

Labour Market Review of the Trucking Sector

Funded by: Human Resources Development Canada
and the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Between September 28th and December 4th, 1998, 100 trucking companies within the Far Northeast Training Board's catchment area were surveyed. The intent of the survey was to identify training needs and practices and to highlight skill shortages in the trucking industry.

The pool of respondents represented small, medium and large companies in the many areas that make up the hauling industry in Northeastern Ontario. General freight, moving, bulk liquids, dry bulk, forest industry related hauling and equipment hauling are the areas that were surveyed.

*Survey respondents identified the following as training and development areas on which they will focus over the next twelve months: **literacy, numeracy and basic skills, orientation of new employees, managerial and supervisory skills, sales and marketing, computer training and occupational health and safety.***

Respondants indicated that they have difficulty finding qualified workers in the following occupations: experienced drivers, heavy equipment operators (specifically identified in by those working with the forestry industries) and shippers/dockworkers.

The majority of the industries surveyed understand the importance of training their employees. The cost and the downtime associated with training are however factors that affect their ability to provide all the training they would like. This is especially true for the smaller companies.

The main concern expressed by survey respondents is the need for qualified and "experienced" AZ drivers. Although there are licensed drivers looking for work, employers are seeking "experienced" drivers.

Respondants explain that obtaining a Class AZ license is but the first step to becoming a truck driver. Drivers need to acquire in-field and job specific driving experience. For that reason, many trucking companies favor in-house training because it allows them to provide future drivers with that job specific component.

The nature of a truck driver's job has changed. On board computer-controlled equipment, monitoring and recording duties and safety and security regulations are all factors that make truck driving a qualified and professional career. *Essential skills required of a truck drivers are: computer literacy and the ability to communicate effectively. Truck drivers must possess good interpersonal skills and know how to work with the people they meet, be it clients, weigh scale officers or other workers. Some ability to trouble-shoot mechanical problems is another ability expected of truck drivers.* Companies look for people who drive carefully and who do not abuse the equipment.

Survey respondents further indicated that *truck drivers need to be able to adapt to the lifestyle this occupation requires*. Employment in the forestry related hauling for example is affected by the season. Spring thaw will prevent the passage of trucks in and out of the bush and result in extended hours and weekend work during the winter months.

Employers expressed some concern with the existing AZ training programs. Driving school programs are short term that provide potential drivers with a few weeks of the basic mandatory skills which are insufficient in meeting the requirement of employers. The main concern is *the lack of standards for the training curriculum used by the different institutions who provide truck driving courses*. Although training programs have the same objective: getting a Class AZ license, the duration and the content of the training programs vary from one training institution to the other.

The concern over the existing licensing standards is not unique to the trucking industries in Northeastern Ontario. Eighty-four per cent of the respondents to a survey conducted by the Ontario Trucking Association (OTA) in the spring of 1998 expressed a strong dissatisfaction with current licensing standards. *"The current "A" license requirements are not sufficient to determine that an applicant can operate an "A" class vehicle. According to the respondents this minimal based certification produces individuals who are not ready to function at the level that many motor carriers require."* (OTA Driver Shortage Survey). Respondents to the OTA survey further observed a prevalence among new applicants of an unprofessional attitude.

Companies surveyed by both the FNETB and by the OTA emphasize that there is a *pressing need to review and to enhance the AZ license requirements*. Most companies have found that new applicants lack experience and knowledge regarding how to operate a commercial vehicle and attribute this knowledge gap to current government license standards.

To ensure there are qualified and experienced drivers in place to access the career opportunities in the trucking industries, results of both the FNETB survey and of the OTA survey demonstrate the importance to address the following issues:

- ◆ the need for standardized driving training programs provincially and nationally
- ◆ the need for consistent high quality standards
- ◆ the need to revise the Class "A" license testing requirements (apprenticeship programs, graduated licensing or standardized truck driving school curriculum)
- ◆ the need to promote truck driving as a career
- ◆ the need to get input from the industry on training initiatives.

Overall, the survey demonstrates that employers in the trucking industry are seeking responsible and professional employees. *"Trucking is a unique industry that requires skill and ambition...some new truckers don't treat their job as a career..."* (FNETB survey respondent). This comment clearly shows the commitment that is expected by employers of individuals entering the trucking industry.

CONCLUSION

This report is intended to provide employers, drivers and training providers with an indication of the trucking industry's concerns in regards to training and labour adjustment

issues The report highlights two major concerns. First is the lack of "experienced" drivers and secondly is the down-time and cost associated with training.

The trucking industry consists of many owner/operated or small sized companies. This makes it difficult to commit time and money to training activities. At the same time, truckers are faced with the necessity to acquire new skills. More specifically, drivers must become skilled users of advanced computerized onboard equipment.

The less-than-satisfactory knowledge base of entry-level drivers is by far the biggest concern for industry representatives. Most companies will attribute the knowledge gap of the current pool of licensed drivers to existing government license standards, which in their opinion are too low, and to driving school instruction which they feel do not provide enough road experience.

In regards to the current "A" license requirement, earlier this year the provincial government announced a stricter licensing regime. The intent is to have stricter written and road tests under a graduated licensing system in an effort to improve road safety and increase driver training. *The goal is to develop testing standards that involve configurations that are closer to something that would be used on the job. (Tony Clement, Ontario Transportation Minister, Truck News February 1999).* The new tests are expected to come into effect this spring.

The Ontario Transportation Ministry also hinted that provincial training standards may be based on those of the Professional Truck Drivers Institute of America (PTDIA). The PTDIA advocates a skills standards system whereby employers, education and training providers and individual workers benefit.

For employers, skill standards will:

- ◆ Improve employee recruitment and retention by more clearly identifying skill requirements.
- ◆ Encourage improved responsiveness and performance of education and training providers.
- ◆ Enlarge the pool of skilled workers.
- ◆ Focus attention on the importance of the training investment.

For education and training providers, skill standards will:

- ◆ Provide information on changes in the modern workplace for all major industries and occupations.
- ◆ Contribute to program and curriculum development by providing an inventory of critical work performances.
- ◆ Strengthen the relationship between education and training providers and the trucking industry.
- ◆ Help them communicate with students and workers to improve career planning.

For students and workers, skill standards will:

- ◆ Help them make better decisions about careers and the training necessary to obtain

well-paying jobs.

- ◆ Allow them to communicate more effectively to an employer what they know and can do.
- ◆ Allow them to work more effectively with employers in career development and skill upgrading.

(DTDIA Skill Standards for entry-level truck drivers.)

Trucking industries have faced and will continue to face major changes and challenges over the coming months. Those changes and challenges will have an impact on employers, employees and trainers. Obtaining and maintaining the skills and knowledge required by the industry is a shared responsibility. Training schools do not have the sole responsibility of providing all the skills and knowledge required. Employers must teach some of the hands-on industry specific components and drivers must learn to master certain abilities on their own.

It is our hope that the information contained in this report will encourage all stakeholders to work collectively so that training programs provide drivers with skill sets that are specific to the needs of Northeastern Ontario's trucking industry.

For the complete Labour Market Review of the Transportation Sector, please contact:

**Julie Joncas
FNETB Co-ordinator
P. O. Box 2198
Hearst, ON
POL 1N0**

Tel: 1-800-530-9176 ou/or (705) 362-5788

Fax: (705) 372-1834

E-mail :