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**Move Over, CB Radio: Trucker Apps Are Helping to Haul the Load**

**By BENJAMIN PRESTON**

STRASBURG, VA. — If you’re old enough to remember 1970s trucker films like “Smokey and the Bandit,” “Convoy” and “White Line Fever,” you may think of truck drivers as free-spirited individuals tethered to the world by nothing more than citizens band airwaves. That depiction was a stretch even then, but today’s truckers are often as Web-connected as the technophiles occupying the local Starbucks. Even on the loneliest stretches of the Interstates, smartphones and tablet apps provide diversions and lend a helping hand.

The number of freight-hauling trucks on American roads rose to nearly 11 million in 2009, the latest numbers available from the federal Transportation Department, from fewer than six million in 1980. In an industry where a few cents a mile per truck can add up to big money on a haul of thousands of miles, trucking companies and owner-operators have grown much more concerned about efficiency. Apps for mobile devices like smartphones and tablets are taking a leading role in trucker tech, as they have in many other facets of modern life.

Consider shipping a load of asparagus from Mexicali, Mexico, to New York City from a trucker’s perspective. Along the way, the driver will travel vast expanses of deserted open road, but will also have to negotiate several congested metropolitan areas. The driver has to take into account low overpasses, tight turns and restricted-access roads.

In the past, the best anyone could do to find the best route was to look at a map, listen to the radio for updates and hope fate would keep the truck out of stalled traffic, dead ends and bad weather. Those risks haven’t disappeared, but even without an expensive computer in the cab — which some trucks do have — drivers with smartphones and tablets are a few clicks away from the latest information on traffic, weather, routing, fuel prices, meal deals, preventive health tips and just about anything else they might desire.

Routing apps are GPS guided, designed to keep drivers away from restricted roads and tight fits.

  The app Trucker Tools provides routing information to optimize fuel consumption and suggests truck stops and rest areas, lets drivers record what they’ve hauled and where, and keeps track of required permits.

Another app, [uShip Mobile](http://www.uship.com/), helps truckers to find potential cargo and place bids to carry the shipments. And FleetSafer Mobile helps truckers to stay focused on the road by blocking calls, texts and e-mails while they’re at the wheel.

Health-oriented apps include the FatSecret Calorie Counter, which can help truckers battling the weight challenges that come with a sedentary job and roadside fast-food temptations.

Keeping track of Transportation Department weigh stations and regulations is an important part of any trucker’s job. Not to worry: there’s an app for that.

Don Carpenter, 39, a long-haul driver from Rehoboth Beach, Del., said he hardly used his CB radio anymore. His world has turned digital.

“There’s 3G and 4G almost everywhere now, so cellphones have really taken over,” Mr. Carpenter said while taking a break in his cab last spring at the Love’s Travel Stop here on Interstate 81, an hour and a half west of Washington. He added that electronic log books and GPS units had become commonplace.

Mr. Carpenter, who was on his way to pick up a load of chocolate bars destined for St. Louis, had a device called PrePass stuck to the inside of his windshield that functions somewhat like an E-ZPass electronic toll tag, though this one helps him to move quickly through weigh stations. Mr. Carpenter’s PrePass transmits his vehicle’s prescreened safety information to the weigh station, which gives him a green light to keep on moving.

“It takes away all the guessing and keeps the D.O.T. off your back,” he said, pointing out that aside from the watchful eyes of regulators, most trucking companies use GPS tracking to monitor where each truck is at all times, within a few hundred feet.

That doesn’t mean that CBs and truckers averse to modern gadgets have faded away. It became clear from the CB chatter at Love’s truck stop that not everyone was on the smartphone bandwagon. The sky was dark and had the ominous metallic smell of an impending storm.

Trucker 1: “It s’posed to snow tonight? Come on back.”

Trucker 2: “Sounds like it is, driver. Gonna be all up and down 81.”

NYT: “Did you catch the Weather Channel report, driver?”

Trucker 1: “Ain’t got no Weather Channel, driver.”

NYT: “Do you have an iPhone?”

Trucker 1: “Ain’t got no iPhone. Can’t hardly afford one of them $10 phones.”

Mr. Carpenter said that most long-haul drivers he knew had some kind of entertainment devices in their rigs. Equipped with climate-control systems that run off small generators or hybrid batteries charged by the engine, an 18-wheeler’s sleeper can be a fine place to watch television during rest breaks. Smartphones add to the entertainment mix by providing a Wi-Fi hotspot for surfing the Internet.

So what’s next for the trucking industry, and how will technology shape the future of shipping? The answer may be found in the fleets of light-duty trucks used by companies in industries like construction and oil and gas exploration.

New technology ensures that such trucks are operating at peak efficiency; fleet managers can monitor driving habits with information from sensors in the trucks that convey such data as vehicle speed, throttle position and fuel consumption.

For example, new Ram light-duty pickups intended for fleet use include mileage-enhancing features like an adjustable air suspension and a more efficient transmission. Smartphone apps and analytic tools can be integrated into the dashboard infotainment screen.

More of this sort of integrated technology is bound to make its way into big rigs, a boon for drivers who now rely on a cup holder-mounted smartphone as their trucks’ nerve center.

In a few years, those holdouts you can still hear drawling on a CB may make the switch to smartphone-based CB-style voice apps. While that would be over and out for the radios that truckers have used for decades, the [lingo](http://jalopnik.com/how-to-talk-on-a-cb-radio-5983279) will probably stick around.

http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/18/automobiles/move-over-cb-radio-trucker-apps-are-helping-to-haul-the-load.html?\_r=0&pagewanted=print