



Owner-Operator's Business
Association of Canada

Association professionnelle des
routiers autonomes du Canada

*...from the
director's chair*

Establishing the real value of drivers

There has been a lot of speculation about the impact of the new hours of service regulations on rates and payscales for owner/operators and drivers. As of this writing, the rules in the U.S. have been in effect for almost a month and, despite the predictions of major disruptions, the roads continue to be filled with trucks, the freight continues to move and consumers are getting the goods. Obviously something's working.

Here in Canada, the expected implementation of the HOS rules likely won't take place until next September...it will take until then for our legislators to finalize the regulations. Until then all eyes will be on the American experience. Do the regulations work for their drivers, carriers and shippers? Most importantly, is there any evidence of evasion of the rules? Are drivers finding ways to get around the 14-hour daily limit (probably through imaginative use of the split sleeper berth provisions), or are they being pressured by their carriers to do so? Have shippers and receivers resigned themselves to the increased transportation costs? Industry estimates of the loss in overall productivity are between 10 and 15 per cent. So there will be a need to increase capacity which will require hiring more drivers and investing in more equipment, thus increasing costs which must eventually be passed to the customer. Shippers and carriers won't like it, but it's inevitable.

The ability to hide time (by booking legitimate on-duty-but-not-driving hours as off-duty) was very easy under the old rules, but it's been made much more difficult by the new 14-hour daily limit. Officials won't need to go back through several days of logbook records to de-

termine a violation; they can do it immediately by examining the current day. If you are still on the road 14 hours after starting work, then you'd better have your chequebook out.

There are many factors coming together at this point: 1) An increasingly severe driver shortage caused by an aging baby boomer workforce, 2) Massive dissatisfaction among the hundreds of thousands of experienced drivers and owner/operators already out there, 3) A more sophisticated entry level driver unwilling to cave in to the 'do what ya gotta do' mentality that the rest of us had to endure, and 4) A realization that more trucks will be required because our society has committed itself to a road transport system which cannot be replaced with any other practical alternative.

But that's not bad news...that's good news, because, in fact, drivers have never had anything to trade but their time. Users of transportation services must get used to the fact that the value of that driver's time just increased dramatically.

It means that, finally, the conditions are right for drivers to be paid for all the work that they do. If carriers want their drivers to wait in loading lineups, act as a receiver's dock labour, or bobtail around backwards for 10 hours, then so be it, but they can no longer expect that drivers will continue to compromise their own earnings by allowing carriers to attempt to satisfy their customers' unrealistic expectations through using their drivers' unpaid time to fill in the gaps.

In addition, experienced drivers and owner/operators will no longer feel compelled to stay with carriers who remain indifferent to the value of a driver's time or who refuse to pass the



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results of careless dispatching on to their customers; the 14-hour workday won't allow it. If carriers continue to allow their more inefficient customers to casually abuse the time of the drivers, they'll have to be prepared to pay for it.

A lot is riding on everyone's acceptance of the new rules. It won't do the industry any good if wide-scale abuses are discovered, because efforts to defeat the system will only demonstrate a failure to understand the long-term implications of the rules.

The challenge now is for owner/operators and drivers to seize the opportunity that has been offered to them.

This is the best chance that competent, reliable and professional truck drivers have ever had to be properly recognized and paid for the considerable experience that they bring to the job.

By refusing to adjust their logbooks they will force the consequences of inefficiencies to be passed to the appropriate party, usually the shipper.

Finally, we are presented with a set of rules that will allow drivers to accurately record all their working hours without concern about being sanctioned by their carriers or customers.

For once, it appears as if the government has stepped in and forced a real contribution to the financial (and physical) health of all truck drivers.

Let's not sabotage this chance to have all of our working time properly compensated.