

Data Spotlight

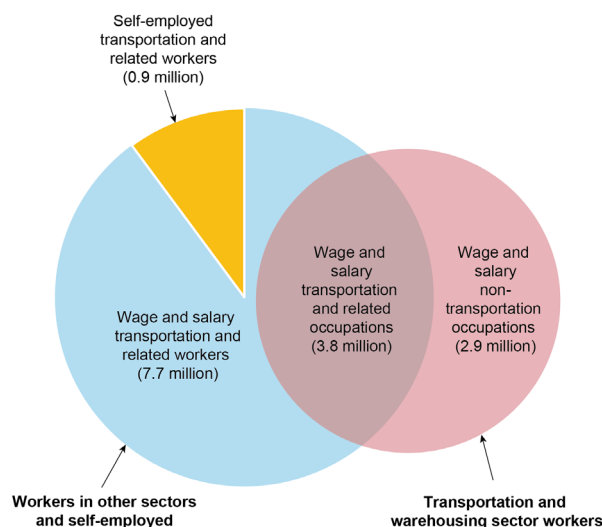
July 1, 2024

Counting the Transportation Workforce: Nearly 1 Million Self-Employed

Counting the transportation workforce from the industry perspective could lead to different estimates than those from the occupational perspective. Workforce employed by the transportation industry, such as transportation and warehousing sector, include those employed in transportation occupations as well as those employed in non-transportation occupations. Workforce classified under transportation occupations include those employed in transportation occupations in any industry and self-employed transportation workers. Therefore, estimates of the transportation workforce based on the number employed in the transportation and warehousing sector (an industry perspective) miss the large number of self-employed workers as well as those employed in transportation occupations in non-transportation sectors. This spotlight looks at self-employment in transportation using transportation occupations (occupational perspective). Transportation occupations, such as truck drivers, include wage and salary jobs in the transportation and warehousing sector as well as transportation-related positions in other sectors and self-employed transportation workers. Unlike estimates based on an industry perspective, it does not include wage and salary workers holding non-transportation jobs in the transportation and warehousing sector.

In 2022, 7.0% of workers (0.9 million) in a transportation or related occupation were self-employed.¹ Inclusion of the self-employed increases the total transportation workforce by nearly one million persons — from 11.4 million to 12.3 million in 2022 (figure 1).² Including non-transportation occupations within the transportation and warehousing sector brings this total to 15.2 million. Self-employed transportation workers account for 10.1% of the 8.6 million workers who perform transportation functions but who are not employed in the transportation and warehousing sector itself.

Figure 1. Employment in Transportation and Related Occupations, 2022

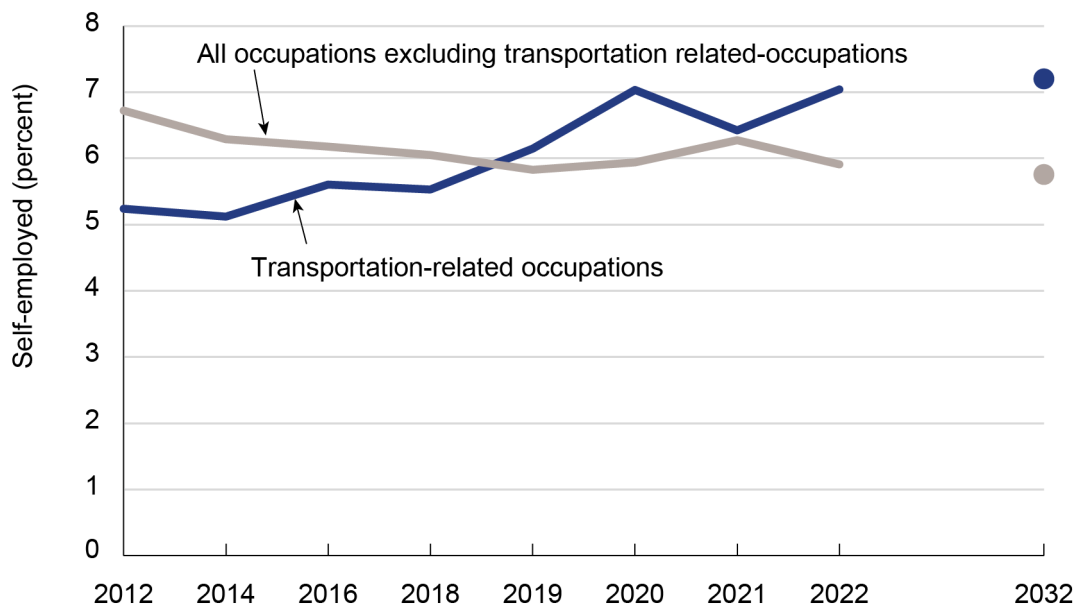


Source: Calculations by U.S. Department of Transportation, Bureau of Transportation Statistics from Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Employment Projections, available at <https://www.bls.gov/emp/> as of October 2023.

Note: Self-employment data are by occupation; therefore, all self-employed in transportation fall into the “workers in other sectors and self-employed category.” Workers within a sector are all wage and salary workers.

The percentage of self-employed transportation workers has grown over the past decade; rising 1.8 percentage points (from 5.2% in 2012) but expected by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) to grow by only 0.2 percentage points to 7.2% over the next 10 years (figure 2). In contrast, the share of self-employed in non-transportation occupations has fallen over the past 10 years; from 6.7% in 2012 to 5.9% in 2022 and expected to fall marginally over the next decade to 5.8% in 2032 (figure 2).

Figure 2. Percent of Workers Self-Employed, 2012–2032



Source: Calculations by U.S. Department of Transportation, Bureau of Transportation Statistics from Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Employment Projections, available at <https://www.bls.gov/emp/> as of October 2023. Data for years prior to 2022 obtained from personal communication with BLS.
Note: Self-employment data are by occupation.

LARGEST SHARE OF SELF-EMPLOYED TRANSPORTATION WORKERS ARE TAXI DRIVERS

Data on self-employment are from the BLS and are by occupation. Some of the self-employed may work for themselves. Others may work for as an independent contractor for a transportation industry, such as those hired by a rideshare company, and some may work as an independent contractor for a non-transportation industry such as Amazon. The data do not specify which industry the self-employed may work for; therefore, the industries hiring the most independent contractors cannot be determined. However, data are available on the number of wage and salary workers by the same occupations that are available for the self-employed. This allows an examination of the share and absolute number of the self-employed by occupation.

The share of self-employed varies across transportation occupations from a high of 91.5% of all taxi drivers to a low of 0.1% among industrial truck and tractor operators in 2022. Taxi drivers include ride-share operators. Ride-share operators work as independent contractors rather than as wage and salary employees for companies such as Uber and Lyft. The rise in ride-share operators over the past decade significantly increased the share of self-employed workers among taxi drivers from only 26.1% in 2012 to 91.5% in 2022 (figure 3a).³ In 2022, the second largest share of self-employed workers were couriers and messengers, accounting for 63.9% of total workers in that occupation. Couriers and messengers provide intercity and/or local delivery of parcels and documents. The emergence of last-mile delivery services, such as Amazon Flex, Uber Eats, and Instacart, where drivers deliver packages, food, groceries, etc. using their own vehicles caused self-employed couriers and messengers to grow from 19,200 in 2012 to 138,700 in 2022 and increased the share of self-employed couriers and messengers from 19.6% in 2012 to 63.9% in 2022. Persons who deliver parcels and documents but work for the company itself rather than as an independent contractor, such as Amazon drivers

who operate Amazon-owned vehicles as well as UPS and FedEx workers, are wage and salary employees, and they account for the remaining share (36.1%) of couriers and messengers.

While self-employed taxi drivers account for the largest share of any transportation occupation, the total number of independent owner-operator truck drivers exceeded the number of self-employed taxi drivers in 2022. In 2022, there were 164,600 heavy tractor-trailer operators according to BLS (figure 3b). Adding self-employed light/delivery service drivers and self-employed driver/sales workers, which ranked fifth and sixth largest, respectively, increased the number of independent owner-operator truck drivers to 293,900, who collectively accounted for 7.5% of all truck drivers in 2022. This number is smaller than the total reported by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA). According to FMCSA, there were 922,854 independent owner-operators as of November 2023, and they accounted for 11.1% of all truck drivers.⁴ Data from FMCSA are from vehicle registration and hence capture the entire trucking universe, while data from BLS are from a survey, which estimates employment from on a statistical sample. The difference in the source of the data and collection method may explain the difference between the FMCSA and BLS estimates for independent owner-operator truck drivers.

Figure 3a. Transportation Occupations with Largest Share of Self-Employed Workers (Top 10), 2022

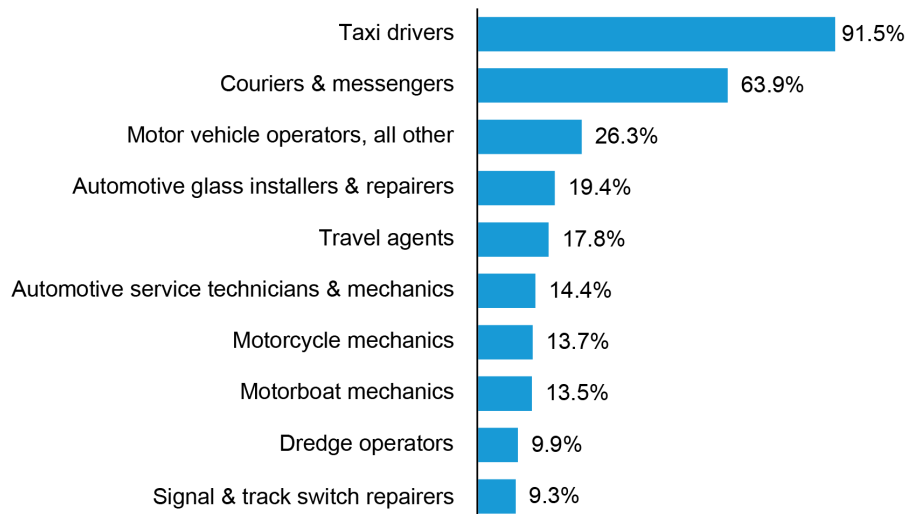
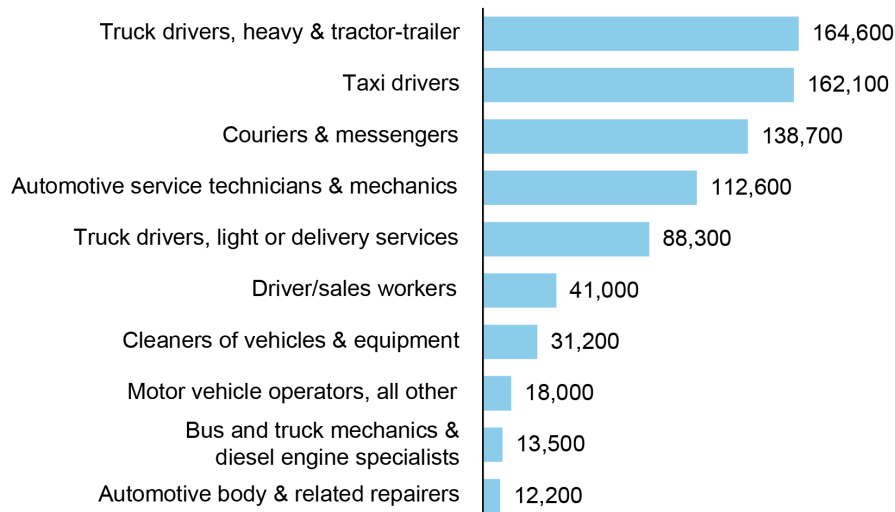


Figure 3b. Transportation Occupations with Largest Number of Self-Employed Workers (Top 10), 2022



Source: Calculations by U.S. Department of Transportation, Bureau of Transportation Statistics from Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Employment Projections, available at <https://www.bls.gov/emp/> as of October 2023.

The Bureau of Transportation Statistics reports the [number of persons employed in the transportation and warehousing sector](#) each month. These data include only wage and salary workers and not the self-employed. Data on the number of self-employed persons in transportation are available only on an annual basis and from a different survey, which measures employment by occupation and industry rather than by industry alone. The BLS data in this spotlight are from BLS' [employment projections](#) and are featured in the Bureau of Transportation Statistics' *Transportation Economic Trends* [Employment in Transportation Occupations](#) page.

¹ "Transportation-related occupations" refers to the occupations listed by the U.S. Department of Transportation, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, *Transportation Economic Trends*, "Employment Concepts," available at <https://data.bts.gov/stories/s/rpax-fyz5#what-are-transportation-occupations> as of December 2023.

² Totals are from the sum of the values in thousands. The sum then was transformed into millions. Summing the components in millions will lead to a different value due to rounding.

³ Uber was the first, modern large-scale rideshare company, which started operating in 2009. Lyft started operating in 2012.

⁴ U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, registration statistics, available at <https://ai.fmcsa.dot.gov/registrationstatistics/CustomReports> as of December 2023. Independent owner-operators assumed to be carriers with one driver and one power unit. Only carriers moving freight included. Carriers with no drivers and/or no power units excluded.