



Quality Data and Information Technology Systems are Critical to Improving Safety

To improve the quality of data collection, transmission and analysis, the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance (CVSA) encourages Congress to call for a study of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's (FMCSA) information technology (IT) and data collection systems.

Uniform, timely and accurate data is the cornerstone of the Motor Carrier Safety Assistance Program (MCSAP) program. Enforcement Personnel, along with State and Federal agencies, use information on a motor carrier's past performance to help prioritize motor carriers for roadside inspections and compliance reviews. Performance data from the commercial motor vehicle industry is used to identify trends and problem areas, and to craft enforcement and education initiatives to target specific safety problems. Data is not only used to evaluate whether or not enforcement is being conducted uniformly, but also to determine whether or not a particular safety program or concept is successful. Data is used to determine whether enforcement funds are being used in the most efficient, effective manner possible. In order to effectively and efficiently perform these activities, the States and the Federal government must be able to rely on the data being compiled in the various systems being accurate and as uniform as possible, in order to make comparisons. As technology continues to advance, we will become even more reliant on the data being inputted into various systems.

Currently, however, redundant, overlapping information technology (IT) systems and outdated software applications result in inconsistencies in the data being collected by the States and the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA), undermining the safety programs and strategies being built upon them. These data challenges hinder the inspection process and create extra, unnecessary work for industry and enforcement alike.

The Motor Carrier Management Information System (MCMIS) is the main system for which all the data collected from State and Federal agencies for FMCSA is housed, including inspection, crash, compliance reviews, safety audits, carrier information and history and numerous other data sets. Other programs, such as Safer, Query Central, and State CVIEW systems, as well as the Compliance, Safety, Accountability (CSA) program, extract the data from MCMIS to run their programs. Developed in the 1980's, MCMIS is almost 30 years old. As the program ages, it becomes harder and more expensive to make software and program changes. The system can simply no longer meet State and Federal data needs.

Another program very much in need of updating is Aspen, which is the program used to collect inspection data during a roadside safety inspection. Aspen was created in the early 1990's and has had few major updates since its development. Most of the changes have been small enhancements and, as a result, users are becoming more frustrated by the system's limitations. For example, currently, an Aspen user must access several separate programs to complete a single roadside safety inspection. Further complicating the process, when an inspector or officer has to switch from one program to another, they are required to input additional passwords and often programs timeout as they shift back and forth. The entire process is cumbersome and time consuming. As a result, the inspector, driver, and vehicle are held up, costing precious time and money. In addition, the multiple actions required and the software limitations create more opportunities for error on data entry, which impact uniformity and accuracy.

Furthermore, Aspen was designed to meet FMCSA needs, not the needs of the States. States want to be able to incorporate e-citations, e-documents, CVIEW systems, size and weight measurements, photos, videos, permits, information from the Performance and Registration Information Systems Management program, as well as more detailed State requirements. By not updating and refining Aspen, FMCSA is missing out on all the extra data that could be collected in the field.

Frustrated with an antiquated system that does not meet their needs, many States have begun to work with private industry to develop 3rd party software systems to meet their needs. These new systems are working to solve user problems, providing flexibility, and increasing data collection, consistency and accuracy.

In addition to relying on outdated, insufficient systems, FMCSA has become too focused on new software development and is distracted by too many competing priorities. As a result, updates and improvements to the primary data collection and management programs on which everything rests are constantly delayed and the States are forced to use outdated and cumbersome legacy systems. In 2009, for example, FMCSA was reviewing the Aspen program and taking input on necessary improvements. However, the update was cancelled so the Agency could focus on developing the CSA program. Now, the Agency is focused on creating the Unified Registration System (URS) program, yet another priority, and still many of the improvements discussed in 2009 have not been implemented.

FMCSA's IT program lacks focus and direction. Were FMCSA to focus on setting parameters and functional specifications, rather than software development, the program would improve tremendously. FMCSA should be managing the system and software development process, rather than doing the actual programming. The Agency needs to clearly identify challenges and solutions, as well as addressing State needs, and establish a clear path forward to meet those needs. FMCSA must take a step back and completely reevaluate its development process and how it prioritizes IT projects.

To improve the quality of data collection, transmission and analysis, CVSA encourages Congress to call for a study of the Agency's IT and data collection systems. The study should include an evaluation of the efficacy of the existing systems and programs and their interaction. It should identify redundancies and explore the feasibility of consolidating data collection and processing systems. The study should evaluate the ability of the programs and systems to meet the needs of FMCSA, both at headquarters and in the State offices, as well as equally the needs of the States themselves. The study should investigate improving any and all user interfaces. The study should take into account the systems' and programs' adaptability, in order to make necessary future changes in an easier, timely, and more cost efficient manner. In addition, the study should explore the necessity and feasibility of increasing the Agency's IT budget, to bring it in line with other Federal programs.

CVSA is an international not-for-profit organization comprising local, state, provincial, territorial, and federal motor carrier safety officials and industry representatives from the United States, Canada, and Mexico. Its mission is to promote commercial motor vehicle safety and security by providing leadership to enforcement, industry and policy makers. The Alliance actively monitors, evaluates, and identifies solutions to potentially unsafe transportation processes and procedures related to driver and vehicle safety requirements most often associated with commercial motor vehicle crashes. In addition, CVSA has several hundred associate members who are committed to helping the Alliance achieve its goals; uniformity, compatibility and reciprocity of commercial vehicle inspections, and enforcement activities throughout North America by individuals dedicated to highway safety and security. For more on CVSA, visit www.cvsa.org.

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