



**Announcer**

It's time for the *IHSA Safety Podcast*.

**Enzo Garritano:**

You're listening to *IHSA Safety Podcast*. I'm Enzo Garritano president/CEO of Infrastructure Health and Safety Association, and I'm here with Michelle Roberts. Our topic today is going to be sharing the road with large trucks, where we're going to continue our conversation with Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) Sergeant Kerry Schmidt. Michelle, I'll pass it on to you.

**Michelle Roberts:**

Let's touch about some of the unique factors when it comes to sharing the road with large commercial vehicles, and in particular, we're talking about transport trucks. We would like to hear from you on some of the tips that regular passenger drivers, so those who commute for work, they don't have a professional class license, they're in a regular passenger vehicle, we know, as you started at the beginning of the podcast, that unfortunately, there has been collisions with large commercial vehicles, the severity and the outcome tends to be very traumatic, and we want to prevent those. And we know that in many of those cases, it's the risky behavior or the poor decisions being made by the other passenger vehicle, not necessarily the professional truck driver. And we want to be able to remind everyone on some of those safe tips with regards to sharing the roads safely with large commercial vehicles. So let's start about trucks' blind spots, so what can you share with us about knowing about being aware of a truck's blind spot?

**Sgt. Kerry Schmidt:**

Well, they're huge and they're massive and they're almost everywhere, they can be in front of the vehicle, right beside the vehicle, in the back corners of the vehicle. When you look at a transport truck and the driver is seated up high above everybody else in the traffic and you look at what his view is, he has mirrors all over the place, looking down beside him, in front of him, that will show a view behind, but yet there's still those signs you always see on the back of trucks, "If you can't see me, I can't see you." Maybe they can see part of the vehicle, but they may not know exactly what's going on. And so, having that awareness and sharing those roads appropriately with other vehicles of different sizes, particularly if you're a motorcycle, even pedestrians and bicyclists, we see them in the cities as well. Consider how large articulated vehicles operate. When they make a turn, those trailer wheels are going to track well inside of where the steering axles are going to be turning. And so, that is just another reminder to understand the dynamics of these vehicles.

So there are blind spots everywhere, and if you're sitting behind a vehicle in their blind spot, some drivers may be a little bit hesitant, a little bit nervous to drive alongside a transport truck, not knowing what's happening, if they can actually see them, and they sit in these blind spots not realizing how dangerous and frustrating that can be for all sorts of drivers. We are sharing the road with one another, and knowing where you are in relation to other vehicles around you, not just in front of you, but beside you and behind you... Every passenger vehicle has mirrors as well, you should have probably three mirrors in your vehicle at minimum to look on both sides, in your rearview mirror, you need to know what's going on around you.

And those blind spots, by design, you need to actively ensure that any movement you make can be done safely. And so, that's not just relying on your mirrors, but it's also relying on your head to turn and do those shoulder checks and look back over your shoulder to see what's right behind you, just to your left or just to your right, if you have that awareness. Truck drivers may not have those abilities to do a shoulder check in a transport truck, so they depend on additional mirrors, vehicles have sensors and blind spot monitoring, and some have cameras as well that will show different images. But again, you need to use them and be aware of that.

So we just ask drivers to really consider how they're sharing the roads and what lane are they in, we can get into lane discipline, I want to talk about that as well. But the blind spots are a huge issue, and when we look at the root causes of collisions here, any guesses the number one problem? Looking at 2016 to 2020, the leading cause of crashes involving commercial motor vehicles was an improper lane change. 22 per cent of every crash that we investigated had a component of an improper lane change in its collision. And then, that's massive, that speaks volumes. If you just clip a vehicle as a transport truck and send it spinning in front of you, you don't know where it's going to end up, and that can go on all kinds of vehicle configurations. But that is the leading cause of crashes, so think about that before you make any change, you need to make sure it can be done safely.

**Michelle Roberts:**

And let's expand on that, you said lane discipline, so I know that's referring to as well passing, there was restrictions on what lanes large commercial vehicles can travel in and not travel in. So let's talk about that lane discipline and safely passing.

**Sgt. Kerry Schmidt:**

Yeah. Well, again, on the 400-series highways, when there's three or more lanes in many areas, trucks, any vehicle over six and a half metres, is prohibited from driving in the far left lane. Now, we certainly still see trucks driving in those lanes inappropriately, they're going to be maybe driving slower than traffic, but they're just a huge, massive wall and they block all kinds of space. The left lane is there for passenger vehicles for their flow of traffic and for them to be able to pass vehicles as well.

Now, for me, again, a pet peeve and a bone of frustration for many officers is these drivers that sit in the left lane, and they may put their vehicles in that lane, set the cruise control at 110 or 115 or 120 and think, okay, I'm good to go now, no one's going to bother me. And they don't realize until, if they were to actually look in their mirror, they would see a whole line of cars behind them waiting to get by, or you'd see these cars now passing them in the middle lane. And again, anytime a vehicle passes you on the right, that just tells me that you're in the wrong lane.

Again, we get calls about road rage and frustrated drivers, and very often, you see that vehicle that's weaving through all lanes of traffic, and yes, they are aggressive and they need to be held accountable. But you may also look back and see some vehicle going along in the far left lane, completely oblivious to the fact that they're causing a jam up of traffic behind them, and now drivers are getting frustrated and they're going into other lanes, and that's where we get into collisions, and there we have improper lane changes again being the number one cause of crashes, and it may have been because of that one driver that just refused to use their mirrors and understand where they fit in this whole issue.

If you don't feel comfortable driving on a 400-series highway or you think the only place that you should be is in the far left lane, well, maybe you should find alternate highways and routes to get to your destination, because driving is a privilege and we need everyone to do their part, and we just ask everyone to be aware of those mirrors, be aware of traffic behind you and beside you. And again, don't just move into the middle lane, because the middle lane is the passing lane for the trucks, they're going to be in the far right lane for the most part and the only lane they can move into to pass is that middle lane. So again, don't be sitting in the middle lane thinking that there's no issues as well.

We get complaints very often from drivers saying, "There's a vehicle tailgating me and trying to push me out of the way," and that's their perception. Usually, my first question is, "What lane are you in? And maybe if you would just move over, it would all be gone," and usually that's the case. But there's a bit of maybe a pride or a bit of an ego, where people don't want to have other cars pass them, they want to set the speed that they think is appropriate and no one should go faster than that, but that just leads to all kinds of problems. So driving is a privilege, let's make sure we share the road responsibly and safely with everybody, and if that means moving over and letting a vehicle that's speeding pass, it's not your job to control the rate of speed, we'll do that already in our job and you'll get to your destination in good time safely as well. But we just need everyone do their part.

**Michelle Roberts:**

And even when you're talking about the passing, if we think of the commercial vehicles, some people don't realize too that in Ontario, the large commercial vehicles, the transport trucks, are governed at a speed, at 105, so that truck doesn't have the capacity to exceed that if they're properly governed. And a lot of passenger vehicles don't realize that, they get frustrated, why are they going so slow? Then they start maybe even tailgating or cutting off the driver. And those are dangerous behaviors, because as you mentioned earlier on, the vehicle configuration, the size, the weight, they need greater stopping distance, and if you cut into that space cushion or that safe cushion, that space between your vehicle and the front of the tractor trailer, that's a dangerous move. We've got to be very careful of that and warn people that it takes a lot of time to stop a large transport truck.

**Sgt. Kerry Schmidt:**

I've seen plenty of vehicles going from the far left lane, once they get close to an exit, and cut across all lanes of traffic to make their exit, cutting other vehicles and transport trucks off in their wake, and we've seen collisions come as a result of that. Again, completely irresponsible. If you're going to be cutting off a driver... Because even going up a hill, transport trucks even going 105 may not be able to maintain that speed going up a hill, and they'll put on their four-way flashing lights, and all of a sudden, they're only going 80 or 85 kilometres an hour crawling up this hill just because of their mass. There's a lot of power behind that.

But again, on the other side, if they need to stop suddenly because someone cuts them off, they may not be able to, and if you are driving a transport truck and you slam on the brakes suddenly, there's a very good chance that that trailer will actually push the transport sideways and it'll begin to jackknife. And once you're off by just a very few number of degrees off of center, there's nothing a driver can do to recover from that and they're going along for the ride. We get calls for jackknifed transport trucks all

the time, and very often, it's because they claim that they were cut off by a driver who just wasn't aware of their speed, their size, and I guess just the dynamics of how these vehicles operate.

Again, collisions are always preventable, there are so many factors involved in that, and that once we come to the realization that we sometimes play a part in these collisions, we may not think we're guilty, but until we objectively look at our situation, we may finally come to that realization that, yeah, I could have done things differently and this probably could have been avoided had I given it just another second of time or a couple more meters of distance of space, because all those factors play into your ability to escape and find an escape route. So having that following distance which is appropriate, that gives you time, and time is your friend in allowing you to slow down, change lanes or adjust your driving accordingly to adjust and account for whatever changing conditions are coming up in front of you.

**Michelle Roberts:**

Yeah, no, no, those are all great tips, and thank you for continuing to reinforce those with us. I know that, as we said, it's important that we're aware of the limitations of the truck. We touched on wide turns, that they need more space, so don't creep into their space if they're making a right-hand turn. You mentioned the rollback as well, and that's something that some people aren't so familiar with. When they're maybe stopped at an intersection or an off-ramp, they need to give that space, the truck ahead of them needs that space. So put a car space in between you, so that if the transport truck does roll back, you're not going to get yourself into a situation.

**Enzo Garritano:**

You're listening to IHSA Safety Podcast. Join us again as we continue our conversation with OPP Sergeant Kerry Schmidt on the subject of seasonal tips for driving, including weather, increased volume and construction season.

**Announcer:**

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