



NW Seaport Alliance Puget Sound  
Zero-Emissions Truck Collaborative

# Puget Sound Zero-Emission Truck Collaborative

North Harbor Truck Driver Listening Session – February 12, 2024

## Overview

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### Purpose

The Puget Sound Zero-Emission Truck Collaborative is developing a plan to transition the diesel-fueled drayage trucks – vehicles that transport freight from an ocean port to a destination – serving the ports of Seattle and Tacoma to zero-emission vehicles by 2050 or sooner. With incentives from the federal and state governments on the rise, the ports of Seattle and Tacoma see this as an ideal time to shift from diesel to zero-emission drayage trucks. Zero-emission trucks such as electric/battery, will reduce a significant source of air pollution that contributes to public health risks and environmental health disparities — especially in communities living near the harbors and along major freight corridors.

Drayage truck drivers that service the Port of Seattle and/or the Port of Tacoma were invited to attend one of two in-person sessions to learn about the Decarbonizing Drayage Roadmap project and share their ideas on how to make this transition to zero-emission trucks equitable for everyone. At this listening session, the Zero Emission Truck Collaborative outreach team asked participants a series of questions to better understand the opportunities and challenges of switching to zero-emission technologies.

### Goals

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- Understand truck drivers’ ideas and opinions on transitioning to zero-emission technologies and what matters most to them.
- Learn preferred ways to reach truck drivers.
- Create a safe space for participants.
- Listen to participants’ voices.
- Have a conversation with both independent owners & operators and fleet operators.

## Format

The listening session was designed to be informal and small in scale. Each participant signed in and received a copy of an overview of PowerPoint Slides and an agenda with the questions the facilitator planned to ask. Participants had a light dinner and refreshments.

Eleven participants attended the two-hour listening session on February 12, 2024. Participants sat around a table arranged in a circle with chairs. The facilitator and NWSA staff sat among the participants. This promoted direct group conversations where everyone was at the same level. Event outreach staff did not receive requests for interpretation for attendees, although these services were pre-arranged.

The facilitator introduced themselves and everyone around the room introduced themselves (including listeners and attendees). Next, a representative from the NWSA provided a 10-minute overview of the need for a zero-emission strategy for the drayage trucks that service the ports of Tacoma and Seattle, the state of the industry, challenges and opportunities, and the formation of the Zero Emission Truck Collaborative. Next, the facilitator began asking pre-determined questions of the attendees.

This document summarizes the themes, questions, and comments that arose during the conversation with truck drivers. It does not attribute their names to maintain a sense of anonymity.

## Participants

Eleven participants attended the listening session on Monday, February 12. Of these, ten attendees worked as independent owner-operators, and one attendee worked for a trucking company. Each participant introduced themselves, how long they've been in the trucking industry, and something interesting about their truck.

### **Number of years in the trucking industry:**

- 10 years
- 12 years
- 15 years
- 15 years
- 15 years
- 17 years
- 20 years
- 23 years
- 23 years
- 24 years

### **About their vehicles:**

- Many attendees drive Volvo trucks.

### **When asked (in the registration form) how often attendees visit NWSA marine terminals:**

- Three attendees said twice a day.
- One attendee said once a day.
- One attendee said one to three times a week.

## Next Steps

This feedback will be shared with the Zero-Emission Truck Collaborative as they work together to define the Decarbonizing Drayage Roadmap. The summary will be shared with listening session attendees. Later in 2024, the Zero-Emission Collaborative will share the draft Roadmap with interested audiences.

## Key Themes

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Several priorities, challenges, and possible solutions emerged as key themes through the conversation with truck drivers. This information is qualitative and based on conversations (i.e., not based on statistically valid polling).

### **Maintenance is a big concern**

Truck drivers expressed concerns that there is not enough information about the maintenance of zero-emission trucks – the typical maintenance issues and costs. They asked about the cost for dealerships to do repairs and the turn-around time. It was mentioned that their older trucks (pre-2007) trucks had no maintenance issues. When they transitioned to the trucks they drive now, they're experiencing costly sensor issues.

### **Affordability and cost are a deal breaker**

Truck drivers expressed concerns that they cannot afford to buy a brand-new zero-emissions truck. They always buy a used diesel truck. They were worried that this transition may push independent owner-operators out of business. It's wrong that it's focused on drayage and not all trucks. The requirements should be state-focused.

### **Trucking as a service is too expensive for independent owner-operators**

All but one truck driver said they are not interested in exploring trucking as a service. Leasing is expensive for an independent business. The trucking business is too unpredictable, and so is their income.

### **Start with the large trucking companies**

Bigger companies should make the initial investment in zero-emission trucks; independent owner-operators can't afford to be the first users. If the bigger companies have issues with the trucks before 500,000 miles, when they typically get rid of the truck, then there will be more issues later when they buy it used. If the zero-emission trucks work for the bigger companies and the infrastructure is in place, they said independent owner-operators will consider it. Also, when truck drivers start using them and seeing them on the road, then they can begin to feel more comfortable.

### **Offer a pilot program to expose other truck drivers to zero-emission trucks**

They don't have any information about zero-emission trucks. Truck drivers would like to see how the electric trucks go up and down hills. They would like to have the opportunity to ask questions about how the trucks work and how to use charging stations.

## Infrastructure accessibility and convenience

One attendee expressed concerns that charging stations/networks won't be convenient to access. With a diesel truck, they can go anywhere to get fuel, not a designated charging station. One driver said when they're stuck for hours in a snowstorm, they can refill their truck with diesel. What is the plan for a dead battery?

## Detailed Summary

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The listening session facilitator had a series of questions they intended to ask during this session. The facilitator navigated the conversation in a way that followed the natural flow of the conversation while still answering most of the pre-determined questions. Below is a summary of those questions and answers.

### *Are you all contracted to shippers?*

All truck drivers said yes.

### *Do you all work exclusively for the shipper companies?*

All truck drivers said yes.

### *Do you have a place to park your trucks when working with the shipper companies?*

Yes. Locations are in Tukwila and Tacoma.

### *Do you have to pay to park your trucks?*

Yes, and it is a secure parking site. Terminal 45 South has free parking.

### *Where are all of you hearing about the idea of zero-emission trucks?*

They hear about it from truck drivers from California.

### *Where do you all go to inquire about truck industry updates?*

The NWSA emails and social media truck driver groups.

### *Do you all get updates from the Northwest Seaport Alliance?*

Some drivers do receive updates from the Alliance.

### *Is there anything that the Northwest Seaport Alliance can do to support the financial burden of transitioning to zero-emission trucks? Any grants or any other financial resources? What can be done?*

- The majority of truck drivers agreed that there's no way they can afford a brand-new electric truck. Maybe if state or federal funds can be used to buy a brand-new electric truck then this can work.
- They always buy a used diesel truck.
- They were worried that this transition may push independent owner-operators out of business.
- It's wrong that it's focused on drayage and not all trucks. It should be state-focused.
- Business is very slow this year; many are working only one day a week.

### *What other information would you all like to know and understand throughout the transition?*

Drivers are interested in receiving more information about the purchase cost, maintenance issues and costs and turnaround by dealerships, driving range, overall quality of electric trucks, updates on the charging infrastructure, and hydrogen trucks. No participants had heard of hydrogen trucks, only natural gas.

### *What's most important to know to make a decision?*

Maintenance costs. Their older trucks (pre-2007) trucks had no maintenance issues. Then when they transitioned to the trucks they drive now, they're experiencing costly sensor issues.

### *What would it take to feel comfortable with the transition?*

- An attendee said seeing bigger companies using zero-emission trucks would make truck drivers feel more comfortable.
- One attendee expressed concerns that charging stations/networks won't be as convenient. With a diesel truck, they can go anywhere to get fuel, not a designated charging station. One driver said when they're stuck for hours in a snowstorm, they can refill their truck with diesel. What is the plan for a dead battery?

### *What is everyone's mileage range on the road? Do you all drive locally?*

Most truck drivers are local while some do long-haul trips ranging to 300 miles.

### *If your truck is broken, do you have access to another one?*

Truck drivers don't have access to another truck.

### *In California, some companies are piloting trucking as a service. Companies purchase a plot of land, install the truck charging infrastructure, purchase batteries, insure and maintain them, and they lease them on a monthly or yearly basis. How do you all feel about that?*

Participants hadn't heard of trucking as a service before. All but one truck driver said they are not interested in exploring that option. Leasing is expensive for an independent business. The trucking business is too unpredictable, and so is their income.

### *What do you think of owning a zero-emission truck right now?*

All truck drivers said not right now.

### *If you all were offered the zero-emission truck that is no cost to yourself and access to charging infrastructure, would you try it?*

All truck drivers are interested in trying it.

### *Any suggestions to connect with truck drivers about zero emissions trucks and having conversations?*

- Email is the best way to connect with drivers.
- Expose other truck drivers to get familiar with zero-emission trucks. Truck drivers need to see them on the roads and how they work. This will also allow them to ask questions about the cost, maintenance, mileage range, etc.

- A pilot program would be nice, especially if there is a charging station provided with it. Truck drivers would like to see how the electric trucks go up and down hills. A month-long driving test was popular.

### *How is everyone feeling?*

- One participant said it is not going to be affordable for owner-operators. Let the bigger companies buy the zero-emission trucks first and figure out the maintenance and other barriers.
- One participant says he owns an electric car and loves it. He likes cleaner emissions and wishes he had an electric truck but doesn't think he can afford it.

### *How could those grants go to the small trucking companies?*

Participants continued answering the previous question.

- One attendee said for it to be at the state level and have all bigger companies change their trucks.
- Don't give all the funding to bigger companies. If it's required state-wide, they can afford to do it on their own.
- They will have confidence once they know how the trucks operate and if the infrastructure is established.
- Many are interested in the pilot program.

### *Are there certain companies you buy your trucks from?*

Penske, Schneider, Ryder.

### *What else can be done?*

- This is a good idea, but they will have to wait. Truck drivers can't afford it.
- The big companies should buy it first.
- They don't have \$400,000; it's more than their mortgage. They have other expenses to take care of. Even \$200,000 is expensive.
- They don't have any information about the trucks. They just know they are expensive and can't afford it.
- The state should be involved in this to make it a requirement for big companies to use it first.
- They would like to see how it works on the road with the pilot program. They like the month-long ride and drive idea.

### *Other methods of engagement efforts?*

Some drivers participate in the Trucker Outreach Forum.