

From Bay Street to the Road: Converting theoretical transportation laws into commercial reality



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I am sitting outside the secure yard of John Deere's Grimsby terminal early on a cold, dark Monday morning. It is 6:10 a.m. and instead of heading to my Bay Street offices, I am about to ride-along with driver **Stephen Gordon** of CPC Logistics Canada LTD. on the Grimsby-Syracuse day run.



A score of pristine white Freightliners

I call John from dispatch: the massive gate slides across slowly, and in the dark terminal, I can see the white outlines of a score of pristine white Penske-leased Freightliners.

Spotless trucks, I note: aligned with precision in the far side of the yard. We are assigned a tractor used by the only lady driver.

In the tractor, Stephen unloads his gear for the day: he has a cooler with bananas, chocolate bars, and peanut butter and jelly sandwiches (including an extra one for me); a do-rag to block the sun; backscratcher, clipboard and

papers; ELD; and a personal cellphone (for time display only).

As I adjust to my temporary workspace, I look around. Behind us is a bed covered with a blue and white duvet and matching pillow. I wonder if every tractor has such a nice bed or if this is unique to the lady driver? I decide not to ask.

While I contemplate driver sleeping arrangements, Stephen demonstrates how to adjust the passenger seat. After some mechanical flailing, I manage to circumvent the air suspension by setting the seat right on the floor.

"You might want to take advantage of the air suspension," Stephen suggests again politely, and shows me once more how to get the most comfortable setting. I opt for the highest setting of heated seat and a medium-cushioned ride.



We then go outside again, where Stephen performs a detailed circle check. As we inspect the tractor, it is still dark. I watch Stephen check the tires by whacking each one with a billy club.

Swathed in a bright orange safety vest (no one wants an injured lawyer, and everyone else is wearing one), I am also wearing a lined hoodie I usually wear motorcycle riding, steel-toed boots, and jeans. I wish I was wearing a hat and gloves – I am cold.

I note we have been outside in the dark for about 40 minutes.

Stephen happily announces to shipping he has arrived with a lawyer

Circle check complete, we need the trailer but first we must complete more paperwork. We meet Martin in shipping, who seems somewhat surprised to see a strange woman in his office at 7:14 a.m. Martin's surprise is not mitigated when Stephen happily announces I am a lawyer!

I note that Stephen is very deliberate



with his paperwork: two small paper clasps in John Deere colours affix papers to a clipboard, and Stephen lets me read various invoices, customs documents such as the eManifest and Pars, and the Straight Bill of Lading.

I think about litigating cargo loss cases involving BOLs, analyzing the federal and provincial BOL legislation, and minimizing the BOLs influence in scores of contracts for carriage. But I have never actually seen a BOL in use. It is exciting.

Accuracy of documents saves road time

Stephen wonders aloud if the entry numbers for the cargo customs clearance will arrive before we get to the border, explaining that waiting for the entry numbers can cause a delay of several hours.

I watch Stephen participate in a system of check, check and double check, and final check again. The accuracy of the shipping and customs documents saves road time.

Paperwork complete, we locate our trailer, but realize that somebody dropped the trailer “way higher than they needed to;” we can’t simply back the tractor to couple with the trailer.

We are losing time

We are losing time.

Stephen manually lowers the trailer, so that it can be backed smoothly to hitch to the kingpin. There is a splendid crash-like sound when they couple, and we make one last stop to visit dispatch for more paperwork completion and to microwave our coffees. Now we are border bound.

During the day, Stephen constantly notes the time. We leave the yard later than usual, so we encounter heavier traffic. However, with a later departure we learn the customs entry numbers have already come through. The teamwork

between CPC Logistics and John Deere to get those approvals is a key factor in a driver’s day.

Balancing hours of service regs in two countries

With an ELD tracking his hours of service, Stephen plans our day to have two coffee stops, and a minimum 30-minute break at a truck stop after the cargo drop.

This precision is necessary to balance the two-hour difference in hours of service regulations in Canada and the US. As a lawyer, I measure my time in 10-minute increments (.2) and self-monitor. As a driver, Stephen’s time is regulated by two countries, his employer, the shipper, and his conscience.

We cross at Lewiston-Queenston

We cross the border at the Lewiston-Queenston Bridge. With specific lanes dedicated to commercial vehicles, the wait time is minimal. Our border crossing is uneventful, and we are now in the United States.

In a while, we stop for a Tim’s and a break, and run into a fellow driver who is ahead of us by about 15 minutes. We park in the farthest open space from the rest stop to work in some exercise. I realize that Stephen has implemented every aspect of comfort and self-care into his day that he can.

I buy the coffees, and we share a blueberry muffin. The peanut butter and jelly sandwiches are saved for later in the day.

Along the way to Syracuse, we flash ‘hello’ with our lights at a US John Deere truck that goes by in the opposite direction. “Everyone loves John Deere,” Stephen explains proudly.

As the miles go by, I see numerous car drivers on their cell phones – some pass us on the right side and I can see the drivers talking on a handheld cell!

East Syracuse by 11:50 a.m.

We make it to our destination in East Syracuse by 11:50 a.m. We meet Robin, also a driver for CPC, who cheerily discusses return loads standing in the cold, multi-puddled yard. The camaraderie cheers our day.

I watch with interest as Stephen unseals the trailer.

Stephen picks up a new loaded trailer from the yard, inspects it, and completes more paperwork to transport this cargo back to Grimsby.

We drop off paperwork at the yard’s offices, but interact for several minutes only. With the clock ticking due to Stephen’s hours of service, we have to keep moving. Stephen seals the new trailer and we head back to Canada.

On the way back, we add in a lunch break at a truck stop where drivers can sleep, play in the arcade, shop for sundries, dine, shower, or do laundry. However, we eat and run in 48 minutes with Stephen treating me this time.

For our entire day, Stephen maintains complete focus; driving with precision to safely negotiate countless texting drivers, to avoid being cut off by distracted drivers, suicidal deer, arbitrary construction sites, all while manoeuvring the tractor and trailer under his care for



640 km. Stephen does this every day, five days a week. He is an exemplary driver.

The end of the day

The empty trailer is dropped in the Grimsby yard. It's 4:56 p.m. Our run is over, the cargo is delivered and we are back in the yard safe and sound.

This day converted my theoretical understanding of transportation laws

into practical knowledge. I will never see cross border cargo transport the same way again.

Every step, every document, every movement by the driver is subject to some law or regulation, or some practical, intuitive or experiential requirement. Nothing is superfluous – everything is meaningful.

I am exhilarated. 



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