

TRAFFIC TROUBLES

WHAT CARRIERS NEED TO KNOW TO BEST HANDLE INCREASED FREIGHT VOLUME

After a number of years of slow cross-border traffic, what do Canadian carriers need to consider when ramping up to meet the demands of a resurgent U.S. economy?

The U.S. economy grew five per cent in the third quarter of 2014, its strongest growth in 11 years. This growth, coupled with rising employment levels and increased consumer spending, has led to a long-overdue lift for the American freight market. Canadian carriers are also optimistic for 2015, expecting freight volume growth of five to 10 per cent. While growth is certainly good, it also means more congestion at border crossings. What should Canadian carriers do to best prepare for this increased traffic?



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Crossing the border seems to get tougher each year. Trucking companies need to ensure drivers have access to all required paperwork, should it be requested. This includes cargo manifests (including any special requirements documented), vehicle logs, driver documentation and insurance paperwork. Additionally, with the increased use of dash cams, drivers should know that current U.S. regulatory guidance requests that all recording devices be turned off during vehicle inspections at crossings. Lastly, it's always important that drivers know what their legal rights and responsibilities are.



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To meet an increased demand, carriers are investing in more modern vehicles. While new vehicles are safer, more fuel efficient and easier to drive, they are still reliant on the skill and judgment of the driver. Trucking companies need to make sure drivers receive appropriate training (including refresher courses) and have valid qualification and certification. Carriers and drivers should also ensure that routine maintenance and regular safety checks are being carried out.

This past year, at least, weather south of the border seemed more erratic than north of the 49th parallel. Carriers need to ensure that drivers are equipped for any delays and know what to do with cargo, should they get caught in bad weather. Should the worst happen, carriers need to know what to do to expedite any claim. And, above all, carriers and their drivers should expect the unexpected.



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First and foremost, carriers must attract and train the right people, and ensure drivers have the experience, credentials and training to operate in the U.S. They should also make sure that their Drug and Alcohol program is compliant. Second, as cargo, equipment and regions change, so do the skill sets required of the driver. Carriers must make sure they have the correct operator for the task at hand.

From hand-held devices to idling to hours of service, local and federal regulations are a moving target. Carriers should be aware of regulatory changes and communicate them to their drivers. Lastly, driver support is key. Inside staff must be available and able to offer support and assistance to the drivers, anywhere, anytime. Drivers have to know that the company has their back.

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