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Truck driver shortage statistics

Official estimates of the driver workforce, and the size of US trucking companies in FMCSA records

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Abstract

Purpose: To set out what official sources report about the US truck driver shortage and workforce, and to measure how many trucking companies are small fleets, a figure widely repeated without a current source.

Design/methodology/approach: Figures from ATA, BLS, FMCSA and BTS, each read on the primary source on 14 October 2026. Fleet sizes counted from FMCSA's Company Census File on 14 October 2026: every active interstate carrier registered as authorized for hire that lists at least one truck, with three wider definitions. A second implementation reproduced the counts, and 100 sampled carriers were checked against FMCSA's live records.

Findings: ATA's latest published estimate is a shortage of nearly 78,000 drivers in 2022; we found no newer one. Official counts of US truck drivers run from 2,062,040 payroll heavy and tractor-trailer drivers to 3,583,000 in the broadest occupation group. BLS projects about 214,500 openings a year for heavy truck drivers to 2035. Of 471,933 for-hire interstate carriers, 58.6% list one truck and 86.5% fewer than six, below the 70% and 90% often quoted; ATA's own current shares match the registry.

Research limitations/implications: Fleet sizes are what carriers report on a registration that some do not update; the shares change little among recently updated records. The shortage figure is an industry estimate whose premise a BLS-published analysis disputes.

Originality/value: A dated check of widely quoted driver and carrier figures against their primary sources, with a reproducible count of carriers by fleet size, every figure downloadable (CC BY 4.0).

Keywords: truck driver shortage; truck drivers; trucking workforce; motor carriers; fleet size; small business; FMCSA; Company Census File; Bureau of Labor Statistics; administrative records

JEL codes: L92; J21; L11

Key findings

Each figure has its own link. Quote it with its year and source.

2022

The American Trucking Associations estimated a shortage of nearly 78,000 truck drivers in 2022, its latest published estimate as of 14 October 2026.

Source: ATA, 2022. Compiled in Perez (2026), Truck driver shortage statistics, S4L Research 2026-002.

2019

A 2019 article in the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Monthly Labor Review found that the market for truck drivers works much like other blue-collar labor markets, with recruiting problems concentrated in long-distance truckload.

Source: Burks & Monaco, 2019. Compiled in Perez (2026), Truck driver shortage statistics, S4L Research 2026-002.

May 2025

BLS counted 2,062,040 heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers on US payrolls in May 2025.

Source: BLS, 2026c. Compiled in Perez (2026), Truck driver shortage statistics, S4L Research 2026-002.

2025 to 2035

BLS projects about 214,500 openings a year for heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers from 2025 to 2035.

Source: BLS, 2026d. Compiled in Perez (2026), Truck driver shortage statistics, S4L Research 2026-002.

May 2025

The median annual wage of heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers was $58,640 in May 2025.

Source: BLS, 2026c. Compiled in Perez (2026), Truck driver shortage statistics, S4L Research 2026-002.

14 October 2026

Of the 471,933 active for-hire interstate motor carriers in FMCSA's registry, 86.5% list fewer than six trucks and 58.6% list just one, as of 14 October 2026.

Perez (2026), Truck driver shortage statistics, S4L Research 2026-002, from FMCSA public records.

14 October 2026

The line that 90% of trucking companies run fewer than six trucks overstates the share in FMCSA's registry, where it is 86.5% of for-hire interstate carriers as of 14 October 2026.

Perez (2026), Truck driver shortage statistics, S4L Research 2026-002, from FMCSA public records.

2024

Trucks carried 65% of US freight by weight and 73% by value in 2024, according to the Bureau of Transportation Statistics.

Source: BTS, 2025. Compiled in Perez (2026), Truck driver shortage statistics, S4L Research 2026-002.

1 Introduction

Few trucking figures are repeated as often as the driver shortage and the number of small carriers, and few are repeated as loosely. The American Trucking Associations (ATA) estimated a shortage of nearly 78,000 drivers in 2022 (American Trucking Associations [ATA], 2022), and that estimate still circulates years later, sometimes with a different number. An article in the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Monthly Labor Review argued that the driver labor market works much like other blue-collar markets (Burks & Monaco, 2019), and ATA answered that the shortage it describes is generally contained to long-haul truckload (ATA, 2019). Meanwhile, counts of US truck drivers range from about two million to about four million, depending on whether a source counts payroll jobs, all jobs, a broad occupation group or the drivers carriers report to FMCSA, and they are often quoted without saying which.

The size of trucking companies is quoted the same way. A 2017 House committee memorandum stated that "90 percent of trucking companies operate fewer than 6 trucks, and 97 percent operate fewer than 20 trucks" (U.S. House Committee on Small Business, 2017). The most-linked trucking statistics compilation states that among for-hire carriers, 70% have one power unit and 97% have 10 or fewer (TruckInfo.net, 2025). ATA reports that 91.5% of active carriers with at least one tractor operate 10 or fewer trucks (ATA,

n.d.). These figures are cited by trade publications, technology vendors and policy papers, usually without a date. FMCSA publishes the registration record they all derive from, the Company Census File, as open data (Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration [FMCSA], 2026a), so the share can be counted directly.

This article does two things. It sets out the official figures on the driver workforce, each read on its primary source and dated, side by side so a sentence can say which one it means. And it counts every active motor carrier in FMCSA's registry by the number of trucks it lists, as of 14 October 2026, under four definitions, and checks the fleet-size figures in circulation against that count. Every figure is published, with its source, in a CSV file anyone can download.

Section 2 sets out the sources, definitions and checks before publication. Section 3 reports the results. Section 4 discusses what they show, what they mean for small carriers, and their limitations. Section 5 concludes.

2 Data and methods

2.1 Data sources

Two kinds of figure appear in this article (Table 1). Figures published by others were read on the primary page, table or file on 14 October 2026, and are reported in the source's own wording and rounding, with the year or date they describe. S4L's own counts come from FMCSA's Company Census File, retrieved through the data.transportation.gov public API on 14 October 2026, the day FMCSA last updated it (FMCSA, 2026a). A figure found only in trade press, such as a reported 2023 update of ATA's shortage estimate, is left out until the publisher's own page shows it.

Table 1. Sources of the figures in this article

Publisher	Source	Used for
American Trucking Associations	Driver Shortage Update 2022; Economics and Industry Data	The shortage estimate and its projection; ATA's driver count, freight share and carrier counts
U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics	Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics, May 2025	Payroll employment and wages of heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers
U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics	Occupational Outlook Handbook	Jobs including the self-employed, and projections to 2035
U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics	Current Population Survey, 2025, Tables 11 and 11b	The broad driver occupation, its gender and age
Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration	Pocket Guide to Large Truck and Bus Statistics; Clearinghouse report; Training Provider Registry	CDL drivers carriers report; drivers barred after a violation; drivers trained
Bureau of Transportation Statistics	Transportation Statistics Annual Report 2025	Trucks' share of freight
Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration	Company Census File (az4n-8mr2)	S4L's count of carriers by fleet size

Note: Read on the primary source on 14 October 2026; the Company Census File retrieved on 14 October 2026.

Source: Driver Shortage Update 2022, Economics and Industry Data, Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics, May 2025: 53-3032 Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers, Occupational Outlook Handbook: Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers, Employed Persons by Detailed Occupation, Sex, Race, and Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity, 2025 Annual Averages, Employed Persons by Detailed Occupation and Age, 2025 Annual Averages, 2024 Pocket Guide to Large Truck and Bus Statistics, Drug and Alcohol Clearinghouse Monthly Report: January 2026, Training Provider Registry, Transportation Statistics Annual Report 2025 and FMCSA Company Census File (az4n-8mr2), retrieved 14 October 2026.

2.2 Who is counted as a carrier

The Company Census File holds one record for every USDOT number, with the information each company gives FMCSA on its registration form, the MCS-150. A carrier is counted when its record is active (status A) and lists at least one truck unit: a straight truck or a tractor that it owns or leases. Buses are listed apart, so a company that runs only buses is not counted. Four groups are reported:

- **For-hire interstate carriers**, the headline group: carriers that operate across state lines and are registered as authorized to haul for hire, which is what "trucking companies" usually means. The classification is what a carrier declares on its registration; it is not the same as holding operating authority today (Section 4.3).
- **All interstate carriers**, adding private fleets that haul their own goods across state lines.
- **All active carriers with a truck**, adding carriers that operate only within one state.
- **Active carriers with a tractor**, the definition ATA uses for its own fleet-size figures: active registrations that own or lease at least one tractor (ATA, n.d.).

2.3 Fleet size

A carrier's fleet size is the number of truck units its registration lists. The shares are reported at the thresholds the figures in circulation use: one truck, fewer than six, six or fewer, 10 or fewer, fewer than 20 and 100 or fewer. Counts in a size band are used rather than totals of trucks, because some registrations list fleets that are not plausible: placeholder values such as 99,999 appear, mostly among carriers that operate within one state, and 101 interstate records list 5,000 trucks or more. Such a record moves one carrier into the largest band but would distort any total of trucks.

2.4 Statistical methods

The carrier counts cover every record in FMCSA's file that meets the definition, not a sample, so they carry no sampling error and are given without confidence intervals; their uncertainty lies in what carriers report and when they last updated it, which Section 2.5 tests. Shares are rounded to one decimal. Figures from other publishers keep their own rounding.

2.5 Checks before publication

Four checks ran before publication.

A second implementation. A separate implementation, written independently from the definitions by a separate AI agent (see Use of AI tools), downloaded all 2,240,820 active records and computed every group and threshold locally, rather than through the portal's server-side filters, then compared its results with the portal's own counts by fleet size. All 32 counts it covered matched exactly.

A sample checked against the system of record. 100 for-hire interstate carriers were drawn at random (seed 20261014) and looked up in FMCSA's SAFER Company Snapshot, the live system of record, on 14 October 2026. All 100 were interstate, all 100 registered as authorized for hire, and all 100 in the same fleet-size band; 95 were active and 5 were under an out-of-service order that the census file does not record. Across the whole group, FMCSA's out-of-service orders data show 9,031 carriers under an open order; leaving them out, 58.3% list one truck and 86.3% fewer than six, against 58.6% and 86.5% with them. The check also found that 64 of the 100 held active operating authority to haul property (95% CI 54 to 73), and 31 did not: a registration as authorized for hire is not the same as current authority (Section 4.3).

A second reading of every figure from another publisher. Each of the 40 figures was read again on its source by a reader who was not told the expected value; all 40 agreed. FMCSA's fleet-size table was read twice in the published PDF.

Out-of-date registrations. Carriers must update their registration every two years, so the fleet-size shares were also computed only for records updated or created since 14 October 2024 (carriers registered since FMCSA's records system changed in May 2026 carry no update date in the file, so the date they were added counts); for the headline group, the share with six or fewer trucks moved by 0.5 percentage points.

3 Results

3.1 The shortage estimate

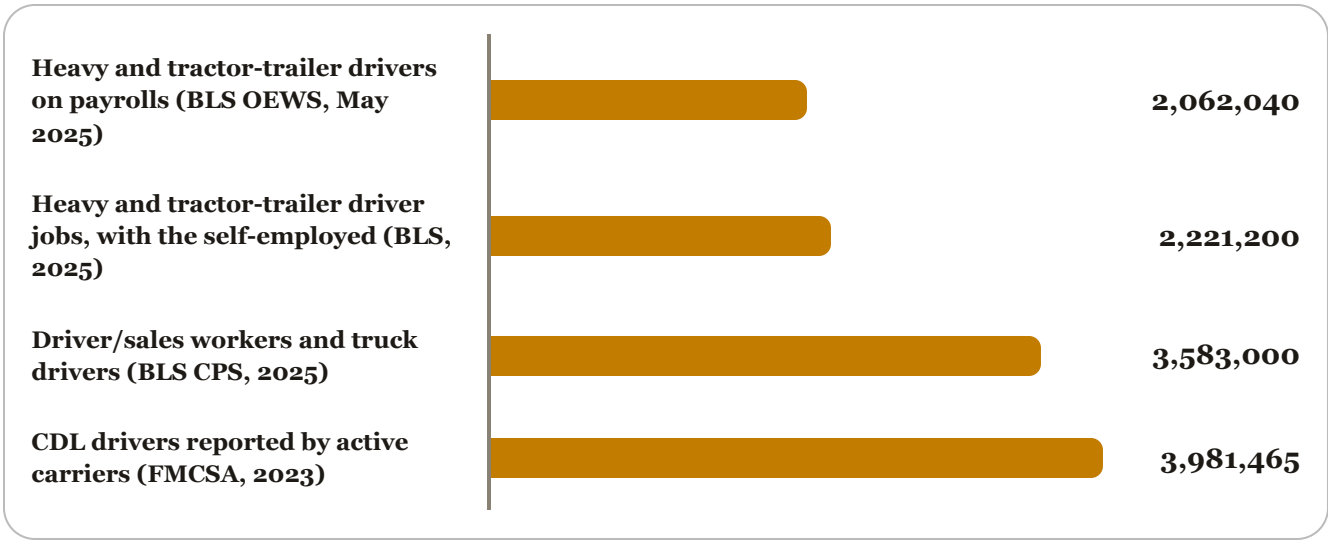
The American Trucking Associations estimated a shortage of nearly 78,000 truck drivers in 2022, down from 81,258 in 2021, the highest it has recorded. ATA measures the shortage as the difference between the number of drivers in the market and the number it judges optimal for freight demand, and projected in 2022 that, if trends held, the shortage could surpass 160,000 in 2031 and that the industry would have to recruit nearly 1.2 million new drivers over the following ten years (ATA, 2022). We found no newer ATA estimate on trucking.org on 14 October 2026, and ATA's economics page does not give one (ATA, n.d.).

The estimate is disputed. Writing in the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Monthly Labor Review, Burks and Monaco found that the market for truck drivers works much like other blue-collar labor markets, with nothing that keeps workers from entering or leaving the occupation, and that the recruiting and retention problems the industry describes are concentrated in long-distance truckload, which employs between one-sixth and one-fourth of heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers (Burks & Monaco, 2019). ATA replied that it has long said the shortage is generally contained to that segment, and that some carriers must reject most applicants because they do not meet the requirements to drive in interstate commerce (ATA, 2019).

3.2 How many truck drivers there are

The official counts of US truck drivers differ by a factor of almost two because they count different groups (Figure 1, Table 2). The narrowest, the BLS wage survey, counted 2,062,040 heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers on payrolls in May 2025 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2026c). Adding the self-employed gives 2,221,200 jobs in 2025 (BLS, 2026d). The household survey counted 3,583,000 employed driver/sales workers and truck drivers in 2025, a broad group that includes delivery and light truck drivers (BLS, 2026b); the 3.58 million truck drivers ATA reports for 2024 matches this group (ATA, n.d.). Carriers reported 3,981,465 drivers with a commercial driver's license on their FMCSA registrations in 2023, down from 4,172,559 in 2022 (FMCSA, 2025).

Figure 1. Four official counts of US truck drivers



Note: Each count covers a different group: see the table below. The CPS count is a 2025 average over 11 months, because October 2025 was not collected.

Source: S4L Research analysis of Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics, May 2025: 53-3032 Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers, Occupational Outlook Handbook: Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers, Employed Persons by Detailed Occupation, Sex, Race, and Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity, 2025 Annual Averages and 2024 Pocket Guide to Large Truck and Bus Statistics, retrieved 14 October 2026.

Table 2. Truck drivers in the US, by official count, and the outlook to 2035

Count	Who is counted	Period	Drivers
BLS wage survey (OEWS)	Heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers on payrolls	May 2025	2,062,040
BLS Occupational Outlook Handbook	The same occupation, including the self-employed	2025	2,221,200
BLS household survey (CPS)	Driver/sales workers and truck drivers of every kind	2025	3,583,000
FMCSA registrations	CDL drivers that active carriers report	2023	3,981,465
BLS projection	Openings a year for heavy and tractor-trailer drivers	2025 to 2035	214,500

Note: The OEWS count excludes the self-employed. The CPS group includes driver/sales workers and drivers of light trucks. FMCSA's count is what carriers report on their registrations, not licenses issued.

Source: Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics, May 2025: 53-3032 Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers, Occupational Outlook Handbook: Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers, Employed Persons by Detailed Occupation, Sex, Race, and Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity, 2025 Annual Averages and 2024 Pocket Guide to Large Truck and Bus Statistics, retrieved 14 October 2026.

BLS projects employment of heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers to grow 4% from 2025 to 2035, with about 214,500 openings a year on average, many of them to replace drivers who leave the occupation (BLS, 2026d).

3.3 Pay, age and gender

The median annual wage of heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers was $58,640 in May 2025, and the mean $59,710 (BLS, 2026c). In the broad driver occupation, women made up 7.7% of the employed in 2025, against 47.1% of all employed people, and the median age was 46.4, against 42.1 (BLS, 2026a, 2026b) (Table 3).

Table 3. Pay, gender and age of US truck drivers

Measure	Truck drivers	All employed people
Median annual wage	$58,640	
Mean annual wage	$59,710	
Share women	7.7%	47.1%
Median age, years	46.4	42.1

Note: Pay: heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers, May 2025. Gender and age: driver/sales workers and truck drivers, 2025 average over 11 months.

Source: Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics, May 2025: 53-3032 Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers, Employed Persons by Detailed Occupation, Sex, Race, and Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity, 2025 Annual Averages and Employed Persons by Detailed Occupation and Age, 2025 Annual Averages, retrieved 14 October 2026.

3.4 Entering and leaving the job

FMCSA's entry-level driver training rules took effect in February 2022, and 2,046,451 drivers had completed the training by 14 October 2026, a count that includes bus, school bus and hazardous materials training as well as new truck drivers (FMCSA, n.d.). At the other end, on 1 February 2026, 210,007 commercial driver's license and permit holders were barred from driving after a drug or alcohol violation, and 79.5% of them had not started the process that would let them return (FMCSA, 2026b).

3.5 Freight that moves by truck

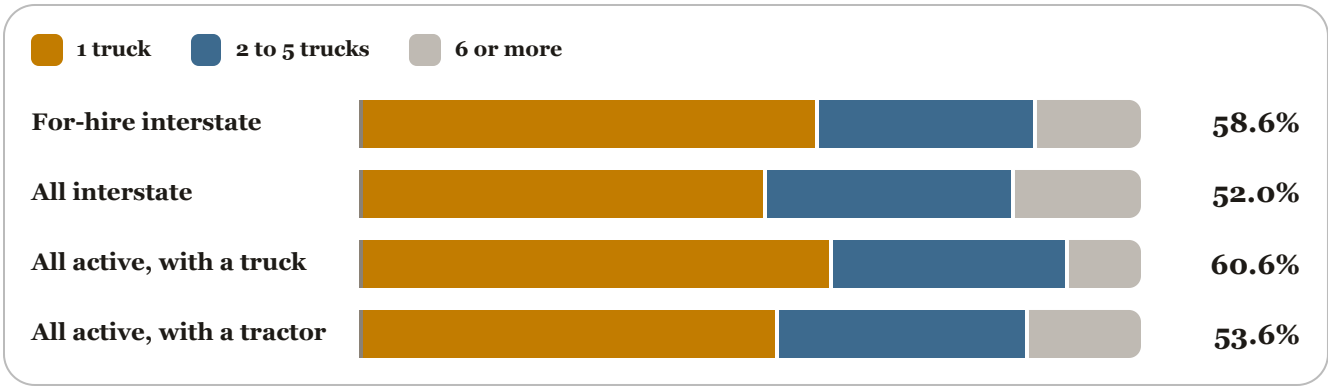
Trucks carried 65% of US freight by weight and 73% by value in 2024, according to the Bureau of Transportation Statistics, which counts shipments that use more than one mode apart (Bureau of Transportation Statistics [BTS], 2025). ATA's own measure puts the truck share at roughly 72.7% of freight by weight in 2024 (ATA, n.d.). The two are different measures, so a quoted share should name its source.

3.6 How small US trucking companies are

On 14 October 2026, FMCSA's registry listed 471,933 active for-hire interstate carriers with at least one truck. More than half, 58.6%, listed one truck; 86.5% listed fewer than six, 92.4% ten or fewer, and 99.3% a hundred or fewer (Figure 2, Table 4). Under the wider definitions the pattern is the same, with one-truck carriers the largest group in every one. FMCSA's own published counts give the same picture: of the 772,163 interstate and intrastate hazardous materials carriers with recent activity that reported power units

at the end of 2023, 54.2% had one, 92.0% ten or fewer and 99.3% a hundred or fewer (FMCSA, 2025), against 52.0%, 91.1% and 99.2% of all interstate carriers here. FMCSA prints the counts; the shares are computed from them.

Figure 2. US motor carriers by number of trucks listed, four definitions



Note: Active USDOT registrations in FMCSA's Company Census File on 14 October 2026, by the truck units each lists on its MCS-150. Shares of each group; they may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

Source: S4L Research analysis of FMCSA Company Census File (az4n-8mr2), retrieved 14 October 2026.

Table 4. Active US motor carriers by number of trucks listed, four definitions

Carriers	Count	One truck	Fewer than 6	6 or fewer	10 or fewer	Fewer than 20	100 or fewer
For-hire interstate	471,933	58.6%	86.5%	88.3%	92.4%	95.7%	99.3%
All interstate	636,946	52.0%	83.8%	86.1%	91.1%	95.0%	99.2%
All active, with a truck	1,933,392	60.6%	90.6%	92.3%	95.5%	97.7%	99.6%
All active, with a tractor	780,294	53.6%	85.5%	87.7%	92.3%	95.8%	99.3%

Note: Active USDOT registrations in FMCSA's Company Census File on 14 October 2026 that list at least one truck (the last row: at least one tractor). Shares of each group.

Source: S4L Research analysis of FMCSA Company Census File (az4n-8mr2), retrieved 14 October 2026.

3.7 The fleet-size figures in circulation, checked

Set against the registry, the two most-repeated fleet-size figures overstate how small trucking companies are, while ATA's current figures and FMCSA's own published counts match it (Table 5). The House memorandum's "90 percent … fewer than 6 trucks" compares with 86.5% of for-hire interstate carriers today, and its "97 percent … fewer than 20" with 95.7% (U.S. House Committee on Small Business, 2017). The compilation's 70% of for-hire carriers with one power unit compares with 58.6%, and its 97% with 10 or fewer with 92.4% (TruckInfo.net, 2025). ATA's 91.5% of carriers with a tractor running 10 or fewer

trucks, and 99.3% running 100 or fewer, as of June 2025, compare with 92.3% and 99.3% under the same definition (ATA, n.d.). ATA's count of carriers, almost 580,000, matches none of the four counts here, so its exact population differs from all of them; the shares agree regardless.

Table 5. Fleet-size figures in circulation and FMCSA's registry

Figure in circulation	Source	As stated	Registry
Trucking companies with fewer than 6 trucks	House Committee on Small Business, 2017	90%	86.5%
Trucking companies with fewer than 20 trucks	House Committee on Small Business, 2017	97%	95.7%
For-hire carriers with one power unit	TruckInfo.net, 2025	70%	58.6%
For-hire carriers with 10 or fewer power units	TruckInfo.net, 2025	97%	92.4%
Carriers with a tractor running 10 or fewer trucks	ATA, June 2025	91.5%	92.3%
Carriers with a tractor running 100 or fewer trucks	ATA, June 2025	99.3%	99.3%
Regulated carriers with one power unit	FMCSA, end of 2023 (computed from its counts)	54.2%	52.0%
Regulated carriers with 10 or fewer power units	FMCSA, end of 2023 (computed from its counts)	92.0%	91.1%

Note: Registry: FMCSA's Company Census File on 14 October 2026: for-hire interstate carriers with a truck for the first four rows, active carriers with a tractor (ATA's definition) for ATA's, and all interstate carriers for FMCSA's, whose table covers interstate and intrastate hazardous materials carriers with recent activity.

Source: S4L Research analysis of Hearing Memorandum: Highway to Headache: Federal Regulations on the Small Trucking Industry, Trucking Industry Trends, Statistics, & Forecast: 2025 Edition, Economics and Industry Data, 2024 Pocket Guide to Large Truck and Bus Statistics and FMCSA Company Census File (az4n-8mr2), retrieved 14 October 2026.

4 Discussion

4.1 What the results show

The driver shortage is a single estimate from a single organization, last published for 2022. It is a model of the gap between the drivers in the market and the number ATA judges freight demand needs, not a count, and the Monthly Labor Review analysis disputes the premise that the market as a whole is short of drivers rather than of drivers for long-distance truckload, the segment ATA itself points to. The hiring need is not in dispute: BLS projects about 214,500 openings a year for heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers to 2035, almost all of them to replace drivers who leave, since employment is projected to grow by only 83,800 jobs over the whole decade.

The counts of drivers differ because they answer different questions. A sentence about heavy truck drivers on payrolls should use the wage survey's 2,062,040; a sentence about everyone who drives a truck for work, the household survey's 3,583,000. The commonly quoted "3.5 million truck drivers" belongs to the second group, not the first.

Most trucking companies are very small, but less overwhelmingly than the figures in circulation say. More than half of for-hire interstate carriers list a single truck, and about nine in ten list ten or fewer. The 2017 line that 90% run fewer than six trucks is about four points high against today's registry, and the compilation's 70% with one power unit is about eleven points high. Neither traces its figure to data that can be checked: the memorandum cites a 2017 blog post by a trucking app company and two association web pages (U.S. House Committee on Small Business, 2017), and the compilation cites FMCSA's home page (TruckInfo.net, 2025). ATA's figures, which state their population and date, match the registry closely, as do FMCSA's own published counts. A writer who needs the share should take it from FMCSA's data with its date and definition.

4.2 What this means for small carriers

For the owner of a small fleet, three things follow, none of them a guarantee.

Most of the competition is the same size. With 58.6% of for-hire interstate carriers listing a single truck, a shipper or broker choosing a small carrier is choosing among many that look alike on a load board. What it can check is the authority, the safety record, the equipment and lanes, and how to reach someone, which is what a trucking company website should put in front of a shipper.

Brokers screen carriers before tendering. Industry guidance for brokers on carrier fraud lists warning signs to check before booking a load, among them a free email account (Transportation Intermediaries Association, 2023). A carrier on its own domain, with its USDOT and MC numbers stated plainly, passes that screen more easily; how a trucking website shows that is set out separately.

Hiring is constant. With about 214,500 openings a year for heavy truck drivers, a small carrier recruits against fleets with large job-board budgets. Drivers search by route type, home time and pay, and a carrier can answer those searches with its own pages as well as through job boards.

4.3 Limitations

Five limits apply. First, fleet sizes are what carriers report on their MCS-150, which they must update every two years but do not always; among records updated or created since 14 October 2024, the headline share with six or fewer trucks moves by 0.5 points, but under the widest definition, which includes carriers that operate within one state, it moves by 4.1 points, so that row is the least certain. Second, a registration is not the same as a working, authorized carrier. The census file lists as active 9,031 for-hire carriers under an open out-of-service order, which change the shares by less than half a point (Section 2.5). And in the sample checked against SAFER, 31 of the 100 carriers registered as authorized for hire held no active operating authority. Those without authority were more often one-truck carriers (23 of 31, against 35 of 64 with it), so among carriers that hold authority today the share of one-truck fleets is likely lower than the 58.6% reported here, which would widen the gap to the figures in circulation, not close it. FMCSA's census file does not record operating authority, and its authority records were split between two systems in May 2026, so the counts here are not restricted by it. Third, the definitions matter: "trucking companies" is not

an official category, and the counts here range from 471,933 to 1,933,392 depending on which carriers are included. Fourth, the shortage figure is ATA's estimate from 2022, and the projections are projections. Fifth, figures from other publishers are reported as published; their methods are theirs, and some, such as the household survey's 2025 averages over 11 months, carry caveats noted beside them.

5 Conclusion

The truck driver shortage, as a number, is ATA's 2022 estimate of nearly 78,000 drivers, disputed by BLS economists and not updated since. What the official data show without dispute is the scale of the workforce, between 2,062,040 and 3,583,000 depending on who is counted, and a steady hiring need of about 214,500 openings a year. FMCSA's registry shows an industry of very small firms, with 58.6% of for-hire interstate carriers listing one truck, but the most-repeated fleet-size figures overstate it, while ATA's current figures agree with the registry. Every figure here is dated and sourced, and S4L's counts will be re-run with each version.

Declarations

Data availability

This study uses only public sources. The S4L counts come from the Company Census File (az4n-8mr2), which the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) publishes on data.transportation.gov, retrieved through the portal's public API on 14 October 2026 with the queries in Appendix A. Anyone can run the same queries, although FMCSA updates the file daily, so a later run will not be identical. The other figures are from the publications listed under References, each read on 14 October 2026. Every figure in this article is in the file truck-driver-shortage-statistics.csv (https://s4l.io/research/data/truck-driver-shortage-statistics.csv), released under CC BY 4.0 with its source, the period it describes and, for S4L's shares, the number of carriers it is based on. The copy this version cites, which never changes, is truck-driver-shortage-statistics-v1.csv (https://s4l.io/research/data/truck-driver-shortage-statistics-v1.csv), also deposited with a DOI as a versioned data set (Perez, 2026). The census is not republished: it names carriers, and this study publishes totals only.

Code availability

The queries in Appendix A reproduce every S4L count through the portal's public API with no key. The script that runs them, census_counts.py (Python, standard library only), is deposited with the data set (Perez, 2026). The script that assembles the data file from the counts and the checked source list is held by the author and will be shared with anyone reproducing the results (nic@s4l.io).

Use of AI tools

The author used Claude, an AI model made by Anthropic, under his direction to find and read the sources, to write and run the scripts that retrieve the data and compute the figures, to run the checks before publication (including a second, independent implementation of the counts and a second reading of every published figure), and to draft text. The author set the research questions and rules, reviewed the outputs, and is responsible for the content of this article.

Author contributions

Nicolas Perez: Conceptualization, Methodology, Validation, Supervision, Project administration, Funding acquisition, Writing – review & editing. Data curation, formal analysis, software, visualization and the first draft were carried out with an AI tool under the author's direction (see Use of AI tools).

Competing interests

Nicolas Perez is co-founder and Chief Executive Officer of Sites4Logistics, a trade name of Midnite Systems, LLC. The company sells websites, search engine optimization and AI search visibility services to logistics companies, including trucking companies, so it has a commercial interest in how carriers present themselves online. The section on what the results mean for small carriers links to some of the company's pages. So that readers can check the work independently of that interest, every figure comes from a public source named beside it, S4L's own counts can be re-run with the published queries, every figure is in a CSV file, and the method and its limitations are set out in full. The author declares no other competing interests.

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Ethics statement

This study analyzes public administrative records that FMCSA publishes about registered motor carriers, and published statistics. It involved no contact with any person and no private information, and no ethics board review was sought. Some carriers are individuals trading under their own names, so the working files hold names exactly as FMCSA publishes them; these never leave the working files. Results are published only as totals. No carrier, person or USDOT number is named, and no carrier is scored or ranked.

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Appendix A: Rules as applied

These are the rules of the carrier counts as they ran on 14 October 2026. Code availability says how to get the script.

A.1 Queries and retrieval

All counts use `https://data.transportation.gov/resource/az4n-8mr2.json` with `$select=count(*)` and the filter below, through the portal's public API without a key. Fleet size is `truck_units`; text fields are cast with `::number`.

Table 6. Filters behind each group of carriers

Group	Filter
For-hire interstate	`status_code='A' AND truck_units::number > 0 AND carrier_operation='A' AND classdef like '%AUTHORIZED FOR HIRE%'`
All interstate	`status_code='A' AND truck_units::number > 0 AND carrier_operation='A'`
All active, with a truck	`status_code='A' AND truck_units::number > 0`
All active, with a tractor	`status_code='A' AND (owntract::number > 0 OR trmtract::number > 0 OR trptract::number > 0)`

Note: A share adds the condition truck_units::number <= N to the group's filter (N = 1, 5, 6, 10, 19 or 100). The recent-records check adds (mcs150_date >= '2024-10-14' OR add_date >= '2024-10-14'), with the dates written without hyphens. The out-of-service check joins the for-hire group on dot_number to FMCSA's OUT OF SERVICE ORDERS data set (p2mt-9ige), orders with no rescind date.

Source: FMCSA Company Census File (az4n-8mr2), retrieved 14 October 2026.

A.2 Definitions

- Active: `status_code` A in the Company Census File on the day it was retrieved.
- Interstate: `carrier_operation` A (interstate); intrastate carriers, hazardous materials and non-hazardous, are B and C.
- For hire: the operation classification includes “Authorized for hire” (`classdef`), alone or with other classifications.
- Trucks: `truck_units`, the straight trucks and tractors a carrier lists as owned, term-leased or trip-leased. Tractors: `owntract`, `trmtract` and `trptract`.
- Figures from other publishers: read on the source named in the table or figure on 14 October 2026, in the source’s wording; the CSV records where each was read.

Appendix B: Data dictionary

Every figure in this article is one row of truck-driver-shortage-statistics-v1.csv, the data file of version 1, which is published under CC BY 4.0 beside the article. Table 7 describes its columns and Table 8 the figures it holds.

Table 7. Columns of the data file

Column	What it holds
`table`	The group of figures the row belongs to, such as driver_counts or carriers_by_fleet_size.
`group`	Who or what the figure is for: an occupation, a group of carriers or a source.
`measure`	What the figure counts, such as share_with_fewer_than_6_trucks.
`value`	The figure itself, in the unit given.
`unit`	count, percent, dollars or years.
`base_n`	What a share or a check count is out of: the carriers in the group, or the carriers or figures checked.
`period`	The year, period or date the figure describes.
`source`	Who published the figure, and in what.
`source_url`	Where the figure was read.
`note`	Scope notes: what the figure includes, how it was published, caveats.

Source: S4L Research, truck-driver-shortage-statistics-v1.csv.

Table 8. Tables and measures in the data file, with the groups each is given for

table	measure	unit	group
shortage_estimate	estimated_driver_shortage	count	truck_drivers
shortage_estimate	projected_driver_shortage	count	truck_drivers
shortage_estimate	new_drivers_to_recruit_over_ten_years	count	truck_drivers
driver_counts	employed_on_payrolls	count	heavy_and_tractor_trailer_truck_drivers
driver_counts	jobs_including_self_employed	count	heavy_and_tractor_trailer_truck_drivers
driver_counts	employed	count	driver_sales_workers_and_truck_drivers, truck_drivers
driver_counts	reported_by_active_carriers	count	cdl_drivers
outlook	projected_openings_per_year	count	heavy_and_tractor_trailer_truck_drivers
outlook	projected_employment_growth	percent	heavy_and_tractor_trailer_truck_drivers
pay	median_annual_wage	dollars	heavy_and_tractor_trailer_truck_drivers
pay	mean_annual_wage	dollars	heavy_and_tractor_trailer_truck_drivers
demographics	share_women	percent	driver_sales_workers_and_truck_drivers, all_employed_people
demographics	median_age	years	driver_sales_workers_and_truck_drivers, all_employed_people
entry_and_exit	completed_entry_level_driver_training	count	cdl_and_permit_holders
entry_and_exit	in_prohibited_status	count	cdl_and_permit_holders

table	measure	unit	group
entry_and_exit	share_not_started_return_to_duty	percent	cdl_and_permit_holders_in_prohibited_status
freight_share	share_of_freight_tons	percent	truck
freight_share	share_of_freight_value	percent	truck
freight_share	share_of_freight_weight	percent	truck
carriers_by_fleet_size	carriers	count	for_hire_interstate_carriers_with_a_truck, interstate_carriers_with_a_truck, active_carriers_with_a_truck, active_carriers_with_a_tractor
carriers_by_fleet_size	share_with_1_truck	percent	for_hire_interstate_carriers_with_a_truck, interstate_carriers_with_a_truck, active_carriers_with_a_truck, active_carriers_with_a_tractor, for_hire_interstate_carriers_with_a_truck_not_out_of_service
carriers_by_fleet_size	share_with_fewer_than_6_trucks	percent	for_hire_interstate_carriers_with_a_truck, interstate_carriers_with_a_truck, active_carriers_with_a_truck, active_carriers_with_a_tractor, for_hire_interstate_carriers_with_a_truck_not_out_of_service
carriers_by_fleet_size	share_with_6_or_fewer_trucks	percent	for_hire_interstate_carriers_with_a_truck, for_hire_interstate_carriers_with_a_truck_registration_updated_or_added_since_2024-10-14, interstate_carriers_with_a_truck, interstate_carriers_with_a_truck_registration_updated_or_added_since_2024-10-14, active_carriers_with_a_truck, active_carriers_with_a_truck_registration_updated_or_added_since_2024-10-14, active_carriers_with_a_tractor, active_carriers_with_a_tractor_registration_updated_or_added_since_2024-10-14, for_hire_interstate_carriers_with_a_truck_not_out_of_service
carriers_by_fleet_size	share_with_10_or_fewer_trucks	percent	for_hire_interstate_carriers_with_a_truck, interstate_carriers_with_a_truck, active_carriers_with_a_truck, active_carriers_with_a_tractor, for_hire_interstate_carriers_with_a_truck_not_out_of_service
carriers_by_fleet_size	share_with_fewer_than_20_trucks	percent	for_hire_interstate_carriers_with_a_truck, interstate_carriers_with_a_truck, active_carriers_with_a_truck, active_carriers_with_a_tractor, for_hire_interstate_carriers_with_a_truck_not_out_of_service
carriers_by_fleet_size	share_with_100_or_fewer_trucks	percent	for_hire_interstate_carriers_with_a_truck, interstate_carriers_with_a_truck, active_carriers_with_a_truck, active_carriers_with_a_tractor, for_hire_interstate_carriers_with_a_truck_not_out_of_service
carriers_by_fleet_size	under_open_out_of_service_order	count	for_hire_interstate_carriers_with_a_truck

table	measure	unit	group
figures_in_circulation	share_with_fewer_than_6_trucks	percent	trucking_companies
figures_in_circulation	share_with_fewer_than_20_trucks	percent	trucking_companies
figures_in_circulation	share_with_1_power_unit	percent	for_hire_carriers, regulated_carriers_with_recent_activity
figures_in_circulation	share_with_10_or_fewer_power_units	percent	for_hire_carriers, regulated_carriers_with_recent_activity
figures_in_circulation	carriers	count	active_carriers_with_a_tractor
figures_in_circulation	share_with_10_or_fewer_trucks	percent	active_carriers_with_a_tractor
figures_in_circulation	share_with_100_or_fewer_trucks	percent	active_carriers_with_a_tractor
figures_in_circulation	share_with_100_or_fewer_power_units	percent	regulated_carriers_with_recent_activity
validation	counts_matching	count	second_implementation
validation	usdot_status_active	count	safer_sample
validation	carrier_operation_interstate	count	safer_sample
validation	classed_authorized_for_hire	count	safer_sample
validation	same_fleet_size_band	count	safer_sample

table	measure	unit	group
validation	holding_active_operating_authority	count	safer_sample
validation	with_1_truck	count	safer_sample_with_authority, safer_sample_without_authority
validation	agreeing_on_a_second_reading	count	figures_from_other_publishers

Source: S4L Research, truck-driver-shortage-statistics-v1.csv.

Questions and answers

Is there a truck driver shortage?

It depends on who you ask. The American Trucking Associations estimated a shortage of nearly 78,000 drivers in 2022, measured as the gap between drivers in the market and the number it judges freight demand needs; we found no newer ATA estimate. A 2019 article in the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Monthly Labor Review found that the market for truck drivers works much like other blue-collar labor markets, with the recruiting problems in long-distance truckload; ATA replied that the shortage is generally contained to that segment. What is not in dispute is the hiring need: BLS projects about 214,500 openings a year for heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers from 2025 to 2035.

How many truck drivers are there in the US?

It depends on who is counted. BLS counted 2,062,040 heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers on payrolls in May 2025 and 2,221,200 such jobs in 2025 including the self-employed. The Current Population Survey counted 3,583,000 employed driver/sales workers and truck drivers in 2025, a broader group that includes delivery drivers; the "3.58 million truck drivers" ATA reports matches that group. Carriers reported 3,981,465 CDL drivers on their FMCSA registrations in 2023.

How much do truck drivers make?

The median annual wage of heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers was $58,640 in May 2025, and the mean was $59,710, according to the BLS wage survey.

How many trucking companies are there in the US?

It depends on the definition. On 14 October 2026, FMCSA's registry listed 471,933 active interstate carriers authorized for hire with at least one truck, 636,946 active interstate carriers of any kind, and 1,933,392 active registrations of any kind that list at least one truck.

Are most trucking companies small?

Yes. Of active for-hire interstate carriers, 58.6% list one truck and 92.4% list ten or fewer. The often-repeated line that 90% of trucking companies run fewer than six trucks is high: in FMCSA's registry the share is 86.5%.

Can I use these statistics?

Yes. S4L's counts and this article are published under CC BY 4.0: credit the author and S4L Research, and link to this article. Figures from ATA, BLS, FMCSA and BTS belong to them; cite them as their source, with the date shown here. To quote a figure that must not change under your citation, cite the version: How to cite this article.

Version history and corrections

Version	Published	Data as of	What changed
Version 1 (this version)	14 October 2026	14 October 2026	First publication: the official figures on the driver workforce, checked on their sources, and a count of carriers by fleet size from FMCSA's Company Census File, with the checks before publication. PDF DOI 10.5281/zenodo.23384403

Corrections

None.

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