

Truck Drivers' Trip Planning Guide: Know Before You Go

What's the difference between a professional driver who always arrives on time and one who's constantly running behind? Preparation. Careful trip planning helps you expect the unexpected so you can reach your destination safely and on time. It also gives you peace of mind. Plan the best trip possible by following these seven steps every day before you leave the lot.

1. Perform your pre-trip inspection. Walk around your truck and trailer, looking for worn or damaged parts. Top off oil and coolant levels. Make sure lights and brakes are in good working order. Look for tire wear or rubbing and check the air pressure in all tires. Report any concerns to dispatch so they can be addressed quickly.

2. Pack your paperwork. Roadside inspections can happen anywhere at any time. Prepare by carrying all essential documents, including your current CDL and DOT medical cards, Record of Duty Status, vehicle registration, proof of insurance, and shipping papers or bills of lading. If you cross state lines, make sure your truck sports an International Fuel Tax Agreement (IFTA) decal.

3. Set your GPS. Map out your route using truck-specific GPS systems or apps, and ensure you know the weight and height of the vehicle you are operating. Check for any potential obstacles, such as low-clearance bridges, construction zones, weight-restricted roads or road closures. Set realistic drive times based on the roads you'll travel and their speed limits, and plan an alternate route in case you encounter any detours.

4. Plan your breaks. Identify the best places to eat, refuel and take your 30-minute breaks. On longer routes, book parking in advance so you have a safe, well-lit place to stay and sleep on your 10-hour break.



5. Check the forecast and monitor traffic.

Downpours, snowstorms and traffic jams can cause unexpected delays. Prepare by checking the weather before you leave and use your GPS to receive real-time traffic alerts.

6. Breakdowns can happen anywhere. Pack a year-round emergency kit with a flashlight, emergency triangles, flares, reflective vests, tools, and non-perishable food and water. Add a shovel, ice scraper, snow brush, kitty litter and thermal blankets during cold-weather months. Carry extra water, portable fans, sunshades and cooling towels during hot-weather months. And always carry a fully charged fire extinguisher in your cab. Also, routinely inspect these items to confirm they have not expired and are working as they should.

7. Expect delays. Build extra time into your route to account for surprises — such as inspections, open weigh stations, and heavy traffic — so you don't need to speed to reach your destination.