

# Study details COVID-19's impact on trucking industry

By [The Trucker News Staff](#) - December 1, 2021

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The American Transportation Research Institute has released a new study on the effects COVID-19 has had on the trucking industry.

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ARLINGTON, Va. — COVID-19 has affected just about every aspect of life. The trucking industry is no exception.

According to a recent analysis of the operational costs of trucking by the American Transportation Research Institute (ATRI), in addition to faster truck speeds, COVID-19 impacts were considerable. The research is based on detailed 2020 financial data provided directly by motor carriers of all sectors and fleet sizes. The various line-item cost centers clearly document the numerous impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic had on trucking and the economy in general.

The study noted that dead-head miles increased to 20.6%, annual operating miles decreased to 89,358 miles per truck, and fuel costs declined by nearly 20% to 30.8 cents per mile.

Independent of COVID-19 impacts, insurance costs continued their climb, rising more than 18% to 8.7 cents per mile — the highest in the report's history, according to ATRI.

The report documents the effect that faster truck speeds, due to low overall traffic levels, had on multiple line-items, as well as the sector and commodity volatility that occurred as consumers were forced to dramatically change spending habits.

“The COVID-19 pandemic made 2020 a historically unprecedented year for the global economy,” the report stated. “Despite encountering numerous logistical difficulties, the trucking industry performed with admirable consistency, and so did its marginal costs. Carriers were able to take advantage of some unexpected windfalls, such as unusually low fuel costs and highway traffic, to offset heightened expenses in other areas.”

While truck driver wages increased from 2019 to 2020, benefits costs per mile decreased. Overall truck driver compensation was 73.7 cents per mile. Separately, safety and retention bonuses increased by 10.5% and 14.2% respectively, but starting bonuses dropped by 10% — reflecting the soft driver marketplace in early 2020 for many sectors.

Overall, the average marginal cost per mile incurred by motor carriers in 2020 decreased 5 cents per mile to \$1.64. When the per-mile costs are converted to hourly costs, the report found that total hourly costs dropped slightly to \$66.87.

“In the face of a COVID-19 economy, our industry tightly managed costs and operations, while delivering essential goods to market. We also led the way out of the COVID-19 recession in the latter half of the year. I expect 2021 to

continue the positive trends for our industry,” said Cully Frisard, COO of Frisard Companies.