

STEERING TOWARDS SKILLED OCCUPATION STATUS

By Kenneth E. Seaton



DID YOU KNOW THAT IN THE CANADIAN TRUCKING ALLIANCE'S (CTA) 2014 CANADA TRANSPORTATION ACT REVIEW?

THE CTA WROTE THAT OVER 90% OF ALL CONSUMER PRODUCTS AND FOODSTUFFS ARE SHIPPED BY TRUCK IN CANADA?

Real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the for-hire trucking industry is valued at \$17 billion, but its impact on our economy is estimated at \$65-billion overall, based on benefits to the economy through sales, jobs and taxes generated by firms and sole proprietors operating in the trucking sector. It's plainly obvious that, when the trucking industry rolls along smoothly, so does the economy. Similarly, what would happen to the Canadian economy when the trucking industry hits a speedbump? By now, most people are aware of the predicted truck driver shortage – of anywhere between 34,000 to 48,000 drivers – that's forecast for 2024.

At first glance the projected numbers may seem daunting – but once the figures are allowed to sink in – they are merely alarming. So much so, that many trucking industry experts and non-experts alike

are weighing in with varying suggestions, fixes and potential solutions as they try to address the anticipated driver shortage.

RECOGNIZING THAT HAVING 'SKILLED TRADE' STATUS IS A GOOD THING

One of the soundest proposed suggestions would be to have the government recognize truck driving as a 'skilled trade'. Official designation status would allow the trucking industry considerably more wiggle room in its effort towards making drivers' wages, benefits & lives, noticeably better.

It would also be seen as a very progressive step towards promoting driver immigration. A change in status would be viewed internationally, as a very positive move. It would also make it more appealing and less complicated for employment consultants and global fleet owners to recruit and hire foreign drivers.

Case in point, Vijay Gill – principal research associate with the Canadian Chamber of Commerce – stated in a 2013 interview with Business in Vancouver that he believed that one of the reasons for the looming driver shortage is that truck driving is not recognized as a 'skilled trade'.

"If the occupation was recognized as a skilled trade, it would have implications for the supply of drivers," he said, citing the example of someone who is trying to enter the country as a skilled immigrant and they are trained as a driver, it doesn't help them get in. Adding that, "It's not only an immigration issue because if

it's recognized as a skilled trade, it would likely enhance the image of the industry and the occupation domestically as well." The Statistics Canada website lists the National Occupational Classification (NOC) 201 as it pertains to truck drivers as:

7511 - Transport truck drivers - Transport truck drivers operate heavy trucks to transport goods and materials over urban, interurban, provincial and international routes. They are employed by transportation, manufacturing, distribution and moving companies, and trucking employment service agencies, or they may be self-employed. This unit group also includes drivers of special purpose trucks and shunters who move trailers to and from loading docks within trucking yards or lots.

So, with form NOC 201 in hand there are many individuals out there who still believe that just anyone can drive a truck or big rig and that the position does not merit 'skilled trade' status. In fact, Trucking HR Canada noted on its website that Canada's National Occupational Classification (NOC) code – which groups more than 40,000 occupations into one of four skill levels – only lists drivers as "low skilled".

SUPPORT NEEDED TO GALVANIZE THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT INTO MAKING A MOVE

It most likely will take considerable combined pressure from immigration consultants, the trucking industry and many other interested supporters, in persuad-

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ing the federal government that it should reconsider its position on the contentious trucking 'skilled trade' status issue.

Contributing to that support, the BC Trucking Association divulged on its website that the Canadian Chamber of Commerce² had approved a policy to support a change to the National Occupational Classification for truck drivers from unskilled to skilled, as well as the development of a national minimum training standard, completion of a training program prior to licensing, and mandatory, ongoing training/re-certification throughout a truck driver's career.

In a 2013 report, Understanding the Truck Driver Supply and Demand Gap³ Vijay Gill noted that, "That there is also an important role for government to play in developing policies and regulatory frameworks in order to establish national occupational, training, and licensing standards that recognize truck driving as a skilled occupation."

The Canadian Trucking Alliance (CTA) – who financially supported the research – wrote in the report that, "Having the occupation recognized as a skilled trade would increase the potential to access im-

migrant labour. To accomplish this, the CTA is recommending that governments mandate a minimum level of entry-level training, ongoing professional development, and enhanced licensing standards. This will also help to improve the image of both the industry and the occupation, which could make it more desirable for younger workers in particular."

Jean Marc Picard, executive director of the Atlantic Provinces Trucking Association (APTA) thinks that commercial truck drivers should have the designation of a 'skilled trade' and the sooner the better.

He states that, "This country is dependent on commercial trucking for the transportation of all goods and keeping the economy moving and our most important position is the truck driver."

"The training and responsibilities involved to become a driver are not only important but continuous and their responsibilities are becoming more and more complex." Picard maintains that, "This would bring structure to our training across the country and consistency as well."

In May of this year the Canadian government responded to a number of reports, submissions and petitions that it

had received. Basically its reaction was that they – the government – weren't going to give the matter of recognizing truck driving as a 'skilled trade' any further consideration.

The Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour released a Response to Petition 4 statement, stating in part that "Trucking is mainly under provincial and territorial jurisdiction. Each Canadian province has jurisdiction to regulate motor vehicle transportation within its own borders. Driver licensing and training is a provincial/territorial responsibility."

MANDATORY ENTRY-LEVEL TRAINING OR MELT

As early as 2006 the trucking industry was recognized as a skilled trade by the Government of Ontario. At that time the government created the trucking industry's first apprenticeship program, naming it the Voluntary Apprenticeship Program for Professional Drivers in Ontario. The completely voluntary program comprised of 12 weeks of training with a mentor, followed by up to 40 weeks of on-the-job work training.



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Currently in Ontario, as of July the 1st, any new applicants who wanted to get a complete commercial Class A licence – the class needed to drive trucks with air brakes and vehicles over 4,600 kilograms – must successfully complete an Ontario's Ministry of Transportation's (MTO) mandatory training course. Only upon completion of the course, will applicants be able to attempt a road test.

Those drivers who already hold a valid Class A licence or any drivers who took the road test before July 1, 2017 are not required to take the course. Any new drivers wanting to take the Ministry of Transportation's Driver Certification Program will have to enroll with an MTO recognized service provider or a registered private career college.

In November 2016, the province of Manitoba allied itself with the British Columbia Trucking Association (BCTA) and trucking associations in Albertan and Saskatchewan, as it joined the New West Partnership Trade Agreement (NWPTA).

The four western provinces were now committed to strengthening and expanding Canada's largest barrier-free interprovincial market.

Working diligently through the NWP-TA the BCTA – along with its three provincial partners – have been actively promoting the implementation of a harmonized MELT standard for Class 1 commercial licence holders; a criterion that is consistent with the new Ontario MELT standards.

As in other regions across Canada, in the eastern portion of the country, APTA's Jean Marc Picard says that his association is also aware of MELT and that they have been, "lobbying the Atlantic Governments to mandate training in our 4 provinces but it's easier said than done."

Consequently, the APTA just recently announced, in partnership with the Trucking Human Resource Sector Council Atlantic, that it will be endorsing an industry developed 12 week truck driver training standard. The program is available at various schools throughout Atlantic Canada. This program combines a minimum 8 weeks at a professional training institution and 4 weeks internship with a host fleet /coach. Upon successful completion of the 12 week program graduates will receive a certificate from the trucking industry of Atlantic Canada, recognizing their success.

AND FINALLY . . .

It has already proven to and continues to be a very challenging undertaking – in not only obtaining federal government support for – but also raising its awareness level of how knowledgeable, experienced and professional truck drivers are. The government needs to finally acknowledge and reward the industry drivers for the skills they show as they efficiently adjust to ever changing conditions as they carry out their daily deliveries.

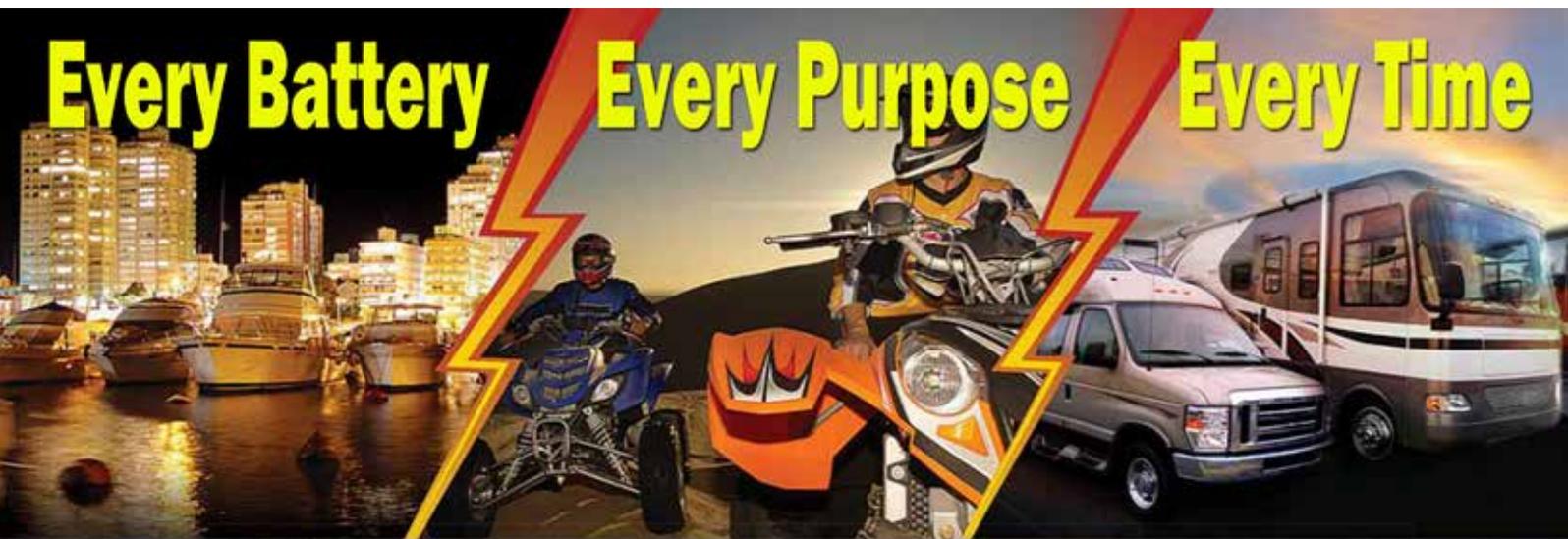
No funding programs can be offered for skills enhancement, nor will foreign workers be eligible for grants for training, unless truck drivers become encompassed under the heading of 'skilled trades'. A positive change in truck driver status would go a long way to not only improving, but in boasting the trucking industries image and this will also make it considerably easier to attract a more millennial class of driver.

¹ Canada Transportation Act Review, Prepared by: CTA. PDF file. Fall 2014

² Commercial Truck Drivers Training and Classification in Canada. Submitted by the Atlantic Chamber Of Commerce, 2016

³ Understanding the Truck Driver Supply and Demand Gap, Prepared by: Conference Board of Canada, February 2013

⁴ Response to Petition, Response by the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, April 2017 



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