



## Truck Drivers: Labor Issues. In : Encyclopedia of Transportation

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## Truck drivers: Labor Issues

The road network serves all the places of production and consumption. Its wide-reaching and flexible nature and its key role in the circulation of freight make it the most important driver of global trade, particularly within large conurbations. However, it would cease to exist without the work of those in charge of transporting the goods. Indeed, next to non-mobile handling agents, truck drivers or truckers in North America, truckies in Australia and New Zealand, lorry drivers in UK, make up the most important working population in the haulage system. In the U.S.A., the Bureau of Labor Statistics estimated their total number at 2,867,400 in 2010.

Following an overview of the key regulatory features and tasks, this entry will discuss the tensions that arise from the distinction between driving time and working time and from the social relationships that characterise this profession highly dominated by men. Finally some perspectives will be drawn in view of the drive towards market deregulation.

In most countries of the developed world, Commercial Driver's Licenses can be obtained from the age of 18. In North America, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration identifies several categories of drivers (*e.g.* Delivery Truck Drivers, Drivers Sales Workers and Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers) who must hold distinctive types of licenses defined by criteria such as the gross vehicle weight rating. Similar regulations are applicable in the European Union including the requirement to undergo a certified training program every five years.

The main task of a truck driver is to make a journey marked by a series of stops between the shippers (for the pick up) and their clients (for the delivery). However, truck drivers represent a heterogeneous group whose daily experience varies according to the type of journey they make. Depending on the destination, the number, the distance and the frequency of stops, the journey may last from several hours up to several days, or even weeks. For example, as opposed to local drivers, "long-haul" drivers may spend long periods away from home. Linemen are the only ones to always make the same journey

Working time is not only limited to driving. Time spent waiting, loading and unloading, dealing with paperwork, etc. must also be taken into account. They have to deal with a multiplicity of people who may not always be available which prevents them from planning their work schedule ahead. The degree of constraint increases with the frequency of stops. Truck drivers thus seek to anticipate the different stages of their journeys so as to devise alternative strategies to cope with unforeseen situations.

While driving time is subject to a number of rules all over the world, this is not always the case with regard to working time.

In the U.S.A., a driver may spend a total of 11 hours behind the wheel during a period of 14 consecutive hours. Since 2013, driving is not permitted if more than 8 hours have passed since the end of the driver's last off-duty or sleeper berth period of at least 30 minutes. In the European Union, the daily driving time should not exceed 9 hours (twice a week, this may be extended to 10 hours). After driving for 4.5 hours, a driver shall take a break of no less than 45 minutes. The weekly driving time shall not exceed 56 hours. The total driving time during any two consecutive weeks shall not exceed 90 hours.

Truck drivers are engaged in two types of social relationships which both entail some degree of subordination. The first concerns the classical employment relationship between employees

(company drivers or wage-earners) and their bosses, and the second relates to the contractual arrangements between business entities, including that between owner-operators and independent workers.

In this type of relationship, the two parties are typically shippers on the one hand, and carriers (or forwarders) on the other. Shippers may be farming, industrial or business enterprises whose production generates merchandise flows (for provisioning and distribution). Forwarding companies are those in charge of transporting shipments for others (a practice known as “transport for hire or reward”) as opposed to own account transport companies that carry their own freight. To reduce their costs, shippers have reduced or removed their stocks. Relying on just-in-time management practices, they have hence transferred the time constraints of the production process onto forwarding companies.

However, medium or large transport companies also increasingly exert pressure on small forwarders by occasionally acting as charterers. This means that they outsource the transportation of their freight to another forwarder, a smaller company or independent owner operator. They choose to do so because they may be unable or unwilling to meet a demand that is highly exposed to risks or hardly profitable, or simply because of insufficient resources.

Consequently, working conditions vary from one type of truck driver to the next. At own account companies, the organisation of work is integrated into the production. Haulage is an integral part of the process of value creation. At companies based on a transport for hire or reward system, the added value stems from freight storage and delivery being achieved within set times. Fluidity is their main objective and this is heavily dependent upon the driver’s ability to adapt to the organisational patterns of the shippers and clients it connects (opening and closing times of the warehouses, availability of personnel at the shipper’s, etc.). This requires adjustments of the driver’s working and rest hours.

Before the deregulation of road haulage activities, each driver would be allocated the same tractor and enjoy a high level of autonomy. These arrangements were seen as a compensation for the flexibility required from the job. But competitive market pressures have led haulage companies to rationalise their activities. They have made their services more flexible by increasingly disconnecting the truck driver from the tractor. At the same time, geolocation systems and other package tracking tools have reduced the advantages that drivers would derive from remote working. Today, management has direct access to a range of information regarding the truck’s itinerary, its stops and more generally speaking the stage of advancement of driver’s schedule. This knowledge is however tarnished by the fact that details on the difficulties encountered by the drivers, e.g. conditions of traffic or conditions at the shipping place are often missing.

Next to the problems of isolation and long periods being away from home, drivers are exposed to several risks. Research conducted in France (Hamelin, 1987) has shown that the risk of road accidents is correlated to the duration of the work amplitude (from 14 hours and onwards, it is 2.5 times higher than under 10 hours of work) and more precisely the number of hours carried out, and according to the time at which the drivers are at the wheel (at the end of a normal working day and at night). At the same time, the risk of being involved in an accident is double when the work is made during nighttime hours (between 8 p.m. and 6 a.m.). Risk is also present on and around trucks. It concerns slipping, tripping and failing. They occur during leaving or entering the cab, loading and unloading, connecting the truck tractor to the trailer or trailer-top operations at clients’ premises.

In addition, truck driving also entails a number of long-term health risks. These include musculoskeletal disorders, cardiovascular diseases, hypertension and sleep disorders.

Time constraints and atypical working hours often lead to unhealthy eating habits such as skipping meals. When drivers stop for a meal, this tends to be in fast-food restaurants. Moreover, the combination of poor sleeping conditions and drugs against tiredness leads to hypertension. Finally, constant mobility impedes access to appropriate health care in those countries which have failed to develop services for these types of road users.

Since 2010, cabotage defined by the European Commission as the “national carriage of goods for hire or reward carried out by non resident haulers on a temporary basis in a host Member State” has been deregulated in Europe, the objective being to reduce the numbers of journeys made with empty vehicles. But legislative harmonization relating to working and fiscal conditions is still weak. Many national haulage companies fear that they will be outplayed by competitors who enjoy a more favorable legislation in their home country. As a result, truck drivers’ working conditions may worsen. Patrick Hamelin’s research has shown that a way for individual agents to offset the pressure from the institutional and economic environment is to alter their driving behavior. They may regularly breach the Highway Code, for example. In fact, this situational behaviour is clearly a symptom of a structural phenomenon. Eventually, when the strain and unrest over wages and terms reach a climax, truck drivers resort to industrial action, bringing regional – and in some instances, national – economies to a standstill.

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#### Further Readings

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See Also: Trucking Industry, Operations and Management ; Trucking, Computer Monitoring Systems and use of GPS ; Trucks (semi. tandem-trailers) (social science, planning, and policy) ; Trucks, Safety Issue and driver fatigue, vehicle condition, tandem-trailers.