

Alaina Mallette

No PAIN, No Gain: Fitch Law Firm Truck Accident Awareness Scholarship Essay

No PAIN, No Gain



Many of us have experienced being next to a commercial truck, and most of us likely feel the urge to speed up and pass them as if being too close to them for too long will cause some sort of bodily harm or simply because they tend to go the speed limit when other road users do not. What happens from the moment we open a child's board book to learn about different kinds of trucks to the moment we feel the urge to speed and pass them? We gain experiences, hear stories, and begin to form opinions—both positive and negative—about commercial trucks and their drivers. However, how often do we learn about safe driving around commercial trucks and for commercial truck drivers? If we are lucky, once in a drivers education course. Therefore, **we call on commercial trucking companies to annually fund a Public Awareness and Improvement Nexus (PAIN) within state-level associations of the American Trucking Associations (ATA)** because the human capital in PAIN will pay off in less accidents and better roadway safety.

Who should we expect to join an ATA state association's PAIN? Though every ATA state association should analyze their own state-level data to focus on roles that address high-incident

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accident types, there are five core paid or voluntary roles that should make up the nexus: **Public Education Specialist, Transportation Engineer, Technology Innovation Manager, Driver Health Specialist**, and a **Director**. This proposed interdisciplinary team has been selected based on the National Safety Council's (NSC) analysis of National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's Crash Report Sampling System and Fatality Analysis Reporting System data files as well as interviews with a former long-distance truck driver and honorably discharged Afghanistan War veteran Mr. Chris Jeter, retired Carrier engineer Mr. Frank Miller, and regional and municipal community planner Ms. Alaina Mallette.

According to the NSC, the majority of truck accidents happen during the daytime in rural areas on non-interstate roadways. Mr. Jeter states that road users are capable of creating unsafe situations, such as pulling out or changing lanes in front of a commercial truck that cannot brake as quickly as a small passenger vehicle. He shared that personal physical and mental health of drivers can be a risk factor, as well. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2019, 10.3% (about 926,000) of working veterans were "in occupations directly involving transportation," which was about 4% more than the non-veteran population. Mr. Miller speaks of the need to use different truck types and sizes for different roadways, i.e., 53-foot trailers for interstate roadways, shorter units for rural non-interstate roadways, and even shorter units for urban areas. Additionally, Ms. Mallette speaks of how dangerous intersections can be redesigned to improve traffic flow and reduce the rate of accidents.

This announcement calls for commercial trucking companies to fund ATA state associations' PAIN so that they can either hire or support new positions. A new interdisciplinary approach to addressing truck accidents can integrate expertise from different disciplines to create

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synergistic, innovative solutions. Ensuring that this team is not only created, but also able to collaborate with commercial trucking companies (e.g., share data, design projects, and implement new initiatives) is essential.

Public Education Specialist. This position requires a specialist to liaise and partner with state-level Departments of Motor Vehicles to improve driver safety education for young drivers and traffic violators. Social media campaigns, media tool kits, and similar tools will need to be in the Public Education Specialist's toolbox. The position will also seek operations-based solutions, such as reducing truck traffic on major holidays to accommodate small vehicle holiday traffic, based on feedback and input from the public as well as analyses of publicly available data.

Transportation Engineer. This position will work closely with municipal and state governments as well as developers to both identify high-incident accident intersections and roadway design improvements for those intersections. Reducing intersection conflict points (e.g., converting four-way intersections to roundabouts), reducing collision types (e.g., sideswipes rather than T-bone crashes), and designing multimodal solutions (e.g., bike lanes or multiuse paths) for pedestrians and bicyclists will be the main focus of this position. This role would also include establishing operational norms related to truck types and sizes for different roadways based on accident data and risk modeling. Solutions identified by this position will require significant infrastructure investments as well as public-private partnerships.

Technology Innovation Manager. This position will analyze operational needs and identify advanced driver-assistance systems that can be implemented in commercial trucks. This position will also create implementation plans for installing cameras, radars, sensors, and even AI supercomputers for autonomous driving assistance—either autopilot or full self-driving. This

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role will require liaising and partnering with tech companies who are designing innovative technology for vehicles.

Driver Health Specialist. An individual familiar with the types of health issues common among truck drivers will be essential to the team as new technology, improved roads, and better public education will have little effect if truck drivers are not healthy, physically and mentally. The position will require designing health plans for truck drivers, which will include diet and exercise plans as well as on-demand therapy opportunities—including physical therapy (e.g., Physera) and mental health therapy (e.g., BetterHelp). For drivers suffering from substance abuse, post-traumatic stress disorder, or any other health issues, the position will create and manage an employee assistance program (EAP) in which employees can support one another and also connect with resources. The EAP would also include a veteran mentor and assistance program in which new veteran-turned-truck drivers would be paired with experienced veteran-turned-truck drivers for mentorship and support.

Director. As the glue of the team, the Director will ensure that the “big picture” is central to the work being done. This position, much like an orchestra’s maestro, synthesizes each individual’s work into a cohesive whole. They catalyze opportunities for collaboration amongst team members and seek out funding opportunities for solutions that the team identifies. This position is responsible for liaising with the national ATA and other states’ associations as well as reporting to the ATA’s board of directors and aiding them in high-level, association-wide decision making.

A siloed approach with different specialties operating in separate spaces does not appear to effectively address truck accidents. NSC data shows that, in the past decade, large-truck

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involvement in injury crashes and the number of people killed in crashes involving large trucks are on the rise. A new industry-wide approach may be the solution to addressing the pain caused by truck accidents. A purpose-driven Public Awareness and Improvement Nexus within ATA state associations is a policy approach that brings human capital to the truck accident prevention equation, and the list of possible solutions becomes limitless. As they say, **no PAIN no gain**. So, consider funding an ATA state association's PAIN to prevent additional pain for your drivers, their families, and the public.



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