

More Fleets Using Electronic Driver Logs In Effort to Lift CSA Scores, Survey Finds

By Seth Clevenger
Staff Reporter

Electronic driver log usage has risen, according to a recent survey by Transport Capital Partners, and technology vendors pointed to carrier safety ratings and an expected electronic onboard recorder mandate as primary reasons.

In February, 34.6% of carriers said they have placed electronic driver logs in all of their trucks, up from 25.4% when TCP asked the same question in a May 2012 survey.

The percentage of fleets that said they were testing e-logs or using them on at least some trucks climbed to 68.1% in the February survey, compared with 56.6% nine months before.

The results were part of TCP's first-quarter 2013 business expectations survey.

Richard Mikes, a partner at TCP, said about 125 carriers responded to the questionnaire, which covered primarily truckload fleets, the majority of which were midmarket-size companies.

The federal Compliance, Safety, Accountability ratings program "is one of the drivers" of the growth in e-logging, he said.

Another factor is the expected electronic onboard recorder mandate.

"I think the larger fleets in the sample don't have any doubt about a mandate coming," Mikes said.

The smaller carriers, though, are more constrained by the costs of the hardware, software and training time, so they are still waiting to see what will happen, he said.

Technology vendors agree that CSA and the impending EOBR mandate are accelerat-

ing the rise in e-logging.

Erin Cave, director of product management at Telogis, said carriers have turned to e-logging to protect the hours-of-service portion of their CSA scores, especially because shippers and insurance companies are looking at them.

"If you leave it to the driver to manipulate the logs, you can get yourself into some pretty big trouble, especially with all of these numbers being so public," she said.

Many large and midsize fleets are relying on e-logs now, Cave said, but smaller companies and owner-operators are

started to become more prevalent, we started to see an uptick at that point, and it did not slow down until even today," he said.

Now, first-time customers almost always implement e-logs, Witty said.

"I don't know if it's 100%, but it's really high," he said. "When they're buying a system for the first time, they're adopting e-logs right out of the gate."

Jim Angel, director of safety and compliance at PeopleNet Communications Corp., said "there's no doubt" that the anticipated EOBR require-



A driver uses an onboard device from PeopleNet.

holding out as they face paper-thin margins.

"I think they're going to wait on the final rule on everything before they decide what they're going to do," she said.

Eric Witty, product manager at Omnitracs Inc., a Qualcomm company, also connected rising e-log adoption to CSA.

Witty said that among Omnitracs' customers who already were using onboard computers, e-log adoption paralleled the launch of CSA.

"Our [electronic logging] numbers were pretty small, and then in 2010, when CSA

ment is driving a portion of the adoption.

Electronic logging also represents a "huge opportunity" for carriers to lower CSA violations related to hours of service, including form and manner and record-of-duty not current, he said.

However, HOS offerings are just "the icing on the cake" of what the devices that PeopleNet offers by can do, Angel said. Apart from compliance, EOBRs offer carriers many other ways to improve operations, including driver behavior monitoring by tracking metrics such as speed, he said.

Ferro Says FMCSA to Miss Deadline

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"We never expected or anticipated that the agency would be able to issue a final rule by this October," he said.

Abbott said the September timeframe for the new proposal is "realistic." But since that date has been delayed before, it could be pushed back further, he said.

In 2010, FMCSA first issued a rule requiring trucking companies with a history of hours-of-service violations to use electronic logging devices. That would have taken effect in June 2012.

The next year, the agency proposed requiring ELDs, which it called electronic onboard recorders at the time, for all com-

panies that were using paper logbooks. But months later, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 7th Circuit overturned the 2010 rule, saying the agency did not meet a statutory obligation to ensure that the devices could not be used to harass drivers.

The universal mandate used the same technical specifications as the one overturned in court, so in 2012, FMCSA rescinded its proposal and vowed to reissue a rule that complied with the court ruling. Later that year, Congress mandated the regulation in MAP-21.

Writing a rule that stands up to court scrutiny is of paramount importance to FMCSA, Ferro said.

"It's got to withstand any legal challenges; it's very important," she said.

The driver harassment issue is just one of the major aspects FMCSA must consider in its new proposal, ATA's Abbott said. It also must settle some issues that ELD manufacturers identified with certifications of the devices and their communication and security, he said.

FMCSA has held several listening sessions to gather input from drivers and carriers on the harassment issue. In December, it said it would conduct a survey of drivers on the issue, but it has not yet submitted a request for the research to the White House Office of Management and Budget.