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For over-the-road truckers, the 34-hour restart is part of the federal hours-of-service system. Drivers who take at least 34 consecutive hours off duty can reset the clock that limits them to 60 hours on duty in seven days or 70 hours in eight, depending on their carrier's operations.

On paper, it's straightforward. Park the truck, stay off duty, and get back to work with a fresh clock.

Real life doesn't fit quite so neatly on an electronic log.

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34 Hours Off the Clock.

But Is It Really a Break?

Thirty-four hours sounds like a long break until you're spending it in a truck-stop parking lot, staring at a bag of dirty clothes and wondering when you last ate a meal that didn't come through a window.

For over-the-road truckers, the 34-hour restart is part of the federal hours-of-service system. Drivers who take at least 34 consecutive hours off duty can reset the clock that limits them to 60 hours on duty in seven days or 70 hours in eight, depending on their carrier's operations.

On paper, it's straightforward. Park the truck, stay off duty, and get back to work with a fresh clock.

Real life doesn't fit quite so neatly on an electronic log.

A driver might spend the first morning hunting down a working washer, then sit through the dry cycle with a phone full of missed calls. There are groceries to buy, bills to handle, and a cab that has slowly turned into a combination bedroom and storage closet. Getting a decent shower can depend on finding a truck stop with an open stall.
None of that is the same as moving freight. Much of it counts as personal time. It just doesn't feel much like a day off.

Then comes the matter of where to take the break. A driver who makes it home can spend the restart with family. One stuck hundreds of miles away has to work with whatever is nearby. Safe parking isn't guaranteed, either. The shortage of truck spaces has become serious enough that federal transportation researchers are studying its effects on driver well-being and the cost of moving freight.

The schedule can be just as awkward. Thirty-four hours beginning on a Tuesday afternoon don't magically turn into a Saturday morning at home. A restart may finish in the middle of the night, with the next pickup already assigned. A driver's body clock doesn't always follow the dispatch board.

Those working close to their hours limit may have little flexibility about when to stop. If a load delivers Monday morning, the next restart can begin wherever the day ends, rather than where the driver would choose to spend it.

There is an important distinction here: the restart is meant to provide real off-duty time. Loading freight, inspecting or repairing equipment, and other on-duty work cannot simply be tucked into those 34 hours. Personal chores may be unavoidable, but job duties can interrupt the restart itself.

Research by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration found that drivers slept more during restart periods than on working days. That matters. Sleep is the point, and the rule gives drivers a way to recover hours before starting another work cycle.

Still, a legal restart isn't automatically a restful one. A good break means a safe place to park, something decent to eat, and enough peace to sleep without wondering if someone will knock on the door and tell you to move.

The miles may stop accumulating for 34 hours. Life doesn't.

And when the clock resets, the next load won't care whether the laundry ever got folded.

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The Trailer Is Empty.

The Expenses Aren't.

An empty trailer has a way of making a truck feel heavier.

The load has been delivered. The paperwork is signed. The driver pulls away from the dock with nothing in the trailer worth billing for. There may be another pickup 40 miles down the road. There may be one 250 miles away.

Either way, the odometer keeps turning.

In trucking, those unpaid repositioning miles are called deadhead. For an owner-operator, they're among the quickest ways a good-looking load can turn into an ordinary paycheck — or no paycheck at all.

Consider a simple example. A load pays $1,800 for 900 loaded miles. That's $2 a mile, according to the rate confirmation. Add 300 miles of empty running to reach the pickup or find the next load, and the same $1,800 now covers 1,200 miles. The effective gross rate has fallen to $1.50 per mile, before expenses.

The fuel station doesn't offer a discount because the trailer is empty. Neither does the insurance company.

The American Transportation Research Institute reported in July that the industry-average operating cost reached $2.336 per mile in 2025, up 3.4% from the year before. That benchmark covers motor carriers of different sizes and operations, so it isn't an individual owner-operator's balance sheet. But it explains why carriers worry about every mile.

The report also found that empty miles remained elevated as freight operators dealt with a weak market and thin margins.

What looks like a rate problem is often a geography problem, too.

A truck can deliver into a market where freight is scarce and spend the next day searching for something headed in a useful direction. Taking a cheap load may be better than driving empty. Then again, hauling cheap freight into an even worse market can create a bigger problem.

Sometimes the least expensive choice today is the most expensive one on Friday.

Deadhead also burns up something a dispatcher cannot refill: available driving hours. Running empty still counts against federal driving limits, leaving less time for the paying freight an operator needs to keep the business profitable.

That's why experienced operators look beyond the price printed on a single rate confirmation. They consider all miles, tolls, fuel, appointment times, and the odds of finding freight after delivery. A shipper's delay can eat up driving hours that might have been used to reach the next paying pickup.

There isn't a perfect formula. Freight markets change. Some loads are worth taking because they get a driver home. Others make sense because they position the truck for a stronger week ahead.

For a company driver, empty miles may still earn mileage pay, depending on the carrier. For an owner-operator responsible for the truck's expenses, every mile goes on the ledger.

Most motorists see an empty trailer and assume the trucker's work is finished.

The driver knows better. The delivery is over. The cost of getting to the next one has already begun.

WHERE is Gizmo?

Keep your eyes peeled for Gizmo, NAIT's furry mascot. He's out on the road, wagging his way across the miles. Spot him? Don't paws – snap a pic, send it our way!

mona.brimeyer@naitusa.com

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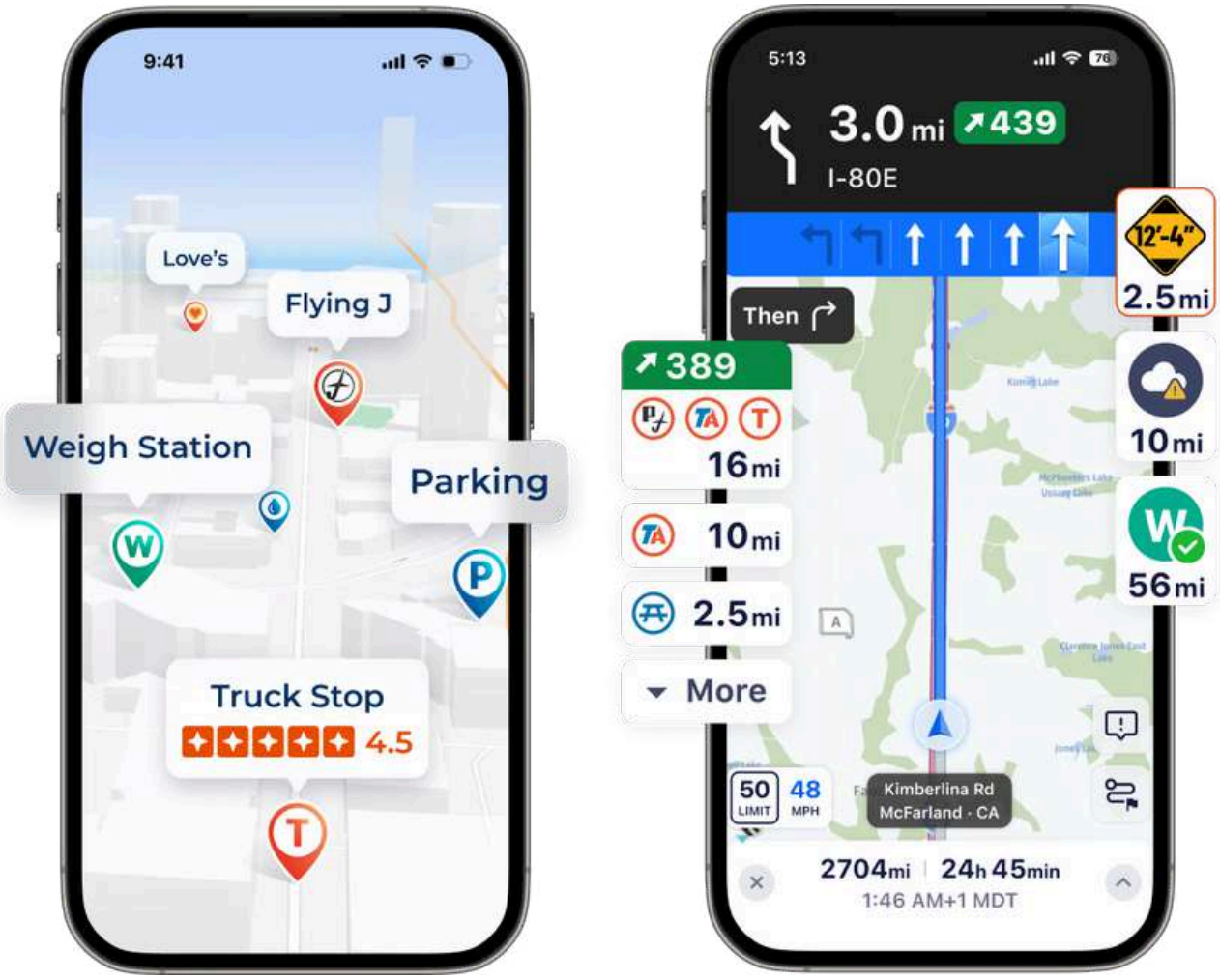

TRUCKER PATH™

A Thousand Miles From Home

... But Not Among Strangers

There are people who recognize a truck long before they recognize the driver climbing out of it.

Maybe it's the woman at a fuel stop who remembers the coffee order. Maybe it's another driver who recognizes a familiar tractor three states from where they last crossed paths.

After enough miles, the highway starts producing its own version of neighbors.

For over-the-road truckers, home can be days away. Birthdays happen over video calls. Dinner with family gets replaced by whatever is open near the interstate. Even drivers who love the freedom of the job know there are evenings when the cab feels awfully small.

But loneliness isn't the whole story.

The same road that separates people from home can introduce them to a community that doesn't require a shared ZIP code. Drivers meet in repair-shop waiting rooms, at fuel islands, and over breakfast when dispatch has left them with a few hours to spare.

Sometimes a conversation lasts ten minutes. Sometimes the friendship lasts twenty years.

A 2025 University of Alabama at Birmingham study of 98 long-haul drivers found problems with sleep and moderate loneliness among participants. Researchers emphasized the importance of social connections to drivers' well-being.

What binds those friendships isn't necessarily where someone grew up or what name is painted on the trailer. It's the things that are difficult to explain to somebody who has never delivered to a warehouse before sunrise.

They understand a missed appointment that throws off two days of planning. They know how a tire failure can turn a profitable run upside down. And they understand what it means to be exhausted and still have to find somewhere legal to park.

A fellow driver doesn't need the whole story. Usually, they already know the frustrating parts.

The connections have changed with the equipment. CB radios still have their place, but so do text threads, online trucking groups, and calls made during the long stretches between exits.

Drivers share information about difficult receivers or pass along warnings about weather delays. A familiar voice can make a night at a crowded truck stop easier to bear.

Of course, the road isn't one big family reunion. Some truck stops are unfriendly. Some strangers are best left alone. Drivers have good reasons to think about personal safety and keep their guard up.

Trust is earned out there, same as anywhere else.

That makes the decent moments worth remembering.

A driver gives another an honest heads-up about a bad parking situation. Somebody offers directions that save a newcomer from squeezing a 53-foot trailer onto the wrong street. Two people who haven't spoken in months pick up the conversation as if yesterday was their last stop.

Small things, perhaps, until you're a thousand miles from anyone who knows your middle name.

A trucking career is measured in miles, loads, and delivery times. But drivers have another way to keep score: the people who make the road feel a little less far from home.

And sometimes, after a particularly long day, finding a familiar truck parked at the next stop is enough.

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For more than 25 years, ATBS has specialized in tax, accounting, and business services for truckers. Its team understands that an independent driver's taxes aren't the same as those of a typical nine-to-five employee. Per diem deductions, quarterly estimated payments, and records from life on the road all require attention.

With the ATBS Hub, drivers can scan receipts, track per diem, review profit-and-loss statements, and check tax estimates right from their phones. Depending on the service package, ATBS also handles bookkeeping, prepares federal and state tax returns, and provides business consulting.

The real advantage goes beyond getting taxes filed. A clearer picture of operating expenses can help owner-operators spot problems and make better business decisions.

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			3			6	7	2
			2				8	
7	2		6		1			
			1			5		
	5	6		9	8		1	4
			5					
	9	5	8	1				
2		1			3			
6	3			2	5	8		

Sudoku

The goal is to fill a 9x9 grid with digits 1 through 9, ensuring each digit appears only once in each row, column, and 3x3 subgrid.

Did You Know ...

• **There's roughly one truck parking space for every 11 drivers.**
A 2025 trucking-industry study estimated that nationwide ratio. Finding a legal place to sleep can be harder than finding the next load.

• **Most trucking companies aren't big trucking companies.**
Some 91.5% of U.S. motor carriers operate 10 or fewer trucks, according to the American Trucking Associations' 2025 industry report. Those national fleets may dominate the highways visually, but small operators dominate the carrier count.

• **Nearly three-quarters of America's freight moves by truck.**
Trucks transported approximately 72.7% of U.S. freight tonnage in 2024. Much of what Americans use every day spends at least part of its journey on a truck.

• **A parked truck can burn more than six gallons of diesel overnight.**
The Department of Energy estimates a heavy-duty truck burns around 0.8 gallon of diesel per hour while idling. Over eight hours, that's approximately 6.4 gallons – without moving an inch.

• **Drivers reported spending more than two hours waiting at nearly four in 10 stops.**
A 2024 ATRI study found that drivers reported detention at 39.3% of stops in 2023. Waiting at shippers and receivers cost for-hire trucking more than 135 million hours that year.

• **Operating a truck costs an average of more than $2.30 per mile.**
ATRI's July 2026 report put the industry average at $2.336 per mile for 2025. That's about $2,336 in operating costs for a 1,000-mile run, before any profit. Individual carrier costs vary.

• **More than 80% of U.S. communities depend exclusively on trucks for freight transportation.**
According to the American Trucking Associations, most communities have no direct freight-rail or waterway alternative for receiving goods. Trucks aren't merely convenient. They're essential.