

Where the Trucks Actually Are

I went through all 3.19 million FMCSA carrier records to see what US for-hire capacity actually looks like.

Most capacity numbers count trucks. I counted companies instead, because who you can actually book turns out to be a different question.

1,428,837

Active interstate for-hire carriers

65%

Of them operate a single truck

84,331

Registered in the last 12 months

402,268

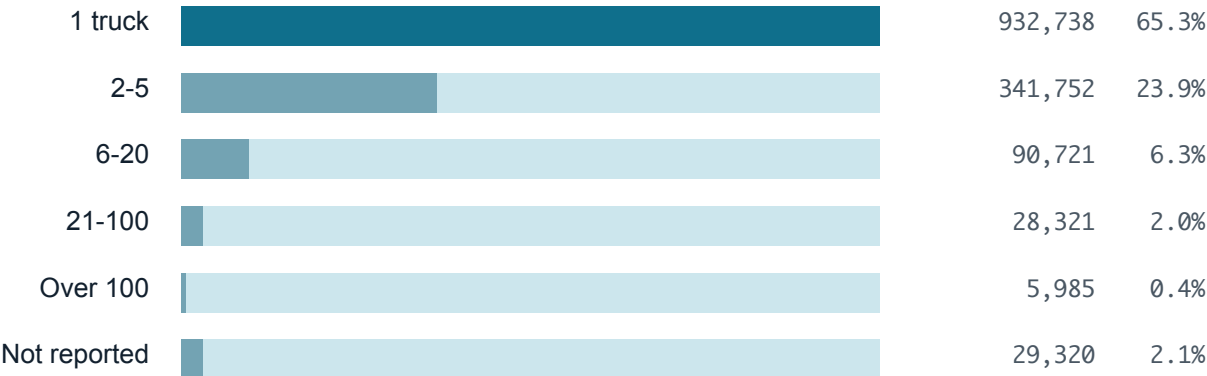
Share a phone number with another carrier

Where this came from: the FMCSA Company Census file ([data.transportation.gov, dataset az4n-8mr2](https://data.transportation.gov/dataset/az4n-8mr2)), which I refresh daily. I limited it to carriers with active operating authority, interstate operation, and for-hire cargo authority, because that is the population you can lawfully tender a load to. How I did it, and where I would be careful, are on the last page.

The median carrier owns one truck

Freight capacity is usually discussed as though it sits in fleets. It does not. Of the 1,428,837 carriers with active interstate for-hire authority, 932,738 report exactly one power unit. Another 341,752 report between two and five. Fleets of more than 100 trucks account for 0.4% of carriers.

CARRIERS BY REPORTED FLEET SIZE



WHAT I TAKE FROM THIS

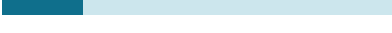
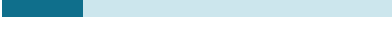
A capacity shortage is rarely a shortage of trucks. It is a shortage of carriers big enough to take a multi-load commitment. When 89% of the market runs five trucks or fewer, covering a surge means recruiting a lot of small carriers rather than calling a few big ones, and every one of them is a separate vetting decision.

NEW ENTRANTS

84,331 of the carriers in this population registered their USDOT number within the last twelve months, which is 5.9% of the active for-hire market. New authority is not a warning sign in itself, and every legitimate fleet starts here. It matters because fraudulent operations are always new, so a young registration that reports an established fleet is worth verifying against insurance and references rather than accepting at face value.

Where that capacity is domiciled

Carriers are counted at the address on their USDOT registration, which is where the business is based rather than where its trucks run. Read this as the supply of carriers you can recruit in a market, not as freight demand.

State	Carriers		Power units	1-truck	Per 100k residents
TX		148,042	481,968	66%	485
CA		143,046	391,599	71%	367
FL		98,247	224,336	73%	435
GA		77,815	179,932	71%	707
IL		63,999	344,999	59%	508
NC		54,921	144,751	69%	509
PA		52,951	208,947	64%	407
OH		50,778	245,099	60%	430
NJ		50,475	145,536	70%	543
NY		34,695	117,517	65%	177
IN		31,590	142,418	59%	458
VA		30,628	85,635	68%	352
MI		29,782	130,232	61%	298
TN		29,689	108,857	64%	418
MD		29,639	72,966	68%	478
WA		26,299	89,075	65%	337
SC		26,178	64,028	72%	485
MO		25,861	99,684	62%	417
MN		24,800	96,533	61%	435
AZ		23,331	66,899	69%	315

Texas and California together hold 21% of the country's active for-hire carriers. But carrier count per resident tells a different story: sparsely populated freight corridors carry far more carriers per capita than the coastal states, which is why recruiting in a thin market often means reaching carriers domiciled several states away.

402,268 carriers share a phone number

Across the census, 402,268 carriers list a telephone number that at least one other carrier also lists. The largest single cluster puts 3,082 distinct DOT numbers on one phone number.

THIS IS NOT A FRAUD STATISTIC

Most shared numbers are entirely legitimate. Filing services register hundreds of authorities from one office. Dispatch services answer for many small fleets. Family operations run several authorities from one kitchen table. A shared number on its own means nothing at all, and treating it as an accusation would be both wrong and unfair to a large share of honest carriers.

It becomes a signal when it clusters. A carrier that shares a phone number and a street address with several other authorities, where the officer surnames repeat and the company names are variations on each other, and whose own registration is a few months old, is describing a pattern rather than a coincidence. That combination is the one worth a direct question before booking, and the question is simply whether the company has operated under another name or DOT number.

HOW I DID IT, AND WHERE I WOULD BE CAREFUL

- Population: carriers with authority status ACTIVE, interstate operation, and for-hire cargo authority. Private fleets and intrastate-only carriers are excluded.
- Fleet figures are self-reported on the MCS-150 and are not audited at filing. The single largest reported fleet in the census is 2,099,979 power units, which is plainly a data entry error. Power unit totals here exclude any carrier reporting more than 500 units, which removes obvious bad filings without materially changing the distribution.
- A filing may be up to two years old, so fleet and mileage describe the carrier as it was at its last biennial update rather than as it is today.
- Per-capita figures use 2024 state population estimates and are rounded.
- Out-of-service status is not included: it is published in a separate FMCSA dataset that this analysis does not ingest.

Check any carrier in here yourself

Every figure here comes from the same FMCSA census behind the free lookup I built. Search any carrier, see authority and registration status separately, and run a free check for the contact-clustering patterns described above. No account needed.

freightradarhq.com/dot-lookup