FMCSA chief: report shows U.S.-Mexico truck travel can be safe, generate business opportunities

Trucks participating in the demonstration project had no crashes, the report said. (Associated Press)

The Trucker News Services

11/6/2008

WASHINGTON — An independent evaluation panel's report on the U.S.-Mexico cross-border trucking demonstration project shows an open border strategy can assure safety and business opportunities, the head of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) said today.

The report was prepared at the request of Secretary of Transportation Mary E. Peters by Mortimer L. Downey III, chairman of the board of PB Consult Inc., James T. Kolbe, senior advisor at McLarty Associates and a professor in the college of business at the University of Arizona, and Kenneth M. Mead, a special consultant at Baker Botts LLP and former inspector general of the Department of Transportation.

"This report provides a comprehensive, independent, analysis of the safety measures the agency put in place to ensure the success of the project," FMCSA Administrator John Hill said. "As the report makes clear, those measures have effectively shown that U.S. and Mexican carriers can safely engage in cross-border trucking operations while providing U.S. drivers new opportunities to compete and succeed in a market where they previously were unable to operate."
The report notes that the level of participation fell far short of what DOT had projected with only 29, not the anticipated 100, participating.

Hill has repeatedly said the uncertainty of the program is the result of continued attempts by some in Congress to shut down the project, and the primary reason for the lower-than-expected participation. Among other findings:

• Demonstration trucks had no reported crashes.

• The DOT has honored its commitment to check every truck everytime.

• FMCSA and state safety enforcement officials reported no crashes involving Mexico-domiciled trucks participating in the demonstration project. During the project, more than 7,000 safety inspections were conducted on the participant drivers and more than 1,400 safety inspections on the participant trucks, in addition to the every-truck-every-time checks done at the border-crossing facilities used by the OP-1 carriers.

• Of the 7,000 driver safety inspections, 37, or less than 1 percent, resulted in out-of-service (OOS) violations.

• The panel's work "verified" that FMCSA implemented policies and regulations regarding admitting Mexico-domiciled carriers into the demonstration project, establishing safety mechanisms at the border, ensuring enforcement of safety rules by state enforcement officials, and carrying out the Department's commitment to check every truck and every driver every time. More specifically, the report said the authors found that (1) the Pre-Authority Safety Audits (PASAs) were comprehensive and the agency conducted all the audits on-site in Mexico, (2) that FMCSA honored its commitment to check every truck every time at the border, and (3) that FMCSA provided state safety enforcement officers with guidance on enforcing safety requirements for the demonstration project.

A full copy of the report can be found at **http://www.dot.gov/affairs/PanelReport.pdf**.