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CDL Focus Group Study

Final Report

Prepared for

AMERICAN ASSOC. of MOTOR VEHICLE ADMINISTRATORS

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## IV. CDL IMPACT ON CARRIER OPERATIONS

### A. Driver Hiring & Training

Safety directors and truck drivers agree that the introduction of the CDL -- the written test, in particular -- caused a significant number of experienced drivers to leave the industry because they feared that they would not pass the test. This group appears to have included some drivers who were illiterate and others who were not illiterate but had inadequate driving skills. However, it also included some who had adequate skills but were simply "test phobic".

Large carriers consider the CDL a necessary, but not sufficient, prerequisite for employment. New hires will generally be expected to have two or more years of relevant experience with a completely or largely clean driving record. Safety directors explained that, while such drivers are difficult to locate and recruit, they still prefer this over hiring and training inexperienced drivers.

Reasons why large carriers recruit only experienced drivers include: (1) to minimize the cost of training; (2) to force the employee to pre-qualify himself by virtue of a clean MVR; (3) to minimize exposure to accidents frequently experienced by drivers after their first six to twelve months of regular operation; and (4) to avoid subsidizing the cost of driver training for competitors who will hire away many of the new drivers trained by the carrier.

Many large carriers installed training programs to help their drivers prepare for the CDL exams as a means of protecting their investment in the men. These programs were integrated into the company's existing training and safety departments and were generally successful in achieving high levels of certification, panelists said.

Some smaller and medium-size carriers said that their pre-CDL training programs were minimal and that with the introduction of CDL they have installed new or expanded programs and placed increased priority on compliance and operational safety. This has led to reduced losses and savings in workers comp premiums in some cases.

CDL impact on carrier training and safety operations appears to have been greater in the area of endorsements than with the basic license. Safety directors and drivers acknowledged that hazardous materials, doubles/triples, and oversize loads present significant risks that benefit from increased training. Significantly, several safety directors said that current CDL testing criteria for doubles/triples are inadequate.

Appendix C

Edited & Categorized Comments

Respondent Comments  
(Safety Directors)

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Location of session (California, Missouri or Texas)  
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## II. TRUCK DRIVERS & THE CDL

### A. Driver Population

"The CDL has gotten rid of some unqualified drivers but there are still far too many out there that have that piece of paper." (M)

"There are too many opportunities and too many places unqualified drivers can go to drive a truck. But you're not going to see them in this group. They're going to be out there for the small guys who can't find experienced truck drivers." (M)

"Years ago in the state of Missouri you could obtain a chauffeurs license in a pick-up truck. Then along comes the CDL and we grandfathered in. We've got people today who have CDLs and it's questionable that they're ever driven an 18-wheeler in their life." (M)

"We had a guy who worked on the docks in Kansas City and he entered our training program. He had a CDL with all the endorsements. I asked him why he wanted to get into our training program and he said he'd never driven anything bigger than a one-ton truck. His uncle had falsified a document and he got his CDL that way." (M)

"I think this group is rather unique in the way our hiring practices are carried out. I don't think the whole industry is like that. When you get to the smaller carriers I think the CDL has been real good. It has made things more uniform and it has helped them a lot." (M)

A. Driver Population (Cont'd)

"When the CDL was first introduced it was supposed to be a cure-all for all of the industry's ills. It would put a qualified driver out there on the street by virtue of the fact that he's got this CDL. We all know that's simply not the case. However, the fact remains that there are a lot of carriers out there that still make the assumption that because a driver holds a CDL he or she is a fully qualified driver. It still behooves the carrier to make sure that the driver is in fact qualified for what they want him to do." (M)

"Look where a lot of the drivers are coming from. I don't want to throw a rock at companies like J.B. Hunt and Schneider, but they can get a driver who probably doesn't stay there longer than 90 days or 6 months. He's there long enough to get his CDL and once he's got that he's out in the marketplace looking for a job that's going to pay more money. Now he's got a piece of paper that says he's a qualified driver. But it takes more than 90 days to make someone a truck driver." (M)

"The state where the driver came from doesn't even enter my mind. I learned a long time ago that just because a guy has a CDL it doesn't mean he can drive a truck. I'm going to put him behind the wheel and we're going to go on an extensive road test that starts with a pre-trip inspection, the hook up and the whole bit. I don't think a CDL means anything as far as the ability to operate the vehicle." (M)

"I've flunked a lot of drivers on the road test even though they've got a CDL in their hand." (M)

A. Driver Population (Cont'd)

"We have to take that position. When we add a new guy to our fleet we're putting that guy out there in an expensive asset and he's also packing millions of dollars worth of potential liability. If he goes out there and really screws up one of us is going to have to answer to somebody. We don't want to see any innocent people get hurt and we don't want to see our trucks torn up. So I'm going to go way out of my way to make sure that each and every driver that I hire has satisfied me that he's the right guy for the job." (M)

"The bottom line is that we have a responsibility to the public to make sure that we have the safest driver we can possibly put out there. And the only way to know that is to test him yourself." (M)

"In some locations we require two years minimum experience and in some locations it's three years. We've got our own program that they have to go through if they have less than our minimum experience, and at the very least it's a minimum of 12,500 miles behind the wheel in the truck with a qualified driver trainer present. That qualified driver trainer is the one who ultimately makes the determination whether it's an individual he wants to stake his continued livelihood on. If they agree that it's the individual they want, then they take him through the balance of the training program and ultimately qualify him. Then for the first year after they're kept relatively local. I think that's part of the responsibility that we have to assume as members of the industry. It's a responsibility that every motor carrier has to every other user of the highway out

A. Driver Population (Cont'd)

there. We have to make darn sure that the individuals we put out there on the street in those trucks are as qualified as they can be." (M)

"When we get a driver from J.B. Hunt we first look at his background. Chances are he's been driving for less than a year and we're not even going to take the time to interview him." (M)

"Our requirements are two years, so I thank him for his interest in our company and invite him to come back and see us in a couple of years." (M)

"When someone chooses to be a professional driver I think they choose to hold themselves to a higher standard because they are a cut above the common John Doe with a regular drivers license. If we ever went back to having a dual standard, in other words separate licenses for your personal automobile and for commercial motor vehicles, we'd be right back to where we were before the CDL." (M)

"But there are still two sets of standards. If you get pulled over for DUI in a truck the consequences are different than if you get it in your car with a CDL. But my feeling is that it doesn't matter if an individual gets a DUI in a truck or a car. If you've got two DUIs in your car what kind of individual are you?" (M)

"I don't think the insurance industry would allow them to separate the licenses because of the liability. If I hire a driver who's got four tickets in his personal automobile and he goes out and drives my truck and kills somebody I'm going to be liable." (M)

A. Driver Population (Cont'd)

"We look at the license in general. We don't care if they got the ticket in their car or in a truck. It's all a reflection on their driving behavior."  
(M)

"It's given us an extra tool to pick out the bad drivers." (M)

"Ten years ago you could have walked in with five speeding tickets in the last three years and we'd have hired you if you'd been experienced. And you could have had three moving violations in the past 24 months. But we won't take you now with that kind of record."  
(M)

"We're probably a little different than most companies in that we don't have a problem with driver turn-over. There is a major problem out there with getting drivers but we're a little unique - we don't take new drivers. We look for a group that has two to three years experience and once we get a driver the only way we get rid of him is if he retires or dies." (M)

"It was the older drivers who didn't want to be bothered with the test or they didn't want to face the humiliation of failing the test. I can understand that. It all stems from the Motor Carrier Safety Act of 1986 and the Hazard Communication Act. You have to have a CDL license - one national certification. In the beginning the advantage was that you could tell the drivers it would be better for them because now the responsibility is removed from the carrier for safe operation and it's in the driver's hands. The end result would be better benefits and better pay for the

A. Driver Population (Cont'd)

drivers. But it hasn't happened. And a lot of these older men are moving on. They don't see any added benefits as a result of the CDL license. So now I would guess that only 50% of the drivers out there have more than 5 years of driving experience. The rest just have one or two years." (T)

"In retrospect I would not be willing to forgo what the CDL has done just to retain the older drivers who left the industry because they felt intimidated by it. Let's face it, those people were at the tail end of the spectrum anyway and we have to start with some new people. The CDL has cleaned up some of the multiplicity of licenses, etc., and I would be willing to accept that at the expense of what it's cost." (T)

"I would agree with that statement. There have been a lot of added benefits. But my concern is with the small number of available drivers out there. I cannot see that the industry has grown that much. I think the total number of trucks and loads are basically about the same. I don't attribute that lack of drivers to the CDL. I really don't know what's caused it. I run a \$1,200 ad in the Sunday paper, get 10 responses and find only one who is qualified. That's scary." (T)

"One thing that I'm finding though is that a lot of drivers have the opinion that if they pass this hazardous material tank truck test that they are a qualified hazardous materials tank truck operator. I ran an ad in the Houston Chronicle a week about and only got about 12 responses, and out of that 12 I was only able to pull out one. But every one that called

A. Driver Population (Cont'd)

thought he could meet our criteria. It's disheartening and in some ways it's crippled us. They fall down in actual experience. They have the endorsements but they don't have the experience to satisfy the carrier's criteria. I came from a larger carrier and did about 75% of all their driver training. At that time, as large a carrier as they were, they didn't have a program that would enable you to take a man off the street with no hazardous materials tank truck experience at all. Being a carrier of 85 units now, we sure don't have that luxury now. We will only hire with experience." (T)

"In the Houston terminal probably 45% of our drivers have less than 6 months experience. And that 45% of the drivers will probably have 65% to 75% of the accidents. Experience pays off. About three years ago we hired an experienced driver to be an instructor at one of our training centers. He taught over there for a while and decided to go back on the road. He went through our three day orientation class and got 100% on all his paperwork. But he still chose to go out with one of our trainers for two weeks to learn the actual operation of the system and how to use it to his benefit and maximize his potential. And that's a person who had been teaching at our training center. He knew how valuable it is to have hands-on experience. He was willing to just take \$42 a day to finish up his training and get that experience." (T)

"I think he would be the exception. He's coming from an organized background, being a trainer, to being an instructor and he realizes the benefits of that training, unlike most of these cowboys out there who make up the bulk of the drivers today." (T)

A. Driver Population (Cont'd)

"In all the employment ads the first thing is a CDL with an endorsement and at least two years of verifiable experience." (T)

"All of us have experience qualifications that we require. A few of us have the type of schooling and training for marginally experienced or new drivers like J.B. Hunt has. If a guy with a year at J.B. Hunt comes to me I'll take it as three years of experience right there. They train them good and they work them good. But it has been a problem getting people with qualified experience. One of my drivers with 5 or 6 years of truck driving experience could not immediately interface with some companies that haul strictly hazardous materials without some training in that specific craft." (T)

"I've been advertising for a month and a half now trying to find five good drivers. It's not that the supply is down - I talked to 200 people yesterday. The quality of the supply is down." (C)

"I think you can attribute that to a lot of things, not just the CDL. The drivers that are just going and getting their license were taught by somebody who was taught by somebody else and they're passing down all the wrong techniques. They don't have any proper training." (C)

"We're not just looking for people with two or three years experience, we're looking for people with a clean MVR, no chargeable accidents, references for all the years they've been driving -- up to 10 years if possible, and

A. Driver Population (Cont'd)

in operation they have to be at least 25 years old. When you start putting those qualifiers on it I'm not sure the CDL is responsible for that as much as the nature of the beast. I can't remember a time when it's been easy finding qualified drivers unless a major carrier goes out of business. But I've been in the industry for 25 years and it's always been tough to find qualified drivers. It will take 100 applications to find 10 or 20 good ones, and that's good." (C)

"There is a learning curve and basically drivers have problems when they start operating beyond their experience and when they start pushing the envelope a little bit. We hire drivers with three and four years of experience. They have a CDL and they pass our road test and they're competent drivers but six months down the road they have an accident. I'm not sure that environment doesn't play a part in what's going on, too. We might ask our drivers to do things differently or to take on more responsibilities and they might get overwhelmed. So I'm not sure the CDL necessarily precludes that. The CDL is merely a license to go out and get experience. It's like getting a degree in college. You have no experience when you get a degree. So the CDL is limited in nature and we can't blame all our accidents and liabilities on the fact that the CDL is the starting point." (C)

"I agree with that. As I look back on it, in every driving job I've had it seems like within six months after I was hired something would happen, either major damage to freight or something like that." (C)

A. Driver Population (Cont'd)

"I see a broad base of experience and capability when interviewing and hiring drivers. It's almost like when teenagers go to drivers training. You basically pay a fee to have them signed off to go take their test and they don't get a real base of experience. I think some of these truck driving schools are of the same nature. Unless you get a guy who's come through one of these coast to coast companies who really spent a great deal of time training, or the military, you don't get the experience that I think the motoring public should have." (C)

"I've been doing a lot of road tests for my company this year and I've noticed a difference in the drivers who are just starting out with a CDL as compared to the ones who have been driving for a while. I seems like the ones who have gone through the CDL program are better at doing pre-trips than the more experienced drivers. That's almost directly the opposite of what I would have expected." (C)

"I also do the road tests and I find that the experienced drivers know what to look for. I think that's true in any industry." (C)

"If they're not as good or better than me as a driver I won't hire them. The problem is that when you bring them in they don't want to work. You point them to a hand truck and they go, 'What's that?' They say, 'I'm a truck driver' and they don't think that means they have to load their truck." (C)

"We've had drivers come in with more than two years of experience and they

A. Driver Population (Cont'd)

have their CDL and endorsements and their references don't say anything bad about them, but when they get in the truck they strip the gears or they cause a problem on the freeway because they don't know what they're doing. How do they have a CDL? The owner of my company doesn't put any stock in the CDL program. Now we will not put anyone on the road in any equipment unless we know that they're competent and can handle the job. Even if it's their own equipment we still road test them because they're hauling our commodities." (C)

"We won't touch them with under three years of experience and they have to be a minimum of 25 years old." (C)

"I think everybody is having a little bit of trouble getting drivers now because of the new requirements. I think it's harder for people to obtain the CDL or maybe they don't want to take the time to get it or whatever the situation might be." (C)

"We used to take guys right out of school but we don't touch them now. We require two years of experience but I still find that I have to take them out and give them a little road test just to find out what their capabilities are. Our equipment is extremely specialized and I find guys that cannot even begin to get through the gears, and yet they've come up with two years of work. And because of some of the legalities you don't get good information from prior employers. So I will refer them to Sschneider or some of the other companies that will give you a CDL and put you through training and then you drive for them for a minimum of a year or two and

A. Driver Population (Cont'd)

they pay for your training. I tell the drivers to come back and see me in a couple of years." (C)

"That's what I do if I get a driver who comes to me with a minimum amount of experience. We can't touch him, but we point him in the direction of one of the schools so he can go there and get some experience. We just can't put co-drivers with these guys and teach them to see. The money just isn't there to do it." (C)

B. Driver Safety

"The CDL program has definitely helped to make the highways safer." (M)

"It's a first step." (M)

"I think we've gotten rid of a large portion of the guys who had multiple licenses to hid multiple violations. It's helped in a large degree with that. There are still some problems with the testing and there were some glitches with the grandfathering, but I think it's been a good first step." (M)

"I think the trucking industry and the dedicated carriers have made more of an impact than the CDL because we have more restrictions that it does." (M)

"I think the CDL has made this group a lot larger. Because of the restrictions, other people are doing what we were already consistently doing prior to the CDL." (M)