

Truck Driver Training for Safe Urban Operations in San Francisco, CA

Noteworthy Practice | September 2017

Overview

In 2015, in support of the Vision Zero San Francisco policy, the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) developed a curriculum and video training for safe operation of large vehicles in urban areas. SFMTA also required drivers of vehicles over 10,000 pounds who were employed, contracted, and permitted by the City and County of San Francisco (CCSF) to complete the training. The goal of the training program is to reduce the number of bicycle and pedestrian fatalities caused by collisions with large vehicles. Crashes involving large vehicles and pedestrians/bicyclists are low-frequency, but high-severity events. From 2007 to 2011, large vehicles were involved in only four percent of all vehicle collisions in San Francisco, yet they accounted for 17 percent of all fatalities. Furthermore, pedestrians and cyclists were over eight times more likely to be killed in a crash with a large vehicle than with a car. The training program also encourages private companies to

adopt the curriculum and incorporate urban driving safety principles into California's commercial driver licensing curriculum. Over 6,400 drivers are estimated to have completed the SFMTA training since 2015. (More information is available at <https://www.sfmta.com/blog/drive-big-truck-heres-how-go-big-safety>.)

Process

In 2013, SFMTA convened the Large Vehicle and Safer Streets Working Group (WG) to identify actions to increase safety for pedestrians and bicyclists. The WG stakeholders included statewide trucking organizations; the Teamsters; CCSF and regional agency staff who oversee and train large vehicle operators; public safety stakeholders; the California Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV); private fleet owners and operators; and shuttle operators. In addition to holding in-person WG meetings, SFMTA conducted one-on-one conversations with stakeholders unable to attend and some members provided written feedback. SFMTA

staff also surveyed 200 professional large vehicle drivers about their comfort and knowledge of safe urban driving.

The WG recommended that the CCSF develop a set of curriculum standards and take the lead in promoting safe driving techniques for operators of large vehicles in urban areas with pedestrians and bicyclists—a gap in existing commercial driver license training. CCSF worked with operators, fleet owners, and local agencies to develop a curriculum that included in-depth training and a written test, which were finalized in June 2016. SFMTA also produced a training video (see Figure 1), available at <https://www.sfmta.com/getting-around/commercial-vehicles/large-vehicle-urban-driving-safety-program>.

Key Accomplishments

- First U.S. municipal program providing city-specific truck driver education on bicyclist and pedestrian safety.
- City developed training standards, training video, and written curriculum.
- Training video streamed over 6,400 times as of September 2017.
- Has helped increase trucking companies' awareness of their responsibility to train drivers for safe urban operation.
- Collaboration among city departments, truck operators, and advocacy groups.



Figure 1. Scene from SMFTA large vehicle driver safety awareness video (Source: SMFTA).

Beginning in September 2015, commuter shuttles and other companies that contract with SFMTA must require their drivers to watch the training video, while all city-employed large-vehicle drivers must complete the training curriculum. At least 27 non-contracted private companies have also shared the training video with their employees and the Teamsters union has shared it with their locals. The training video has been streamed over 6,400 times as of September 2017.

In the future, the CCSF plans to extend the training requirement to contractors of other city agencies and to permitted operators, such as tour buses. Next steps include outreach to secure commitments from more freight companies to use the training program and efforts to add the contents of the training program to the State commercial driver's license manual and exam.

Lessons Learned

CCSF staff worked with the Teamsters, the California Trucking Association, insurance companies, and interested private operators to develop and disseminate the training materials. Through this effort, SFMTA and the California Trucking Association established a strong working relationship. The focus on developing new resources for drivers was key to this collaborative partnership. The CCSF also set a strong example by requiring all CCSF employees to be trained. SFMTA believes the program has been successful in raising awareness of safety needs and building collaboration with the local trucking industry.

The training has also helped increase trucking companies' awareness of their responsibility to train drivers for safe urban operation. If a CCSF-contracted freight operator fails to require its drivers to complete the training and one of its drivers injures or kills someone in an urban crash, the company may be found liable.

One challenge to launching the program was addressing internal SFMTA staff perceptions that there would be significant bureaucracy involved in administering and enforcing program compliance. By leveraging existing processes as much as possible and asking companies (rather than individual drivers) to self-certify, SFMTA was able to successfully overcome these challenges. However, given the reliance on company (not driver) certification, SFMTA is unable to track the training status of individual drivers.

Developing and producing the training video also took more time than expected.

The CCSF recognizes the challenges involved in implementing commercial driver training requirements at the local level. State and Federal vehicle codes and laws constrain any city's ability to require training for all truck drivers using city streets. In the future, the CCSF plans to work with the California DMV to include specific questions on State DMV commercial licensing exams, which would ensure that newly licensed commercial drivers become aware of safety issues specific to urban driving. In the meantime, professional organizations have indicated a strong interest in providing such training to their members. San Francisco recommends that other cities introduce similar requirements, freely adapting the resources already developed by SFMTA.

Recommendations

To local jurisdictions seeking to adopt a similar program, SFMTA specifically recommends the following:

- Establish a local committee to adjust SFMTA's model curriculum as needed.
- Establish minimum training standards and then develop training materials that meet those standards, ideally materials that are highly interactive.
- Engage and partner with local and State trucking associations early on to assure buy-in and wide distribution to industry partners.

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