

CONCLUSIONS

Rapid increases in truck traffic, combined with a limited expansion of public rest areas and commercial vehicle parking, have resulted in a shortage of available parking. Because of the parking shortages and limits on stays in public facilities, truck drivers may be creating unsafe situations by parking on roadway access ramps and shoulders to obtain adequate rest. This synthesis describes approaches that respond to commercial vehicle parking demand.

The problems associated with commercial vehicle parking are evidenced by the presence of trucks parked along public rights-of-way and overflowing public parking areas. The solution to the problem lies in a multifaceted approach that includes government, the commercial carrier industry, and commercial truck stop and plaza operators. There are simply not enough public resources, nor is there a desire among public agencies, to greatly expand the level of public investment in public rest area facilities. A closer working arrangement between the private-sector providers of parking and the public sector could leverage existing resources and meet expanding needs. The following detailed conclusions reinforce the need for a coordinated approach to the problem.

- First, commercial vehicle travel demand is large and growing—and along with it an increased demand for parking.

As of 2000, approximately 500,000 interstate motor carriers operated in the United States, and projections over the next 20 years point to continuing growth. As truck traffic on America's highways has increased, the demand for services and facilities for the trucking industry, including the demand for truck parking spaces, has increased as well.

All of the states responding to the survey administered as part of this synthesis project reported that truck traffic parking demand has increased in their state over the last 5 years. Major problems cited as a result of this growth include shoulder damage, restriction of site distances, the presence of obstacles in the clear zone, and litter and sanitation problems in public rest areas. Estimates indicate a daily demand of approximately 66,000 public rest area spaces and 221,300 commercial truck stop and travel plaza spaces. This compares with a supply of 31,300 public spaces and 277,775 private truck stop and travel plaza spaces. A number of states have conducted studies that verify the presence of parking shortages, particularly along high-travel demand corridors.

- No single entity is responsible for providing parking facilities.

Under the current federal Hours of Service rules, commercial vehicle drivers participating in interstate commerce are generally permitted to drive up to 10 hours after 8 consecutive hours off duty. Drivers are responsible for obtaining long-term rest, but no agency or organization is responsible for providing required facilities. Public rest area facilities were never intended to serve as long-term rest points for travelers—either automobile or commercial traffic. These areas are generally designed to provide only a minimal amount of facilities to provide travelers with time for short-term rest and refreshment. An entire industry has developed to provide services to the trucking industry, but these businesses provide parking only as an inducement for truckers to stop and purchase various goods and services. Parking availability is generally on a first-come, first-serve basis, so truckers wanting to stop may be faced with a full commercial lot and the need to keep searching for another stopping point for rest.

- The problem is nationwide.

An analysis of parking supply and demand concludes that the problem of parking shortages is nationwide. There are, however, variations among states and travel corridors in shortages and surpluses. However, shortfalls can be observed throughout the nation because truck traffic exists nationwide. The results of the survey conducted for this synthesis confirm that finding. Responding states from throughout the nation reported shortages of parking, particularly at public rest area locations. Many states limit the time that trucks can park at rest areas, although few strictly enforce these limits. It is speculated that this is because enforcement officials do not want to send tired truckers back on the road.

- Most supply is located in commercial truck parking lots and plazas.

The data provide evidence that the amount of parking available for commercial vehicles is much greater in the private sector than in the public sector. Furthermore, most truckers prefer to use commercial parking facilities for long-term rest as opposed to using public rest areas. However, the simple provision of parking at any location will not meet the demand. Parking must be strategically located so that commercial drivers can obtain required rest in a

geographic location that supports their need to maintain a delivery schedule.

- The problem is concentrated in public rest areas.

Public rest areas throughout the nation are experiencing overcrowding, particularly during the overnight hours. Nearly all public rest areas have a limited number of commercial truck parking spaces. Over the last several decades only limited parking expansion has occurred. When such availability is compared with the significant increase in truck traffic on the nation's highways during this period, it should not be surprising that many public rest areas are overcrowded. States have undertaken actions to improve the amenities and functionality of rest areas, including developing Welcome Centers that are designed to expand some services to travelers. Although states consider the needs of truckers as part of the planning and design process, they do not develop or expand rest areas for the exclusive use of the trucker.

- A multipronged approach is required.

The results of this synthesis project suggest that state DOTs have identified a number of potential solutions to dealing with truck parking demands. One solution is to expand or improve public rest areas. For example, New York State developed a statewide program to expand and improve rest areas over the next decade in response to increased needs and deteriorating infrastructure. Participation came from a variety of stakeholders, including the trucking industry, travel plaza and truck stop operators, as well as public transportation and law enforcement agencies. The resulting document will serve as the guide for state investment to expand and upgrade rest area facilities and services. Also, the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet developed a "safe haven" program to allow truckers to use state weigh stations for long-term parking, requiring little or no additional investment.

The survey conducted for this synthesis identified strong support among responding states for the establishment of a federal assistance program targeted at truck parking. Although there is no specific information on exactly

what this program would entail, it is possible that states believe that at least some portion of such funds would be used to expand public facilities.

A second solution is to educate or inform drivers about available spaces. Evidence shows that most of the spaces available for trucks are located in private truck stops and travel plazas. In some cases, truckers could benefit from more timely and accurate information regarding the location and availability of spaces. For example, Maryland publishes and widely distributes a "Truckers' Map" that identifies the location of both public rest areas and private truck stops and travel plazas. This type of information is beneficial to truckers searching for places to stop for long-term rest. Also, survey respondents recommended the use of Intelligent Transportation System technology as a means to provide more timely and accurate information to truckers regarding space location and availability. Many believe that this would be both effective and feasible in dealing with shortages.

Another solution is to make better use of the private sector and private truck spaces. For example, the California In-Route Truck Issues Task Force identified a privatization-partnership concept that proposed the construction of fenced, lighted parking lots built adjacent to commercial developments in the vicinity of overcrowded rest areas or where the master plan indicates unmet stopping needs. The auxiliary lots would be free to all motorists and would be publicized by signs along the highway and from nearby rest areas. It is envisioned that the private sector would provide restrooms, clean up litter, and provide security at these auxiliary lots through competitive, negotiated, long-term agreements. Land for these lots might be leased or purchased by the state.

The evidence collected for this synthesis study shows that there are many more private spaces than public spaces. A better understanding of the reasons for this imbalance is required before developing specific strategies to address this imbalance. Among the factors to be considered are poor accessibility to a private supply of parking spaces because of poor geometric design, a lack of information concerning the availability of spaces, and inadequate security at private locations, which can inhibit their use by truckers.