BESTPASS + Drivewyze

Integrating Toll and Bypass Management

Fleets that regularly roam our nation's highways are subjected to charges from many different tolling authorities, each with its own rules and regulations. It's an issue that creates a compelling business case for exploring available toll management options, which offer a coordinated and stream-lined approach to tolls that can save hours each month, boost productivity and positively impact the financial bottom line.

Yet, while managing toll is a strong start, it's only one part of a broader landscape that includes addressing other challenges such as citations, acquiring International Fuel Tax Agreement (IFTA) permits to cross state lines and passing through weigh stations. A rising trend among forward-thinking solution providers is to expand services through technology integrations and partnerships, with an overall goal of architecting a comprehensive payment platform that ties together all types of charges that fleets encounter.

Combining the management of tolls and weigh station bypass is a natural fit. Bypass technology enables electronic logging devices (ELDs) already utilized in fleet vehicles to inform drivers of their eligibility for a weigh station bypass, with benefits that mirror those of toll management: saving time, increasing productivity and boosting revenue. In addition, leveraging data from both types of transactions can provide a more complete picture of fleet operations — enabling both drivers and fleet managers to make better decisions that maximize efficiency.

Here is a closer look.

Weigh Station Basics

Weigh stations are found across the United States, serving as designated areas for the Department of Transportation (DoT) and state highway patrols to ensure that commercial vehicles are not exceeding the maximum weight allowed on the roads. Generally speaking, 80,000 pounds is the limit, and weight checks are required for all commercial vehicles weighing more than 10,000 pounds. The time spent at a weigh station can vary widely: newer scales using weigh-in-motion technology allow trucks to be weighed without stopping, while older, static scales are less efficient. Any vehicle being weighed is also subject to a more thorough safety inspection if selected. As a result, while some trucks may spend as little as five minutes per station, others can spend as much as two hours at each stop. Either way, this is time lost that translates to diminished productivity.

The likelihood of being selected for an inspection increases each time a vehicle enters a weigh station, and each inspection increases the potential for safety concerns to be flagged and tickets to be issued. These tickets negatively impact the Inspection Selection System (ISS) score set by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) that helps enforcement officials determine whether to pull vehicles for inspection. It's not hard to see how this can become a vicious cycle: increased inspections can mean higher scores, and higher scores can result in more inspections. It's important to note that weigh station bypass is a reward for good safety practices, not a way to avoid inspections.
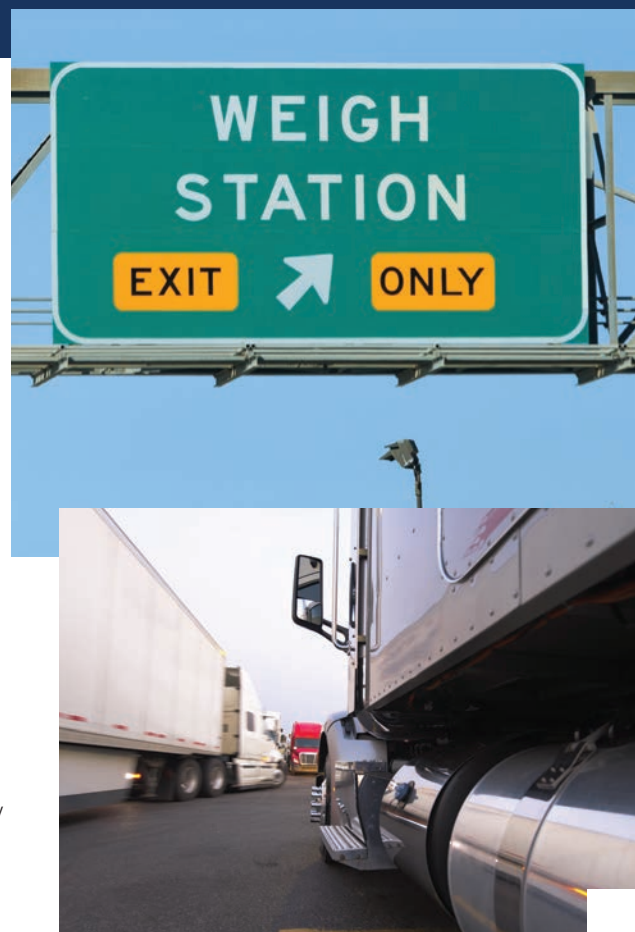
The ability to bypass weigh stations changes the equation, helping both fleets and individual operators to keep their safety scores low and to save time overall. This means increasing the time drivers can spend on duty and improving delivery times, as well as decreasing the fuel costs associated with idling at weigh stations and reducing maintenance costs — all factors that have a positive impact on revenue. The unpredictable nature of bypass eligibility can make taking advantage of these benefits an elusive goal.

Who Gets a Bypass?

The same safety scores that influence decisions on which vehicles to pull for inspections are also the key to bypass eligibility. Lower scores reflect better safety records, and the FMCSA considers these cumulatively for fleets — in other words, when individual drivers keep their safety scores low, their whole fleet can be eligible for weigh station bypasses. But it's important to remember that this is a two-way street: When individual drivers receive "dings" on their scores due to safety violations, the rest of the fleet is also impacted. Fleet scores can change daily, and drivers may be surprised to learn that they no longer have bypass eligibility because of an incident elsewhere in the fleet, earlier that same day. Even fleet managers may not be aware of a "ding" until they receive a formal report, as much as 30 days after the incident occurs.

Adding to this unpredictability is the fact that qualifying safety scores vary by state, which can make a significant difference for fleets that travel across multiple states or regions. And while many states have fixed locations for their weigh stations that can be planned into travel routes, some use roving "pop-ups" that appear at random checkpoints along the way.

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Technology That Empowers

Integrating bypass eligibility data into vehicle based ELDs can be an ideal answer to these challenges, providing insights at all levels of fleet responsibility. The ELD can be used to inform drivers when they are approaching a weigh station, whether it is a fixed or roving location, and also to let them know whether they are eligible for a bypass, based on their most current safety score information. Fleet managers, who may already be tracking information such as driver on-duty hours and maintenance records, can leverage this additional data into gaining a more complete picture of what's happening at the individual vehicle level. The same applies to data on tolling, further adding to a holistic and comprehensive view of fleet operations. Combining information about both the money spent on tolls and time lost to weigh station visits can

make it possible to plan the most efficient travel routes at levels of detail that were previously unavailable. Establishing route optimization as a regular, ongoing fleet-wide practice can lead to improved profitability.

Both bypass eligibility and tolling data can also support other fleet management duties, whether those tasks are performed by dedicated staff or part of the overlapping responsibilities of a few — most likely overworked — administrative professionals. Safety directors can keep their focus on driver safety rather than getting bogged down in the complexities of tolls and weigh stations. Human resource associates will find benefits in both decreased levels of driver stress and increased retention rates.

The bottom line is that bypass and toll technologies can be empowering — both for fleets and for the drivers that keep them running. The same technology is also flexible, allowing for solutions that integrate with existing equipment, and accessible in a variety of forms including cellphone- and tablet-based apps.

New Directions

Whether large or small, fleets are regularly tasked with a hefty load of challenges extending far beyond their most basic function of hauling cargo from one location to another. Paying tolls and visiting weigh stations, addressing citations and acquiring permits — all these tasks can add up to an administrative nightmare, or they can be well-managed by solutions on the cutting edge of modern transportation.

Already, platforms with a singular focus such as toll management have proven their value in simplifying the lives of professionals at all levels of the trucking industry. The integration of multiple point solutions into a more comprehensive platform is the next progressive step, and the natural fit of combining toll and bypass management is just one example. Powered by new partnerships among solutions providers, these innovative offerings are driving the industry in new directions.

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