



Holly Baril:

Truck crashes are on the rise in Ontario. And it's getting dangerous on our roadways. In 2022, the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) recorded over 9,100 collisions involving transport trucks. The highest in over a decade. These represented about 12 per cent of all collisions that year and led to 71 tragic deaths. What's behind the spike? It's a mix of things: inexperienced drivers in cars, risky moves by some truck drivers and mechanical failures. And when you add the sheer size and weight of transport trucks, the results are often catastrophic.

The Professional Truck Training Alliance of Canada is calling for a major shift recognizing truck driving as a Red Seal trade. That would mean stricter standardized training across the country and hopefully leading to safer roads for everyone. The OPP and the Ministry of Transportation Ontario (MTO) are already ramping up enforcement and launching public safety campaigns. But they can't do it alone. If you believe in safer highways, it's time to get behind this push.

Announcer:

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

Holly Baril:

Welcome to *Driven to Learn: The Road to Safer Trucking*, an IHSA podcast. I'm your host, Holly Baril. And in this episode we're digging into one of the most critical and often overlooked aspects of the trucking industry, training.

Behind every safe delivery and every avoided accident is a driver who was taught the right way to handle the road, the rig, and the responsibility. From mastering vehicle control, to understanding regulations, reacting under pressure, and staying alert on long hauls, proper training doesn't just save freight, it saves lives.

Join us as we talk to an industry expert about why smart, thorough preparation is the foundation of a safer future for everyone on the road. My guest today is Kim Richardson, senior advisor with the Professional Truck Training Alliance of Canada (PTTAC), with over four decades of experience in transportation. I had the pleasure of meeting Kim at one of our northern chapter meetings for Fleet Safety Council, where he presented this idea of Red Seal certification to the group.

Now, for someone like myself who does a lot of driving on the highways, I have seen firsthand accidents, road closures that are happening all over. And I thought to myself, wow, this is a great idea. Now, before we get started, please take note that the podcast is meant to discuss the need for better training regulations for drivers, to raise the bar on training requirements. This is not meant to criticize the safe, professional drivers we have on our roads today.

Thank you for joining us, Kim. Hopefully you're having a good morning.

Kim Richardson:

Hey, Holly, how are you? Thank you for having me on, greatly appreciate it.

Holly Baril:

Yeah, when you gave that presentation at Fleet Safety Council, right away I thought to myself, oh my goodness, of all the driving I do for work, for personal, coaching figure skating, I'm all over the place, it does, it stresses me out, gives me a little bit of anxiety when I'm on the roadways because of all the things I see and hear. And I happen to follow different groups, we'll say, for the different highways in northern Ontario. And it seems every day there's something happening on our roadways. And you're right, something needs to be done.

So yeah, before we get started, can I just ask you to maybe provide our listeners with an explanation of who PTTAC is and what the mission is?

Kim Richardson:

Yeah, absolutely. So PTTAC was actually formed as a non-profit organization in December of 2023 after probably a year of a committee meeting, a committee from across Canada. There was two schools from every province selected by who I call the founder of this group, Jim Campbell, from Manitoba. He actually brought the group together. And after a number of months, one of the committee members said, "Hey, listen, what's our next step here? It's nice to get together and shoot the breeze, but what are we going to do?"

And that's when the alliance was formed. And they come up with four key objectives. The first one being to strive for a Red Seal apprenticeship for commercial drivers. Which really excited me. Quite frankly, I had zero interest in getting involved at the start because I'd just finished my tenure at the Truck Training Association of Ontario [TTSAO] and was looking forward to doing some traveling with my beautiful bride, Lisa. And I come home and told her about it and she said, "Well, who better to give some advice and direction being in the business for four decades?" So I got involved as a senior advisor. They formed, they have a four person executive committee, they've got an amazing board of directors from all across Canada. And these folks are making a difference. It's really exciting to be part of this group.

Holly Baril:

Awesome. And it's funny because just I can tell your passion for the topic. So I'm kind of thinking, you went home and told your wife, "Oh, you know the traveling we want to do, I have one more thing I need to accomplish in my career." I know, because I'm so passionate about health and safety and I feel the same way. You just feel like this is something that you know you can make a big difference.

Kim Richardson:

Yeah, I have to be honest with you, that's not the way the conversation went. Let's just say I had other things that I had planned on working on. And after a long conversation, it's the right thing to do. I don't want this to sound corny, but I've been at this a long time, and I see this as part of my legacy. I want to leave this industry a better place. It's been very good to our family. We have helped improve roads.

KRTS has licensed and trained over 17,000 people for their class A or D license since 1989. So this is what we know. And it's exciting. Our whole team's involved with Transrep. And it's a lot of fun.

Holly Baril:

Great. Awesome. So can you maybe present to our listeners what the current situation is in Ontario or Canada when it comes to truck drivers and the training that they're receiving. And then maybe if you have any stats that you can provide which will emphasize the need for the training requirements.

Kim Richardson:

Yeah, absolutely. So this is a Canadian issue, this isn't an Ontario issue. One thing that we've learned quickly with the alliance is that it's the same problem in every province. Some provinces are just a little bit bigger. So to use some statistics as an example, when we started in the training game, August 10, 1989, there was 10 registered facilities in the province. Today there is over 300 in Ontario. That's 300 facilities that offer commercial training. When you take a look at the other provinces, we're told that most provinces have grown in the school business by at least 50 per cent. And this is since the introduction of MELT: mandatory entry-level training. Which started in Ontario, it was a great thing, a great idea, a great concept.

But really what MELT did was build a playbook for the bad actors to not only get approved as a school, but to open up. And at the end of the day, you can have all of the best business practices in the world, but if there is no regulation or enforcement, which in most cases in most provinces, with the limited amount of staff that the provinces have, they just can't do it. Can you imagine, six examiners or eight examiners in all of Ontario, there's 300 commercial truck training schools, but they manage all the private vocational schools like welding, hairdressing.

Holly Baril:

Wow. Okay. Yeah. So there's no real follow up or policing we'll say on these facilities. So if I was going to register into one of these facilities, how do I know I'm not getting into a bad actor, as you say?

Kim Richardson:

That's a really good question and a really good statement. Because it is, consumers believe what they hear, and a lot of times consumers, we purchase on price. So quite frankly, when we get phone calls at our training facilities, it's "How much, how long and when's my test?" Those are probably three of the worst questions you can ask.

Questions should be asked like, how long have you been in business? What carriers do you deal with? What insurance companies recognize your training program? What type of wages can I expect? What's the retention level like at the carriers I'm going to go to? Instead of how much, how long and when's my test?

And it's just when you take a look at the growth of the commercial driver right across Canada, I mean, it is the second...trucking is the second-largest employer in Canada, next to retail.

Holly Baril:

Wow.

Kim Richardson:

So you have to have that influx of drivers in order to meet the demand of the market.

Holly Baril:

And it's not an easy task either, sitting for all those hours on the roadways alone.

Kim Richardson:

No. I think, I grew up in the industry and I love to drive. Yesterday I drove to Windsor actually to go to the IHSA, and it was three hours, but I love being out in the road. But yesterday driving to Windsor and taking a look at what's going on on the highways there, the amount of truck drivers, there's so many great drivers out there, and you can really tell them by company. But there's some really bad actors out there, on their phone, crossing lanes and it's like, you're supposed to be professionals.

Holly Baril:

So just quickly, I read this on the PTTAC's website, and I'm curious to know what is a misclassified driver?

Kim Richardson:

Great question. So that's the new term for Driver Inc. Driver Inc. is the driver who calls themselves an owner-operator or a contracted driver, and they're supposed to be able to file proper taxes and pay their deductions and all that sort of good stuff. But they're finding loopholes where they don't have to do this, and it's costing the province billions, not millions, sorry, it's costing the nation billions of dollars annually because people are not filing their taxes properly. It's actually illegal. Now, the reason why it's being called misclassified drivers now is because the government does not like the term Driver Inc. And during a meeting of the minds up in Ottawa, they said, "Hey, listen, it's not Driver Inc., it's misclassified drivers." And the Canadian Transportation Agency (CTA) and Ontario Trucking Association (OTA) and all the provinces across Canada are working diligently at putting an end to this concept because it really is hurting the industry.

Holly Baril:

Okay. Great. Awesome. Thank you for explaining that to me. So I want to get into now the whole Red Seal certification. So what would be the process if myself, 30 years ago of course, if I wanted to get into this industry, what would be that process for me to become a Red Seal certified truck driver?

Kim Richardson:

Okay. So this is all conceptual right now because the Red Seal committee is building and meeting regularly across the province. So let's back up and talk about how the industry is going to become Red Seal before you as a driver are going to become Red Seal. Because what has to happen is there has to be

a lead province, first of all, that sees this as a viable thing to do. Then there has to be four other provinces that jump on board. So there needs to be five provinces, I'm going to use the term sign off, that they want to see commercial truck driving as a principal trade. Then what needs to happen is it needs to have industry support.

So over the last couple of years, that's what the industry and PTTAC has been doing. We've been going across the country advocating and lobbying and having group meetings about why Red Seal. Unbeknownst, Alberta has really stepped to the plate. And their minister, Minister Dreesen, has actually stated and has been quoted as saying that their pathway program is going to be the lead into apprenticeship and they're going to take the lead on this I'm sure.

Saskatchewan, Manitoba have agreed in principle. I don't think it's going to be too long before there's two other provinces. But make no mistake, if the industry doesn't want this, meaning the carriers, it's not going to happen. It's just not going to happen.

The Private Motor Truck Council of Canada, led by Mike Millian, their president, the private motor carriers are behind this big time. For hire fleets need to be educated because many see this as a burden of cost and too expensive. Which in fact is not the case. In every Red Seal that has come to fruition, all 50 of them in Canada, there's tons of funding that will be made available through the federal government, not only to the schools, but to the carriers. Insurance has a huge stake in this as well. So all that has to transpire first, which is in the making now.

From then, once it gets started, I can tell you what the vision is. The vision is that an individual will go to an approved school. Then that individual, once graduated, will go to an approved carrier who's involved in the Red Seal program. It looks like what's being kicked around is a minimum of 2,000 hours behind the wheel before they can do that test. Meaning the written test, which every Canadian will do to get their Red Seal apprenticeship.

But where the big misconception is is that there needs to be a mentor or a trainer in that truck the whole time. Which is not true. With today's technology, with forward-facing cameras, with all of our technology that we have to be able to communicate, that individual can probably be moving for-profit loads after anywhere from six to 10 weeks. With touches with the mentoring coach, make sure all of the different items are covered that need to be covered.

Once they successfully obtain their X number of hours, whatever number of hours that are, they can then challenge the written test, which will be the same across Canada. So that's how Red Seal works. I hope that's explained it a bit.

Holly Baril:

Yeah, actually, yeah. So I like the idea. So I'm just curious, the lead province right now you're saying is Alberta, so they're the ones pretty much taking the lead on this?

Kim Richardson:

Yeah. And they've made no bones about it. I was just out at the Canadian Council of Motor Transportation Administrator (CCMTA) meeting in Regina, Sask., which all the government agencies are there, deputy ministers for transportation, and Alberta has made a statement. They not only want to

lead the way for the new and innovative ways that training is being done, but they also are very interested in being the lead for Red Seal. And this has got a real western flavor to it.

Some people will say that this is being driven by Humboldt.

Holly Baril:

Interesting.

Kim Richardson:

I would have to disagree. And I'll tell you why I disagree. Ontario had mandatory entry-level training before the Humboldt Broncos incident. I would say that it's incidences like Humboldt, because Humboldt is not an isolated incident, that just happened to be a bus load of hockey players, that was very, I even have a hard time talking about it today as an ex-hockey player, rode around on buses all over the country, I really struggle with it, but it's incidences like Humboldt that is raising the awareness. And it's needed, make no mistake.

Holly Baril:

Yeah. No. Great. Awesome. So I was going to ask you about funding. You did touch on that. So like you said, the other Red Seal trades that we have do have funding available. So glad to hear that the schools, the carriers, the students, that there is funding available. Which does attract people to take the trade and become part of that trade if there's funding, absolutely.

So now I'm just curious here, if I was already a driver, and you introduce this and it comes into play and it's all set, am I grandfathered in or do I have to go do a whole retraining to get my Red Seal?

Kim Richardson:

Holly, you've done your research. What a great question. And something that we've been asked regularly. So again, as a vision, not every company will have to do Red Seal. It's like an electrician or a plumber. I can go out and hire a plumber who's not Red Seal approved or I can hire an electrician. There's all kinds of businesses out there. So no different than the trucking industry.

But those drivers, and I'm always quick to talk about the amount of outstanding professional drivers that are on our highway today, I really don't know how they do it, day in and day out with some of the other poor drivers that are out there. But to answer your question, the drivers, as we see it, will be able to challenge the test.

So let's say Holly's been driving for 10 years and she works for a company and she says, "I want to challenge the test to be a Red Seal." You'll be able to challenge that test. Now, let's say you don't meet the grade. Well, what does that tell you as a professional driver. Even after 10 years, we all need to be educated, retrained, take ongoing training. But the existing driver will be able to challenge the test.

Holly Baril:

Okay. Well, that's good news. And I mean, in all honesty, if that was made available, it's probably in your best interest to go ahead and get Red Seal certification. You're just maybe more attractive to other carriers now.

Kim Richardson:

Well, not only that, that's so true, but when you take a look at the carrier themselves, and I have the opportunity, being in this business all my working life, I know a lot of owners of different fleets, and they all have different opinions. They all generally started behind the wheel or family business or whatever, and now they're running trucking companies. But I had one forward-thinking trucking executive say to me is, "We're going to use this as a major recruiting tool. Sign me up. We're going to have the best drivers on the planet. They're going to get paid the most money. We're going to have the safest fleets. We're going to have lower turnover because they're going to be Red Seal approved." So all of the positives, instead of, "Oh my goodness, this is going to cost me more money."

So the forward-thinking companies are going to drive this bus. And I always say, it's gravitation. So you go to a great school, you get hired by a great company, who's insured by a great insurer. Insurance plays a huge role in this process. And we're talking long-term sustainable career.

Holly Baril:

Right. It sounds great to me.

Kim Richardson:

Yeah.

Holly Baril:

Now, you did mention earlier about how there's 300 facilities in Ontario, six inspectors, or I'm sorry, whatever the term was you used. So I'm just curious now, let's say Red Seal goes through and we have all these facilities, people are signing up, who's going to make sure and maintain, I guess, the accuracy or whatever of this whole certification?

Kim Richardson:

So there's a body that looks after Red Seal, it's called the Canadian Council of Directors of Apprenticeship. Don't ask me what that acronym stands for. But I know it's got to do with the organization that looks after Red Seal. And think about this for a second. And just to back up, I'm not sure if it's six examiners now or 10 examiners now, they don't have enough. They don't have enough.

Holly Baril:

Okay. Yeah. At the end of the day, it's like Ministry of Labour inspectors, there's not enough.

Kim Richardson:

Yes. And you know what? I feel for them. Because I mean, we know these folks, we've been working with them for decades. They're just great people and they want to do a good job. But they're tapped, I mean, all government, they're tapped.

Holly Baril:

Absolutely.

Kim Richardson:

And we'll maybe come back to the regulated and the unregulated if we have a minute. But to answer your question. This is going to help clean up the market too. Either training facilities are going to get on board and raise their standard to do things properly or they're going to be out of business. And you know what? If you aren't doing things, following the rules and doing things properly, this is a really important job, people need to be educated properly, they shouldn't be in business. It's that simple. I think it's going to clean up some of the mess.

Holly Baril:

So, following up on that then, I'm just curious to know, have you had any feedback from drivers or the training providers, the carriers? Yes.

Kim Richardson:

One of the greatest, I guess, surprises has been the drivers. The existing drivers, they did a study in 2013, Today's Trucking did a study of drivers, a survey, sorry, not a study, it was a survey, and they basically asked them what they thought about Red Seal apprenticeship. Eighty-four per cent of the current driver population certified said there should be a Red Seal principal trade for commercial drivers. This is the existing drivers saying this.

Holly Baril:

Wow.

Kim Richardson:

That's a big number. And then when you take a look at the governance, we talked about the regulation of being regulated, I'm really a firm believer that we need to have support from our government at arm's length, but we do have a responsibility to regulate internally. We need to regulate ourselves. We have the infrastructure in place through insurance, through the carriers. I mean, who's hiring these poor drivers right now that are out there on the road that's creating the carnage? Somebody's hiring them. And someone's ensuring them, right?

Holly Baril:

Right.

Kim Richardson:

So what about some self-regulation, some self-policing?

Holly Baril:

Okay. Great. Now, you kind of touched a little bit on it, but I'm just curious to know what kind of support is PTTAC looking for from the industry, which you talked a little bit about, business owners, again, the carriers you talked a little bit about, what about the general public?

Kim Richardson:

Yeah. Plays such a huge role. And you know what? Again, you're just hitting all the hot buttons. I mean, at the end of the day, if we can get the drivers on board, the existing drivers on board, and "John Q. Public" or "Jane Q. Public" as I like to say, they get educated about this, they're going to help drive this. Because name me one other profession that after a minimum of let's call it four weeks of training and education and then a government license that shares their job with the general public every day, name one?

Holly Baril:

And really shares their job, but also that vehicle. That vehicle is, I live up in Sudbury, so we deal with the mines, and those haul trucks, when they're full, their weight capacity, I mean, it's...you don't want to come face to face with that.

Kim Richardson:

No. And where you are, Highway 11 and 17, I mean, yeah, there's been orders, there's actually government officials that are lobbying heavily to help improve training and education and regulation. I think we as an industry as a whole.

When I was a kid and I started driving, I'm not proud to say this, but it's a fact, I'm pretty transparent, I delivered loads of hay when I was 16 years old, illegally, around the community farms. Knew what I was doing. But the roads today, the traffic today, the conditions, the equipment, I mean, you get inside one of those, you get inside a new tractor trailer today, and it's like sitting in the cockpit of an airplane.

Holly Baril:

Right. Things have changed, things have evolved. There's more vehicles on the road. People are driving faster. There's more distractions. Yeah, it's scary sometimes to drive. But I think the general public, again, talking about people who may spend a lot of time on roadways, will support this 100 per cent. I mean, they see it on a daily basis, weekly basis. So I think once the word is out ... And like you said, it's a lot about education, why are we doing this? What's the process? What's the support? I think it'll be welcomed for sure.

Kim Richardson:

Yeah. And it has to be consistent. The Red Seal committee, who's made up of some amazing people from across Canada, carriers, insurers, schools, they come up with a three-prong approach, and they're

sticking to it. So the approach goes like this, it's educate, advocate, and support. So it's up to the industry leaders to educate the rest of the industry on why this is a great idea.

The advocacy comes into play when we're talking government, when we're talking leadership at association levels, high association levels. And then the support from the carriers, which is the fleets. Again, if they don't support this, it'll die on the vine. I will be surprised if this drive doesn't continue. Will we see it in the next three years, five years? People are always saying, "Well, how long is this going to take?" It's going to take as long as the industry takes to get this done. But it's well on the way.

Holly Baril:

Good, good. Now, I do want to ask a question though about the certification and addressing international drivers and will it affect their ability to operate within Canada?

Kim Richardson:

Just so I'm clear on that, are we talking about a driver coming from another country who has their license or doesn't have their license?

Holly Baril:

Do you have an answer for both of that? So I would say maybe doesn't have their license.

Kim Richardson:

Okay. So they come, and let's be very specific, which is very normal in our industry, so they come from India and they don't have their license, they have their car license. So there's reciprocity in some cases in some provinces in reference to their car license. But I'm hearing out west that they're actually reciprocity for a commercial license, which I don't get, but that's a whole other story. So A, they're going to have to get their license. But they're going to be able to fit into the Red Seal program. Why wouldn't they? Yeah. Yeah.

Holly Baril:

Great. Great. Awesome. Great news. Now again, just to kind of wrap things up, again, we're going to have a bunch of listeners to our wonderful podcast, and if they're new to this whole topic and conversation or curious to maybe keep in touch and find out what's happening next, where would you suggest that they go to keep an eye on the changes or actually if they're interested in getting involved?

Kim Richardson:

Yeah, two great points. So first of all, if someone's just getting their license or thinking about transportation and trucking, being a professional driver as a career, first of all, buyer beware. Do your homework. The best thing an entry-level person can do, who's thinking about getting into this industry, call some of your trucking companies around where you live and say, "Hey, I'm thinking about getting into the trucking industry, where should I get my license?" These folks are end users, they know. So if it's in Sudbury, I mean, I'm not going to mention names, but I mean, I know some great people in the Sudbury area that I would highly recommend if I was a carrier and they called me. But it's buyer beware.

And the other thing is just keeping abreast on all this sort of stuff. But the PTTAC website is an amazing, well, as you know, you've been on it, tons of information about Red Seal. There's actually a downloadable PDF on why Red Seal for companies to look at and understand the concept better.

Holly Baril:

Okay. I'm going to actually put the link to your PTTAC website on the podcast so that people can access it easier than having to go search for it.

Kim Richardson:

And the other thing is, I'm not sure, Holly, I'm sure you are on LinkedIn, LinkedIn is a wonderful tool. We are communicating regularly through LinkedIn to all of our followers. So there is a PTTAC LinkedIn site, PTTAC Canada. I am constantly commenting about what's going on in our industry with Red Seal through my LinkedIn account, Kim W. Richardson. All of our executive have accounts. So LinkedIn's a great spot to get information too.

Holly Baril:

Great. Awesome. I like that. So one last question, unless there's something else I haven't touched upon that you feel is just burning inside of you to get out. But I did want to know that, are there any lessons or reflections from your 40 years in the industry that really does give you confidence in this path ahead?

Kim Richardson:

Yeah. When it comes to lessons, I've learned so many. Getting good at something, it's just making a bunch of mistakes and not making the same mistake over and over again. But we've learned so much. I'm pretty proud to say that as a training institution, we've been leaders, we've been innovators. And I think that if we're going to legitimize this profession, we have to embrace technology. We have to be able to compete with all of the other industries that are competing for the same thing we are. And what I mean by that is our competition is not within our industry itself, our competition is every other industry who's doing things better, smarter, quicker, faster.

The youth, depending upon who you ask, the average age of a professional driver is 50-ish, 46 in the private sector I'm told, but probably 50-ish on the for hire sector. So what are we doing to engage our future driver population? So I guess that's one of the lessons. And the other thing is we have to strive to be the best we can be. And we need to really work hard at governing and making sure that we're looking after our own industry. We can't always blame government when things go wrong. Just lessons.

Holly Baril:

Well, perfect. That's great. So we're going to keep in touch because as things progress we may have to do a update or a part two of this excellent topic so that we can see how things have progressed or are moving along in the industry.

Kim Richardson:

Hey, can I share something with you, Holly, that I think is really important? Your career's with IHSA, and heavily involved in the Fleet Safety Council, the leadership team over there have been absolutely incredible to PTTAC. They've hosted more meetings in Ontario than in all of Canada, which I think is pretty impressive. And I just want to parlay that to say, this is fresh off the press, we're having a big meeting in Toronto in partnership with IHSA on August 7, and we're fleshing out the details right now, but it's going to be at Voyager Court there in Etobicoke. And I can't thank the leadership team of IHSA and all the different districts for all their support, it's been amazing. So thank you for that.

Holly Baril:

Well, you're very welcome, Kim. And thank you very much for accepting to be my guest on this podcast. And like I said, we will be in touch to get some updates from you.

Kim Richardson:

It's been my privilege, Holly, thank you so much for having me.

Holly Baril:

Thank you for listening to our podcast on moving the trucking industry towards Red Seal certification. Be sure to subscribe and like us on your podcast channel. And visit us at ihsa.ca for a wealth of health and safety resources and information.

Announcer

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