

HOTSHOT OWNER-OPERATORS, CARRIERS, DISPATCHERS, AND SMALL FLEETS

Hotshot Load Decision Toolkit

Turn a promising hotshot posting into a documented whole-move review before the carrier decides.

Use the interactive web calculator and this printable worksheet to compare loaded and empty miles, truck-specific cost, payload and usable-deck fit, source integrity, authority and insurance review, securement, schedule, accessorials, and written terms. This toolkit does not determine legality, safety, compliance, profitability, or whether a load should be booked.

HOW TO USE IT

1. Read the gates

2. Print the worksheet

3. Record actual results

Reviewed July 20, 2026 | Complete web version: loadladder.com/resources/hotshot-load-decision-toolkit

WORKFLOW 1 OF 6

Gate 1 - Preserve the current load facts

Start with the live source record and keep verified facts separate from unanswered questions.

[]	Source and load ID Record the authorized source, current identifier, access restrictions, and the time availability was rechecked.
[]	Pickup and delivery Record full locations, dates, appointments, time zones, stops, loading method, and the truck's real empty location.
[]	Cargo facts Record commodity, count, piece and total weight, dimensions, center-of-gravity concerns, and special handling.
[]	Unknowns Write missing rate, cargo, appointment, permit, payment, or contact facts as questions rather than assumptions.

WORKFLOW 2 OF 6

Gate 2 - Verify truck and trailer fit

The label hotshot does not establish capacity. Use records for the exact configuration that would run the move.

[]	Available payload Use current scale, equipment, and rating records after fuel, driver, tools, securement, and carried weight.
[]	Usable deck Compare each piece with usable deck, loading clearance, axle placement, overhang, turning clearance, and distribution.
[]	Securement plan Identify applicable general and commodity-specific rules, anchor points, tiedowns, working load limits, protection, and bracing.
[]	Stop on mismatch Unknown or mismatched payload, rating, geometry, securement, or equipment condition requires qualified review.

WORKFLOW 3 OF 6

Gate 3 - Review the actual operation

Requirements depend on vehicle or combination, ratings and weights, commerce, cargo, route, and jurisdiction.

[]	Identity and authority Match the legal carrier, USDOT, and any applicable operating authority with current official records.
[]	Driver licensing Compare the actual combination with current federal CDL classes and the issuing state's requirements.
[]	Insurance and filings Review current official filings and policy evidence for the operation, cargo, equipment, customer, and contract.
[]	Hours, route, and permits Confirm available hours, records, restrictions, dimensions, weight, permits, escorts, weather, and parking.

WORKFLOW 4 OF 6

Gate 4 - Calculate the whole move

Use truck-specific records and preserve the original estimate for comparison with actual results.

[]	All decision miles Add loaded miles, pickup deadhead, and expected repositioning after delivery.
[]	Operating cost Use the carrier's recent fuel, maintenance, tires, equipment, insurance, registration, compensation, and reserve method.
[]	Trip-specific costs Add tolls, scales, parking, tarps, permits, escorts, loading help, lodging, and accessorial exposure.
[]	Time and reload effect Record dwell, appointments, stops, weekend exposure, reload conditions, and productive days consumed.

WORKFLOW 5 OF 6

Gate 5 - Verify company and written terms

Finding a posting is not the same as verifying the counterparty, contact, payment path, or agreement.

[]	Company and contact Compare legal identity, authority when applicable, phone, email domain, instructions, and payment changes.
[]	Rate and accessories Confirm total rate, fuel, stops, detention, layover, TONU, loading, tarps, permits, escorts, and deductions.
[]	Payment and documents Review packet, W-9 and insurance handling, factoring or NOA fit, rate confirmation, BOL, POD, and invoice requirements.
[]	Fraud and source boundaries Stop on mismatches, rushed off-platform instructions, credential requests, or changed remittance details.

WORKFLOW 6 OF 6

Gate 6 - Record decision and actual result

The worksheet prepares a decision; it does not make one. The authorized carrier retains control.

[]	Decision owner Record carrier approval or rejection, conditions, unresolved risks, and the facts used.
[]	Written match Compare the confirmation with approved cargo, equipment, stops, appointments, money, and special requirements.
[]	Exception triggers Define immediate stop or escalation events for cargo, weight, securement, delay, damage, payment, and document conflicts.
[]	Actual versus estimated After completion, record actual miles, time, cost, accessorial recovery, service, and payment without rewriting the estimate.

PRINT HOTSHOT LOAD DECISION RECORD

Preserve the original estimate or review. Add actual results separately so the decision process can improve.

Field	Working value
Source / load ID / recheck time	_____
Origin / pickup appointment	_____
Destination / delivery appointment	_____
Commodity / pieces	_____
Cargo weight / dimensions	_____
Truck / trailer configuration	_____
Verified payload / usable deck	_____
Gross rate	\$ _____
Loaded / deadhead / reposition miles	_____
Operating cost per mile	\$ _____
Trip-specific costs	\$ _____
All-mile RPM / estimated margin	_____
Open questions / risks	_____
Carrier decision / owner / time	_____

FINAL REVIEW

☐	Current source and load availability rechecked
☐	Applicable authority and insurance reviewed
☐	Equipment, payload, dimensions, and securement confirmed
☐	Pickup, delivery, route, and available-hours fit reviewed
☐	Broker or counterparty identity and contact reviewed
☐	Accessorial and payment terms reviewed
☐	Written confirmation matches the carrier decision
☐	Actual-result review scheduled

SOURCES AND BOUNDARIES

Use current authoritative records

These links are starting points for current official information. Requirements and records can change. This resource is not legal, tax, insurance, accounting, safety, or financial advice. It does not replace source terms, qualified professional review, carrier approval, or a counterparty's current requirements.

FMCSA: Do I Need a USDOT Number?	https://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/registration/do-i-need-usdot-number
FMCSA types of operating authority	https://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/registration/types-operating-authority
FMCSA CDL classes	https://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/registration/commercial-drivers-license/drivers
FMCSA cargo securement rules	https://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/regulations/cargo-securement/cargo-securement-rules
FMCSA hours-of-service overview	https://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/regulations/hours-of-service
FMCSA SAFER Company Snapshot	https://safer.fmcsa.dot.gov/CompanySnapshot.aspx

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