

NEWS & INSIGHTS

ATRI's 2025 Critical Issues: Trucking's Roadmap for the Year Ahead

BY: [DOUGLAS B. MARCELLO](#) | [INSIGHTS](#) | [ARTICLE](#)

DECEMBER 18, 2025



The American Transportation Research Institute's annual "Top 10 Critical Issues" study isn't just a list – it's the trucking industry's MRI scan. For motor carriers, insurers, and risk managers, it reveals where pain points are intensifying and where smart operators should focus resources in the year ahead.

Why It Matters

This year's findings confirm what many of us in trucking defense litigation already know – lawsuit abuse and its downstream effects on insurance are reshaping the industry's operating environment. But the study also surfaces critical disconnects between what companies prioritize and what drivers experience daily. ATRI breaks down perspectives by companies versus drivers, and owner-operators versus company drivers, providing strategies for addressing each issue.

By the Numbers

- **\$4,600** — Average annual income loss per driver due to time spent searching for parking
- **9,300** — Revenue-earning miles lost per driver yearly to the parking crisis
- **1:11** — Current ratio of truck parking spaces to trucks on the road nationwide
- **150,000** — Estimated drivers impacted by English language proficiency enforcement actions
- **44%** — Entry-Level driver training schools disqualified by FMCSA last week

The Industry's Top 10

1. **Economy** — The ongoing freight recession continues to squeeze margins across the sector
2. **Lawsuit Abuse** — Nuclear verdict headlines and plaintiff lawyer billboards aren't slowing down
3. **Insurance Costs/Availability** — The direct cause-and-effect consequence of #2
4. **Truck Parking** — A crisis of safety, fairness, and economics, with one space for every 11 trucks
5. **Driver Compensation** — Directly linked to economic pressures and the truck parking shortage
6. **Compliance, Safety and Accountability (CSA)** — Still on the list after years of promised reform from FMCSA
7. **English Language Proficiency** — This year's headline issue with major enforcement implications
8. **Diesel Emission Regulations** — Industry needs regulatory finality for equipment planning
9. **Driver Training Standards** — The crackdown from the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) on entry-level driver training last week validates widespread concerns
10. **AI in Trucking** — Positioned as the most valuable resource for safety and risk reduction when used correctly

Drivers See It Differently

The study separates company and driver perspectives – and the gaps are telling. While executives fixate on the economy and litigation, drivers put compensation, parking, and English proficiency at the top. These operational pain points directly impact driver income and quality of life.

Autonomous trucks and the entry-level driver mandate appear on the driver list but not the industry list – signaling anxiety about job security and operational burdens that corporate leadership may be underestimating. This perception gap could affect retention and recruitment strategies.

The Perennial Problem

Several issues have earned permanent residency on this list, demanding action rather than continued study. Truck parking hits its 10-year anniversary on the list this year – a full decade of identifying a crisis without solving it. Economy has been a fixture for 10 years, though market forces limit industry control. CSA has appeared in nine of the last 10 years with FMCSA changes perpetually in the offing. Driver compensation is on a six-year streak, with truck parking solutions offering one path to improvement. Lawsuit abuse marks its fifth consecutive year – the clearest case for tort reform.

These aren't emerging issues – they're systemic failures. The value of ATRI's research is identification. The industry's challenge is execution. As the report demonstrates, simply recognizing problems year after year without meaningful action benefits no one.

The Defense Angle

For trucking litigation defense, three takeaways stand out. First, the lawsuit abuse and insurance cost pairing at No. 2 and No. 3 confirms the feedback loop driving operational shutdowns across the industry. When carriers can't afford coverage or can't find it at any price, they exit the market – regardless of their safety record.

Second, AI's appearance at No. 10 – framed as “the most valuable resource for safety and risk reduction” – validates the strategic shift toward objective, data-driven defense against plaintiff experts' subjective opinions. This is the industry acknowledging that technology-based evidence can counter narrative-driven litigation tactics.

Third, the driver training standards issue gains new urgency after the FMCSA disqualified 44% of ELDT schools – creating both compliance risks and potential defense opportunities around training adequacy documentation.

What to Watch

English language proficiency is the wildcard. With 150,000 drivers potentially affected, aggressive enforcement could exacerbate the driver shortage while simultaneously creating new litigation exposure related to hiring

practices and communication-related accidents. Carriers need clear protocols for documenting English proficiency assessments as both a compliance and a defense measure.

Also on the radar: The diesel emission regulations issue reflects deeper uncertainty about fleet planning. Manufacturers and carriers need regulatory finality to make long-term capital investments. Without clarity, the industry operates in a holding pattern that affects everything from equipment purchases to maintenance strategies.

Go Deeper

ATRI President and COO Rebecca Brewster provides a detailed video overview of the findings with her expert analysis in [this video](#) or in [her podcast](#).

Read the Trucking Association Executive's Council's action plan to address key issues undermining trucking integrity. View its plan for immediate action for trucking resurgence at www.truckingresurgence.com.

If you have any questions on the most significant issues facing the trucking industry, please [contact me](#) or any member of the [Saxton & Stump Trucking and Commercial Transportation Group](#).

Related People

[Douglas B. Marcello](#)

Related Services and Industries

[Trucking and Commercial Transportation](#)