

The U.S. May be 160,000 Truck Drivers Short by 2030



The American Trucking Associations paints an alarming picture of what could happen if the current truck driver shortage isn't addressed quickly.

Going into 2020, the nation was already struggling with a truck driver shortage spurred on by the wave of retiring Baby Boomer drivers, new rules concerning the number of hours an individual can drive without taking a break, and new regulations related to drug-testing and other activities.

When the COVID-19 pandemic emerged in the U.S. in March of 2020, parts of the nation shut down in an effort to stem the outbreak's spread. Many overseas manufacturing centers took a similar stance. Later, as the world began to reopen, pent-up demand quickly led to supply chain shortages that would endure well into 2021 (and quite possibly, beyond). As transportation ramped back up to meet demand, carriers and fleet owners found themselves short on at least one critical asset: truck drivers.

Now, the American Trucking Associations (ATA) is saying that if the issue isn't rectified soon, the U.S. could wind up short 160,000 truck drivers by 2030. Right now, it says that the dearth lies somewhere around 80,000 drivers and continues to grow. In its late-October [Driver Shortage Update](#), the ATA says this figure is the difference between the number of drivers currently in the market and the optimal number of drivers based on freight demand.

The deficit of 80,000 drivers represents a 30% increase from before the pandemic, when the industry already faced a labor shortage of 61,500 drivers, [CNN](#) reports. "That's a pretty big spike," ATA's Chris Spear told CNN, noting that many drivers are retiring or dropping out of the industry. He sees the recruitment of younger drivers as a key answer to the labor shortage. "I think that clearly is the most impactful thing that could be done right now to alleviate this problem," he explained. "So next year, we are not going to be having

this conversation since it will alleviate itself because we're investing."

10 Reasons for the Driver Shortage

Most acute in the longer-haul, for-hire truckload marketplace, the driver shortage is being caused by a few different factors. The ATA sees these as the main causes:

1. High average age of current drivers, which leads to a high number of retirements
2. Women making up only 7% of all drivers, well below their representation in the total workforce
3. Inability of some would-be and current drivers to pass a drug test, a problem exacerbated by an increasing number of states legalizing marijuana (a substance still banned federally)
4. The federally mandated minimum age of 21 to drive commercially across state lines poses a significant challenge to recruiting new drivers
5. The pandemic caused some drivers to leave the industry
6. Truck driver training schools trained far fewer drivers than normal in 2020
7. Lifestyle issues, notably time away from home, and especially in the longer-haul transportation market
8. A lack of truck parking spots, which causes drivers to stop driving earlier than they need to so they can get a spot for the night
9. Traffic congestion, which limits drivers' ability to safely and efficiently make deliveries
10. The inability of potential candidates to meet carriers' hiring standards for driving record or criminal histories

Truck Drivers Wanted

The ATA estimates that over the next decade, the industry will have to recruit nearly 1 million new drivers into the industry to replace retiring drivers and drivers who leave voluntarily (e.g., lifestyle) or involuntarily (e.g., driving records or failed drug test). It will also need more drivers to support ongoing industry growth.

“These trends do not account for the impact of potential laws that may either alter the industry dynamics positively (e.g., lower the minimum age to drive across state lines) or negatively (e.g., regulatory mandates that push drivers to exit the industry or be less efficient),” the ATA points out in its report, which notes that the common solution being used to rectify the problem—higher wages—won’t singularly solve the driver shortage.

“Some drivers will choose to work less at a higher pay rate, negating the impact of the increase,” the association explains. “The solution to the driver shortage will most certainly require increased pay, regulatory changes and modifications to shippers’ receivers’ and carriers’ business practices to improve conditions for drivers.”