

WESTERN COMMENT: In praise of PIC

2/21/2005

By James Menzies

CALGARY, Alta. -- During its short-lived run ending in 2003, Alberta's Partners in Compliance (PIC) program was widely viewed as a fine example of what industry can achieve when it takes the initiative to assess itself and strive towards operational excellence.

So it's no surprise that some eyebrows were raised in 2003 when the Alberta Motor Transport Association (AMTA) reportedly returned an \$85,000 cheque to the province and told it the association would no longer administer the program.

Under the program, PIC carriers were required to audit themselves, agree to random vehicle inspections and submit monthly reports to the Department of Transportation. In return, they were given...well, a fancy licence plate that identified them as a PIC carrier. There were other benefits as well, but not enough to justify the cost of membership, carriers complained.

While everyone agreed that the concept of PIC was laudable, many carriers felt there simply wasn't enough incentive to go through the onerous entry process and absorb the extra costs incurred by self-auditing and ongoing membership in the program.

Fortunately, a number of member carriers were determined not to throw the baby out with the bathwater and have gone to great lengths to keep the program alive. The new PIC has been taken off life support and is on the verge of getting a second lease on life thanks to their efforts.

A number of the former PIC's shortcomings have been addressed, including making the program easier to enter. This should encourage more carriers to take part and the success of the new PIC program will depend largely on their willingness to do so.

Another key improvement is the proper implementation of a scale bypass element of the program. Imagine the productivity gains that could be achieved if your trucks didn't have to pull into every weigh scale in the province every time those amber lights were flashing!

PIC carriers will soon enjoy that luxury, once the province invests in the required Automatic Vehicle Identification (AVI) technology. And that, folks, is the sought-after carrot that should make the new PIC a winner. Finally, fleets will have more to show for their efforts than a tacky PIC licence plate on the front bumper of their trucks. They'll have quantifiable results that will positively impact their bottom line.

The carriers behind the resurrection of PIC have already been testing the new framework.

Although the AVI equipment is not yet in place, Alberta Transportation has been allowing PIC carriers to roll through the scales without stopping. It's only going to get better when the AVI equipment is up and running and a driver won't even have to let off the throttle when passing by the scales. Hopefully government will move quickly towards getting the system up and running.

As with all voluntary programs, the participation of industry will determine whether or not the new program flies. Here's an opportunity to raise the bar for other jurisdictions within the country and even south of the border. PIC has already been recognized by the U.S.-based Transportation Research Board and rumour has it Quebec is considering launching a similar program.

There aren't many second chances in life, but here's one for carriers. Hopefully this time around it's going to work – but it depends on you!