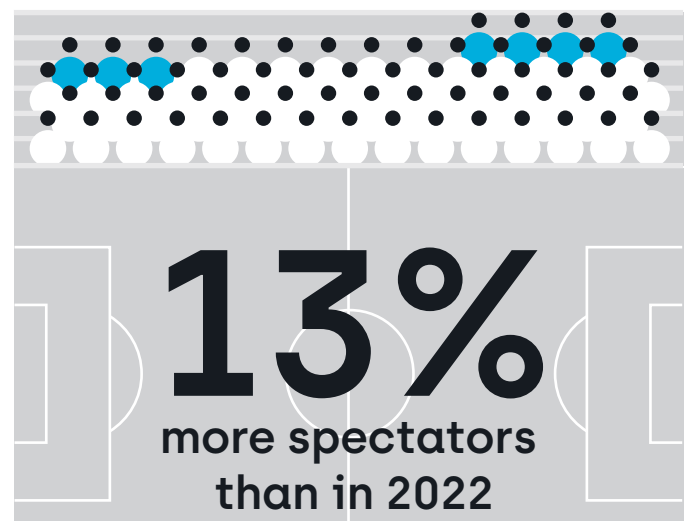
As mentioned, in the UK both women's club matches and internationals are now more often staged in large, iconic stadiums such as Wembley and the Emirates. In some cases, this is a strategic choice to attract larger crowds and raise the profile of the women's game; in others, it is a necessity, as there is no dedicated women's venue of comparable quality or capacity available. This trend is more common in the UK than in many mainland European nations - for example, Arsenal Women regularly play at the Emirates, whereas Lyon Féminin typically play at the smaller Groupama OL Training Centre.

However, the use of these stadiums is not without challenges: facilities such as toilet provision and the steepness of seating (seat rake) are often designed with a predominantly male demographic in mind, which can make the matchday experience less well suited to the women's audience. Understanding these demographic and infrastructure considerations is important in assessing the impact of venue choice on the growth of the women's game.

Figure 01. Attendance growth - WSL & EUROs



880,000 spectators attended Barclays Women's Super League games in 2024/25.



Over 650,000 spectators attended the UEFA Women's Euros 2025.

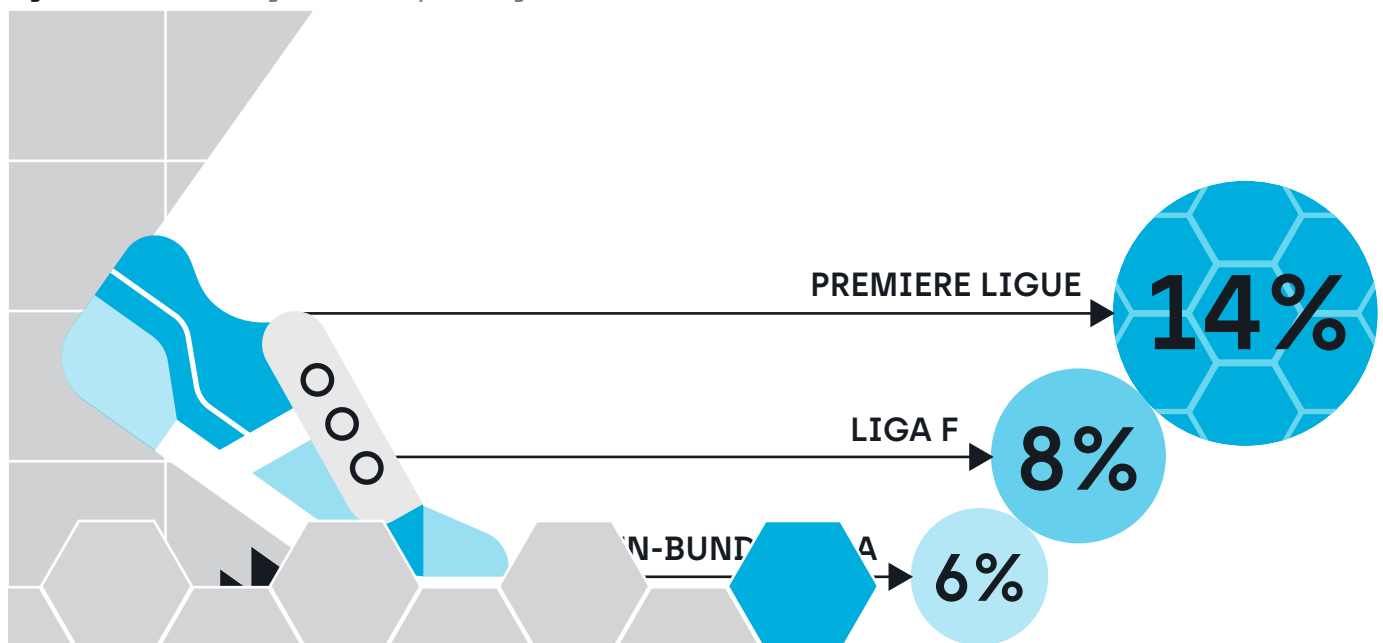


Central to the momentum of women's sport overall is a broader cultural shift that has been gaining traction for over a decade. Prominent athletes such as Rachel Ankamah, Ilona Maher, and Leah Williamson have captured public attention, becoming powerful symbols of athletic excellence and gender progress.

Simultaneously, targeted strategic investments by key stakeholders have significantly improved the conditions for women's sports to thrive. In particular, initiatives such as the 'Big Games' strategy in the UK and Germany have directly contributed to increased matchday attendance and visibility. The Big Games strategy is the practice of hosting women's league matches at larger stadiums, often at the grounds of men's teams, to attract larger crowds and visibility. The strategy aims to boost attendances, enhance fan engagement, and potentially generate greater revenue for women's football. The Big Games strategy enabled access to larger stadiums and expanded marketing efforts through funding from top-tier leagues and national football clubs.

Despite the huge progress made, challenges remain. While growing numbers and flagship events have demonstrated the appetite for women's football, there are risks to realising the growth potential and the commercial and reputational returns as a result. Existing matchday operations are not adequate for meeting the needs of a new demographic. Maintaining a reliable and engaged fan base for in-person events is critical for the continued growth, long-term financial sustainability, and the commercial viability of women's football.

Figure 02. Attendance growth in European leagues 2022/23 to 2023/34





04. Fan demographics

A defining feature of women's sport is the distinct and unique fan demographic. Insights from interviews and stakeholder data consistently highlight that women's sports attract a markedly different audience profile compared to men's sports – characterised by a family-based audience with a higher proportion of children, and significantly greater numbers of female attendees.

UEFA data from the Women's EURO 2022 revealed that 47% of stadium spectators were women and 20% were children. Similarly, the Football Association (FA) reports that fixtures involving the Lionesses consistently attract a family-oriented crowd, reinforcing the perception of a family friendly atmosphere at women's games.

Geographical spread

Elite-level women's football in the UK – such as the WSL – draws a broader geographical spread of supporters than the Women's Championships. Data from sports agency Two Circles shows that 59.6% of WSL ticket buyers live within 20km of the host stadium, while 40.4% travel from farther afield. This distribution becomes even more pronounced when matches are held at larger 'Big Stadium' venues, where 20.5% of spectators travel more than 50km, compared to 15.9% for fixtures at regular stadiums. The wider catchment for 'Big Stadium' games highlights that fans are more willing to travel longer distances for a high-profile venue, which in turn expands exposure and attracts new audiences to the women's game.

This wider catchment area for WSL fixtures compared to Women's Championship games, and those hosted at 'Big Stadium' compared to smaller stadiums, has significant implications for matchday transport planning. Transport operators need to consider the increased demand across a larger portion of the transport network, ensuring connectivity, reliability, and accessibility for fans traveling longer distances.

Figure 03. Demography of UEFA Women's EURO 2022

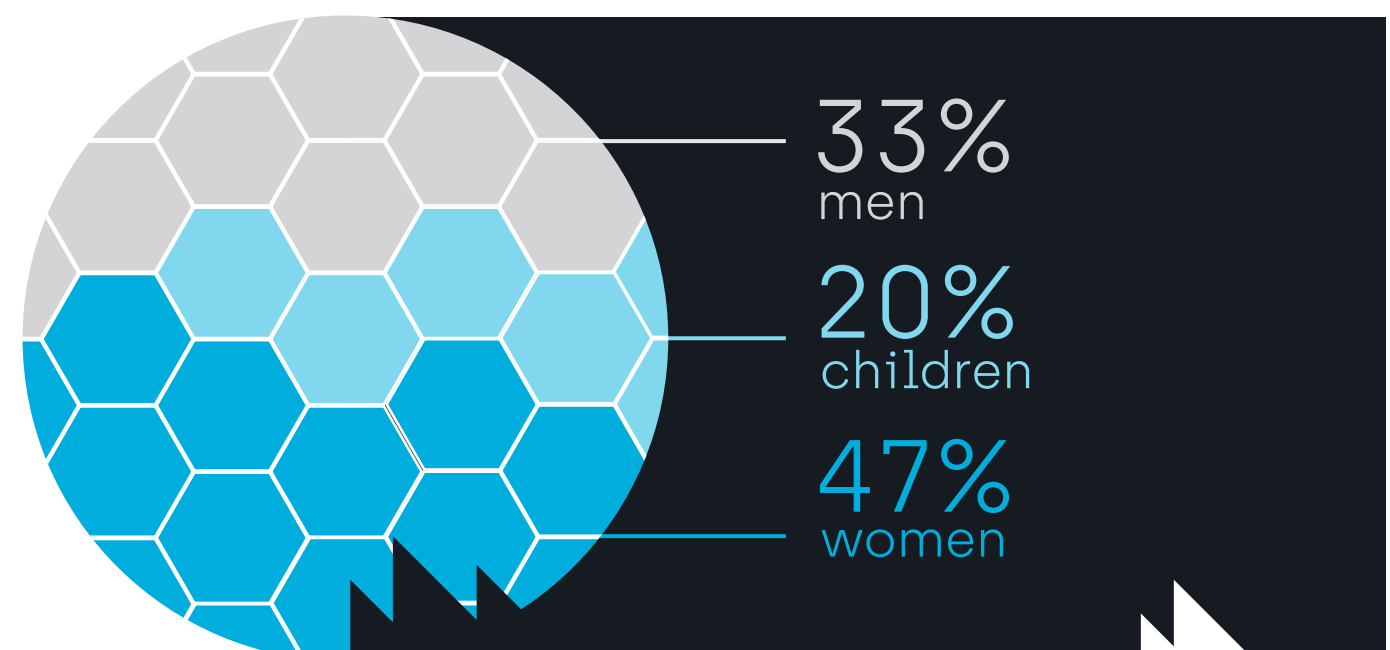
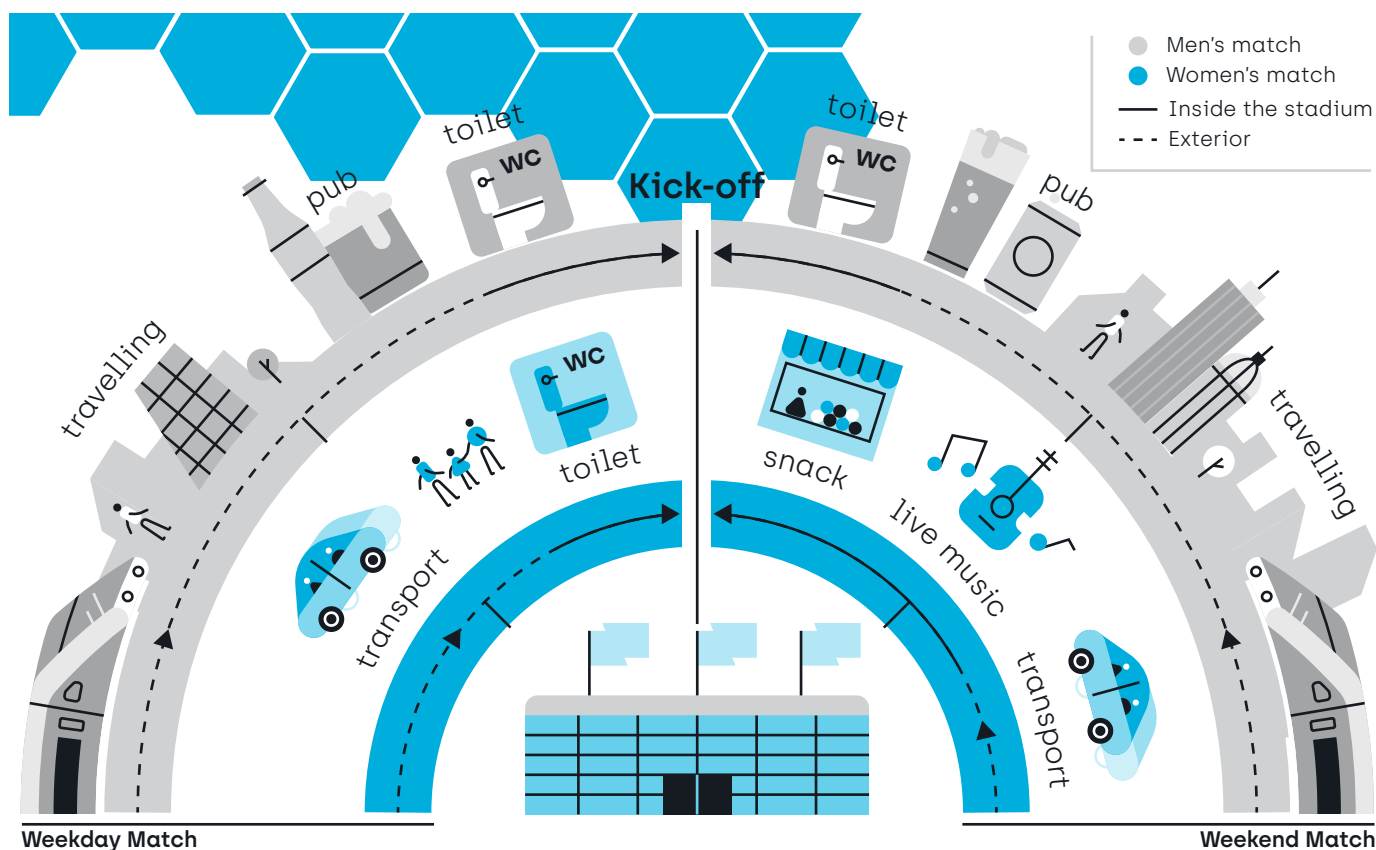


Figure 04. Illustrative arrival profiles – men's vs. women's matches

Arrival profiles

Arrival and departure profiles for women's matchday vary depending on weather, kick-off time, and whether the fixture is on a weekday or weekend. There is direct experience with this from Lionesses' on-the-road fixtures where colder weather, evening fixtures, and weekday fixtures have a reduced demand on public transport and a later arrival profile, and weekend, daytime fixtures show increased utilisation/demand for public transport services and earlier arrival profiles, engaging with onsite pre-match activations.

Analysis of arrival profiles for weeknight fixtures reveals that fans attending women's football matches tend to arrive later than those attending men's games. While male audiences typically arrive 60–120 minutes before kick-off, spectators at women's fixtures tend to arrive within a much tighter 30–90-minute window — placing greater pressure on transport operations and venue security, and requiring more proactive, coordinated planning. This trend reverses for weekend fixtures, when there tends to be earlier arrivals for women's fixtures as there is greater flexibility in travel and planning and desire to engage with on-site activations, fan zones, and entertainment.

The unique nature of this fanbase invites proactive planning from key stakeholders across stadium design, operations, and infrastructure — not just to enhance the fan experience, but to maximise the venue's commercial return. From accessible facilities and child-friendly amenities to tailored communications and transport, every detail plays a role in unlocking fan engagement and long-term revenue opportunities.

As this audience potential continues to expand, the question for organisers and planners is, how can matchday operations and stadium infrastructure evolve to meet the needs of this new generation of fans?

Case study — 1

Women's Professional League Limited (WPLL)

As part of our work with the Women's Professional League Limited (WPLL), we developed a comprehensive and data-driven response to the Department for Transport's (DfT) call for ideas on the Integrated National Transport Strategy (INTS). Our aim was to align transport policy with the unique needs of women's football, supporting its continued growth while promoting sustainable and inclusive transport solutions.

What we did:

- Strategic collaboration: Worked with WPLL to align transport policy with their growth and sustainability goals.
- Data analysis: Used ticketing, geographic, and transport data to understand fan travel behaviours, supporting that women's football is unique.
- Barrier identification: Highlighted gaps within transport – service availability, cost, and safety – that impact match attendance.
- Policy recommendations: Proposed practical solutions, such as like flexible scheduling, integrated ticketing, to improve access and support long-term growth.

Client: Women's Professional League Limited (WPLL)
Date: 2025





05. Transport

The travel behaviours of fans attending women's sports events differ from those where there are predominantly male crowds, with considerations arising for service availability, cost, and safety. Due to sustainability targets, fears of congestion, and the impact this can have on kick-off time by delaying team arrival, it is essential to get transport operations right to make public transport the mode of choice over personal vehicles for fans.

Service availability

Scheduling is a central issue when it comes to matchday and service availability, with priority given to men's fixtures. WSL matches are typically arranged after Premier League, Championship, League 1 and League 2 games, often leaving them with less favourable time slots. There are often limited or no services post-event for weekday evening events, and clashes with planned railway engineering works for Sunday events, restricting fan access. This was experienced a number of times with Lionesses' On-the-Road fixtures, where lack of service resulted in fans being deterred from travelling by public transport and reduced attendance.

These issues will only be exacerbated as attendance numbers grow – Arsenal currently leads the pack with roughly 30,000 fans at an average game (compared to a 60,000 capacity), with runner up Manchester United at roughly 10,000 (versus a 12,000 capacity).^[vi]

Service availability is also impacted by planned engineering works. The engineering strategy for planned engineering works on the railway network has historically focused on commuter transport, but there should be a shift to better accommodate and prioritise leisure travel. Women's Super League fixtures often take place on Sundays, and this more often clashes with planned engineering works, therefore reducing availability of rail as a mode choice for these fixtures. If engineering works were shifted, this would have a positive impact for Sunday fixtures as rail would be a viable mode choice for spectators. Given post Covid-19 working pattern changes there is now the opportunity to flex engineering work into other days of the week with less impact on commuters than was historically the case.

Rail operators can optimise existing assets, enhancing the flexibility of the network which would play a crucial role in supporting the growth of women's sports. Increased flexibility allowing for the provision of additional services when needed (demand-based) is key to supporting growing demand for women's sports.

Rail operators could have the capability to add services and adjust capacity on event days, if demand is forecasted to be high, by providing additional services or running longer trains.

There can be commercial benefit for the railway in aligning services with the growing demand associated with women's sports, as increased attendance translates to higher ridership, improved revenue streams, and stronger partnerships with event organisers. Proactively supporting this growth not only enhances customer experience but also positions rail networks as key enablers of inclusive, sustainable transport solutions and generators of wider social value in the communities it serves.

A sufficiently flexible staffing model and adequate rolling stock availability enables the realisation of the railway's contribution. Having the means to efficiently secure additional staff (train drivers, conductors, station staff) for major events, and ensuring additional capacity can be secured when needed. This will best be secured by earlier engagement, as detailed below.



Case study — 2

Lionesses on-the-road

Steer were appointed by the FA to provide transport consultancy support in the planning and delivery of all 'on-the-road' fixtures.

Key work includes:

- RAG rating: Assessing existing conditions, evaluating public transport services, the highway network and car parking capacity.
- Demand forecasting: Analysing postcode data to understand ticket distribution and predict travel choice. Modelling produced to understand transport capacity constraints and additional service provision needs.
- On-the-ground event delivery: Managing live highway and public transport network checks, car park operation and ensuring safe and efficient spectator travel.

We frequently encounter challenges with limited public transport service availability, requiring proactive engagement with operators to overlay additional services. Where enhancements were not feasible, we implemented park and ride solutions that offered safe and trusted transport - particularly beneficial for women and families - while easing stadium congestion and avoiding disruption to teams.

Client: The Football Association (FA)
Date: 2022 - 2023



Earlier engagement between event organisers and transport operators has proven to be beneficial. This collaboration is required to adapt management plans to reflect the unique needs of women's sports.

It would result in the modification of strategies and decision-making processes to account for the variation in needs and behaviours, considering different demographics, arrival and departure profiles, geographical spread, and safety concerns.

As the management of Britain's rail services move increasingly into public ownership, there is increased opportunity to recognise the broader outcomes and incentives to support sporting events. The need to meet the commercial and operational imperatives for the railway will remain but can be placed in a broader context. Railway devolution and local management structures could make the need to contribute all the starker. Where contracted operators remain, e.g. London's Overground and Elizabeth Line services, who will still require appropriate commercial arrangements to ensure appropriate engagement with the planning and delivery of services.

Earlier engagement with transport operators during the fixture scheduling process would allow for better coordination in the determination of the maintenance/ engineering works schedule to avoid clashes with key events or fixtures, enabling minimal disruption to matchday travel. While engineering activity is often essential, the timing can be flexible, ensuring railway operation, local community mobility, and fan travel needs are met efficiently. Earlier engagement and positive relationships between event organisers, devolved decision makers, and transport operators will also enable a more demand-responsive service model. Advanced planning and demand forecasting will enable rail operators to secure availability of the required rolling stock.

Transport cost to fans

The cost of public transport can be a barrier preventing fans from attending women's sports events. The Football Supporters Association's 'Women at the Match' report highlighted that 48% of female survey respondents cited the cost and distance to travel as a factor discouraging their attendance at more matches.^[vii]

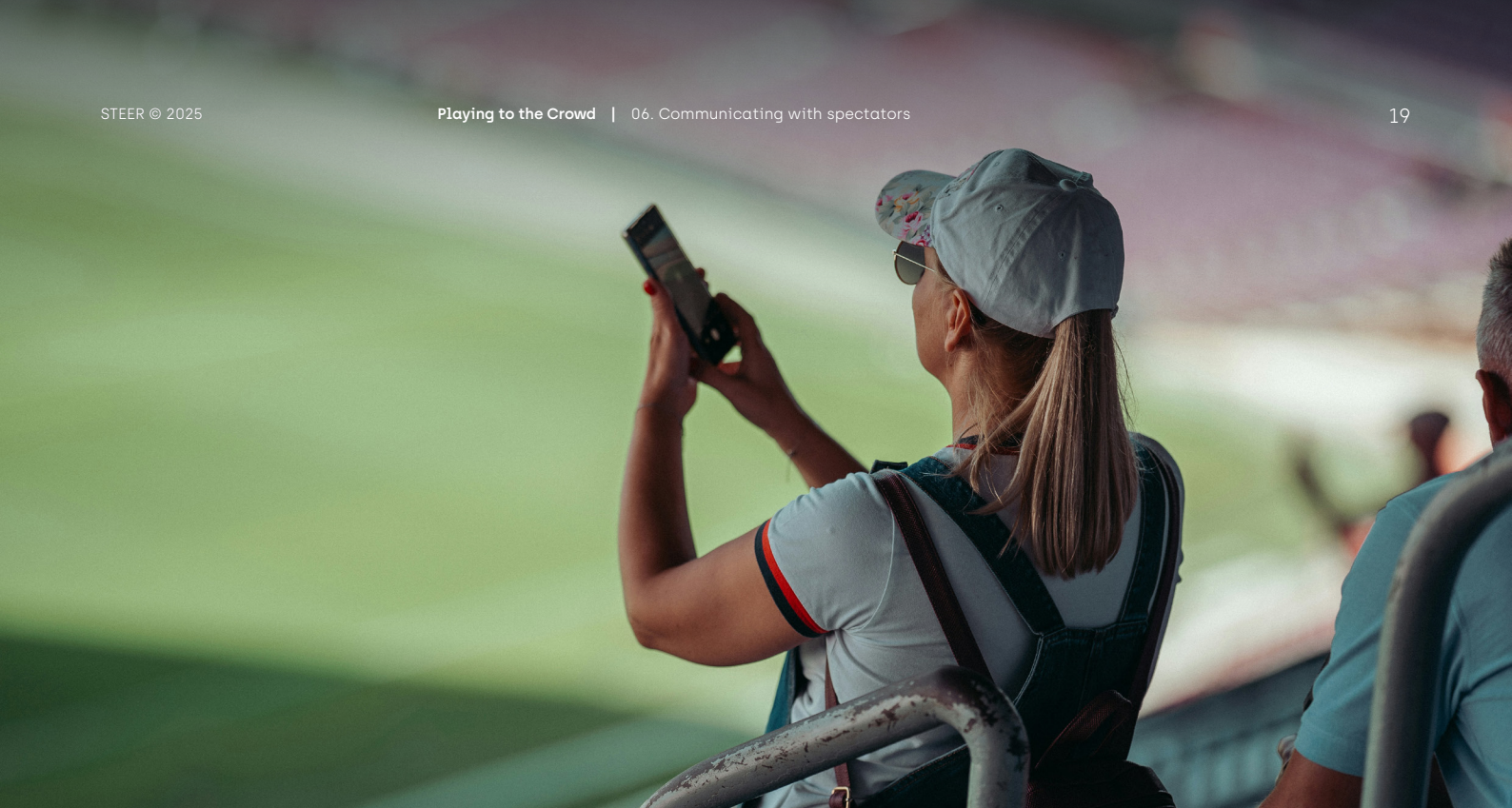
While the fanbase for women's sports is still growing, affordability plays a key role in attracting and retaining spectators. Travelling by car is often perceived as being cheaper and easier, therefore public transport could be incentivised via 'Family & Friends Railcard' and integrated ticketing.

Promoting the Family & Friends Railcard would boost attendance at women's sports events by making travel more affordable and convenient for families and groups by providing discounted and cost-effective travel, and encouraging group attendance. A reduced travel cost makes it more feasible for families and friends to attend matches together.

Despite discounted rail fares, promoting the Family & Friends Railcard will also result in benefits for the rail industry by increasing passenger numbers and revenue, optimising service usage, and contributing to sustainability goals.

Travelling confidently

Safety concerns on public transport could hinder the growth of women's sports by deterring fans from attending events/ fixtures. In general women report feeling unsafe on public transport according to the Office for National Statistics, with nearly 50% feel uncomfortable on public transport after dark which is highly relevant for midweek fixtures.^[viii] Meanwhile, a report by Kick it Out found that 48% of women had heard sexist language on public transport to matches.^[ix] This can greatly impact the decision of not just how to travel but whether to attend matchday at all for women fans.



06. Communicating with spectators

Attracting and retaining audiences for women's sport begins with clear, accessible, and inclusive communication. Research and stakeholder interviews have highlighted that marketing and communications are pivotal in shaping fan engagement, particularly given the unique and evolving demographic profile of women's football attendees.

Tailored communications

Unlike many supporters of men's football, a large proportion of spectators at women's games are first-time or infrequent attendees, often without an established matchday routine. As such, targeted pre-match communication plays a critical role in shaping their overall event experience.

The need for tailored messaging is particularly relevant to families and newcomers, for whom logistical clarity reduces anxiety and encourages advance planning. It also enhances the likelihood of repeat attendance by ensuring a positive first experience.

Comms could be well-considered by event organisers and transport operators to deliver information to ticketholders based on audience demographics. The FA highlighted the value of event-day email communications that provide clear guidance on transport options, arrival times, and venue information - particularly where sustainable travel is being encouraged. The mobility lead for Women's Rugby World Cup (RWC) 2025 also noted that well-structured communications improved spectator compliance and helped ensure smooth operations on matchdays.

Affordable tickets

Ticket pricing emerged as a decisive factor in attracting first-time attendees and families in our interviews. Women's matches offer a more affordable entry point into sports, making them especially appealing to those priced out of men's fixtures and families needing to buy multiple tickets.

For instance, World Rugby reported that after offering low-cost tickets for the Women's Rugby World Cup (RWC) 2025 they surpassed previous tournament sales within just two weeks of general release. Crucially, lower price points were also linked to repeat purchases, contributing to the development of long-term fan engagement.

Affordability also proved instrumental during the FIFA Women's World Cup in New Zealand, where attendance increased steadily throughout the tournament. This suggests that once individuals experience the atmosphere and excitement of live women's sport, they are more likely to return.

Moreover, for a family-focused fanbase, which constitutes a significant portion of the women's sport audience, affordability is self-evidently essential. With multiple tickets often required per group, cost can be a barrier to attendance. Pricing strategies must therefore account for the financial realities of families and first-time fans. Affordable tickets increase accessibility for families and is likely to attract new audiences.



07. Stadium design and operations

Stadium infrastructure has historically been designed with male spectators in mind. This is reflected in the standards set out in the Sports Ground Safety Authority (SGSA) Green Guide. The SGSA's Green Guide is a comprehensive set of guidelines providing best practice recommendations to ensure the safety of spectators at sports venues. It is widely regarded as the global standard for stadium design and management and is a highly respected framework that has advanced spectator safety and venue operations. However, its design guidelines are based on average male height. As a result, core elements of stadium design often don't align with the needs of the demographic attending women's sports. There are significant opportunities for adaptive, inclusive design to meet this shift in audience profile, with appropriate facilities and amenities.

It was acknowledged by the SGSA that design guidance and regulations set out in the Green Guide are based off average male heights and male audiences, and that the next iteration of the document, due in 2028/2029, will incorporate larger consideration for female spectators.

There are three models available for clubs:

- Multi-venue approach which sees women's teams play at alternative stadiums e.g. Chelsea's women's matches are mostly played at Kingsmeadow
- Multi-use single venue operation e.g. Arsenal Men's and Women's play at Emirates
- Bespoke option of building a custom-made stadium for women's team as well as men's e.g. Brighton Women's new stadium being developed

Interviewees identified the final option as the 'ideal' scenario, recognising that positioning women as tenants in stadiums originally designed for men is inherently sub-optimal. While this ideal is widely acknowledged, there is also a pragmatic understanding of the complexities involved in its realisation, largely financial. Looking ahead, stadium design could evolve to either accommodate tailored responses to distinct audience demographics, or incorporate the flexibility to adapt based on the gender of the teams that are playing.

Safety and security

Safety, security, and safeguarding are critical components of matchday operations, particularly for women's sports events where the audience profile presents unique needs. These events typically foster a family-friendly and inclusive atmosphere, with lower levels of anti-social behaviour compared to men's events. However, there remains a heightened sensitivity around personal safety and safeguarding, particularly for female fans and families with young children.

As a result of the varied demographic of attendees, a more nuanced approach to security is required—one that maintains necessary safety protocols and standards, while creating a welcoming, non-intimidating environment. The high-visibility security presence often seen at men's fixtures may be excessive in the context of women's sports events. The lesser chance of disruptive behaviour at women's sports events means security teams can adopt a more light-touch approach, with fewer personnel dedicated to enforcement. Security personnel could also be appropriately briefed and trained on conducting searches with sensitivity, particularly with women and children, to ensure procedures are aligned with safeguarding best practices.

Additionally, security screening procedures could be adapted to accommodate the practice needs of families and women. Attendees at women's sports events are more likely to carry larger bags, containing essential items such as food, drinks, and childcare necessities. Security protocols could therefore allow for greater flexibility including modified bag size allowances, a review of prohibited items, and clearly communicated guidance on permitted items, to reduce friction and support a more seamless entry experience.

Another measure to further improve the experience for families attending women's fixtures would be to introduce ticket scanners capable of recognising and processing family tickets, and security staff being fully briefed on safeguarding protocols for a demographic with higher proportions of children.

Toilet facilities

Toilet provision could be adapted to reflect a higher proportion of female attendees. Standard stadium toilet ratios—typically designed around a 70:30 male-to-female split—can result in long queues. Flexible conversion of toilet facilities based on expected event demographics would significantly improve the matchday experience and could be incorporated into venue design.

Given the number of families and young children attending women's sports events, it could also be considered to provide baby-changing facilities and private areas for breastfeeding.

In addition, the provision of free sanitary products in women's restrooms is an important and inclusive step. Brighton and Hove was the first Premier League club to implement this policy in 2018 after a viral social media campaign by three Celtic supporters 'On the Ball'. Other teams including Arsenal, Manchester City and Stockport County have followed suit.

Seat configuration

Seating design could account for the physical needs of a more diverse fanbase. For example, the height difference between average male fans and women or children can affect sightlines – as previously stated, stadium designs are currently based on average male heights, including seat rake and therefore sightlines, resulting in women and children are at a disadvantage.

The Green Guide requires that seating configuration be calculated to ensure every spectator has an unobstructed view over the person in front, using the C-value formula [calculated using the distance between seat rows, the vertical step between rows, the spectator's eye level, and the position of the 'focal point' which is typically the nearest edge of the pitch] to measure the vertical clearance of each sightline.

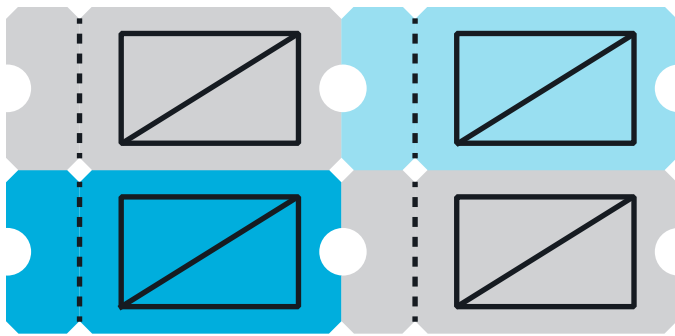
Stadiums have been designed to be steep sided to fit as many seats in as possible. This is at cross purposes to what is needed for a women's game demographic, families may benefit from more spacious seating zones, including areas where parents can comfortably supervise young children who may become restless during the match.

Processing rates

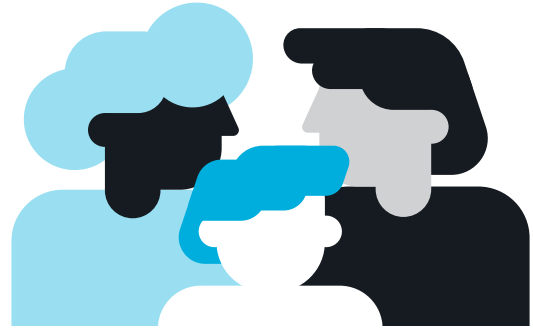
Current guidance suggests approximately 11 spectators per minute, per turnstile – and is based on data from predominantly male crowds. This benchmark doesn't accurately reflect the behaviours observed at women's sports events where there is the varied demographic. There are often slow processing times due to a number of reasons as set out in the infographic below.

Given these points, the Green Guide could provide additional guidance on the approximate processing rate assumptions for women's sports events, and for event organisers and venues to consider operational adjustments for example increasing staffing and support at entry points, and adjusting queue management to facilitate smoother entry. Accurately anticipating and accommodating slower processing rates will help to reduce crowding, improve the fan experience, and enhance overall safety and efficiency at the stadium.

1. Shared devices and tickets: Families often purchase tickets under a single account and store them on a single device, requiring time to scan multiple tickets at the gate.



2. Accompanying children: Parents or guardians may need additional time to assist children through turnstiles.



3. Bag checks and belongings: Spectators are more likely to have bags, necessitating additional coordination and slower processing with security bag checks.



4. Lower familiarity: Many fans at women's sports events may be first-time visitors, or less familiar with stadium protocols, which can lead to hesitation or the need for additional guidance at turnstiles.





08. Conclusion

Women's sports in the UK is growing rapidly with increasing numbers of women, families, and children attending events. However, stadiums, transport, and matchday operations are often not designed to support this new demographic, which risks limiting further growth.

This report highlights the need for improved spectator communication, transport availability, affordability, and increased coordination with transport operators, bespoke safety and security operations, and inclusive stadium design and facilities. Adapting infrastructure and operations to meet the needs of today's fans is essential to unlocking the full potential of women's sports.

Moreover, the opportunity extends far beyond the stadium walls – women's football generates spend across hospitality and local infrastructure, with potential for regeneration, job creation and civic pride.



09. Key reflections

Women's football is no longer a niche – it's mainstream and growing fast.

Matchday attendance is soaring, and the Lionesses' continued success is fuelling an unprecedented rise in interest. The challenge now is to match this momentum with investment and innovation.

The spectator demographic is different – and so are their needs.

Women's matches attract more families, women and first-time attendees. Their behaviour, priorities, and expectations differ markedly from traditional men's football crowds – and must be actively accounted for in stadium design, transport and operations delivery.

Applying a 'copy and paste' approach from the men's game risks holding women's football back.

Operational models built for men's fixtures don't translate and should reflect who is actually attending – not who traditionally has. Tailored planning for crowd flow, transport, safety and amenities is vital to sustain spectator experience, engagement and opportunities for long-term revenue generation.

Spectator communications must be proactive, inclusive, and multi-platform.

Clear, targeted messaging before and during matchdays helps build confidence, particularly for newer attendees unfamiliar with stadium logistics or transport options.

Transport is a critical enabler of inclusive matchday experiences.

Last-mile access, modal options, scheduling alignment, and safety are all critical to unlocking the full potential of matchday attendance — without addressing these transport barriers, potential spectators may stay home, resulting in missed opportunities across ticket sales, retail, and brand equity across a club's entire team portfolio.

There's a first-mover advantage for those who invest now.

Clubs, operators, and local authorities that adapt early will benefit most from loyal fanbases, stronger revenue streams, and reputational leadership.

Women's football can be a model for modern, inclusive sport.

By rethinking how events are planned and delivered, women's football presents an opportunity to set new standards in accessibility, experience and value across the major events sector.

References

- i UEFA, UEFA Women's EURO 2022 one year on: impact study shows major boost across Europe [2023].
<https://www.uefa.com/news-media/news/0283-186d13be214d-1d7ff6f2e858-1000--uefa-women-s-euro-2022-one-year-on-impact-study-shows-major/>
- ii UEFA. Biggest Women's EURO Crowds and UEFA Women's Competition Crowds. [2022].
<https://www.uefa.com/womenseuro/news/0276-15748cb0ba74-f342af5f57b8-1000--biggest-women-s-euro-crowds-and-uefa-women-s-competition-c/>
- iii Women's Sport Trust. Attendances Key to Turning Moments into Habits in Women's Sport. [2023].
<https://www.womenssporttrust.com/attendances-key-to-turning-moments-into-habits-in-womens-sport/>
- iv Two Circles. Women's Football League Attendances Continue to Grow as Understanding of Fans Builds Across Europe. [2023].
<https://twocircles.com/gb/articles/womens-football-league-attendances-continue-to-grow-as-understanding-of-fans-builds-across-europe/>
- v BBC Sport. Women's Super League: How the English Top Flight Has Evolved Since 2011. [2018].
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/45737718>
- vi Football Web Pages. Women's Super League Attendances – 2023/2024 Season.
<https://www.footballwebpages.co.uk/womens-super-league/attendances/2023-2024>
- vii Buckinghamshire New University. Experiences of Women at Wycombe Wanderers Football Club. [2024].
<https://www.bucks.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2024-03/Experiences%20of%20women%20at%20WWFC.pdf>
- viii Office for National Statistics. Perceptions of Personal Safety and Experiences of Harassment, Great Britain: 16 February to 13 March 2022. [2022].
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/perceptionsofpersonalsafetyandexperiencesofharassmentgreatbritain/16februaryto13march2022>
- ix Kick It Out. Sexism and Misogyny Research. [2024].
<https://www.kickitout.org/sites/default/files/2024-09/Sexism%20and%20Misogyny%20Research%20-%20Kick%20It%20Out%202024.pdf>

Insight report

Playing to the Crowd: Adapting matchday operations for the next phase of women's football

Author	Charlotte Read Senior consultant, Steer
Other contributors	Tim Gallagher, Simon Hall, Ed Robinson, Mark Brownie, Jennifer Davis
Date	August 2025

DISCLAIMER: This Document is the intellectual property of Steer. You may not reuse, republish, or reprint such content without our written consent. All information posted is merely for educational and informational purposes. It is not intended as a substitute for professional advice. While the information in this Document has been verified to the best of our abilities, we cannot guarantee that there are no mistakes or errors. The Document is current as at the time it is dated. Steer assumes no responsibility for updating the Document and findings can quickly become outdated. We disclaim all and any liability whether arising in tort, contract or otherwise which we might otherwise have to any party in respect of this Document, or any information contained in it. By acceptance of this Document you agree to be bound by this disclaimer.

Complex challenges. **Powerful solutions.**

Steer is a global consultancy specialising in the critical services and infrastructure that make our world work.

Our interdisciplinary teams combine deep industry experience and real-world insights with strategic excellence, commercial acumen, and technical expertise. Leveraging the most advanced technology and data science.

From mobility to energy and technology to education, we're trusted to deliver powerful solutions that make a measurable difference - to our clients, the communities we work in, and the world we share.