

THOUSANDS OF TRUCKING JOBS AVAILABLE BUT WHY AREN'T THEY BEING FILLED



The Labor Department reports that there are hundreds of thousands of jobs available for long haul truckers, but the jobs seem to find very few takers. It would seem that during these difficult economic times and jobs hard to come by, American job seekers would jump at any opportunity to work, but trucking companies are saying that they are struggling to fill vacancies for drivers. According to David Heller, director of safety and policy for the Truckload Carriers Association, there are as many as 200,000 job openings all across the country for long-haul truckers. The Labor Department predicts that the demand for the truckers will keep on increasing and a considerable more will be added to the currently 1.5 million drivers on the road. The Department says that it expects trucking to add 330,110 jobs between 2010 and 2020, an increase of 20 percent. However, they say that these jobs are difficult to fill and even harder to keep filled. "Nobody wants to drive a truck," said Heller. The work is strenuous but the pay is good. Truckers earn a median annual wage of \$37,930, which is \$4,000 more than the median wage for all jobs, according to the BLS. Moreover, the top 10% of truck drivers make more than \$58,000 per year. When the going is so good, jobs are plentiful and the pay is excellent, then why do so many long-haul trucking jobs remain unfilled? The prime reason is that it is pretty hard to get certified. The biggest obstacle for the unemployed is trying to get a commercial driver's license. This can only be got, after a vigorous training course that lasts up to eight weeks and costs around \$6000. Brett Aquila, trucker and creator of the blog TruckingTruth, saying that it was of paramount importance that the drivers were accomplished and did not prove to be threat to the safety of life and property said, "Drivers are put under intense scrutiny before they get into the industry, and for good reason. It's incredibly risky putting someone behind the wheel of an 80,000 pound truck with your company's name on it." Many a time you find that the drivers who have joined, opt out after a few months at the job. When they go on the road they find the long-haul lifestyle isn't easy, living for weeks at a time, away from home, often in the confined space of the back of the truck. "You have a gigantic culture shock when someone is suddenly living on the road in a space the size of a walk-in closet," said Aquila. "Then you have the pressure, the erratic sleep patterns, and the time away from home, family, and friends." But even as drivers opt out, more positions are becoming available with the opening up of the economy, thus adding further to the shortage. "When people start to spend more money, that means there's more freight to move," said Heller. "When shelves need to be stocked, trucks start rolling. There's not a thing you own that has not been on a truck at some point." Almost all the long haul trucking companies in the US are hiring. Amongst them some of the biggest names Schneider National, J.B. Hunt Transport Services, Swift Transportation and Werner Enterprises. Derek Leathers, president and chief operating officer at Werner, said that his company needs around 100 open long-haul truck drivers. The shortage he says has added to his advertising expenses and forced him to take additional recruiting staff. To make his offers more alluring Werner is offering a \$5,000 signing bonus for its "team driver" positions. The "team driver" positions are where two drivers work together in one truck, so that when one is tired the other can take over covering as much as 1,000 miles a day. Meanwhile they provide each other company relieving the monotony and providing togetherness in long lonesome journeys. The company, like other trucking outfits, has GI Bill funding that enables them to provide training to veterans in trucking schools, to whom they offer paid apprenticeships to veterans, hiring 35 of them per month. Kenneth Johnson has been driving a truck for the last 4 years, he says, "It's something I love to do. I love to travel, see a lot of things, meet a lot of people. I believe you see a lot of things you have only see on TV. When you see it with your own eyes, it is exciting." He says that although he spent a lot on training and has to spend long periods away from his family the benefits of the job still outweigh the negatives. Leo Wilkins, an independent long-haul trucker from St. Charles, Minn., who's been driving for 40 years says that trucking is good work and very profitable but the choice is not an easy one and he says that he manages to make as much as \$300,000 a year. After accounting for fuel, insurance, truck payments and maintenance he can take home at least half of it. Of course he says that the reverse side is that most of his time he is on the road living in his customized sleeper. That's the sacrifice you have to make he said, "I stay out on the road for six weeks at a time," he said. "In this business, you can't be running home every weekend if you're going to make money."