



# MIDWEST TRANSPORTATION WORKFORCE CENTER

## Flexible CDL Training

Truck driving is an occupation that pays a living wage. It is also an occupation for which people can become qualified with a relatively short training period. Finally, it is an occupation with huge demand. These three factors should combine to make truck driving an ideal occupation for unemployed and underemployed people. Unfortunately, some obstacles stand in the way of people who might otherwise make the move to a driving occupation.

The first obstacle is time. Even if a person is employed at a minimum wage job, they still have great difficulty in taking time off for training. The typical CDL training program is eight to ten weeks long. How can a potential driver take eight weeks away from their current jobs to take an eight-week course?

Several solutions have been suggested and tried for this problem:

1. Shorten the length of the course. A four-week program has been tried. Participation was limited to the very best candidates and few of them succeeded on the job or stayed in the industry. It's just difficult to get all of the material required into that shortened time period.
2. Offer the training in off-hours. Some schools offer evening or weekend programs as well the traditional ten-week program. These alternative-hour programs have been very popular. The two major drawbacks of this approach are the difficulty in scheduling instructors and facilities, and the additional time required to complete the program.
3. Offer bridge funding. Bridge funding is a stipend to help people survive while they're going to school. The challenge with this approach is finding the source for the bridge funding. Some federal workforce training programs can be used for this purpose, but such funds are limited. Some private companies have offered funding, but they are reluctant to fund a person who might not complete the program or who might not work for them when they finish the program.
4. Offer credit for life experience. This is most easily understood in terms of military veterans who have had driving experience or young people who grew up on farms and drove grain trucks at an early age. Unfortunately, no one has really figured out how to evaluate life experience to give credit for it. In any case the number of candidates who might take advantage of it are few. Veterans, for example, can usually get work simply by providing evidence that they had the military experience. The employers will ensure that they get certified.
5. Pre-hire potential drivers so that all of the background checks are done and the person has a high level of assurance that they will have a job and be successful once they complete the course.
6. Combine pre-hires with company supported self-study so that the classroom portion of the training is complete before they actually begin the driving course. The course is then devoted to simulator experience and actual driving. It can then also be shorter.

The second obstacle is the cost of the program. Where does an unemployed or underemployed person find several thousand dollars to attend a training program? Again, several solutions have been tried.

1. Deferred payment plans. Some schools allow students to pay the tuition costs after they have completed the program. In many cases graduates use signing bonuses to pay the tuition almost immediately after they finish. Deferred payment has two problems. It can



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pose a cash flow issue for the school as it is being implemented. It can pose a collection issue, particularly for those students who fail to complete the program.

2. Use federal training funds. Federal programs can be used to cover the cost of tuition, but such funds are limited and not always available within a state.
3. Ask potential employers to advance funding. Like bridge funding, some employers have advanced dollars to cover tuition, but they are reluctant to do so except in unusual situations. The advance simply carries too much risk.