



FIXING THE CDL BOTTLENECK

An Urgent Workforce and Supply Chain Problem

February 2023

According to The American Trucking Association, the U.S. needs 80,000 commercial drivers to meet current demand. ([American Trucking Association Driver Shortage Report](#)). In Oklahoma alone, there was a shortage of 5,777 drivers in 2021, including heavy and tractor-trailer drivers, light truck drivers, and industrial truck and tractor operators ([Critical occupations list](#)). Without truck drivers, 51 million tons of goods worth \$51.8 billion would not make it into stores or processing facilities in the U.S. per day. ([BLS Transportation Statistics](#)).

This shortage of commercial drivers is not just a workforce issue for the trucking industry, its effects have severely disrupted supply chains and continue to ripple through the entire American economy. Labor shortages in the trucking industry have, in part, contributed to inflation and product shortages.

According to Service Oklahoma, 1,100 new CDLs are issued per month. This includes any type of CDL, from bus driver to big rig driver. One area states may look to in order to raise CDLs issued is the licensing process, particularly the written knowledge test proctoring.

LICENSING PROCESS

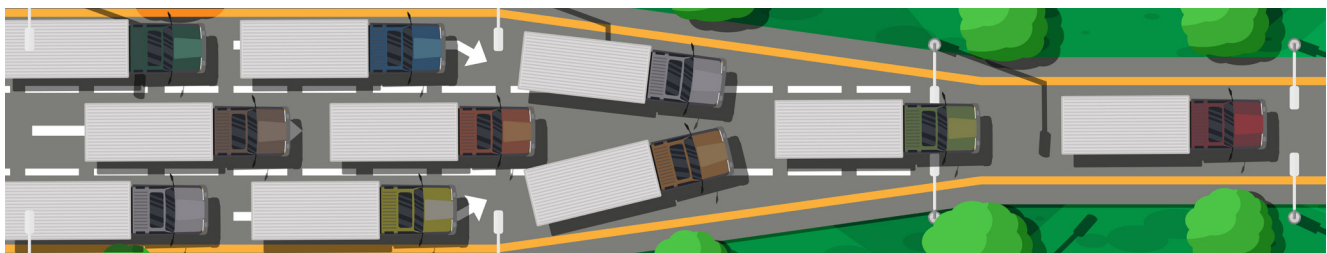
The CDL licensing process is regulated at both the state and federal levels.

Federal regulations require the Entry-Level Driver Training (ELDT). ELDT is the minimum federal requirement for first time CDL holders before permitting can take place. ELDT requires all drivers seeking a Class A or B CDL, passenger endorsement, or school bus endorsement to complete entry-level driver training from a certified training provider. For some CDLs, ELDT requires behind-the-wheel training either on a range, a public road, or both, depending on the type of license.

Once ELDT is completed, applicants may begin the testing process, which is required federally, but state-governed. There is a written, or “knowledge,” test and a skills test. A vision test is also required. Once an applicant passes the vision and written tests, Service Oklahoma will issue a commercial driver learner permit. The applicant must hold the permit for 14 days before taking the skills test proctored by either a third party or Service Oklahoma. Once passing marks are received on the skills test, Service Oklahoma will issue a license.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS & OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Oklahoma has implemented innovations in CDL licensure, serving as a model for other states. In 2016, Oklahoma developed a pilot program for third-party skills examiners to issue the skills test. Three years later, Oklahoma passed **SB 378**, which fully allowed third-party examiners for the skills test. This reform has been highly successful, significantly increasing the state’s capacity to get new licensees on the road.



But opportunities for improvement remain. The written portion of the CDL test remains closed to third party examiners, creating a bottleneck at the written test stage of the licensure process.

Simply put, there are far too many applicants for the existing authorized examiners to serve in a timely manner. What is needed, then, is an increase in the number of examiners. Some progress was made recently by allowing the written portion to be proctored by a career tech institution, an institution of higher education or a local school district, after being approved by Service Oklahoma, but this still has not filled the need for more authorized examiners. ([47 O.S. 6-110 \(OSCN 2022\)](#))

Significantly, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration recently [issued guidance](#) allowing third parties to proctor written knowledge tests. With this federal guidance and Oklahoma's track record of success opening the licensure process to third party skills examiners, the solution to the CDL bottleneck is clear: Oklahoma should again lead the way in allowing third party examiners to alleviate the testing backlog in our licensure process.

