

Breakout 8: Freight Safety

Moderator: Jeff Warner, Multimodal Freight Transportation Programs, TTI

Session Summary:

The transport of freight is intertwined with that of the movement of people. Trucks that transport goods utilized in every aspect of daily life operate alongside the general public on our roadways. Companies moving freight have a vested interest in the safe operations of their fleets because the outcome of their daily operations directly relates to the companies' bottom line. Operating without incident is often dependent on the operations of the traveling public, who might underestimate the requirements of commercial vehicles. This session discussed aspects of safe trucking operations, along with the efforts of the Austin Police Department to address aggressive operations by both the traveling public and commercial vehicles.

John Esparza, Texas Motor Transportation Association, discussed commercial vehicle driver fatigue. This issue of driver alertness is addressed by the federal Hours-of-Service (HOS) rules. In considering the proposed new HOS rules it should be noted that under the current HOS rules safety has improved over the past couple of years with fatality and injury incidents at the lowest level since 2002. Mr. Esparza noted that while driver fatigue is a serious consideration, other factors contribute more significantly to the safety of commercial vehicle operations. In his view, the majority of truck incidents are not the fault of the truck driver, but rather the unsafe practices of vehicles operating around commercial vehicles. Of the incidents where the driver is at fault, only a small number relate to fatigue. Factors such as speed and driver inattentiveness make up the majority of these incident causes. Mr. Esparza recommends addressing the primary causes of truck crashes, which comprise incidents where the truck driver is not at fault and where fatigue is not a factor.

Sergeant Jason Mutchler, Austin Police Department, made a presentation on *Ticketing Aggressive Cars and Trucks (TACT)*. Through a Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) grant, the Austin Police Department has implemented a program that focuses on aggressive cars and commercial vehicles. It uses communication, enforcement, evaluation activities, and high-risk corridors to reduce fatalities and injuries from unsafe driving behaviors by passenger and commercial motor vehicle drivers. Austin is the first city in the U.S. to be awarded the grant. Previously, only states have been awarded the grant. The primary focus is a campaign to inform the traveling public to "Leave More Space for Trucks." Behavior such as tailgating behind semi-trucks, cutting off semi-trucks, and speeding are offenses targeted under this program. In addition, the police department is performing commercial vehicle inspections as part of this program.

The final presentation in this session, by B.L. Manry, Palletized Trucking, addressed fleet safety issues. Most trucking companies are comprised of 25 trucks or less. Many of those comprise a single truck operated by the owner, often making safety issues difficult to address. The safety issues discussed by Mr. Manry included:

- Distractions Presented by the Use of Non-integrated Technologies – Cell

phones, GPS units, and computers are technologies now located in the cab that may distract the driver.

- Uniform Commercial Drivers License Testing – Each state currently has different testing protocols.
- Long Term Parking – Particularly in the Northeast, there is a shortage of places along freight corridors to park.
- National Employer Notification System – This system would allow carriers to know driving history of drivers or potential drivers. Turnover is a large issue in trucking, so the logistics of a system like this would be a significant challenge.
- Registry of Certified Medical Examiners – Currently drivers may “shop” for doctors that will clear them to drive.
- Passenger Vehicle Driver Education Curriculum – Current driver education curricula either neglect or provide minimal information on operating around trucks.