

TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

SETTING THE STANDARD FOR TRUCK DRIVER TRAINING (2016)

There has never been a better opportunity to help the trucking industry obtain the skilled professional truck drivers it needs, and improve public safety at the same time. By 2020, the Conference Board of Canada expects the industry will need between 25,000-33,000 new truck drivers. Some of that demand will come from an expanding industry, while some will be needed to replace a retiring workforce.

The end result will be that within a few years, there will be a huge turnover in the men and women who currently sit behind the wheel of the big rigs that roll along on our highways. According to the *Business Expectations Survey* by Transport Capital Partners (TCP) in 2011, 70 percent of Canadian carriers experienced “unseated trucks.”

At the moment, there is no mandatory training curriculum for truckers. The B.C. Superintendent of Motor Vehicles requires only a pass on a written examination and a 2-hour road test combined with a 16 hour ICBC-approved course on airbrake testing. There are cases in Canada where people have applied for and obtained a commercial vehicle driver’s license in as little as three days.

Background

Trucks haul 90 percent of all consumer goods and food stuffs across Canada. They also handle 70 percent of our trade with the United States. According to the most recent data, trucking in Canada is a \$65 billion industry that employs over 260,000 drivers and somewhere in the order of 400,000 employees including dispatchers, office staff and managers. The industry consists of a few large companies and thousands of small and medium-sized businesses and independent owner-operators.

Trucking industry experts describe the current B.C. commercial vehicle driver test as minimal. It consists of demonstrating the ability to perform a short list of basic skills, such as shifting gears, safely merging onto highways, unhitching a trailer, backing up, parking and so on. “The road exam does not require the truck to even be fully loaded, and often times they are not required to even back up the vehicle,” says the British Columbia Trucking Association, whose organization is lobbying for better trained drivers.

Only a fraction of new commercial vehicle drivers has attended one of the dozens of truck driver training schools in the province for preliminary instruction. A student’s financial constraints often dictate what the schools are able to teach, in some cases teaching only to the level needed to pass the written and road tests, denying the further required additional driver training.

Driving schools are currently free to create their own curriculums which only need to meet minimal provincial standards. Currently Mountain Transport Institute (MTI) in Castlegar, B.C., is the only professional truck driver training school in the province to be accredited and registered by the Private Career Training Institutions Agency of British Columbia (PCTIA). “Our accreditation is your assurance that MTI meets and maintains the rigorous standards of educational and administrative excellence set out by the agency,” states Andy Roberts, the owner of MTI, a certified master trainer. “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. That is not a person who you would want to give a loaded trailer to and send on a road trip over the Coquihalla between Kamloops and Vancouver,” says Roberts.

Driver training is complicated by different regulations in each jurisdiction within Canada and the United States. Concerns continue to be raised over inconsistent levels of training and weakness in license testing for commercial drivers. The FMCSA Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration in the U.S. is proposing

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minimum training standards while Ontario – that Canadian province is seeking mandatory entry level training for drivers.

Markel Insurance in Toronto, one the largest insurers of trucks in Canada, says, “Entry level drivers that 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.”

Conclusion

Admittedly the industry has done a poor job recruiting new and/or young drivers. There are certain changes that can help, such as:

- Working with young people in high school to introduce them to professional truck driving at a much earlier age and providing them with opportunities to train for a professional driving career; and
- Changing the National Occupational Classification Code (NOC) for the occupation of truck drivers to give individuals the opportunity to qualify for funding and grants to support their training.

Developing an education system which produces competent, employable, commercial vehicle drivers begins with a solid base of fundamental training through the development of a “reasonable minimum curriculum” which is delivered to students to the same standard both provincially and nationally.

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That Provincial Government and Federal Government, in coordination with the provincial and national trucking associations:

1. Create a minimum standard for accreditation of commercial driving programs based on the national occupational standard;
2. Require mandatory graduation from an accredited commercial driving program in order to qualify to take the exam for the professional driver license;
3. Amend the graduated license program to allow graduates of the accredited commercial driving program to obtain their Class Licence 1 or 3 upon graduation (as early as age 18); and
4. Amend the national occupational stand to move professional driving from a Class C to Class B.