

TRAINING FOR INTERMODAL FREIGHT TRANSPORTATION WORKERS

ROBERTA E. WEISBROD

Employers have frequently cited the need for trained workers in the field of intermodal transportation. For communities impacted by intermodal transportation projects, training can enable local workers to achieve certification that allows them to compete for high-quality jobs, and can make it possible for both existing and future transportation workers to position themselves for changing employment opportunities. A new course on intermodal freight transportation, developed by Partnership for Sustainable Ports, Inc., is addressing this need.

Defining the Need

The need for a trained intermodal workforce is felt by all involved—employers, communities, and workers.

Employers

Global trade is expanding rapidly, driven in part by technological advances in intermodal transportation. Expectations for speed, precision, transparency, and flexibility are increasing. Customers for the transportation of goods demand reliable just-in-time service—service that can be tracked in real time and can be rerouted in accordance with changing circumstances. Customers need assurance that special handling conditions (for example, temperature and humidity control) will be maintained with continuous precision.

This expansion of both global trade and service expectations has spurred competition on all fronts (1). Shippers realize that their competitiveness depends on upgraded training. For example, the National Industrial Transportation League, the oldest shippers' trade group in North America, is making "continuing logistics and transportation education a hallmark of its operation in the new millennium" (2). The International Warehouse Logistics Association (until recently the American

Warehouse Association) recognizes that warehousing has changed and is now consciously supplying value-added services in the intermodal chain. Warehouses are no longer mere storage facilities; they now serve as product transformation centers, responding to information and requiring workers with new skills (3).

Seaports are engaged in intense competition for cargo on the basis not only of physical infrastructure, but also of productivity—the ability to meet the service expectations of speed and quality, which in turn are a function of the capabilities of labor. Trained workers can enable seaports, reliant as they are upon a smoothly functioning transport chain, to capture and retain market share. Indeed, as port facilities in the New York–New Jersey region embark on major investment programs, there will be increasing opportunities for jobs and advancement for a professionalized cadre of workers (4).

In short, transportation employers require trained workers—workers who are knowledgeable about and able to use the rapid advances in transportation and telecommunications/information infrastructure, as well as the theory and practice of logistics management.

Communities

The call for intermodal transportation training comes not only from employers, but also from the communities, located adjacent to ports and major transportation corridors, that house the growing intermodal transportation network. The communities that accept transportation infrastructure expansion in their neighborhoods want to see construction and operation jobs go to local workers. There is a dilemma, however, in that, like most innovations, "intermodal freight transportation is capital intensive, but often requires less labor" than was previously needed to do the job (5). And the labor that is required must have proficiency. How,

The author is Director, Sustainable Transportation Program, INFORM, Inc., New York, New York.

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New York City Technical College
The City University of New York
Division of Continuing Education
and External Partnerships
CONTINUING STUDIES CENTER

New York City Technical College's Intermodal Freight Transportation course, created by Partnership for Sustainable Ports, Inc., reflects a growing trend toward the development of programs focused on intermodal transportation education and training for both managers and workers in all transportation modes.

then, can the port or corridor authority guarantee hiring of members of the local community?

Workers

What are the intermodal training needs of the workers themselves? Organized labor is wary, being cognizant that, as noted above, intermodal transportation requires less labor than was needed before containerization. Previously, for example, hundreds of longshoremen would be required to unload the amount of cargo from vessels that now requires tens of workers. Yet while it takes fewer workers to handle a given amount of goods, the aggregate amount of goods being traded has increased dramatically—7 percent per year over the past decade, compounded annually.

At the same time, new technology creates job opportunities and jobs in unanticipated ways, as was the case, for example, with the rise of the personal computer and the fading away of the typewriter. Proof of this is offered by the growth of jobs in the transportation sector during the past year. In 1997 the transportation sector grew by 4 percent (compared with 2.7 percent for nonfarm employment), adding a total of 162,000 workers; this growth followed an increase of 112,000 workers the previous year. The airline sector gained 67,000 workers, the trucking industry 60,000, and transportation brokers/forwarders 17,000. Logistics management was cited by the Secretary of Transportation as a particularly lucrative and growing field. And the major portion of the gain in transportation jobs was freight-related.

What are the predictions for the numbers and kinds of workers that will be needed in the future? The observable trend is that transportation's share of gross domestic product (GDP) has remained constant since 1989 at the same time that transportation's share in the economy has grown dramatically. For example, international trade, 95 percent by volume, increased from 11 percent of GDP in 1970 to 25 percent in 1995. Transportation has, in effect, moved more goods (and people) without consuming more resources. In fact, transportation's productivity has increased in ways that cannot yet be measured. With standard transportation data, productivity is measured in terms of tons/miles. Modern transportation productivity is a function of overnight, reliable, trackable, and flexible delivery, which is not part of standard transportation statistics. Nevertheless, businesses offering these services have expanded, and the workers they hire must have the skills and knowledge needed to deliver the desired productivity.

Current Intermodal Education

Courses in intermodal transportation and logistics abound for managers. Many colleges have begun to offer transportation and logistics management courses. In the New York area, there are substantial opportunities for training for transportation leaders. The World Trade Institute (formerly administered by the Port Authority) at Pace University has programs designed for midcareer executives. Courses offered at the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy lead to a degree in logistics and intermodal transportation and are designed for students who earn a Coast Guard third officer's license (5). The Academy also offers continuing education courses in logistics and intermodal transportation for managerial and executive transportation professionals.

There are also many training programs for workers. In the New York-New Jersey area, the Port Authority and the New York Shipping Association developed a course in quality for the workers who unload automobiles from ships. As a result of this ongoing training program, the Port of New York and New Jersey is now the number one U.S. autoport in terms of vehicle throughput.

The issue, however, is that every operation and every transportation mode has its own training. There are training programs for truckers, for longshoremen, for railroad workers, for warehouse workers, and for clerks at terminals. What appears to be lacking to date is training that transcends the individual modes—training that is truly intermodal.

New Intermodal Transportation Course

To meet this unaddressed need, Partnership for Sustainable Ports, Inc., has developed a course in intermodal freight transportation for the Continuing Education program at New York City Technical College. This institution has an excellent record in technical education, and is located in Brooklyn near both the port and where potential and actual workers live and work. Customers for the course include transportation, logistics, distribution, and warehouse businesses wishing to upgrade their staff; career transportation and warehouse staff seeking advancement; and entry-level workers in the transportation/warehouse sector desiring to improve their opportunities.

The course focuses on the needs and technology associated with the distribution and transportation

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