

## 66. Addressing the Labour Shortage of Commercial Truck Drivers

It is essential that the trucking industry work with governments to ensure that the industry can access the skilled professional truck drivers it needs, and improve public safety at the same time.

By 2024, the Canadian Trucking Alliance projects a need for 34,000 new truck drivers. Some of that demand will come from an expanding industry, while a significant percentage will be needed to replace a retiring workforce. The average age of a truck driver in Canada is 47, meaning that within a few years there will be a huge turnover in the men and women who currently drive trucks on Canada's highways. A lack of available drivers is already being felt; according to the *Business Expectations Survey* by Transport Capital Partners (TCP) in 2011, 70 percent of Canadian carriers had to decline loads due lack of available drivers.

As shippers are increasingly reliant on trucks to operate just-in-time supply chains, a shortfall in the workforce will have a significant impact on business. A shortage of drivers may:

- cause limited driver resources to migrate to large, scheduled loads, and the spot market for transportation will increase in price and decrease in availability;
- extend order and delivery times resulting in the need for increased inventories and carrying costs; and
- cause small and rural businesses requiring less than truckload services to experience decreased access to transportation services, increased costs, and decreased competitiveness.

The looming driver supply gap can be attributed to several factors including work conditions and lifestyle balance, but also due to the lack of programming to help address shortages and the varying standards of accreditation for commercial driving programs across the country.

### Background

Trucks haul 90 percent of all consumer goods and food stuffs across Canada and handle 70 percent of our trade with the United States. Trucking is a \$65 billion industry that employs over 260,000 drivers and employs 400,000 people, including dispatchers, office staff and managers. The industry consists of a small percentage of large companies and thousands of small and medium-sized independent owner-operators.

The demands of driving a long haul truck have evolved significantly. With the advent of multiple configurations of trailers, highway and border congestion, electronic documentation, navigation, and logbooks, the skills required to efficiently and safely operate such vehicles has increased considerably. This has increased the knowledge and responsibility demanded of truck operators although the occupation remains classified as low-skilled under the Statistics Canada National Occupational Classification (NOC 7511 transport truck drivers). The classification as low-skilled can hinder recruitment, particularly for the younger generation who are desperately needed.

The skill rating for truckers has two principal impacts. The first issue is the inability of potential drivers to access funding to support training. As the cost of quality driver training can cost up to \$20,000 in some provinces, it is challenging for students to pay tuition without support. The current classification restricts applicants' ability to access student loans or apprenticeship funding, leaving only limited support via Employment Insurance and the restrictive conditions of employer-funded Canada Job Grants. There is a clear need to expand the number of funding programs available to young people considering trucking as a career.

Employers are further challenged to recruit experienced immigrant truck drivers to Canada on a costly and usually temporary basis. This challenge could be eased by providing access to additional programs

for employers beyond the Temporary Foreign Worker and Provincial Nominee programs. Additional immigration programs such as those provided for skilled workers would increase the size of the immigration stream, facilitate permanent residency and allow open work permits for spouses.

It is also been recommended by the Canadian Trucking Alliance (CTA) and provincial trucking associations that a national minimum standard of accreditation for commercial driving programs be developed. Most provincial authorities require only a pass on a written examination and a 2-hour road test combined with an approved course on airbrake testing. Only a small fraction of new commercial vehicle drivers attend accredited truck driver training schools for preliminary instruction, primarily because limited student financial resources often constrain what the schools teach. The Ontario government has recently recognized the need to address training standards and by July 2017 will require Class A driver test candidates to successfully complete a recognized entry-level training program from an accredited driver school. This first in Canada initiative can act as a model for national training standards to ensure driver competence and public safety.

“If you talk to many trucking companies, a person who has simply passed the road test and has no skills beyond that is not employable.” states Andy Roberts, the owner of Mountain Transport Institute in Castlegar, BC. Markel Insurance, one of the largest insurers of trucks in Canada, says, “Entry level drivers who do not take a recognized program at a recognized institution are simply not insurable. Very often we are asked if they can be insured with higher premiums – the answer is they are simply not insurable.”

Admittedly, the industry can do more to recruit new and/or young drivers. There are certain changes that can help, such as introducing young people to professional truck driving at a much earlier age and providing candidates with better opportunities to train for a professional driving career.

To avoid shrinkage of the workforce, it is important that government act now in partnership with trucking associations to create a renewed regulatory and classification regime that more accurately reflects the skills and responsibilities that professional truck drivers are required to demonstrate.

## **Recommendations**

That the federal government, in coordination with the provincial and territorial governments and provincial trucking associations:

1. Work to address the labour shortage of long-haul truck drivers by expanding the number of funding programs available to young people considering trucking as a career and ensuring that pathways to immigration are expanded for individuals entering this industry.
2. Support the recommendations of the Canadian Trucking Alliance (CTA) and provincial trucking associations in the development of a national minimum standard of accreditation for commercial driving programs, including programs delivered through accredited commercial driving schools.