



Driven to succeed; Looming worker shortage spells opportunity

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The numbers are so daunting, it's hard to imagine how Canada's vast transportation industry will find enough workers to fill the jobs.

The trucking sector estimates it needs 37,000 new drivers a year. In the next five years, 50 per cent of the country's railway workers are eligible for retirement. The average age of marine officers on the West Coast is 54 -- and it takes at least a decade to acquire full training to go to sea.

"In the next 10 years, we need to recruit and train tens of thousands of new workers," said Ruth Sol, president of the Western Transportation Advisory Council. "There is going to be an extreme shortage of workers, and it's already happening in certain areas."

The council, which represents major transportation organizations in western Canada, has recently launched an online job board to centralize job postings for the industry's trucking, rail, marine and air sectors and hopefully draw more people to careers in transportation.

The website, www.transportationcareers.ca, lists a wide range of jobs from delivery truck driver to aircraft luggage handler to logistics experts who co-ordinate the moving of products and passengers around the country.

"A lot of jobs in transportation offer a lifetime career," Sol said. "This is a growing, dynamic industry and there's a tremendous range of opportunities."

The industry organization has also created a second website, www.transpocity.ca, to introduce high-school students to careers in transportation.



Sam Leung, The Province Port captain Randy Johnstone has been working with tugboats since he was 19, in an industry short of workers.

"The Asia Pacific gateway is going to increase opportunities even further, but it's coming at a time when there are dwindling numbers of people entering the workplace," she said.

"Globalization has been enabled by transportation, and if you want to be in an industry that is roaring along and is not going to crash, this is where it's at."

Jim Mickey, president of Cloverdale trucking company Coastal Pacific Xpress, said drivers are in such short supply companies have had to reduce their expectations when hiring new workers.

"If we had kept on demanding the same standards for the last 20 years, the economy would have come to a halt," Mickey said. "The crisis is coming, no question. The average age of truck drivers is alarming."

Brian Siemens, assistant manager of marine personnel for Seaspan International Ltd., said the tow company is losing an average of 10 deck officers a year to retirement -- and in 10 years will have to replace 60 of its 200 officers.

"It's not like it's a four-year apprenticeship and you've got your ticket. This takes years," Siemens said. "Where are we going to pull these people from? We put an ad in the paper looking for experienced officers, and nobody applied."

Randy Johnstone, a port captain for North Vancouver-based Seaspan, started working on tugboats 30 years ago.

"It's a great life," said Johnstone, who also works as a private pilot on the big yachts that cruise to Vancouver. "You're out on the water, you see dolphins and whales and wake up to the smell of the sea. It can be difficult on the family because you work two weeks on, two weeks off. But you're also only working 150 days a year -- and that leaves 215 days to do other things."

Joy Thomson, business agent for the Canadian Merchant Service Guild which represents marine officers, said the union is struggling to find trained officers.

"We're definitely feeling the shortage now," she said. "Everyone is already employed."

The marine sector offers workers good-paying jobs, sea travel and lots of time off, she said. Entry-level deckhands earn about \$65,000 a year and work about five months a year.

"It's an interesting job. You go to places that are only accessible by boat, up and down the coast -- and it's hands-on work. This is not a desk job."

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CAREERS THAT REALLY MOVE

The transportation industry offers a huge variety of jobs -- and they don't necessarily involve sitting behind the controls of a boat, train, truck or plane. Here are a few of the possibilities and their wage ranges:

Air

Aircraft maintenance engineer: \$35,000 to \$85,000

Airport ramp attendant: \$18,000 to \$51,000

Flight dispatcher: \$35,000 to \$75,000

Marine

Boarding agent: \$40,000 to \$50,000

Rubber-tired gantry operator: \$80,000 to \$120,000

Deck officer: \$50,000 to \$120,000

Road

Commercial vehicle inspector: \$35,000 to \$55,000

Truck dispatcher: \$28,000 to \$43,000

Operations manager: \$50,000 to \$75,000

Rail

Gang labourer: \$30,000 to \$40,000

Rail traffic controller: \$61,000 to \$68,000

Yard master: \$60,000 to \$100,000

Logistics

Customs broker: \$25,000 to \$75,000

Logistics manager: \$40,000 to \$110,000

Warehouse supervisor: \$40,000 to \$75,000

