

The Driver Shortage is a Myth

Well, by now everyone is tired of hearing about the driver shortage. Until I read Mr. Park's article below, I did not realize that there is really an excess of drivers and that the driver shortage is a myth! While I am offended that Mr. Park elects to generalize and make insinuations of all trucking companies, I do agree with his overriding theme – that drivers need to be paid more, that their time is valuable, and the wage scheme should accommodate time invested as well as miles driven.

However, if Mr. Park thinks that pay is the only concern that affects a person's decision to be or not to be a driver, then he has indeed been out of touch with the industry too long. In our limited experience (over 50+ yrs in business), we find the following factors affect a person's decision to enter/exit the trucking industry.

- Time away from home makes it difficult to have a stable family life
- Ever increasing congestion contributes to more stress
- Increasing complexity of government rules and regulations makes compliance more difficult
- Management's recognition and appreciation of the difficult job that drivers perform day in and day out
- Ever increasing shipper/consignee special requirements make it harder for drivers to maximize time/miles

Certainly, pay is the single biggest issue, but Mr. Park should not ignore the above factors.

The job of a professional truck driver is very difficult and becoming more difficult due to the reasons stated above. Both Carriers and Shippers must recognize that a driver's time is just as valuable as the miles he drives – and strive to maximize both! By doing so, carriers will be able to properly reward drivers for their time and efforts.



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On the Road Blog by Jim Park, Equipment Editor

There are thousands of men and women out there today with a CDL in their pocket no longer working as truck drivers. Why is the industry moaning about a shortage of drivers?

Like any perceived shortage, the tightness in the current labor market exists only in the minds of those unwilling to pay the price of resolving it. In our case, jobs are going begging because the cost of filling the empty seats seems too high. Or, looking at it from the opposite perspective, those the industry would hope to attract are unwilling to work -- again -- for companies that used and abused and took advantage of them for years.

If a fleet can't fill its empty seats, it's because the fleet has more trucks than it needs, or drivers simply do not want to work for that company.

It's like choosing a restaurant. As a diner, you have choices: fast food, nouveau cuisine, meat and potatoes, Indian, Thai, Italian ... Maybe you don't like Thai food. Maybe you got sick the last time you ate at the fast food place. You're a meat and potatoes guy, but you're bored with that. Well, there's that Italian place, but the parking lot is always empty; maybe the food's no good.

If that restaurant sits empty night after night, do you think the owner goes around whining about a shortage of customers? If he did, who'd listen to him? More to the point, would his pleas for more business entice you to try the place?

If that restaurateur wanted to improve his fortunes, he'd offer a more appealing menu, clean up the place, hire some friendly wait staff, and sell the customers on the experience one meal at a time. If he gets it right, his parking lot would soon be full. Then, maybe you'd try the place too.

Drivers have choices as well, and one of them is staying away.

This little rant comes about because of the recent [4th quarter 2011 Business Expectations Survey](#) released by Transport Capital Partners in January. It suggested, among other things, that more and more carriers are starting to think that driver pay needs to rise to \$60,000 or more.

Geez. I earned 20% more than that when I left at my last driving job in 1996. But I know drivers who are today making less than \$40,000 for 50 weeks of 100 hours or more "on the job." And we wonder why people don't want to be truck drivers? If you're not quick with your math, that works out to eight bucks an hour.

Outdated Pay Structure

As a line in the sand, \$60,000 is a good place to start, and to be truthful, plenty of drivers are making that and more today.

But while annual earnings are important, how drivers are paid is as much the reason existing CDL holders and potential new recruits are staying away as what they are paid.

Drivers are paid exactly the same way migrant farm workers are paid: piecework. Rather than fractions of a penny per head of lettuce plucked from the ground, drivers earn a few cents for each mile they travel. When they aren't moving, they aren't earning. It doesn't seem to matter that they remain responsible for the trucks they drive, or that they are away from home and prepared to do their employer's bidding at any time. There's nothing in most pay schemes to compensate for the inevitable irregularities that push the clock up to and past 100 hours a week, while the meter records only miles.

They are required to spend about a quarter of an hour every day inspecting their bosses' truck, uncompensated. They spend countless hours driving around drop-yards looking for trailers and doing

paperwork, uncompensated. Hour upon hour is spent waiting around for loads, uncompensated. They are subject to the vagaries of loading dock politics, which can result in day-long delays, often uncompensated. And then they have to fight with payroll over all the miles and hours that were clawed back because customers didn't pay, or because of archaic pay policies.

There's nothing more dehumanizing than having to fight for your pay.

Carriers got away with that back in the days when drivers truly were a dime a dozen. That's no longer the case.

The other regrettable aspect to this is that trucking's current pay structure has bred a culture of noncompliance. There's more incentive to cheat on logs, cut corners on inspections, and push too hard and drive too fast than to take one's time and do the work properly. It's all about turning motion into money.

My last driving job -- at \$72,000 for 49 weeks of 60 hours -- paid us for everything we did. We were paid off our tachograph cards. All miles and hours were recorded and all miles and hours were paid. And we weren't paid eight bucks an hour for loading and unloading and 15 bucks an hour for driving. The pay was about the same no matter what we did, so there was no incentive to rush through one to get to the other. If we were delayed at a customer, no big deal. I wasn't going to take home any less because of it.

No driver should have to worry about how much he or she will bring home to their families simply because a customer ordered a load a day early and decided to keep the driver sitting until there was room for the freight.

Anyone on the outside of trucking looking in soon discovers how drivers are paid. Sure, \$40,000 might seem appealing if you're making only \$18,000 a year behind the counter of a 7-11 store, but sooner or later, the cost of earning that extra \$22,000 takes its toll and they pack up and leave. Those people aren't used to stopping the clock when there are no customers in the store.

Folks who work in factories don't punch out and wait in the lunchroom while their machines are repaired. They show up for work prepared to do eight or 10 hours of work, and they expect to go home with eight or 10 hours' pay for their trouble.

Why should trucking get away with anything different?

A few years ago in the United Kingdom, lawmakers all but banned mileage pay, forcing carriers to pay hourly wages or put drivers on salary. A couple of interesting things happened.

Carriers, forced to rationalize their fleet sizes because they could not afford to have drivers earning full wages while the trucks sat around earning nothing, soon found they needed fewer trucks. Those fewer trucks earned more money because of the pressure it put on capacity. Shippers soon realized that inefficiency would cost them dearly, and they suddenly started getting trucks loaded and unloaded a lot more promptly.

I'd like to think electronic logs will bring drivers closer to how I was paid back in the mid-'90s. Those things record everything a driver does, and drivers should -- must -- be paid for everything they do, even if it's waiting for a tire repair truck or a recalcitrant shipper.

Trucking can no longer afford to download all of its problems and inefficiencies to the driver. There aren't enough of them anymore willing to put up with that way of doing business. Many have already

passed judgment on trucking and they have done so with their feet.

But at the end of the day, pay is only part of the problem. Check out the next installment of my blog in about a week, where I'll wax philosophic about the culture of culpability and why it retards meaningful improvements in safety and driver recruiting.