

Bigger pay, better perks: Alberta trucking industry lures new drivers despite hiring hurdles

ALBERTA EMPLOYER
SURVEY REPORT



While the freight recession and changing political climate are forcing fleets to navigate many challenges, Trucking HR Canada (THRC) research shows rising costs are the top concern across the country, while finding qualified drivers continues to be critical.

In Alberta in particular, trucking and logistics companies are adapting to the shortage of qualified drivers by putting more effort into attracting new drivers — offering better pay, stronger perks, and investing in strategies to keep drivers on the road.

Alberta has a higher vacancy rate for truck drivers than the rest of Canada, so THRC surveyed Alberta employers to better understand the ways new drivers are being hired, and how they are being supported and compensated.

The findings shed light on how employers are adapting:

- **High hiring rates for new drivers:** Most of the employers surveyed hire recently licensed drivers, although the cost of training and insurance for inexperienced drivers creates challenges.
- **Investment in training:** Employers who hire new drivers typically invest in substantial training programs, with most providing around 90 hours of training, including mentoring and onboarding.
- **Rising incomes and incentives:** Annual incomes for drivers are increasing, with 18% of companies reporting over a 10% pay rise in 2023. Most employers offer a variety of incentives, particularly for full-time employees.

As part of THRC's labour market information work, we regularly gather data on provincial and national labour trends in the trucking and logistics sector.

When they hire recently licensed drivers (those with two or fewer years of experience), nearly two thirds of companies (65%) feel they are expected to do too much to train them, and just over two thirds (67%) say hiring a new driver is more expensive than hiring an experienced one.

Employers use mentoring (73%), onboarding (65%), and/or finishing programs (60%) to help drivers get road-ready. One in five companies offer more than three weeks in-house training.

Employers who choose not to hire newer drivers say that training them on the basics adds up: company policies, routes, safety protocols, and more can take a newer driver longer to learn. If the job includes driving on remote roads or hauling products such as mining or construction material, newer drivers don't have the required skills.

Employers also recognize the challenges in insuring new drivers. Insurance providers won't always insure inexperienced drivers, or they charge higher rates, mostly because of the industry's claim history of new drivers and the wide variety of driver training programs — which insurers often assess.

Many employers (56%) admit that hiring seasonal employees can be either somewhat or very challenging. They attract seasonal workers by offering incentives (51%) or ways to improve work-life balance (50%), simplifying compensation (43%), and offering higher wages (41%) among other tactics.

Annual pay varies based on experience, the type of driver, and the company. Perhaps not surprising, on average, newer drivers are paid less than more experienced drivers; short-haul drivers are paid, on average, less than their long-haul counterparts. When the results were reviewed for the highest paying companies, the average annual income was almost double for long-haul drivers.

See Figure 1.

Figure 1 – Annual income comparison for full-time employees

	Average annual income	Average income		
		A driver with 2 years or less experience	A driver with 10 years or less experience	Five highest paying companies
Short-haul employees	\$61,849	\$58,000	\$78,673	\$98,000
Long-haul employees	\$73,411	\$67,813	\$83,000	\$140,000

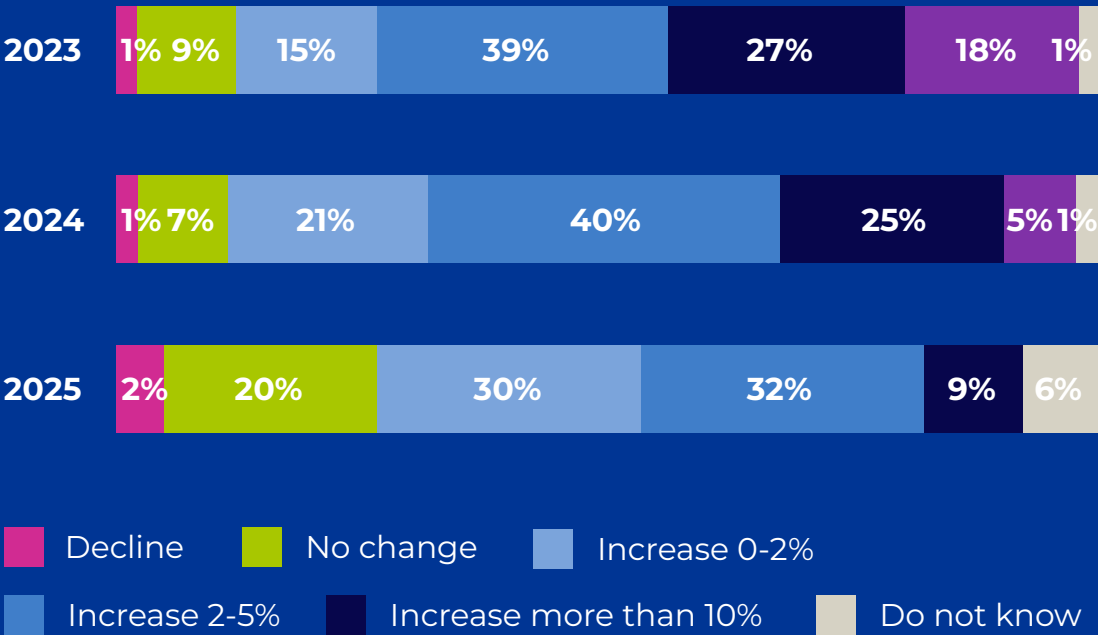
Source: Trucking HR Canada, Alberta employer survey, November 2024

Annual income of full-time employees has also been on the rise.

One in five (18%) companies reported that the annual increase in annual income in 2023 for full-time employees was more than 10%. In comparison, only 5% of companies reported this type of increase in 2022 and none reported it in 2021.

See Figure 2

Figure 2 – Change in full-time compensation by year



Q. For the years listed in the table below, what were the average year-over-year changes (%) in the annual income for your full-time employees who are truck drivers at your company? (Please select one response for each year)

On top of annual income, most employers offer a range of incentives to full-time (96%), part-time (91%), and seasonal employees (84%).

See Figure 3

Figure 3 – Incentives given to employee by type

Incentive received	Type of employee		
	Full-time	Part-time	Seasonal
Safety and performance incentives (i.e., flat rate or mileage premium associated with the demonstration of exceptional performance, usually based on established metrics and KPIs)	59%	35%	32%
Human resources benefits (i.e., health or dental plan)	58%	22%	15%
Overtime	49%	29%	21%
Equipment premiums and non-driving activities (e.g., additional compensation for operating certain types of equipment like dump trucks, assisting with loading a shipment, etc.)	46%	19%	14%
Unplanned downtime (e.g., waiting time, layovers, etc.)	46%	30%	30%
Fuel incentives (i.e., flat rate or mileage premium associated with meeting an established threshold for fuel consumption within a defined period of time)	42%	38%	26%
Mileage premiums (i.e., commodity premiums, volume premiums, certification premiums, etc.)	38%	25%	15%
Premiums for driving in northern or remote regions	31%	18%	14%
Premium for accepting a seasonal position	na	na	13%
Do not offer any incentives	4%	9%	16%
Other	6%	3%	1%

Source: Trucking HR Canada, Alberta employer survey, November 2024

Alberta's truck driver vacancy rate — over 2,700 vacancies from Q3 of 2024 — means building a pipeline of new drivers will help the industry continue to meet demand. Investments from the Government of Alberta through the Class 1 Learning Pathway Grant Program will provide much needed assistance to help potential drivers cover the cost of entry level training and for employers to offset training costs.

A follow-up survey is planned later this year to track changes over time.

Survey details:

The survey was conducted online from October 4 to November 5, 2024. Senior executives from 133 trucking companies in Alberta representing 5,149 truck drivers participated. The companies serve various industries, with food retail, manufacturing, and agriculture being the most represented sectors.



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