

# Crossroads Quarterly

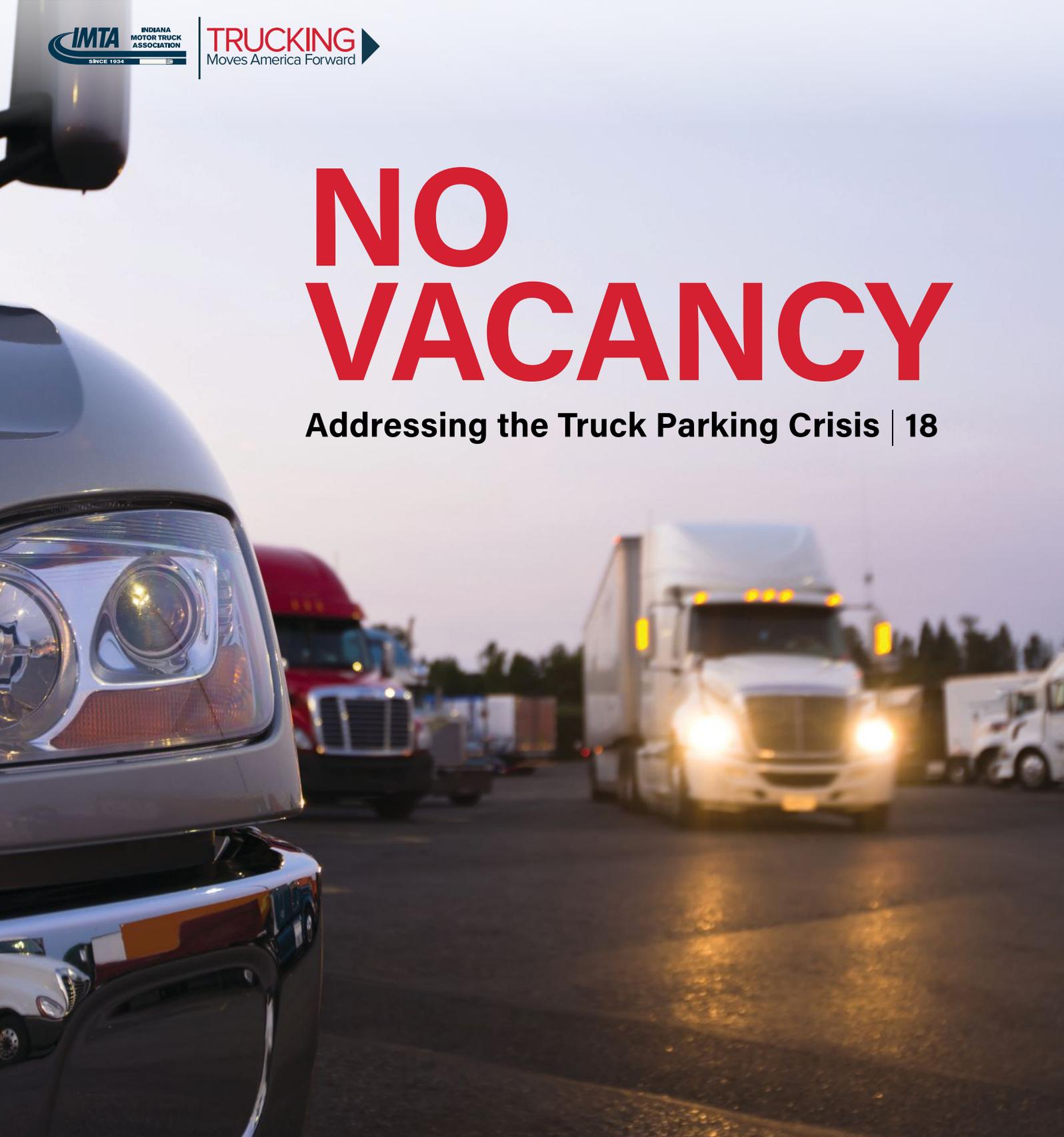
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# NO VACANCY

Addressing the Truck Parking Crisis | 18



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NO

# VACANCY

## Drivers, State and National Organizations Weigh in on Truck Parking Crisis

by Samantha Brown



**F**inding truck parking is a major concern for drivers nationwide. The widespread problem is nothing new — Jason’s Law was passed in 2012, and drivers have increasingly been forced to pull over whenever and wherever they can for rest. But it’s currently gaining prominence on state and federal entities’ radars.

“It’s obviously a key issue for us because our members provide 90 percent of all truck parking,” said Lisa Mullings, president and CEO of NATSO, the national trade association that represents travel plaza and truckstop owners and operators.

“When I first started at NATSO back in 1995, it was one of the first issues that I came across. This has been an ongoing issue for the trucking industry as well as the truck stop industry for many years.”

The U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) cited truck parking shortages as a national safety concern, noting the importance for access to safe and accessible truck parking for commercial drivers. USDOT explained that with the projected growth of truck traffic, the demand for adequate parking will outpace the supply of public and private parking facilities. “Tired truck drivers may continue to drive because they have difficulty finding a place to park for rest,” USDOT said. “Truck drivers may choose to park at unsafe locations, such as on the shoulder of the road, exit ramps or vacant lots, if they are unable to locate official, available parking.”

### Root Causes

Many factors contribute to the unsafe conditions the nation's freight drivers routinely battle, making it hard to pinpoint the main cause. But USDOT carried out public, private, academic and nonprofit studies to get a better understanding.

According to USDOT, the following conditions combine to worsen the truck parking problem:

- Projected growth of truck traffic on the nation's highway system
- Barriers encountered by facility owners attempting to expand existing parking sites
- More acute truck parking needs in certain regions of the country
- A lack of adequate information for drivers about parking availability at existing facilities
- Challenges associated with meeting scheduling requirements of shippers and receivers.

Dan Murray is the senior vice president of the American Transportation Research Institute (ATRI) and has been involved in nearly two dozen parking studies at the state level. He also designed the Minnesota real-time truck parking system used in several Midwest states, is a member of the USDOT truck parking coalition, and provided technical support to the development of the



“Park My Truck” app run by the NATSO Foundation. “Based on our driver responses in our ‘Top Industry Issues’ survey, truck parking is the No. 2 issue for truck drivers,” he explained. “The capacity situation is very bad, and new trends such as e-commerce and growing traffic congestion are changing the locations for where drivers want to park versus what exists today.”

In addition to those factors, many truck drivers cite electronic logging devices (ELDs) as another hurdle to jump when searching for a place to stop.

Chris Kramer is an independent driver who's been in the business since the mid-1990s. “Because everybody's on an electronic logging device now ... it seems to have caused everybody to be stopping at the same time, or within about the same time frame,” he said. Kramer added that most of his issues come in highly trafficked metropolitan areas, and when lots are full, he's forced to the edge of the cities. And if you don't get there within a certain timeframe, you're out of luck.

“In most cases, if you're not in there by about 5 o'clock in the evening, you're not going to find a parking space,” he said.

Kramer said he does try to plan where and when to park. “I try to get as close to the place that I'm going to as possible ... or trying to find out if I can park at the facility itself that I'm going to, and that helps me utilize my hours,” he explained.

He said each stop can be anywhere between 2 to 100 miles away, and he explained his best-case scenario if he has time to make it all the way to his next destination. “I will try to get a hold of the place that I'm going to and see if I can park there, so then all I have to do is stop for maybe about 15 or 20 minutes and get everything I'm going to need to get through the night if I don't already have it with me,” he said. “There are a lot of places that won't let us inside to use the bathroom anyway, so sometimes not having a bathroom facility is not a deal breaker, but it can be a little bit of a problem.”

But stopping with a tractor-trailer doesn't always work out as planned. He recalled a situation in Ohio that forced him into a risky parking situation. Kramer explained he tries to get within 50 miles of his next stop, and he was planning to pull over at a rest stop outside of Columbus, but when he arrived, he learned the rest stop was closed and was forced to drive to the next available

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— CHRIS KRAMER



exit. "There [were] two truck stops there, but at that time of night there's no parking left. At that point, I'm just about out of time and I didn't have any more time to keep looking for a parking space, so I had to literally park on the side of the highway in front of the truck stop," he recalled. "When I woke up the next morning there were about 15 other trucks that had to do the same thing. I would have been willing to pay for a space that night, but all of the paid spaces were filled up also."

As USDOT explained, the increasing number of drivers on the road will in turn increase the demand for spaces, and larger cities are routinely posing problems. "Drivers find it difficult [...] to find parking, especially in areas where there's a lot of people and traffic — like on the East Coast, in New England, certainly around major port cities, parking lots fill up earlier," Mullings said.

### Advocating for More Parking

The simplest solution, on the surface, would be to add more parking spaces at the existing truck stops or new builds, but planning for and implementing that solution is nearly always accompanied by opposition. Mullings said NATSO deals with this issue routinely with local communities that don't want any

more expansion. "Our members are particularly frustrated by that and certainly new builds are the same way," she said. "It can take a long time for a truck stop to be built because of the process of getting the permits and the other approvals they need to build."

Murray added, "Based on data and driver feedback, the single most important truck parking objective is to increase capacity at key locations. This increase would be for both public and private sector facilities. Unfortunately, until we get a new infrastructure bill, we lack the needed funds — so the short-term alternative is to develop info systems that tell truck drivers where parking is today."

Carla Williams drives for Walmart Transportation, and is familiar with the perceived reasons for pushback and how to address them. "Typically, those against will bring up issues such as cost, the potential for crimes such as human trafficking, prostitution and drugs, as well as the possibility of a slew of bars and clubs opening up and around the truck stop. A lot of people are also often concerned about things like light and air pollution and environmental impacts," Williams said. "Inevitably, these concerns will get the project shut down."

The transportation sector is united in its efforts to stop the flow of human trafficking along America's interstate highways.

Williams noted the efforts organizations like Truckers Against Trafficking have made to educate those in the trucking industry to combat human trafficking and other crimes, and increase awareness for identifying these illicit activities in the trucking industry and the public. "That worry is being addressed for today's driver," she said. "Now, drivers can receive training specifically about how to respond when they see such things occurring and are actively encouraged to call and report anything suspicious to the authorities."

Furthermore, as an industry that caters to millions of travelers every year, truck stops and travel plazas and their employees are in a key position to help identify and stop human trafficking along America's highway system. The NATSO Foundation has been helping the industry engage in the fight against human trafficking for nearly a decade by providing the necessary tools and resources to train owners, operators and their employees to recognize and report suspected incidents. The NATSO Foundation also works closely with the Department of Homeland Security, Department of Transportation, Polaris Project, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, Truckers Against Trafficking and other organizations.

In terms of concerns surrounding the addition of bars and clubs, Williams said the solution is simple: don't zone to allow them. Environmental concerns, like sound and light barriers, are understandable, but Williams said there are ways to deal with this, too. Adding a tree line is a natural way to block out sound and light while helping with the air quality. Soundproof walls (such as barriers you see between interstates and residential areas) could also be built. And new technology is increasingly making truck engines quieter, while modern light poles come with options for downward-facing LED lamps for dimmer conditions, while ensuring ample lighting shines directly on the lot.

NATSO said state and local governments can incentivize on regulations imposed on travel centers to encourage private entities to increase truck parking capacity

by removing local zoning ordinances that frequently restrict adding parking, helping pay the cost of any environmental or other permits necessary to ensure construction or providing tax benefits to encourage the private sector to invest in truck parking capacity, especially where property values or local zoning obstacles make doing so exceedingly expensive. Additionally, NATSO cited the number of jobs and tax revenues that truck stops, convenience stores, repair shops and restaurants add to the local community to further persuade local governments and residents.

### Combating the Cost

While public and environmental factors contribute to parking challenges, economic issues are also considerations. Travel plazas and truck stops provide the vast majority of available truck parking today. NATSO, which represents those business types, said its members are adding parking as they see a demand for it, permitted by land availability and government approval for expansion, but it's not necessarily an issue that local, state or federal governments can solve alone.

"It is an issue that needs to be solved by the private sector, and the reason I say that is [because] the private sector provides 90 percent of the parking now and states are limited in their funds, and they're limited in places they can add parking to rest areas," Mullings said. "Any kind of solution to this is going to have to be driven by the private sector primarily, but there is a role for the federal and state governments, and the local governments as well."

Murray took the time to address the roles of federal programs. "States (and private sector truck stop operators) are in the business of building capacity, but we need a stronger voice from USDOT to provide policy guidance and dedicated federal funding," he explained. "It is either the perfect storm of issues or an amazing opportunity for stakeholder collaboration, depending on whether you're an optimist or a pessimist."

While limited resources pose a real threat to the expansion of rest areas, some drivers argue that funds should be allocated evenly to include accommodations for their role in the industry. Williams said some believe parking is not important enough to warrant



## We need a stronger voice from USDOT to provide policy guidance and dedicated federal funding."

— DAN MURRAY

the cost because people simply don't understand the impact truck drivers have on the U.S. economy. She explained that while planes and trains take some of the burden off freight, most products are on store shelves thanks to the work of truck drivers.

Further, Williams explained, "The vast majority of warehouses and stores do not allow truck drivers to park in their lots. (Many don't have space to allow it if they wanted to!)"

In order to increase drivers' options, Williams and Kramer have similar suggestions. Many of the companies building warehouses and distribution centers receive tax incentives for building in any given state, including Indiana. "Truck drivers should also be considered employees — they are a necessary part of the business, so they should be afforded some of the same considerations that would commonly be given to in-state employees," Williams said. "I would think that the simplest solution to help with the cost concern is to make contributing to the cost of building parking for trucks part of the requirements to be met in order for a business to receive a tax break. This would ensure additional funding goes to the state specifically for parking and lessen the state's own burden of cost."

Kramer agreed, addressing the time it takes for some loads to be emptied or filled. "When you're holding us up for four, five, six, seven hours, we're running out of hours and we have no other choice but to stay there. Otherwise, we're out of compliance just trying to get to the closest place to park," he said. "So, I think it should be mandatory that some of these businesses that are being given these big tax incentives that require that many trucks, that they have to build a parking lot to park some of them."

### Improving Data and Technology

One topic for study has been the correlation between interstate corridors' total truck parking capacity and the presence of commercial rest areas. According to a February 2018 study released by NATSO,

researchers found "69 percent more commercial truck parking spaces per mile along interstate highways where the private sector caters to the needs of the traveling public free from government competition at commercial rest areas."

The report, titled "Rest Area Commercialization and Truck Parking Capacity 2018," used independent third-party data from 13 states to compare the number of truck parking spaces on commercialized and non-commercialized segments of the Interstate Highway System. With that data, Dr. Ronald Knippling of Safety for the Long Haul Inc. confirmed a negative relation between the presence of commercial rest areas and total truck parking, and also found a greater negative relation than in 2010.

"We counted the number of parking spaces along the toll roads, turnpikes and other roads that have commercial rest areas ... and we found that there are a lot more parking spaces on the routes without commercialization than the routes that have commercial rest areas (also known as service plazas)," Mullings said. "... It really does hinder the ability to meet the parking needs if you put up these service plazas because they have limited parking; and because they're right on the shoulder of the road, they put a lot of other businesses out of business, such as truck stops, convenience stores and restaurants."

Since 1960, federal law has prohibited the sale of food, fuel and other commercial service from rest areas located directly on the Interstate Highway System to prevent the granting of monopolies along the interstate right-of-way. The research, which evaluated more than 12,000 interstate miles, found that non-commercialized interstate corridors have 6.57 truck parking spaces per mile, or 69 percent more than the 3.88 spaces per mile on the commercialized interstate segments.

Several states are joining the effort to understand the root of this issue and

## Plainfield, IN Rest Area

ATRI analysis of Plainfield rest area showing trucks parked on ramps. *Courtesy of ATRI.*



improve the conditions. “The single biggest positive sign is that several dozen state DOTs, along with some urban areas, are aggressively pursuing truck parking studies,” Murray said. “This is the first time that these government agencies have actively sought to assess the supply and demand situation and seek out a blueprint for action. It is a great first step in addressing what is clearly a truck parking crisis.”

As one of those several dozen states, the Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT) is working to make those existing parking spaces more visible to drivers with the addition of the Truck Parking Information Management System (TPIMS). As the Crossroads of America, Indiana has 1 million trucks that travel throughout the state on a daily basis and is considered to be the fifth busiest state for commercial truck traffic with 724 million tons of freight annually. In addition, Indiana is at the top of the manufacturing market, with trucks moving in and out of plants each day. That

makes it an essential component for research within the trucking industry. Indiana, along with seven other states — Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin — has joined efforts to develop a real-time, multi-state system to help truck drivers locate available parking.

Donna Luley, freight policy analyst and TPIMS project manager at INDOT, said the objective is twofold. “No. 1, we want to let [drivers] know exactly where the parking is located and give them enough time to know that if there’s not enough at one rest stop, they’ll need to go on to the next one so they can figure out which area they can go to. And then No. 2, we want to get them safe parking for their downtime.”

The TPIMS project is in its early stages, and one of the most useful components is the amount of data available that wasn’t accessible prior to the project. “One of the things that the TPIMS project has given us that we haven’t really had before is data

on utilization,” said Kristin Brier, freight manager at INDOT. “This will allow us to take a look at what parking is currently available in the state, what’s being really well utilized, what isn’t necessarily being well utilized, and that helps us evaluate what the key areas are in the state and where our opportunities are to improve.”

The program seeks to provide truck drivers, dispatchers and others with a consistent, cohesive parking-availability system on highway signs as they cross state lines. The TPIMS initiative does this by consistently gathering, analyzing and distributing parking data through a common application programming interface — or API. Each state can also integrate proposed solutions into their existing transportation information systems.

With every brand-new program, especially brand-new IT programs, some growing pains can be expected. Luley said some common complaints in the first few months

of implementation have been signs not working altogether and power outages. “The first couple of months, at least, we were still working through all of the bugs, trying to get everything working correctly,” Luley said.

But even as bug fixes and power outages posed problems, data was still pouring in. “We did not have data before that showed how many trucks come into the parking lots,” Luley explained. “Now we do, and we can use that data not only for our purposes, but also for federal highways to look at and see whether or not the program is working and if it’s worth putting more money into.”

And it’s never too early to spot signs for growth. “We have other rest areas and signs in the state that don’t currently have the TPIMS technology installed because we had to make some difficult decisions about where we can spend our limited resources,” Brier said. “I think [of] the future. We will be looking at where else we can deploy this technology to both help us understand usage and to provide that information to the industry.”

### **Educating the Industry — and the Public**

Mullings emphasized that motor carriers should consider negotiating parking with truck stops when they are entering into fuel contracts. “Trucking companies are asking about fuel prices when negotiating with truck stops. Parking is never brought up in those discussions,” she explained. “If carriers made the decision about where to stop in part because the stop offered parking — or if the trucking industry paid for parking — more parking would be built.”

In addition, trucking companies can play a bigger role in helping point their drivers toward adequate parking. “The trucking companies are experts in logistics and they direct their drivers to go fuel at a certain place, they could perhaps look into where parking might be available and direct them to those places as well,” Mullings said.

Parking is expensive to build and maintain. Truck stops report that on average it costs between \$5,000 and \$10,000 per space to put in new truck parking capacity. One thing truck drivers can do to keep parking free, Mullings said, is to park at the same



place they fuel, or at least buy something at the place where they park. “There are razor-thin profit margins in the trucking industry and a lot of drivers — independent drivers, company drivers — they will sometimes fuel at a location and park somewhere else and not buy anything at the second truck stop because the first may not have had any parking available,” she explained. “[...] Most of our members don’t charge for parking at all, but in the case that they do, they normally don’t charge for customers, only for non-customers.”

Those incentives, in addition to countering community opposition to truck stop expansions and new builds with productive compromises can help combat the shortage and provide safer parking for the nation’s drivers.

And in ensuring adequate rest areas, Williams believes the Hoosier State should be the initiative’s leader. “Indiana’s called

the Crossroads of America for a reason,” she said. “We should for once be taking the lead on issues like this one and not following the federal trucking guidelines like the state currently does for most all things related to trucking.”

And as Williams had previously stated, drivers are an integral part of not only the industry, but the U.S. economy.

“I am an extremely important link in the chain,” Kramer said. “I may not be the most important, but you can’t live without us.”

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