

Compliance Date Arrives for Rule Mandating Training for Aspiring Commercial Drivers

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Beginning February 7, 2022, most aspiring commercial drivers will need to complete specified training before they can get behind the wheel of a truck or bus. The new requirements, mandated by Congress, include a list of theory topics and driving skills that commercial driver trainees must learn, and establish qualifications for those who provide the training.

Background

In 2012, the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act ([MAP-21, P.L. 112-141, §32304](#)) directed the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) to create a minimum standard curriculum for the training of new commercial drivers. The resulting Entry-Level Driving Training (ELDT) [regulation](#) applies to persons seeking to get, for the first time, a Class A or Class B commercial driver license (CDL); to upgrade from a Class B CDL to a Class A CDL; or to add an endorsement (an authorization added to an existing CDL required for the holder to drive certain types of commercial vehicles) allowing the holder to drive a school bus, a passenger bus, or a vehicle transporting hazardous materials. The ELDT regulation does not apply to persons seeking to renew an existing CDL, or to those not subject to CDL requirements (e.g., military drivers, and farmers and firefighters excepted by their state).

The ELDT regulation is based on recommendations made in 2015 by FMCSA's [Entry-Level Driver Training Advisory Committee](#), which included representatives of driver organizations, motor carriers, state licensing agencies, law enforcement agencies, trucking safety organizations, labor unions, and insurance companies. FMCSA issued a [proposed rule](#) in March 2016 and, after accepting public comments, published the [final regulation](#) in December 2016. The compliance date was set for 2020—and subsequently extended to February 7, 2022—to allow FMCSA time to set up an online training provider registry, to provide states time to pass necessary legislation and to modify their information systems to record CDL applicants' compliance, and to allow training providers time to comply with the new requirements.

New Requirements Taking Effect

The ELDT regulation establishes a curriculum composed of theory topics and driving skills (found in 49 C.F.R. [Part 380](#) Appendix A through E) that must be covered in the training provided to driver-trainees.

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For example, applicants for a Class A license must learn docking and parallel parking maneuvers, while applicants for a school bus endorsement must complete units on student management and the use of mirrors to check for students around the outside of the bus. States may set standards that exceed this regulation.

The regulation also creates an online [Training Provider Registry](#) to serve as a central information site for training providers, state licensing agencies, driver-trainees, and FMCSA. Training providers must create an account on the registry, self-certifying that they provide training that complies with the curriculum requirements, and an account for each student.

To qualify, a trainer must hold a CDL of the same (or higher) class, and with all endorsements necessary, to operate the type of commercial vehicle for which they provide training. The trainer also must have a minimum of two years of experience driving a commercial vehicle requiring a CDL of that class or endorsement or at least two years of experience as a “behind the wheel” commercial vehicle instructor. Further, trainers must meet any other requirements established by their state. Persons seeking training can search the registry to find qualified providers of training.

FMCSA’s cost-benefit analysis (for 2020-2029) estimated that the regulation will cost an average of [\\$366 million](#) each year, mainly in tuition costs for prospective drivers who would otherwise have not gotten training before getting their CDL. FMCSA estimated quantifiable benefits at [\\$239 million](#) per year, mostly from fuel savings from improved driver performance, and also from reduced CO₂ emissions from fuel savings and reduced vehicle maintenance and repair costs. FMCSA could not quantify the driver-safety/crash-reduction risk benefit of the regulation due to lack of data linking training and safety performance. The agency estimated that the benefits of the regulation would exceed its costs if it reduced the number of fatal, injury, and property-damage-only crashes involving new drivers by [3.6% annually](#).

Impact on New CDL Driver Supply

Some observers have questioned whether the new regulation will reduce the supply of new drivers, because the compliance deadline is coming at a time when there is concern about the size of the CDL driver pool. FMCSA projected that the training regulation would not discourage potential drivers, as it estimated that roughly 85% of new Class A and Class B CDL applicants [already were receiving training](#) that, with minimal changes, would meet or exceed the new requirements.

Similarly, there is currently a shortage of school bus drivers, and some have expressed concern that the regulation may make recruiting school bus drivers more difficult. Some commenters originally questioned the inclusion of the school bus endorsement in the regulation, noting it was not included in the MAP-21 mandate. FMCSA observed that two national school transportation associations supported including the school bus endorsement in the new regulation, one of which noted that most states and school districts already provide training to school bus drivers that is consistent with, and in many cases exceeds, the training requirements of the new rule. Federal regulations already required school bus drivers to hold a Class B (or Class A) CDL and a passenger endorsement, as well as a school bus endorsement.

Additional information about the regulation is available from FMCSA's [website](#).

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