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TRANSPORTATION

## Mississauga home to best in trucking and logistics

# Driving change in transportation

*Bison's trophy case continues to fill as trucking firm rapidly advances its claim to be one of the best firms in the sector*

These are trying times for the trucking industry. Gas prices continue to rise. Gridlock is killing businesses, and raising the blood pressure of drivers. Border crossings get longer and longer. And there's a serious shortage of skilled drivers.

But the good news is this: trucking is still the great driver of the Canadian economy, and getting the goods to market is why transportation has to be one of the most important industry sectors.

Couple that with the logistics business, and the movement of product is one of the great one-two punches in corporate Canada.

Few trucking companies have succeeded like Bison Transport, headquartered in Winnipeg, has a growing presence in Mississauga, including a new building slated to rise up in 2014.

Bison Transport is one of the largest transportation companies in Canada, offering a smorgasbord of transportation and logistics solutions to the industry for 44 years.

Recognized by the TCA (Truckload Carrier's Association) as North America's Safest Fleet, Bison is a high-service, dependable and value creating supply chain partner. It offers truckload service, LTL service, asset based logistics, intermodal, dedicated fleet operations, yard management and warehousing & distribution. It's also an active member of Natural Resources Canada's FleetSmart Program.

Bison's operations and dispatch departments are staffed all day, and year round. Its density of trucks allows for contingency planning should a Bison truck break down while carrying a time sensitive shipment.

Working closely with customers drives the brand, and creating tools to assist with the shipping process starts with iTools, an online program where customers can log in to track shipments, find proof of shipment delivery (PODs), and create reports. Bison also has in-house programmers who can create specialized reports for customers upon request.

The firm's trophy case continues to fill



On the road again (top) and Bison headquarters in Winnipeg (above).

up. It was recognized by Walmart Canada as the Overall Store Delivery Carrier of the Year at the annual Walmart Canada Carrier Awards banquet held in Mississauga recently.

It's the second year in a row Bison earned this distinction, which is based on on-time performance, commitment to excellence, innovative approach, and customer service.

Bison's on-time performance for Walmart Canada in 2012 was in excess of 99 per cent, successfully delivering over 50,000 shipments, many from Walmart's giant million-square-foot distribution facility in northern Mississauga.

Bison Transport was presented with the 2012 Carrier Quality Award. Its Canadian Truckload Carrier of the Year award was handed out in late May in Novi, Michigan.

Bison Transport has qualified for the Canadian Transportation & Logistics (CT&L) Shipper's Choice Award on six different occasions.

The company is also committed to the environment through implementing idle reduction technologies, recycling programs, efficient routing practices, courses on fuel economy, and utilizing new and efficient equipment such as Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) tractors and Long Combination Vehicles (LCV).

Measuring success is about profits and the reduction of the firm's carbon footprint. It's also driven by its investment in sustainable practices. Bison was an early adopter of capturing and selling carbon credits.

The GHG reductions traded are the result of various fuel efficient strategies including aerodynamic improvements (such as tractor trailer gap fairing, trailer belly skirts, and aerodynamic profile tractors), speed and driver management, truck idling control strategies, using more intermodal transportation, and long combination vehicles, and investing in tire efficient technology such as low-rolling resistance tires.

Bison made its first purchase of Liquefied Natural Gas Tractors, which offer new environmentally-conscious technology by using a 'greener' fuel. Under specific conditions, the use of LNG in heavy duty applications has the potential to deliver a 20 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

Bison Transport has been in a rapid growth mode since 2000 when it operated 380 tractors. Today, there are 1,250 tractors and 3,500 trailers, and overall, it has over 2200 employees.

In 2011, Transport Topics ranked Bison Transport as 68th largest 'For-Hire' carrier in North America. In 2012, Bison rose to become the 65th largest carrier.

Bison Transport has been a member of 'Canada's 50 Best Managed Companies' since 1994.

## Cabbies wondering how to make ends meet

Cont. from page 7

And PVAC citizen member Nabil Nasser is among those wanting to know the ratio of accessible versus total taxi trips in Mississauga annually, and the cost of converting a regular van to Accessible.

"We have to have these (numbers)," he says. "That's why the legislation didn't say we have to do this today. There's a lot of problems."

Blue & White Taxi president Baljit Pandoori puts the purchase price of a new accessible van at \$50,000 – cost-prohibitive for operators in lean times. But according to Sexsmith, one model is available locally for only \$27,000.

Baumber estimates the cost of putting an accessible cab on the road is just \$1 to \$1.25 per day, over seven years (the legal limit for using a taxi in Mississauga).

"You're talking about the price of a cup of coffee," he says, emphatically.

Nasser counters, "it's \$1.25 per fare over seven years, after you have to come up with \$50,000 ahead of time, and then recover it \$1.25 at a time."

Many industry leaders slam the government for laying down this legislation, without providing taxi operators with any financial incentives to purchase these vehicles.

"Once we have the actual numbers to back up the need, I think then the government will step up," Taddeo suggests.

While acknowledging there's no questioning the right of equal access, and that, "this is where the future is", Iannicca notes that Mississauga plateholders have been free to convert their vehicles to Accessibles since the early '70s, and to this point few have responded.

"If there's such a great demand in the marketplace, taxi operators would be addressing it today by converting their vehicles," he says.

He suggests treading carefully, and that the transition to OADA standards will take place over the course of many years. He recommended hiring an outside consultant to develop a new taxi plate issuance formula for 2014, incorporating accessibility amongst the criteria.

Panjoori agrees that the province, and the City of Mississauga will, "need a business plan" before implementing

the 100 per cent threshold.

"The demand isn't there yet," he says, noting that his company's 24 accessible cab drivers wouldn't survive without TransHelp runs, with accessible requests making up just 1 per cent of the 4,000 calls fielded daily.

He emphasizes that many of those with disabilities (using a cane, walker, or fold-up wheelchair) don't require an accessible taxi. And he cites a stigma amongst the able-bodied community against riding in these bulky vehicles.

The disabled community claims brokerage estimates of accessible runs are inaccurate, because many of those requiring accessible taxi service have simply given up calling them.

However, the June 11 meeting attracted only a bare handful of people in wheelchairs, lending fuel to the argument that the demand for blanket accessible service is not there.

"I see there's a small turnout," Baumber countered. "Part of the reason is because it's not easy to get here. They have to book in advance."

# Bradley still bullish on trucking

The Ontario Trucking Association (OTA) is objecting to the proposal from Metrolinx for a special 5-cent a litre tax on diesel fuel to help pay for the regional transportation agency's \$20 billion transit plan for the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area.

"The trucking industry believes in paying its fair share for the infrastructure it uses. However, Metrolinx is a transit plan; it does not address the equally compelling need to maintain and upgrade the region's or the province's network of roads, highways and bridges," says OTA's president and CEO, David Bradley, a Mississauga resident.

Instead, OTA's position is that tax revenues generated from commercial diesel fuel taxes and heavy truck registration fees should be allocated to a dedicated provincial trust fund specifically for roads, highways and bridges.

"That's where the trucking industry's fuel tax dollars should be going," Bradley says. "Truckers should not be expected to pay for transit. Unlike motorists who have a choice in terms of whether to drive or take transit, truckers have no such choice."

In addition, truckers are already smarting from a 70-per cent increase in commercial plate fees announced by the McGuinty government last year.

"No other sector has been subjected to such an increase in user fees," Bradley claims.

Moreover, there are a huge number of heavy utility trucks (such as mobile cranes, vacuum trucks, concrete pumping trucks, water trucks, etc.) which are exempt from the normal registration and licensing requirements, and therefore are exempt from paying any vehicle registration fees, use tax-exempt diesel fuel, and are not subject to most other vehicle or safety compliance standards.

OTA estimates the revenue leakage to the province from this omission to be around \$50 million per year.

The exemption appears to go back to an old law exempting road-building machines from provincial registration.

"These vehicles are not asphalt spreaders,



David Bradley

bulldozers and the like, which are clearly road-building machines that operate exclusively in construction zones," Bradley says.

"These are trucks; they serve many commercial purposes and customers. They operate on provincial highways and they impose wear and tear on the public infrastructure like any other motor vehicle.

"The only difference is they don't pay anything," he argues.

"\$50 million would buy a lot of infrastructure; we have a hard time accepting that some trucks should pay more while others pay nothing. From a tax point of view, these non-contributing trucks enjoy the same tax status as bicycles."

OTA says a regional diesel fuel tax is potentially very problematic.

The association believes it would impact the competitiveness of GTHA trucking companies and could cause some to re-locate outside the boundaries of the region. It exempts carriers from contributing towards the infrastructure costs who are based outside of the region (and from outside of the province) but who operate into, out of, and through the region every day.

It will create an increased administrative burden for government and for the commercial taxpayer. The current fuel tax systems are well-established; the mechanisms for collecting, remitting and auditing are well-entrenched in both industry and government. They are also governed by a well-functioning North American administrative agreement (IFTA).

"We want to play a constructive role in the conversation about how to pay for transportation infrastructure," says Bradley. "The Premier is commended for making gridlock a priority of her government, but we need to use this opportunity to take a system-wide view, to build trust and to do it right."

Ontario's trucking industry has pulled through more than three years of rising loonie woes and lost business, but has emerged as a more stable industry, said Bradley in an interview conducted by the Mississauga Business Times.

He is also president of the Canadian Trucking Alliance (CTA) and is working with groups and colleagues on new and potential methods of attracting young people, screening them and training them.

"Looking back, I'd have to say we were decimated by the financial crisis in spite of struggling with four to five-per cent profit margins in the best of times."

As the biggest antagonist for the industry at large, the rise of the dollar wasn't really expected by many businesses, exporters and foreign-trade customers.

"Our volumes dropped a full 30 per cent in 2009, and of course trucking activity is one of the key indicators of economic slumps," he said.

But it was significantly less devastating for Ontario and the rest of Canada than for the U.S. and other G20 countries.

"Domestic growth in 2010 to 2012 was either modest or non-existent, however. There still is a sense of fragility in the marketplace, and until our biggest trading partner shows clear recovery trends, this will not change much.

"Truckers have shown restraint due to this

lid on the economy; they're waiting for U.S. customers to start buying stuff.

"Most truckers around town have maintained poise and discipline, trimming down their fleets and capacities and trimming off their inefficiencies. There now appears to be a better equilibrium between available freight and freight lines' abilities to serve."

As a result of the better balance, contrasting with overcapacity in 2008, companies report having made "repairs" to their balance sheet, and even reaping a few long-overdue increases in freight rates at the same time.

"Still, there is little scope for absorbing rising equipment and fuel costs, and trucking probably will remain a low-margin business compared with the railways; it also will remain hypercompetitive.

"There is more work to be done in restructuring freight rates, after three years of rate bleeding, but at least our truckers have increasing their stability, out of need."

The driver shortage, along with labour shortages in many other Canadian industry sectors, has become a very large and chronic problem.

"This can only worsen before it goes away. Our driver demographic here is rapidly becoming Canada's oldest workforce. We can't get enough people to come into a skill venue that simply hasn't promoted itself well as a career choice.

"Don't rush to buy new trucks if you're not a hundred per cent sure you've got the drivers and are well equipped to [facilitate] their skill levels and trainability.

"Training is an important problem requiring investments we can no longer avoid. There aren't many young farmhands or armed forces personnel available anymore, particularly where equipment experience is required."

Because of modern safety regulations, most trucking companies are adopting policies of training new people thoroughly to a "comfortable" level of expertise before they can be let loose on the road.

(With files from Rich Letkeman)

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