

Transport Topics

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You'll Need an ACE to Get In

Customs to Require E-Manifests for Trucks Entering the United States

By Stephen Bennett
Contributing Writer

Electronic filing of manifests for truckborne freight entering the United States from Canada and Mexico should speed border crossings and function as a security measure, according to U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

One thing is clear: Electronic filing soon will become mandatory for truckers — almost certainly within a year, and likely at selected ports of entry by this spring.

Customs is urging highway carriers with cross-border operations to start developing electronic capability now, because it takes time.

Qualifying to transmit so-called e-manifests is a rather involved process, according to those who have gone through it.

"It's not the kind of thing you can do in two days," said Steve McQueary, general manager of Brown Line Inc., the first trucking company to file electronic manifests. Brown Line, a small fleet in Mount Vernon, Wash., and a handful of other trucking companies have been working for a year or more to establish electronic filing capability.

The system is called ACE, the acronym of Automated Commercial Environment, one of Customs' most important achievements in modernization.

"Brokers have been submitting their information to Customs in electronic form for years," said Margaret Irwin, director of cross-border issues for American Trucking Associations. "What Customs is looking to do is get the carrier's information — normally on paper manifests — electronically, then match it up [with the broker's] and make sure that they're the same."

This data must be received by Customs no

less than one hour before the truck arrives at the port of entry. Details in the fleet manifest must match the customs broker's statement, or the truck surely will be bounced out of the primary clearance lane to wait for individual review in the secondary lane.

Key data for the fleet are the details about the conveyance and its crew — the truck and its driver.

If the details are complete and accurate, the load should pass through faster than before — at least it should not be delayed for routine reasons, according to those familiar with Customs' plans.

ABF Freight System was the first major carrier to complete a crossing with an electronic manifest; that was in March. Both Brown Line and ABF entered via Blaine, Wash., site of the first ACE installation.

As of November, ACE was functioning at 11 ports of entry in Washington state, seven in North Dakota, one in Minnesota, four in Michigan and five in Arizona. Ports in California, New Mexico and Texas are scheduled to go online within the next few weeks. Detailed information about how to get started is available at the Customs and Border

Protection Web site at <http://cbp.gov>.

An estimated 10,000 carriers haul freight across America's borders. No one knows the exact figure, least of all Customs.

Some 300 of those carriers are ACE-capable, which involves a choice of technologies, because there is more than one way to transmit documents.

At least 85 carriers have sent letters of intent to apply for certification.

At last count, in November, Customs had completed ACE authorization for 15 carriers.

While Customs has yet to set a deadline for electronic filing, ATA's Irwin said the expectation, based on discussions with agency officials, is that ACE will probably be mandatory at all ports of entry by some time in the fourth quarter of 2006.

It could become mandatory as early as April at a cluster of ports, she said, with others added as they become ACE-enabled.

A key decision for each carrier — one of the knotty details — is choosing from among three methods of electronic filing. The options are EDI (electronic data interchange), a Web portal accessed via the Internet, or a service provider.

Carriers are likely to choose on the basis of the size of their operation, according to McQueary of Brown Line. He said the biggest operators, because they presumably would have a greater volume of manifests, would be more likely to choose EDI for its ability to transmit large volumes of data, while mid-size and smaller operators would likely opt for one of the other two means.

Brown Line, a 60-truck fleet, chose Customs' Web portal for the test.

"The portal is a good tool," McQueary said, but Brown Line management has not yet decided which method it would prefer on a regular basis. He said there are other matters besides fleet size and number of manifests to consider, notably the number of shipments on each manifest that would require processing.

For that reason, Brown Line is exploring EDI. Electronic data interchange refers to the transfer of data between different companies, agencies or organizations, using networks. The challenge for Brown Line is to adapt its dispatch software to work seamlessly with the EDI networks. Brown Line's software provider is working on the adaptation now, and the carrier is awaiting the result, McQueary said.

Moving less-than-truckload trailers through customs is complicated by the sheer number and variety of the trailer's contents. Each item has an entry on the manifest or bill of lading.

ABF Freight System started laying the groundwork for electronic filing in the fall of 2004, according to Jevon T. Jamieson, the Fort Smith, Ark., fleet's manager of administration and customs compliance. Nearly a year later, Jamieson said, ABF is continuing

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Being All Thumbs Proves Painful for Some Hand-Held Users

By Alicia Chang
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES
Chris Claypool was addicted to his BlackBerry wireless hand-held. Like many users, he never thought twice about pecking away at lightning speed, replying to a wave of e-mails from clients around the globe.

Last year, the 37-year-old agricultural sales director from Post Falls, Idaho, noticed a throbbing sensation in this thumbs whenever he typed. He switched to tapping with his index finger, then his middle digit and finally his pinky. But his thumbs

pained him to the point where he cannot even press the buttons on his TV remote control.

After months of aching, Claypool took a break. Now he only uses his BlackBerry to send short messages — typing with the tip of a pencil eraser whenever his thumbs get sore.

"It affects business because I can't whack away on my BlackBerry like I used to," he said. "It's just too painful."

Repetitive motion injuries, which have long afflicted desktop and laptop computer users, are invading the mobile hand-held world.

There is even an informal name

for the malady — "BlackBerry Thumb" — a catch-all phrase that describes a repetitive stress injury of the thumb as a result of overusing small gadget keypads.

Business executives and tech-savvy consumers are increasingly using BlackBerries, Treos, Sidekicks and other devices with miniature keyboards designed for thumb-tapping to stay connected while on the go.

And that has some ergonomic and hand experts worried about injuries from overexertion.

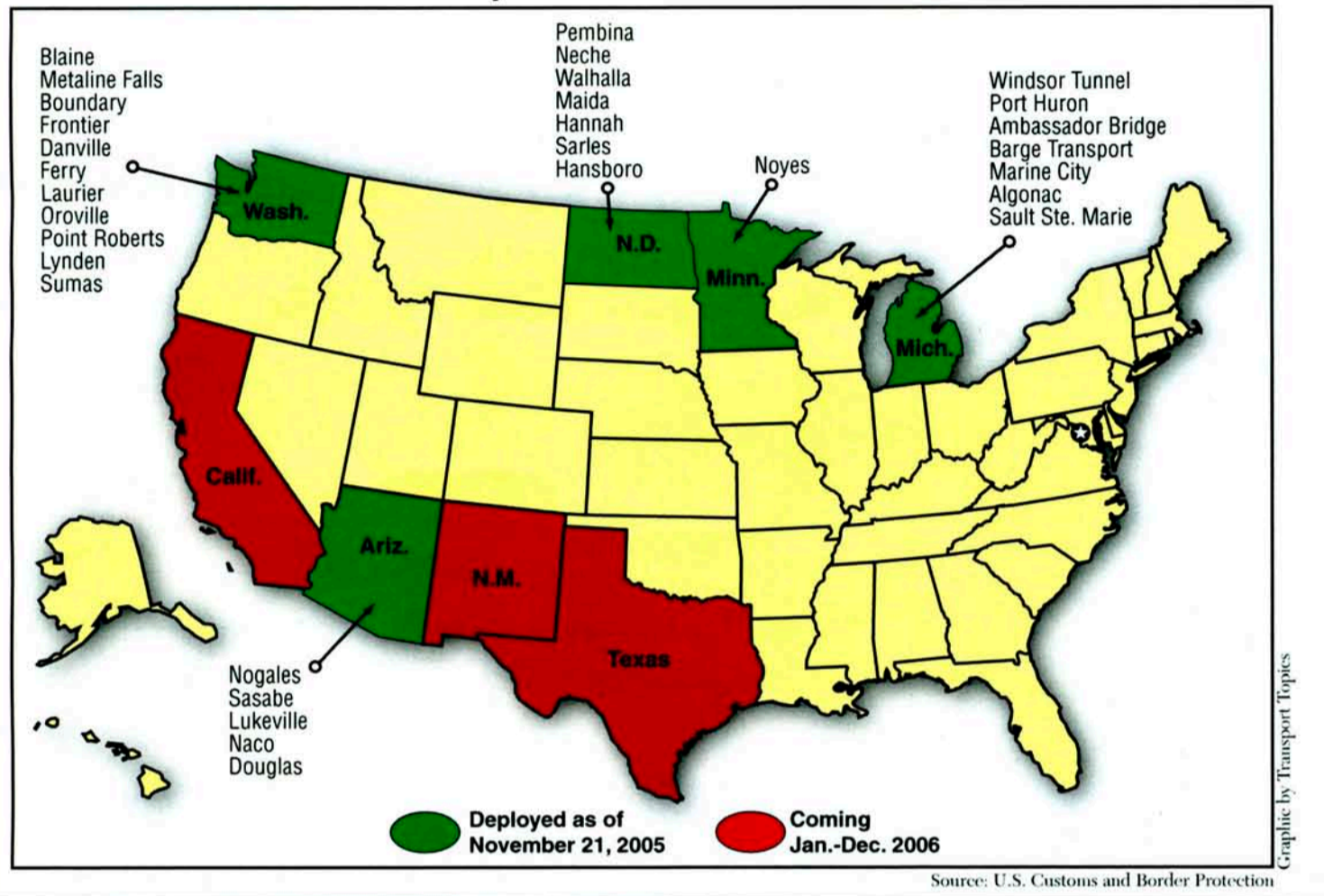
"If you're trying to type 'War and Peace' with your thumbs, then you're going to have a problem,"

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A worker at Research In Motion, maker of the BlackBerry, demonstrates a model of the wireless platform. Heavy use of thumb keyboards may lead to repetitive stress problems, specialists report.

ACE e-Manifest Truck Ports of Entry



EDI for E-Manifests: How to Get Started

IF YOU ARE interested in filing electronic truck manifests using EDI, you must write a letter stating your intent.

The letter of intent should be written on company letterhead and should include:

- The name and telephone number of the company's principal management and technical contacts.
- The Standard Carrier Alpha Code (SCAC) used by your company.
- The ports of entry where your company's vehicles cross into the United States and the approximate number of crossings per month for each location.
- A brief description of your company's data communications system (i.e. MQ/Frame or MQ/VPN identification of your third-party service provider.)
- Indicate whether you will be programming using ANSI X.12 or UN/EDIFACT messages.

If the system is being developed or supported by a data processing company, include the data processing company's name, contact person, telephone number, and expected completion date of the programming or installation.

The letter of intent should be addressed to:

U.S. Customs and Border Protection
 7501 Boston Blvd., Room 211
 Springfield, Va. 22153
 Attn.: Janet Pence
 Director, Customer Support and Systems Training

You may fax the letter of intent to 703-921-7563.

Once your letter of intent is received, a CBP client representative will be assigned to work with you and serve as your technical advisor during the development, testing, and implementation stages.

— U.S. Customs and Border Protection

Qualifying for ACE Is a Time-Consuming Process

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to coordinate its electronic filing with CBP. The LTL giant is preparing to file by using EDI, but is still working out some glitches with CBP, according to Jamieson.

ABF has been on and off the system over the past few months. In early September, it sent manifests for empty and loaded trailers. The manifests for loaded trailers failed "due to CBP issues," Jamieson said by e-mail without further elaboration. "We have stopped sending manifests again until CBP fixes these issues..." he wrote then.

Despite the ups and downs, Jamieson, who is a member of a number of committees involved in the development and fine-tuning of ACE, said, "I think eventually they'll have a good product."

Another EDI user is UPS Inc., which sent its first electronic manifests in February and now is regularly providing Customs with information electronically for shipments crossing at Blaine, Wash.

According to a consultant who works closely with Customs, UPS is filing a small number of manifests for a large number of shipments — approximately 1,500 — entering the United States via Blaine. The consultant did not want to be identified because, he said, as a contract worker, he was not authorized to comment on Customs matters.

With each UPS manifest, the system also provides information on the vehicle and dri-

ver. The company reported that the agency "can verify quickly the legitimacy of vehicles and drivers as well as run the shipping data through electronic filters to make inspection selections. These selections can be determined before a shipment reaches the border. Goods not selected for inspection and that comply with U.S. laws can be expedited."

UPS is now working with CBP to deploy ACE at all 11 of its land port operations, the company said in a statement.

Another carrier successfully filing is Olmstead Trucking, a transporter of wood products in Mount Vernon, Wash. It had filed approximately 180 electronic manifests via the CBP Web portal, Candy Hobbs, an office worker at the carrier's headquarters, said in mid-September. Hobbs said a Customs official from Blaine traveled to the carrier's offices to guide the company through its initial filing.

Olmstead Trucking has 25 tractors and uses flatbed trailers. Hobbs said virtually every manifest has just one shipment. Using the Web portal to file has considerably shortened the time of border crossings by the carriers' drivers, she said.

The third option for carriers is to choose a service provider — an information technology company with the means, and Customs certification, to relay electronic manifests.

The CBP Web site includes a list of companies offering ACE electronic truck manifest processing. An introductory note emphasizes that the list does "not constitute any form of an endorsement" by CBP. The note also points out that each carrier, "regardless of the computer hardware/software used, must successfully complete a period of intensive testing with CBP."

The companies are: CrimsonLogic (North America) Inc., Richmond Hill, Ontario; MSR, Buffalo, N.Y.; Oceanwide (USA) Inc., Miami; Sectra LLC, Amesbury, Mass.; Smart Border by South Ranch Inc., Buffalo, N.Y.; and ViaSafe Inc., Ottawa.

Ken Weinberg, vice president of Carrier Logistics Inc., a transportation management services company in Tarrytown, N.Y., said CLI has formed a partnership with one of the certified service providers, ViaSafe, initially to offer electronic filing of manifests for shipments bound for Canada from the United States.

The same service will be available through the CLI-ViaSafe partnership once electronic filing becomes mandatory for goods entering the United States, Weinberg said. He described the ViaSafe service as an application service provider, incorporated into updated CLI software for LTL carriers.

An application service provider (ASP) provides access to software via a Web site, for which the user pays a fee. It is an alternative to acquiring a software program that would be

installed on the user's own server or servers.

Another transportation services company, TransCore Link Logistics, said it, too, is introducing a Web-based application designed to help carriers file electronically. The offering is designed to enable carriers to directly submit manifests to the ACE system via the Web without relying on a third-party broker, according to TransCore.

TransCore said it has a marketing agreement with CrimsonLogic to use its Web-connectivity software application for ACE compliance. CrimsonLogic is another of the service providers certified by CBP to offer Web-connectivity directly to the ACE system. ♦