What's Riding on US-Mexico Cross-Border Trucking Pilot

by Michelle Kelley - Tuesday, May 29, 2012

The cross-border trucking pilot program that allows designated Mexican carriers to make deliveries across the U.S. border is suffering from low participation, according to senior officials at the U.S. Department of Transportation.

As of May 13, only three Mexican carriers, each consisting of single truck and driver, have made an underwhelming 35 trips across the border since the pilot started last October. (Source)

This concerns transportation officials, who worry that lack of participation may make it difficult to properly analyze the program’s safety data. Without proper data, officials won’t be in a position to judge whether or not the border can remain open to Mexican truckers on a permanent basis.

Counting the three carriers currently participating, officials would need about 42 more carriers on board in order to give a proper safety assessment.

While both countries are working to encourage more Mexican carriers to apply, it’s the fear of Mexico’s retaliatory tariffs that is driving U.S. officials to push the pilot towards a positive outcome.

The U.S. does not want a repeat of the tariffs levied in retaliation for suspension of a similar pilot program in 2009. At the time, Mexico justified the tariffs as punishment for the U.S. failing to open its borders to Mexican truckers—a provision of NAFTA. U.S exporters paid more than $2.4 billion in tariffs before President Obama and President Calderon signed an agreement to initiate the current pilot program last July. The US-Mexico pilot program will run for the next 2.5 years according to the agreement.