

# Recruitment, Retention and Training of Truck Drivers

Local Analysis, Key Findings, and Recommendations



FAR NORTHEAST TRAINING BOARD (FNETB)  
your Local Employment Planning Council

COMMISSION DE FORMATION DU NORD-EST (CFNE)  
votre Conseil Local de Planification de l'Emploi

June 2018



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your **Local Employment Planning Council**

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**Ontario**

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# 1.0 Introduction

## 1.1 Project Sponsor

The Far Northeast Training Board (FNETB) is a regional not-for-profit organization that is responsible for labour market information, integrated planning, service coordination for employers, and research and innovation. The mission of the FNETB is to “promote the effective planning of training and workforce development programs and services so that qualified workers are available to meet the needs of the local labour market”. The FNETB provides these core services within Northeastern Ontario and is part of a provincial network of 26 local employment planning councils (LEPC) and workforce planning boards (WPB).



## 1.2 Project Overview

The trucking industry in Canada continues to be chronically impacted by driver shortages<sup>1</sup> and the situation is similar in the FNETB catchment area. In addition to ongoing driver shortages, retirement projections for the period of 2011-2031 for AZ-DZ licensed truck drivers within the FNETB region are expected to be 825 positions<sup>2</sup>. As a response to the ongoing regional truck driver shortage and the anticipated retirements, the FNETB has initiated a project to support trucking employers in the succession planning areas of recruitment, development, and retention of drivers.

Phase 1 of this initiative includes a survey with trucking industry employers, a series of consultations, and the development of this report. Phase 2 will include trucking industry round table discussions, the identification of actions, and the development of next steps.

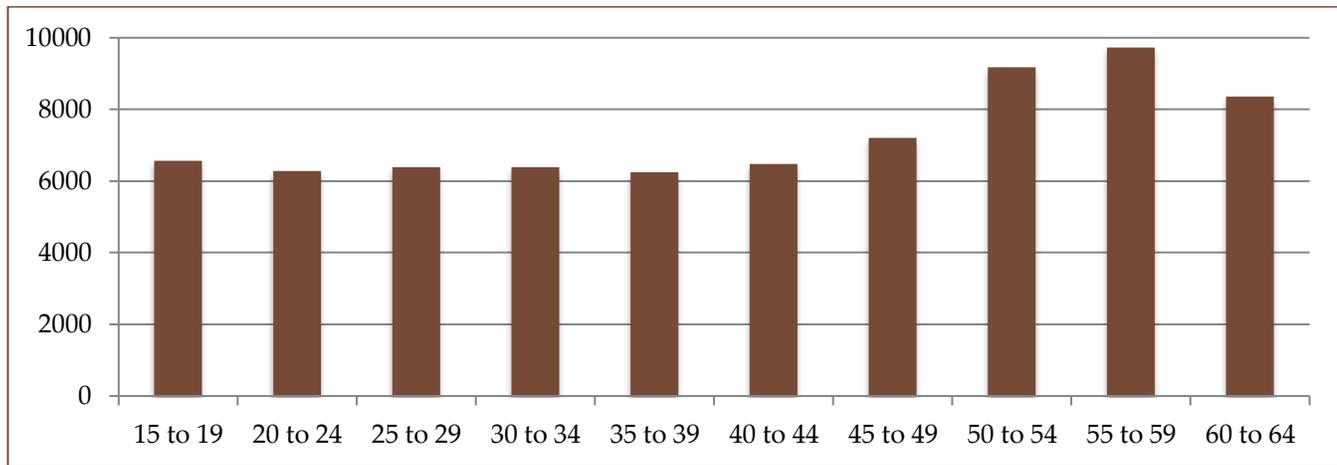
<sup>1</sup> <http://www.drivershortage.ca/report/understanding-the-truck-driver-supply-and-demand-gap-and-its-implications-for-the-canadian-economy/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://fnetb.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Truck-Driver-Far-Northeast-Region-EN.pdf>

### 1.3 Regional Characteristics

The FNETB region can be characterized as sparsely populated, natural resource dependent (forestry, mining, hydroelectric development, agriculture), with a declining population<sup>3</sup> and an older demographic. Refer to *Table 1.3.1: 2016 Population Aged 15-64 for Cochrane and Temiskaming Districts* for an age breakdown for these districts.

**Table 1.3.1: 2016 Population Aged 15-64 For Cochrane and Temiskaming Districts<sup>4</sup>**



Source: Statistics Canada 2016 census data

*Table 1.3.1: 2016 Population Aged 15-64 For Cochrane and Temiskaming Districts* illustrates that the ‘baby boomer’ demographic of 50-64 years of age is the predominant age grouping. From a workforce management perspective, the demographics indicate that there will be significant baby boomer retirements within the next 10-15 years, with fewer workforce numbers to replace those that are retiring. This worker shortage will result in competition for workers, with compensation and working conditions becoming key decision-making factors in a worker accepting and remaining with an employer.

Refer to *Table 1.3.2: Truck Drivers within the FNETB Catchment Area* for an overview of the number of truck drivers, by age category and by Community Futures Development Corporation (CFDC) catchment areas.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.fin.gov.on.ca/en/economy/demographics/projections/projections2017-2041.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Statistics Canada 2016 census data

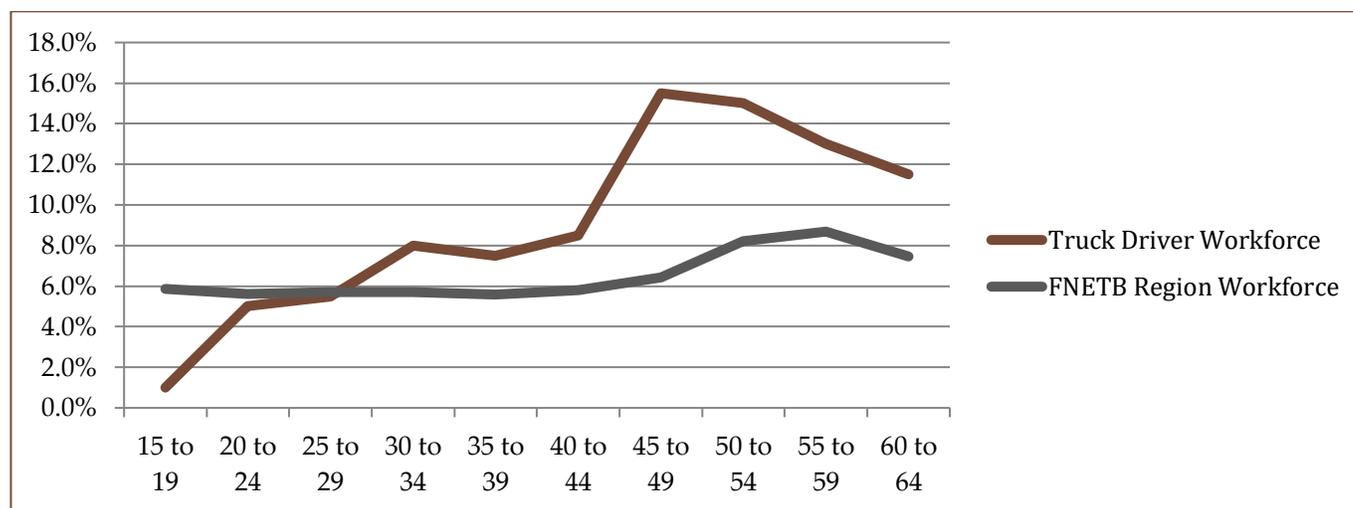
**Table 1.3.2: Truck Drivers within the FNETB Catchment Area<sup>5</sup>**

CFDC Area	Working Age Breakdown										
	Total	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	60-64
Venture Centre	515	0	35	45	55	35	50	75	75	55	50
Superior East	110	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	30	20	10
South Temiskaming	215	0	10	10	20	10	15	15	35	35	50
North Claybelt	405	10	25	25	35	25	40	70	45	45	45
Nord-Aski	190	0	0	10	10	15	25	45	20	40	15
Kirkland District	195	10	0	0	0	25	15	40	50	20	25
Wakenagun	35	0	10	0	10	10	0	10	10	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,665</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>255</b>	<b>245</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>195</b>
Percentage		1.2	4.8	5.4	7.8	7.2	8.7	15.3	14.7	12.9	11.7

Source: Statistics Canada 2016 customized census data

When comparing the population characteristics in *Table 1.3.1: 2016 Population Aged 15-64 For Cochrane and Temiskaming Districts* to the workforce characteristics indicated in *Table 1.3.2 Truck Drivers within the FNETB Catchment Area*, it is evident that the truck driver workforce leans towards an older age grouping as compared to the general workforce of the Cochrane and Temiskaming Districts. This is indicated in *Figure 1.3.3: Age of Truck Driver (15-64 yrs) Compared to the Cochrane and Temiskaming Districts (FNETB Region) Total Population (15-64 yrs)*.

**Figure 1.3.3: Age of Truck Drivers (15-64 yrs) Compared to the Cochrane and Temiskaming Districts (FNETB Region) Total Population (15-64 yrs)**



Source: Statistics Canada 2016 data and Statistics Canada 2016 customized census data

<sup>5</sup> Statistics Canada 2016 census data

## 2.0 Methodology

### 2.1 Project Coordination

Clearlogic Consulting Professionals has been retained to conduct industry research and to host focus groups and interviews with trucking firms in Northeastern Ontario. As a result of industry consultation and research, Clearlogic has developed a discussion paper and recommendations report (this document). This document is intended to support the future development of resources and actions that can aid trucking employers in workforce recruitment, development, and retention.

### 2.2 Survey

#### 2.2.1 Orientation

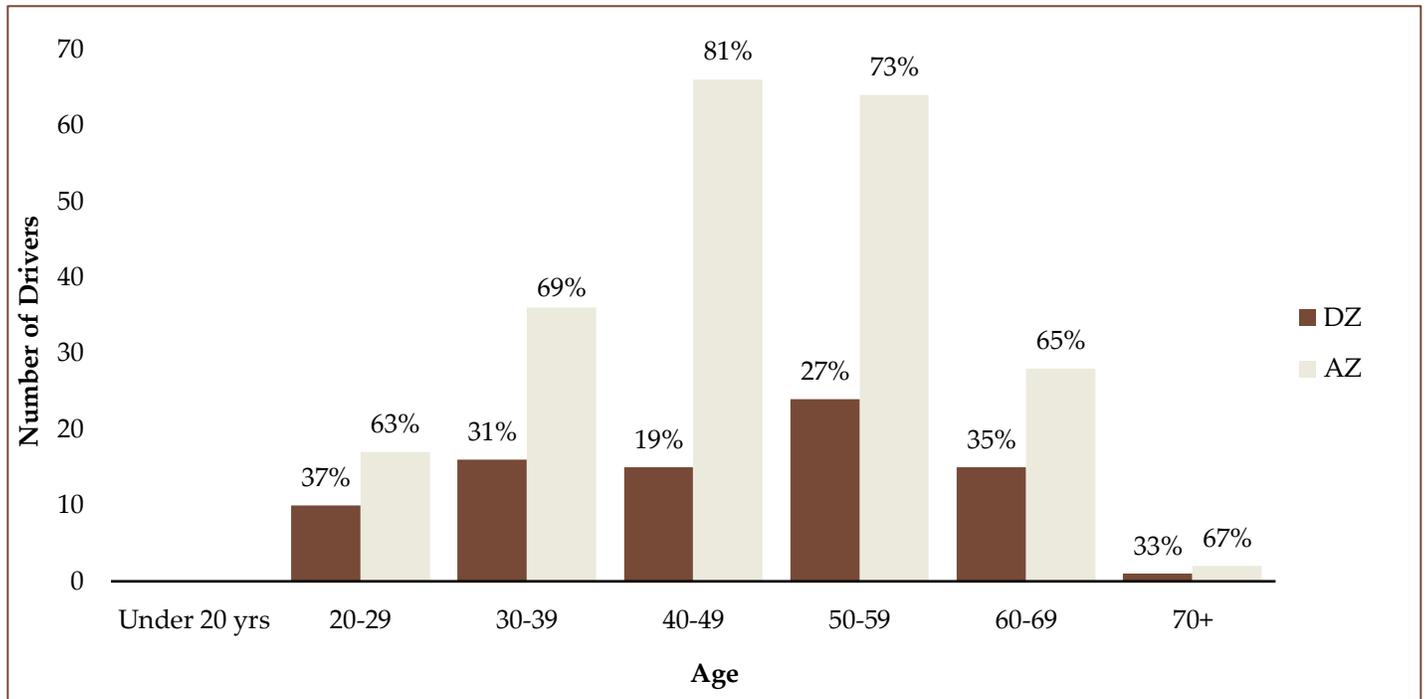
An introductory phone call and follow-up survey was sent to over 100 trucking based companies within the FNETB region. The phone call served to introduce employers to the initiative, gain their commitment to participate in the survey, and to invite them to the subsequent focus groups.

The purpose of the survey was to better understand regional practices and issues related to truck driver recruitment, development, and retention, and to use these learnings to structure the focus group sessions.

#### 2.2.2 Survey results

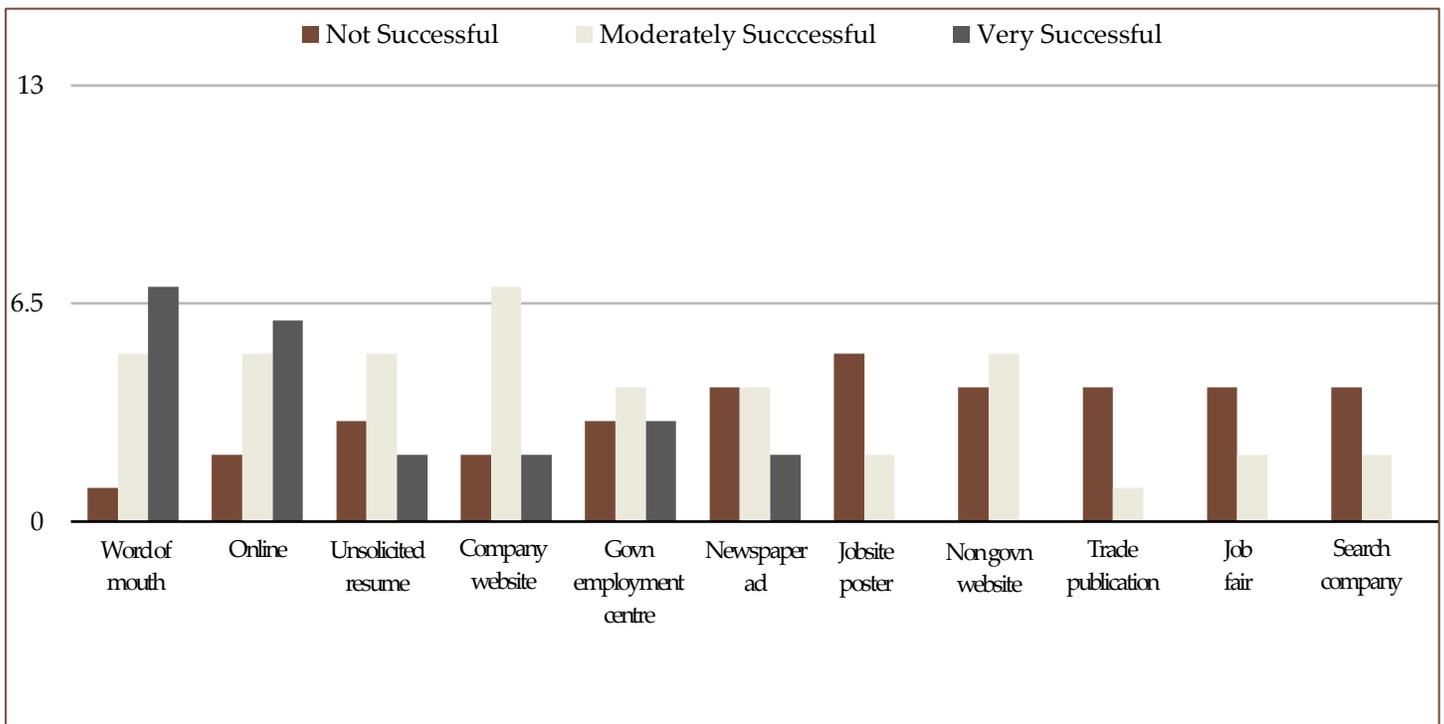
A total of 15 companies participated in the survey, representing approximately 1400 total employees in various industries including construction, forestry, mining, dangerous goods, and general for-hire carriers. The following table, *Table 2.2.2.1: Driver Ages and Licensing Type as Reported by Survey Respondents* provides a breakdown by age and by licensing type (AZ license and DZ license).

**Table 2.2.2.1: Driver Age and Licensing Type as Reported by Survey Respondents**



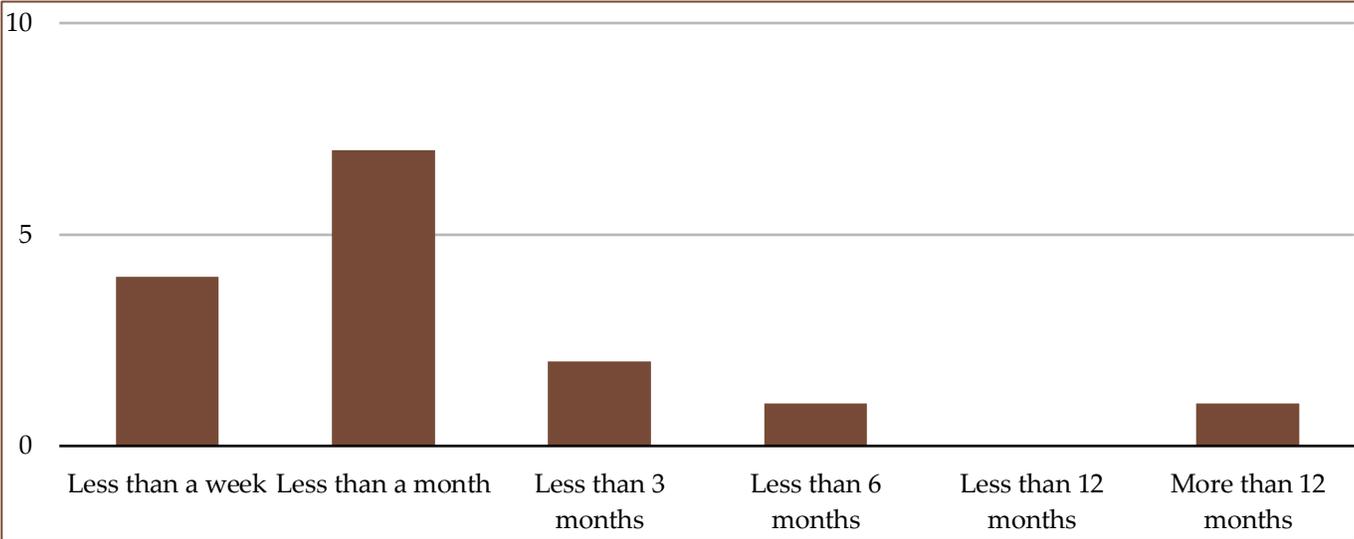
The following table, *Table 2.2.2.2: Recruitment Methods*, indicates that the most successful recruiting methods are via word of mouth and online job postings.

**Table 2.2.2.2: Recruitment Methods**



When asked about recruitment methods, survey respondents generally post for and hire employees in less than a month, as depicted in the following table, *Table 2.2.2.3: Recruitment Cycle*

**Table 2.2.2.3: Recruitment Cycle**



**2.3 Survey, Focus Group and Interview Feedback**

As mentioned in *Section 1.2 Project Overview*, the following industry information is compiled from consultations that took place in May 2018. This includes survey feedback (15), Consultation by Community, and one-on-one interviews (2). The feedback reflects the opinions of the participants and may not reflect the broader industry perspective.

Consultation by Community	
Community	Number of Participants
Hearst	3
Kapuskasing	1
Timmins	6
Kirkland Lake	2
Temiskaming Shores	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>

*2.3.1 Industry and regional characteristics*

**Rapid Hiring and Termination**

Mining, construction, and seasonal projects have boom and bust implications for regional workforce supply and demand, and this encourages rapid hiring and termination cycles. Rapid hiring and termination cycles can normalize the workforce characteristics such as short employment tenures, job-hopping, a lack of investment in training and workforce development, and high levels of occupational attrition.

## **Strong Economic Conditions**

In strong economic conditions, more truck drivers are required to move products; whether it is household goods, primary resources, or to make local, regional, or long-haul deliveries. Truck drivers often have other skills and interests and will seek opportunity in occupations that are more lucrative, more stable, or more aligned to their work preferences. In a robust economy, these opportunities (such as well paid mining-based employment) creates competition for workers and this results in driver shortages that are often acute. Some trucking companies comment on the fact that they have more trucks than workers, and that trucks are often parked or sold due to lack of drivers.

## **Image of Truck Driving**

The trucking occupation is not always regarded as a prestigious job. Parents, Guidance Counselors, and even the industry itself often reinforce a negative image of hard work in adverse conditions, often with low pay and with low prospects for improvement.

## **Owner Operators**

It's also noted <sup>6</sup> that the number of 'Owner Operators' has diminished over time. This reduction of trucking supply puts additional pressure on existing employee-based businesses to fill the void. There is also the perception that the introduction of mandatory Electronic Logging Devices (ELDs) may further hasten the exit of Owner Operators<sup>7</sup>. The perception is that some owner operators cannot afford or cannot be bothered to install and use ELDs and that drivers may retire, may leave the occupation, or may choose to drive for an employer.

## **Introduction of Mandatory Training**

In July 2017, the Ontario Government introduced Mandatory Entry Level Training (MELT)<sup>8</sup> for all new commercial driving applicants. Driver candidates are now required to take a minimum of 103.5 hours of professional classroom and road instruction before becoming eligible to take the commercial driver's test. This new requirement may create a barrier to entry for some driver candidates because of the additional training cost and the time required to attend a formalized training program. With this additional financial and time commitment, it is possible that candidate flow becomes constrained and that this constraint will place additional pressure on the driver shortage. Alternatively, candidates that do proceed through training and testing may now be more committed to the industry, resulting in reduced occupational attrition.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.inboundlogistics.com/cms/article/the-slow-steady-decline-of-the-owner-operator-model/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://eldfacts.com/eld-myths/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.ontario.ca/page/new-mandatory-training-class-drivers-licence-applicants>

## **Insurance Requirements**

A key concern, voiced on numerous occasions, is the difficulty in obtaining or affording insurance coverage for new drivers. Companies can insure new drivers by adhering to Canadian, provincial, and industry training programs, and by adhering to approved driver eligibility characteristics, as indicated in *Appendix A: Insurance Eligibility Requirements for Professional Transport Drivers*. It may be onerous for some individuals or for some companies to meet this eligibility criteria.

## **Larger Companies: Recruitment, Development, Retention**

Larger trucking companies often have greater resources to develop and implement long-term recruitment strategies, workforce training and development programs, and generally have access to more varied and rewarding retention programs. However, even some larger companies have expressed challenges with attraction and long-term retention, and are often able to retain newly licensed drivers for only 2-4 years. Once a new driver gains experience and insurability, drivers often change jobs frequently for reasons of compensation, working conditions, or proximately to family.

### *2.3.2 Employer characteristics*

Seasonal or project based contractual obligations often require employers to hire drivers on short notice. Employers will often notify staff to ‘spread the word.... we need truck drivers as soon as possible’. Word of mouth and online job postings/social media are the two most common recruitment methods, as indicated in *Table 2.2.2.2 Recruitment Methods*.

Recruitment has generally been limited to the local and regional labour pool for several reasons;

- Word of mouth has a notification effect that closely parallels the employer’s service area. Referring employees know and suggest their friends and colleagues who live nearby.
- The compensation range restricts the labour pool to applicants that already live in the area because the job is often not lucrative enough to encourage the relocation of outside applicants.
- Seasonal or project based work requires the labour pool to be readily available; the time required for relocation may be impractical.

### *2.3.3 Employment and training programs*

Government employment and workforce programs such as Second Career and the Canada Ontario Jobs Grants are seen by some as useful tools to help bring people into the industry. Some employers consider navigating and using employment programs onerous, and many of the smaller companies are unskilled, are unaware, or are not interested in accessing training and development programs. There is inconsistent awareness and limited uptake of employment programs, services, and funding.

It was noted during the consultation sessions that the usefulness of training programs can be increased by including work experience components such as placements and partnerships with industry.

Many employers may not be aware that formal training programs (*Appendix A: Insurance Eligibility for Professional Transport Drivers*) can allow inexperienced drivers to qualify for insurance coverage and for insurance premium reduction. No employers mentioned truck drivers as a trade, as defined by the Ontario College of Trades. Information about this voluntary trade can be found in *Appendix B: Truck Driver as a Voluntary Trade*.

It was also noted that when employers train employees on multiple pieces of equipment the employee becomes more versatile and useful, and this aids in work opportunities and employee retention. However, not all truck drivers want to operate other equipment, and some drivers prefer to work on a seasonal or episodic basis.

### *2.3.4 Workforce characteristics*

Applicant characteristics can significantly constrain the pool of suitable employees; driving infractions, limited work experience, personal barriers, and willingness to work away from home are all impediments to employment in the trucking industry. Seventy percent (70%) of survey respondents noted that recruiting employees with the right experience was a challenge.

The industry has a high turnover rate; employees will take or quit a job quickly, often for a small increase in pay or for a change of working conditions. Seasonal or project work creates employment interruptions and can lead to employer cycling and driver exodus towards more lucrative or more stable employers or occupations.

Truck driving is often physically demanding and can require loading and unloading freight by hand or with equipment, tarping and securing loads, and driving for extended hours often on rough roads or in poor conditions. Some drivers may have difficulty with the more physical aspects of the job and this may impede their capability and employability. The career development process may not be clear to younger audiences and this may result in a misalignment of expectations and working conditions. In addition, there is a need for practical on the job experience in order to be autonomous and successful.

### **3.0 Key Findings**

In order to remain competitive, the trucking industry will need to strengthen its recruitment, development, and retention strategies. The majority of employers in the FNETB region are small and medium sized businesses with limited resources. This can make workforce planning even more challenging.

Recruitment, development, and retention are often aggregated and phrased as succession planning. In the true sense of the phrase, succession planning denotes occupational movement within a workforce; as people retire or exit, other staff (or external candidates) are identified, trained and ready to fill the void. This report focuses on the single occupation of truck driver, and not the industry of trucking and its associated hierarchy of labourers, drivers, dispatchers, mechanics, and administration. There are in fact few advancement opportunities for a driver, other than more comfortable or challenging equipment, and routes closer aligned with preferences. For this reason, we will use the distinct terms of recruitment, development, and retention within this report rather than the term of succession planning.

#### **3.1 Regional Economy**

The regional economy will continue to be resource based, project based and seasonal, and as such, the short posting and hiring cycle will likely remain a necessary characteristic of the trucking industry in this region.

#### **3.2 Regional Workforce**

The regional workforce is aging and high levels of retirement are occurring in all industries. These retirements will create a worker shortage and employers will increase compensation levels to attract and maintain a sufficient workforce. The shortage of workers and increased compensation levels will create difficulty in staffing occupations that some may perceive as lower paid and lower skilled.

### 3.3 Recruitment

#### 3.3.1 *Reliance on word of mouth*

Trucking employers within the region currently rely heavily upon word of mouth recruitment to promote job openings and this method of promotion is both cost and time effective. However, there are some drawbacks and limitations to word of mouth recruiting:

- Job opportunities, working conditions, and compensation may not be accurately communicated. This may lead to poorly aligned employee expectations or high levels of turnover.
- A word of mouth recruitment strategy can also work against an employer when a better external opportunity presents itself. Employees may communicate to peers, friends, and associates of external opportunities and a sudden workforce departure may result.
- Intended or unintended bias will influence the applicant pool; applicants will tend to be 'similar' to those that are promoting the job opportunities. This can make it challenging for this industry to recruit and retain a diverse workforce.

#### 3.3.2 *Insurance barrier*

There is the perception that obtaining insurance for new drivers is overly restrictive, is too expensive, or is too onerous and this limits some employer's receptiveness to new entrants into the industry. The majority of employers seem to be unaware that insurance friendly policies and programs exist<sup>9</sup>. However, the small number of employers that have developed insurance friendly policies and programs speak highly about the positive impact that this has had on recruiting.

#### 3.3.3 *Misperception of truck driver occupation*

The perception among some is that truck driving is an unappealing occupation and this perception is sometimes reinforced by parents, peers, and even the industry itself. The perception is that there are long hours, low wages, minimal training requirements, and employment tenures that are often short-term and sporadic.

Related to the image challenge, there can be the perception that the employer will take anyone to fill the position, and that the employer will overly compensate because they're in great need of drivers. The reality is that the job carries a significant level of risk and responsibility and requires a clean driving record, good personal and employment habits, a high level of spatial awareness, a keen sense of judgment, good vision and perception, excellent problem solving skills, and

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<sup>9</sup> See Appendix A: Insurance Eligibility Requirements for Professional Transport Drivers

physical capability. Many would-be applicants are insufficiently aware of the job requirements and as such don't qualify for licensing and employment.

The outcome of these misperceptions is that there is an insufficient number of people interested in the occupation, and an even smaller portion that is suitable for the occupation.

### **3.4 Development**

#### *3.4.1 Limited capacity to plan and develop*

Smaller organizations often lack workforce planning and development capacity and this can result in a reactionary approach to workforce management. This limitation, compounded by project-based work, often results in immediate hiring, limited orientation and training, and limited mentoring, coaching, and employer bonding. This can lead to a 'quick to hire....quick to fire' workforce management approach. Although this approach is not necessarily inappropriate, this approach can lead to high levels of employee migration from one employer to another or to another occupation altogether. Said another way, drivers are not bonded to any one company, nor are they even bonded to the truck driver occupation. This creates a tenuous workforce that requires constant replacement, training and development.

#### *3.4.2 Employment programs are not fully leveraged*

Many employers, and in particular the smaller employers, are unfamiliar with or disinterested in employment support and development programs such as the Canada Ontario Jobs Grant<sup>10</sup>, Second Career<sup>11</sup>, and the various assistance programs as summarized by the Ontario College of Trades<sup>12</sup>.

This lack of uptake may be due to the seasonal or project based work environment that many trucking based employers are in. The short timeline of contract award, work start, and hiring requirements may make many employment support programs impractical (in the mind of the employer).

The lack of uptake on support programs then requires the employer to take the full burden of compensation and the full burden of workforce development. As a result, wages remain on the lower end and the workforce becomes task trained, often in a hurried, unplanned, and on a sporadic basis.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.ontario.ca/page/new-mandatory-training-class-drivers-licence-applicants>

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.secondcareerontario.com/web/second\\_career/](http://www.secondcareerontario.com/web/second_career/)

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.collegeoftrades.ca/wp-content/uploads/FINANCIAL-RESOURCE-LIST-Feb-2018.pdf>

### **3.5 Retention**

Given the nature of project, seasonal, and resource-based work that is common in the region, it is understandable that workforce retention is challenging. It's commonly understood, both by employers and employees that employment interruptions are a reality in this occupation.

As a retention strategy, some employers have the need, ability and opportunity to cross train on alternate season work (Summer road construction, Winter road maintenance), but these opportunities can only be realized with employee interest and participation. It's not uncommon for workers to prefer to work in certain seasons or on certain projects, and then refrain from working on less desirable projects. Given the driver shortage, drivers can pick and chose when, where, and for whom they would like to work.

## **4.0 Recommendations**

The following recommendations are proposed to help guide Phase 2 of this initiative. Phase 2 discussions will include participants from industry, educators and trainers, employment and training program providers, and other relevant industry partners.

### **4.1 Recruitment**

#### *4.1.1 Modify the public's perception of the truck driver*

A coordinated industry response should attempt to modify the truck driver occupation image by promoting the opportunities and lifestyle, the occupational training and professionalism, and the high level of responsibility of a professional driver. The trucking industry can benefit by the learnings of other sectors that have had success in modifying the public's perception of their industries and their related occupations.

#### *4.1.2 Develop an awareness campaign for specific audiences*

A public awareness campaign could be developed with tailored messages for specific audiences (women, indigenous, and out of region workers). These initiatives could support or be in conjunction with other regional attraction and retention strategies.

#### *4.1.3 Promote training that addresses insurance eligibility requirements*

Develop an awareness campaign that promotes approved training and experiential learning (PTDI, TSSAO, Apprenticeship) so that the insurance barriers are minimized for new drivers. This would allow new drivers an entry path into the occupation and potentially capture a younger demographic before they embark on alternate career choices.

#### *4.1.4 Investigate the reasons for the declining number of Owner Operators*

Owner operators are a viable alternative to an employee-based workforce. It's been noted that owner operators are exiting the occupation<sup>13</sup>. Business and economic development organizations could attempt to better understand the reasons for owner operator exits and develop programs and supports to promote owner operation as a viable business option.

## **4.2 Development**

#### *4.2.1 Promote and utilize workforce development programs*

There are funding and workforce development programs that may serve the industry well; the apprenticeship program<sup>14</sup>, which meets insurance requirements and will help to bring new drivers into the occupation, and the Canada Ontario Jobs Grant (COJG), which supports the training of an existing workforce. The COJG could help to extend an employee's work season, thereby aiding in employee usefulness and retention.

## **4.3 Retention**

#### *4.3.1 Encourage retention with an employer*

Meaningful retention strategies are best left to an employer's discretion and capability. Some employers are concerned with retention, while other employers accept the tenure characteristics of the occupation and focus on recruitment and development. It is an occupational fact that truck drivers will go 'where the work is' and are not overly bonded to any one employer. Even larger employers with well-developed recruiting, training, and retention programs commonly see a relatively short 2-4 year employee tenure.

Employer retention strategies may include route preferences (local, regional, or long haul), industry (mining, forestry, agricultural), equipment (newness, comfort, appropriateness), wage (hourly or by the km), compensation (wage, pension, benefits), employer flexibility (time off, hours of work, variety of work), seasons of work, project type (construction, remote, urban,

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.inboundlogistics.com/cms/article/the-slow-steady-decline-of-the-owner-operator-model/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.ontario.ca/page/graduated-apprenticeship-grant-employers#eligibletrades>

dangerous goods, large loads, specialty loads), business type (large, small, family owned, owner operator). Employers would be wise to discover employee preferences and developed individualized retention strategies.

In addition to the employee retention considerations as listed above, there are also occupation retention considerations. These occupation retention considerations should focus on retaining drivers within the occupation and should seek to minimize employee loss to other occupations.

#### *4.3.2 Promote retention within the occupation: Professionalism*

When an individual feels that they are in a professional occupation, they are also more likely to remain within that occupation. They may change employers but they'll remain in the occupation. The introduction of MELT and the apprenticeship program are both positive steps towards increasing the educational requirements and professionalizing the truck driver occupation. Continual training and workforce development programs are also important elements of occupational professionalism. Employers may consider developing experienced workers to be 'certified' instructors<sup>15</sup> that can be mentors, coaches, and effectively support apprentices and recurring training requirements.

Driving schools that subscribe to accredited training programs and industry leaders that promote industry professionalism are both critical elements that serve to change the workforce culture and the public's perception of the truck driver occupation. Other professionalizing initiatives include the development and implementation of codes of conduct, systemic use of safety programs, and the implementation of company or industry dress (or uniform) requirements.

#### *4.3.3 Promote retention within the occupation: Income distribution, employment interruptions*

A commonly noted characteristic of the truck driver occupation is that it is often project and seasonally based employment, with frequent employment and income interruptions. This unpredictable employment pattern, although tolerable (and sometimes attractive to some), can lead to high levels of occupational departure as drivers seek better or more predictable income. Smoothing out employment income may serve to retain drivers within the occupation. This can be accomplished in two ways; by income distribution and by minimizing employment interruptions.

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.overtheroad.ca/little-no-training-standards-truck-driver-instructors/>

**Income distribution**

Income distribution is the practice of annualizing an employee's wage. In periods of high work demand, employees bank their overtime. In periods of low work demand, employees draw upon their banked hours. Employers can use this practice and in the low demand periods can conduct maintenance, training, or provide paid vacation time (thereby depleting an employee's banked hours). An employee benefits by a regular income stream, by regular work patterns, and by professional development opportunities. An employer benefits by workforce retention, lower recruitment and development costs, and by predictable wage expensing.

**Employment interruptions**

Employment interruptions (due to seasonal, project, or scheduling factors) may cause drivers to seek employment in occupations with more predictable employment. The FNETB could take a lead role in actively promoting its jobs portal to trucking firms so that the job portal becomes the go-to source for driver postings. This may help to minimize employment interruptions and to retain drivers within the occupation.