

## Born-again trucker loves his new job: As the transport industry searches for new blood, seasoned workers step up

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Byline: **Michael Kane**  
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Dirk Bollman once hosted the Queen for lunch at his own critically acclaimed restaurant. Today, at 57, he's six months into a new career as a long-haul trucker and absolutely loving it.

Polished and professional, Bollman doesn't fit the rough, gruff stereotype at the helm of a 22-wheeler, but then he's working in an increasingly sophisticated sector desperate to shake off outdated images and attract new blood.

As boomers step down and Asia-Pacific trade ramps up, transportation is an industry with a glowing future in Western Canada, albeit one facing critical labour shortages.

The Vancouver-based Western Transportation Advisory Council (Westac) anticipates 80,000 vacancies over the next three to five years in just logistics management, not to mention the need for 37,000 new truck drivers this year.

To address that, Westac has launched its own online job board to try to attract everything from truckers and ship's officers to longshore workers and airline pilots.

Employers are looking for men and women, for the young and for people like Bollman, who are seeking a mid-life career change. They're even looking for couples to share long-haul trucking jobs, said Ruth Sol, president of Westac.

And, even as companies work together to advance the industry through Westac along with decision-makers from government and organized labour, they are competing with each other to fill vacancies that can't easily be outsourced. That suggests wages and benefits can only improve.

Coast Mountain Bus Co., for example, has openings for 600 new drivers this year alone as it expands services, just as a large cohort of hires from the 1970s begins to retire. Despite labour shortages, the company attracted 1,679 applications during a just-concluded five-day job fair at the Vancouver Convention and Exhibition Centre.

About 700 applicants have been whittled down to 131 that are pretty close to job offers and the balance are still being tested for their suitability, said Doug McDonald, communications director.

"We're extremely pleased with the way the career fair went," he said. "We get a real mix of people, but typically we will see people looking for a change of career."

### IMAGES



Uncredited image

Dirk Bollman is a former restaurateur who has switched to a career in trucking with Surrey's Coastal Pacific Xpress.



Uncredited image

Transportation growing pains

He said they range from those who are fleeing high-pressure sales jobs and wrecked marriages, to those who are simply looking for a solid company offering decent wages and benefits.

Bollman took a round-about route to get into transportation. He served the Queen during Expo 86 when he and his father were operating the Quarry House Restaurant in Vancouver's Queen Elizabeth Park. They subsequently sold the business and he became a part-time fitness instructor.

Last year he was in semi-retirement and grieving the deaths of both his spouse and his father when he read a newspaper article about Surrey's innovative Coastal Pacific Express. The trucking company offers a thorough training and safety program for new recruits and Bollman, a lifelong motoring enthusiast, was attracted to the idea of trying something different, working independently and seeing more of the great outdoors.

"I'm working for a company that's really supportive and I've found that a lot of the older drivers are very, very helpful," he said in an interview. "When you tell them you are new, they're wonderful, they will tell you all kinds of things."

Westac's website, [TransportationCareers.ca](http://TransportationCareers.ca), is offering free job postings for employers until May 15. Westac also operates [TranspoCity.ca](http://TranspoCity.ca) for young people interested in learning more about different career paths in transportation.

[mkane@png.canwest.com](mailto:mkane@png.canwest.com)

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#### TRANSPORTATION GROWING PAINS

Canada's transportation industry is growing exponentially, thanks, in part, to the Government of Canada's \$1 billion Asia-Pacific Gateway and Corridors Initiative. But, while the initiative will improve infrastructure, finding the people to make it work in a climate of labour shortages is another matter.

40%: Portion of Canada's transportation industry employees 45 years and older

80,000: Number of people needed over the next 3-5 years in the logistics management industry

37,000: Number of new truck drivers needed this year

50%: Portion of the rail industry's workforce who will be eligible to retire within the next 5 years

\$40,000: Starting annual salary for many transportation sector jobs

\$150,000: Top annual salary for high-level transportation sector jobs

Source: Western Transportation Advisory Council VANCOUVER SUN

#### Illustration:

- Colour Photo: Dirk Bollman is a former restaurateur who has switched to a career in trucking with Surrey's Coastal Pacific Xpress.
- Colour Photo: Transportation growing pains