Let’s inspire students to get into trucking!

As the economy grows, so does the demand for truck drivers. In 2017, for the first time since 2006, a shortage of drivers topped the list of trucking industry concerns, according to the annual survey by the American Transportation Research Institute. If the trend continues, the shortage will exceed 174,000 drivers by 2026, according to the American Trucking Associations.

Maine’s forest products industry already is experiencing a severe shortage of truck drivers. While that presents serious challenges, it also provides opportunities.

“Forest transportation from in-woods to the final point of utilization is one of the major components in forest harvesting operations in terms of economics, public visibility and safety,” Anil Koirala, University of Maine School of Forest Resources. “In many cases, the price of delivered wood products depends on the transportation distance. Transportation is also crucial in terms of ensuring the supply of demanded products on time.”

The shortage of forest products truck drivers has an economic impact beyond the industry, since about $1 out of every $20 of Maine’s GDP is associated with the forest product industry, according to 2016 University of Maine research. It also represents significant career opportunities for students since 1 out of 24 jobs in Maine are associated with the forest industry.

1 Koirala, Anil, "Forest Products Trucking Industry in Maine: Opportunities and Challenges" (2017) http://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/etd/2757

This proposal provides a solution, but sponsors are still urgently needed to provide the remaining funding needed if the program is to launch this year. Contact Patrick Strauch, at the Maine Forest Products Council to support this initiative to increase well-trained drivers into our industry.

**Program outline**

The Tri-County Technical Center (TCTC) Commercial Driver's License (CDL) program could be expanded to serve the needs of the logging industry and others in Maine by establishing a specific Log Trucking CDL Program at the TCTC. CDL Instructor Vicki Kimball has already started the
process of setting up a truck specifically for log trucking and says that students are enthusiastic about the idea of working in the logging industry.

TCTC will build on its highly successful CDL-A driver training program adding timber/logging yard loading and driving skills. The plan will create a true career pathway. The initial target is junior and senior students attending the Tech Center currently enrolled in the commercial driving program. Adult Education youth will also be eligible.

The program is a collaboration with Weyerhaeuser and the forest industry, including the Maine Forest Products Council and other contributing companies. This program will allow students to learn how to safely operate, load, secure and drive timber to various receiving points statewide. This collaboration will train youth and adult learners who wish to join the industry as it rebounds.

Central Maine is rich in the tradition of timber harvesting. Many families have enjoyed a comfortable livelihood because of their woods work and management of the resource. Thus, there is support from families in the TCTC region to create pathways to employment in the forest economy for youth.

The program will start with 10 selected students who will work with a skilled trainer familiar with woods trucking, and loading timber for transport. Students will learn and will strictly adhere to safe practices and OSHA regulations. Students will either intern for a company during the summer months or be selected for an apprenticeship program leading to a full-time position.

**Steering Committee**

Patrick Strauch, Maine Forest Products Council; Vicki Kimball and Patrick O’Neill, Tri-County Technical Center; Thelma Regan, Piscataquis Valley Adult Education Cooperative; John Fogarty and Chris Fife, Weyerhaeuser. Carol Woodcock of Sen. Susan Collins office also participated.

**Program Description**

TCTC is partnering with members of the logging industry to expand its current CDL Program to train additional students and is willing to partner with members of the logging industry. A planning team has been assembled to build this program. The team has developed a pilot program including the design, staffing, equipment configuration and funding for the program start-up. This team also will serve in an advisory capacity or some members may transition to the already existing CDL Advisory Committee.

An adult education component will be incorporated into the program and, for students who wish to advance their training, will coordinate with the community college logger training program in Presque Isle.

**Staffing/student training needs**

TCTC will hire an instructor who is well versed in both on and off highway log hauling to work with the current CDL instructor. The new instructor will have extensive experience with log loaders as well. Again, safety is paramount. This instructor would be an employee working under the direction and management of the existing TCTC CDL Program.

**Equipment configuration**

TCTC has a tractor that is being retrofitted for safe log trucking. The program will need a log trailer, and a separate stand-alone truck-mounted log crane. It’s hoped that an industry partner (logging contractor, equipment dealer, association etc.) will either donate or substantially subsidize an equipment lease for the program. The loader module could be taught in partnership with regional log concentration yards.

**Safety**

The fundamental building block for instruction is equipment and work area safety. The program will build on the TCTC standard of safety and incorporate logging industry best management principles. The planning team is looking at using the Certified Logging Professional program’s basic training as an important part of building student awareness of safety around a logging site.

**Program costs and funding**

The planning team has leveraged both the TCTC CDL Training Program and Industry Partners to fully understand and develop the program costs.

Initial funding sources may include federal and state grants, donations of monies and or equipment from industry partners, including associations, contractors, equipment manufacturers/dealers, sawmills, pulp mills, and others. Once the program is established funding in subsequent years will be through the TCTC budget and may be supplemented by the other aforementioned funding sources.

**Initial benefits for students**

- Provides students with expanded CDL opportunities and skill set.
Tri-County Technical Center in Dexter plans to build on its commercial driver's license training program by training students in how to load and drive logging trucks.

The center is seeking a commercial truck driving instructor for the new module, which is being offered in partnership with members of the logging industry, the center's commercial truck driving instructor, Vicki Kimball, told Mainebiz. The program will start with a maximum of 10 students. Students will have the potential opportunity to either intern with a company during summer months or be selected for an apprenticeship opportunity leading to full-time employment.

According to its website, the center provides career and technical education for high school students residing in the region. Kimball has been with the center for 11 years. The commercial truck driving program is for high school juniors and seniors, and she also offers adult education classes. The program attracts 20 to 24 students per year.

"Maine is the only state in the country that trains and licenses students under the age of 18," she noted.

Kimball said the log truck driving module was driven by Weyerhaeuser, the timberlands and wood products company that owns 1.8 million acres in Maine, Michigan, New Hampshire, Vermont, West Virginia and Wisconsin, according to its website.

The wood products driver program stems directly from an overall driver shortage, she said.

"We just finished the final planning meeting for this particular training program," said Kimball. "Weyerhaeuser approached us for a training module to add log truck driver training so we can feed that industry for CDL operators because they have a shortage. They raised the money. We're searching for an instructor for that now."

Kimball said that, pending recruitment of an instructor, the program could be in place in November.

Kimball said the driver shortage has driven up pay.

"The pay is fantastic as a driver," she said. "When I started as a CDL operator 25 years ago, I was making $9 per hour and that was pretty good." Graduates from her program might today start out at perhaps $13 or $14 per hour but quickly move up to $20 per hour or more, depending on the job. She cited one student who was making $36,000 plus benefits within six months of graduating from the center.

"I think companies are realizing that, getting and keeping a good driver, they're going to have to pay for them," she said.

According to a presentation called "Forest trucking industry in Maine: A review on challenges and resolutions" by Anil Koirala and Anil Raj Kizha, with the University of Maine's School of Forest Resources, trucking is no small consideration for Maine's forest products industry. On any given business day of the year, 2,300 truckloads of Maine forest wood are on the road, traveling an average of 90 miles one-way. The transportation of forest products comprises around 20% to 50% of the entire operational costs.

Initial benefits for TCTC
- Provides increased enrollment opportunities through an expanded program.
- Eliminates the financial risks associated with a program start-up.
- Fulfills the TCTC mission of better serving students and businesses from local communities.

Initial benefits for industry
- Helps all industry partners, including timberlands owners, logging and hauling contractors, sawmills, pulp mills, equipment manufacturers and dealers, and associations.
- Helps all businesses no matter industry affiliation.

Initial benefits for state
- Provides the skilled labor pool for existing business to survive and expand.
- Allows the state to attract new businesses and employ more citizens.

Program success will be defined as graduating 6-10 students in the first year and continuing to incrementally grow the program each subsequent year.