

Deloitte.

Together makes progress



Future of trucking

Introduction

More than 90% of North American trucking carriers have 10 or fewer trucks, and 99% operate fewer than 100 units.¹ In total, the industry hauls a staggering 11 billion tons of goods each year.²

No matter the fleet size, carriers are bound together by the same forces pulling at the broader trucking industry: freight cycle imbalances, workforce reinvention, regulatory pressures, and persistent cost escalation across labor, insurance, and maintenance. While the impacts differ for a three-truck owner-operator versus a carrier running hundreds of trips per day, they are prompting a fundamental reckoning for an industry that moves the inputs sustaining economic activity.

Deloitte conducted a two-year Future of Consumer research initiative that engaged more than 1,000 professionals, industry leaders, clients, and consumer-industry insiders to help leaders

reorient themselves to meet a future that's coming faster than many anticipated. This undertaking led to the development of specific recommendations for every subsector, including trucking.

This paper examines the myriad issues facing the trucking industry and emerging trends that are likely to accentuate or address them—and includes action steps company leaders should consider taking to get ahead of these forces.



Issues

Running a trucking business means balancing unpredictable demand, tight margins, and operational risks. Today, those challenges have grown sharper:

- Overcapacity and volatile volumes are pushing rates down;
- Financial pressures are straining reinvestment;
- Workforce shortages are constraining capacity and service reliability; and
- Evolving regulations and technology are rewriting the playbook of competition.

For many carriers, these issues are not isolated but overlapping—raising the stakes for endurance.

Freight cycle reset

North American trucking remains idled in a freight cycle reset—with no clear resolution on the horizon. Inconsistent shipment demand, persistent overcapacity, and rising competition continue to strain network economics. Volume variability across lanes reduces planning accuracy and keeps capacity out of sync with actual freight flows. As demand shifts, freight is pushed into the spot market, where carriers are more likely to be price takers than price setters. The combination of inconsistent volumes and structural overcapacity continues to impact rate stability.

Financial stress and capital erosion

Labor, insurance, maintenance, and regulatory compliance costs continue to escalate at a pace that soft freight volumes cannot offset. Cash conversion cycles are lengthening when capital expenditure needs are rising, limiting the ability to refresh fleets or invest in capability-building technology. Repeated over fleetings, obligatory asset sales, and occasional restructurings, combined with escalating operating costs, have pushed carriers into a capital reallocation phase. Carriers are also weighing the capital costs of transitioning to electric-vehicle powertrains against the savings on fuel and maintenance.

Regulatory and policy crosswinds

Carriers are making capital decisions as conditions change. One example includes EPA trucking emissions standards that are set in direction but evolve in practice.³ In addition, trade policy volatility is reshaping cross-border freight economics on lanes that carry a significant portion of North American surface trade. Infrastructure investment, fleet procurement, and network design decisions are now being made under conditions of sustained uncertainty. This compresses planning and distorts capital allocation across the industry.

Workforce reinvention

The trucking workforce is undergoing structural transformation thanks to chronic turnover, accelerating demographic shifts, and rising expectations around quality of life that legacy job models were not designed to meet. Long-haul schedules, extended time away from home, and limited schedule predictability have adversely affected workforce recruitment and retention. Meanwhile, digital tools, electronic logging mandates, in-cab monitoring systems, and advanced driver assistance technologies introduce new skill requirements that widen capability gaps. Driver assistance technologies could also lead to potential reframing of the limits on asset uptime, and more long-term questions about the impact of autonomous driving on workforce requirements.

The intelligent future of trucking

The convergence of zero-emission technologies, autonomous vehicle systems, and intelligent freight platforms is fundamentally restructuring the trucking industry. But the pace and distribution of adoption remain uneven and contested because of infrastructure gaps, economics, and policy variability. The trajectory of this transformation will likely hinge on three main factors: regulatory clarity enabling consistent cross-jurisdictional autonomous operations; technology readiness; and ecosystem partnerships that allow carriers to access next-generation capabilities without bearing the full cost of development.

Five strategic imperatives

Trucking companies can boost their financial performance by adopting innovations that improve reliability, efficiency, and network performance. Deloitte's Consumer practice has identified five strategic priorities for trucking firms to consider.

1. Adopt adaptive structures to stay ahead of freight market unpredictability

To stay ahead of freight market volatility, design your network around what demand looks like most of the time—not just peak conditions. This operation is built on consistent freight volumes, with layered-in flexibility where it matters. This discipline avoids the cycle of overexpanding in strong markets and scrambling when volumes fall. It also allows for the protection of pricing instead of defaulting to the spot market. This is a characteristic of leading carriers.⁴ Now consider how your assets are utilized. Are you locked into ownership, or can you flex through partnerships, leasing, and selective parking? One trucking company has built flexibility into its network by layering multiple capacity sources—starting with dedicated fleets, and supplementing with one-way networks and third-party partners. This stacked approach allows it to keep core assets utilized while flexing up during demand surges, without overcommitting capital.⁵

In addition, ask if you are linking demand scenarios to operational decisions. Another major carrier has emphasized cost control as volumes decline. Instead of expanding aggressively, the company focuses on improving revenue per load. By enhancing equipment utilization and maintaining pricing integrity, the company is positioned to scale when demand resumes.⁶

2. Strengthen pricing through predictive asset and yield management

When your fleet is constantly chasing loads to stay utilized, pricing control is already slipping away. Strengthening pricing means flipping that dynamic—starting with prescriptive action steps to gain more control. By evaluating every load against asset position, downstream opportunities, and true lane profitability, the operation shifts from manual dispatch to network-aware enhancement.

One trucking and logistics enterprise has enacted stronger pricing thresholds through its focus on yield, network balance, and reducing empty miles via technology-enabled load matching. The company's tech stack enables real-time pricing, tapping into a pool of third-party carriers, while still transacting business under the company insignia umbrella.⁷

3. Become an active participant in policy-reshaping, and market environment scanning

The challenge in reshaping policy is not just engagement, but keeping pace and adapting in real time as the landscape evolves. By treating policy engagement as seriously as network design, the company that recognizes regulators as allies, not obstacles, and invests accordingly stands to profit. Many carriers still lack even a basic government affairs capability, limiting their ability to engage across the dozens of agencies influencing the industry.

Influence, however, is rarely built alone. Leading players are forming coalitions to shape standards and funding priorities. These partnerships bring credibility and scale, especially as governments evaluate investments in charging networks, autonomous corridors, and freight infrastructure, influencing decisions that are connected to broader market shifts.

One major carrier has linked its policy engagement directly to its network strategy—adjusting routes, launching new partnerships, and modernizing distribution facilities in response to regulatory changes. Smaller carriers without the scale to fund dedicated policy teams will likely need to pursue shared advocacy strategies to enable their voices to be heard by regulators.

4. Engineer the future truck to advance responsible mobility

If your trucks are still treated as standalone assets, you could be missing a bigger opportunity. The future may lie in engineering vehicles as integrated, intelligent platforms. Start with what's already working: in-cab safety and driver monitoring systems have been demonstrated to significantly improve performance and accountability.⁸ You can extract value when these systems connect with routing, maintenance, and freight visibility tools to create an effective operating environment.

Uptime should be the organizing principle. Telematics, combined with original equipment manufacturer (OEM) data, can identify issues before they occur—and when integrated with service networks, can reduce repair times.

One way to accomplish this is by developing a digital twin—a real-time, digital representation of each vehicle and its operating environment. Instead of relying on fragmented data like maintenance logs in PDFs, a digital twin combines telematics, driver behavior, route conditions, and vehicle health into a single, connected system. This allows you to use real-time data to drive decisions in terms of bidding, accepting and operating loads.⁹

Carriers should take a more active role in truck design by collaborating through forums such as maintenance councils to promote better cooperation among designers and manufacturers.¹⁰

5. Upskill and enable talent for safe, intelligent operations

The future of trucking depends on a workforce that can operate in a highly digital, safety-driven environment. Start with safety systems. In-cab monitoring, telematics, and compliance tools are now standard—but they change how drivers experience the job. Without the right support, these tools can feel invasive. Leading carriers are using these tech innovations as coaching platforms, not just compliance mechanisms.

From there, think about existing capability gaps in analytics or software development. Closing that gap likely means understanding how to mine, extract, transform, and utilize the data that is available to the enterprise.

The composition of the workforce is also evolving. You are managing a broader range of employees that includes digital specialists. Achievement depends on how well these groups collaborate. Leaders should prioritize communication, adaptability, and trust across the enterprise.



Rethinking trucking for the long haul

The path forward for the North American trucking industry will likely depend on series of strategic choices across operations, capital expenditures, and investing in human and technological advancements. As you consider your options for navigating the uncertain terrain, here are a few key questions to ask across several domains primed for change in the years ahead:

- Are you preparing your workforce for a hybrid environment of human, semi-autonomous, and fully automated operations, while maintaining safety and engagement?
- Have you evaluated emerging freight technologies—like predictive maintenance or telematics—to see how they can be integrated without disrupting current operations?
- Are there partnerships with shippers, carriers, or technology providers that could help you share capacity, reduce empty miles, or improve service reliability? Have you assessed your pricing and yield management practices in order to be price makers rather than price takers?
- Are you actively scanning regulatory and policy changes to anticipate shifts that could affect network planning?
- Do you have contingency plans for financial stress, rising insurance premiums, or capital constraints that could affect fleet modernization or technology adoption?



Authors

Madhav Mullapudi

US Transportation Leader
mmullapudi@deloitte.com

Yasir Mehboob

Strategy & Transactions Leader,
Transportation Practice
ymehboob@deloitte.com

Ryan Ernst

Logistics and
Distribution Leader
ernst@deloitte.ca

Kate Ferrara

US Transportation,
Hospitality & Services Leader
kferrara@deloitte.com

Don Busch

US Transportation Deputy,
Supply Chain & Network
Operations Practice
dobusch@deloitte.com

Acknowledgement

We extend our sincere thanks to Larry Hitchcock, recently retired former US Transportation Leader, for his many contributions to this report.

Endnotes

1. Nainika Kumar, "[Owner operator statistics & data every trucker should know in 2026](#)," AtoB, updated March 18, 2026.
2. American Trucking Associations (ATA), "[American trucking trends 2025](#)," August 28, 2025.
3. John Gallagher, "[Trump EPA ends basis for heavy-duty truck emissions rules](#)," FreightWaves, February 12, 2026.
4. J.B. Hunt, "[J.B. Hunt Transport Services, Inc. reports U.S. GAAP revenues, net earnings and earnings per share for the third quarter 2025](#)," press release, October 15, 2025.
5. James Menzie, "'[Stackable capacity](#),' more intermodal and going green all part of Schneider's strategy," trucknews.com, September 10, 2024.
6. Larry Avila, "[Knight-Swift's intermodal segment nearly broke even in Q4](#)," Trucking Dive, January 26, 2026.
7. Ad Hoc News, "[How J.B. Hunt Transport is turning freight into a software-defined product](#)," December 31, 2025.
8. Ritoban Mukherjee, "[Could AI-powered dash cams save businesses millions in legal fees?](#)," TechRadar, May 26, 2026.
9. Krystyna Shchedrina, "[Geotab CEO says AI turning telematics into core fleet infrastructure](#)," trucknews.com, February 13, 2026.
10. ATA, "[Technology & Maintenance Council](#)," accessed June 2026.



This publication contains general information and predictions only and Deloitte is not, by means of this publication, rendering accounting, business, financial, investment, legal, tax, or other professional advice or services. This publication is not a substitute for such professional advice or services, nor should it be used as a basis for any decision or action that may affect your business. Before making any decision or taking any action that may affect your business, you should consult a qualified professional adviser. Deloitte shall not be responsible for any loss sustained by any person who relies on this publication.

About Deloitte

Deloitte refers to one or more of Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited, a UK private company limited by guarantee ("DTTL"), its network of member firms, and their related entities. DTTL and each of its member firms are legally separate and independent entities. DTTL (also referred to as "Deloitte Global") does not provide services to clients. In the United States, Deloitte refers to one or more of the US member firms of DTTL, their related entities that operate using the "Deloitte" name in the United States and their respective affiliates. Certain services may not be available to attest clients under the rules and regulations of public accounting. Please see www.deloitte.com/about to learn more about our global network of member firms.

This publication contains general information only and Deloitte is not, by means of this publication, rendering accounting, business, financial, investment, legal, tax, or other professional advice or services. This publication is not a substitute for such professional advice or services, nor should it be used as a basis for any decision or action that may affect your business. Before making any decision or taking any action that may affect your business, you should consult a qualified professional advisor.

Deloitte shall not be responsible for any loss sustained by any person who relies on this publication.