

Fleet Management – The Journey

WHY TRIP PLANNING IS ESSENTIAL

Trip planning is an important factor in the safe and cost-efficient operation of all commercial fleets. Management must balance two needs: choosing the most cost-effective route and controlling the working hours of the driver.

Unfortunately, this task is often considered to be important only for trucking or bus operations. But it can also be an important aspect of managing car and van fleets. Driver fatigue is a major problem for all drivers and there is growing public concern with the many collisions caused by drivers falling asleep at the wheel.

It does not matter how good a driver is, how law abiding or even how defensively he or she drives; collisions can occur due to another driver's mistakes, lack of skill, concentration, or even courtesy. Therefore, every opportunity should be taken in advance to minimize the factors that could impair your drivers' ability to dedicate their full attention to their driving, to help reduce the risks of accidents and injuries, lost time and equipment.

ABOUT TRIP PLANNING

Before a driver in your organization undertakes any trip, you should be asking:

- Is this trip really necessary? In other words, is there an alternative such as tele/videoconferencing?
- Can long drives be avoided or reduced by considering other forms of transportation, such as bus, train, plane?
- Will time pressures or tight schedules encourage the driver to press on, without a break and while fatigued, on long trips?

- What is company policy (official and "unofficial") on the need for breaks or overnight stays and other safety precautions?
- Do all drivers know this policy?
- Are overnight stays scheduled in advance, rather than encouraging the driver to make a return trip the same day?

ROUTE PLANNING

Thorough route planning is critical, especially when the route or destination is unfamiliar. Identifying things like detours and alternatives, major intersections, tricky turns, distances, and the specific location of destination addresses can be done in advance, so this doesn't have to be done while driving. It isn't always as simple as determining the shortest route: careful route planning will consider local traffic patterns, construction areas, expected weather conditions, bad weather, etc., to minimize driver frustrations and time pressures.

All routes should be planned to maximize safety and minimize the time spent behind the wheel. Where possible, encourage the use of major highways as they are statistically safer than rural roads.

Also ensure that the roads selected are suitable for the vehicle used. Government statistics indicate that there are three to six major accidents where vehicles hit overpasses or bridges every day. Additionally, route selection should take into account where the driver should be at various times of the year and day, to avoid school zones during school hours, rush hours, holiday traffic, special events and other high-risk or heavy-traffic times.

PLANNING AIDS

There are many aids on the market to help in route pre-planning and checking traffic and weather

conditions while en route. They include:

- Mapquest and other on-line mapping services, such as Google Maps,
- Weather channels – radio, TV and on-line,
- All-news radio stations with frequent traffic reports,
- Maps, route planning and other information and services from the Canadian Automobile Association.

TRIP SCHEDULING

A critical question that must be asked is: “Are work or trip schedules realistic”?

Management must know the legal driving requirements, hours of work for the area and jurisdictions being travelled to and through. Commercial drivers are governed by the Motor Vehicle Transport Act (1987), which sets limits on how many hours of driving are allowed before a rest period is required. Tachograph records also can keep distance and time-travelled data and companies can be prosecuted when regulations are breached. There are no such rules for car and van drivers other than the recommendation in the Highway Code that drivers should take a 15-minute break every two hours of continuous driving.

The schedule of daily work should be carefully planned and monitored to ensure that drivers do not put in too many hours. Non-driving hours should also be taken into account. For example, it is not uncommon for car drivers to travel over 200 kms to attend meetings and not return home until late at night – a total working day of over 14 hours, which may be in excess that allowed by employment standards legislation.

Heavy scheduling often also entails early starts, when the body would naturally rather sleep and collisions are much more likely to occur. Schedules should be set so that trips do not start before 6:00 a.m. Similarly, trips should not end too late in the day, nor should the day be excessively long. We know that fatigue greatly increases the risk of accidents. Plus, statistics show that fatigue-related accidents are most likely to occur between 2:00 a.m. and 6:00 a.m., and between 2:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m.

TIME

Employers should ensure that employees are not setting themselves unrealistic targets for their appointments or deliveries. If employees underestimate either the time spent in each appointment or delivery or the time it will take to travel between appointments, they will find they have:

- Put themselves under pressure, thereby increasing their stress levels;
- Made themselves more likely to break speed limits, run yellow lights and so on;
- Increased their risk of being involved in a collision.

Practical appointment scheduling will reduce all of these risks. Since the employer could be prosecuted, along with the driver, if authorities decide that unrealistic scheduling contributed to an accident, it's important for managers to ensure their staff are managing their time and appointments wisely.

WEATHER CONDITIONS

When planning trips, are you satisfied that sufficient consideration has been given to adverse weather conditions, such as snow, fog or high winds? Is sufficient flexibility built in to take account of bad weather?

While Canadian drivers like to think they can handle any weather condition that is thrown at them, not all are sufficiently skilled and experienced, nor adequately adjust their driving habits for all different types of weather that Canada can experience. Therefore, it's up to management to both emphasize safety and implement different driving policies and suitable defensive procedures for all weather and road conditions.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Please contact your Aviva Broker for a copy of the “Aviva Fleet Management Guide” and copies of the “In case of Accident Booklets”.

Please also see Aviva Hardfacts:
Fleet Management Basics (A-5587)
Fleet Management – The Driver (A-5588)
Fleet Management – The Vehicle (A-5589)

For details on working hours see:

www.tc.gc.ca/acts-regulations/general/m/mvta/regulations/mvta001/mvta.html