

**OPPORTUNITIES FOR CAREER ADVANCEMENT  
FOUND TO BE VERY IMPORTANT TO  
TRUCKLOAD DRIVERS**

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Drivers have an overwhelming desire for some form of a career path and system of advancement in the job of professional driving. This was one of the major conclusions of a study conducted by the Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute at North Dakota State University.

The study was conducted to determine what contributes and detracts from job satisfaction for drivers as a means of addressing the driver turnover/retention issue. One factor is that drivers' perception of the opportunities for advancement within their company and the trucking industry are poor. Also interesting was the fact that drivers indicate a very strong preference for some system of job classification within the ranks of driving which is based on performance, skill, and responsibility. A major conclusion of the study, based on detailed information, is that the job of "driving" needs to be redefined in a sincere effort to develop a meaningful career path for truck drivers as "professional drivers."

The study of drivers of 13 truckload carriers located throughout the United States was conducted in 1990. A total of 3,910 drivers responded to a 20-page, 68-question survey resulting in a 34 percent response rate. The survey covered a variety of issues concerning the job of drivers, including several aspects of the work environment and motivational factors that influence job satisfaction. The non-union, company drivers, which constituted a majority of the respondents (2,814) were analyzed separately on the

issue of career advancement in an effort to identify a more homogeneous group. Although the general results were the same as the entire group, the non-union company drivers exhibited stronger preferences in many cases. This was particularly true in their desire for career advancement.

The specific question asked was "How important to you are opportunities for career advancement?" An overwhelming 64 percent of the drivers responded **VERY IMPORTANT**. An additional 25 percent answered **SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT** for an astounding total of 89 percent of the drivers that felt that career advancement was very or somewhat important to them (Figure 1). Only 2.5 percent considered career advancement not or not at all important and 8.6 percent of the drivers were neutral. This unusually strong preference for some form of opportunity for career advancement is in conflict with drivers' perceptions of what their actual opportunities for advancement are, especially within the motor carrier industry.

Drivers were asked, "In general, how are opportunities for driver advancement within the motor carrier industry?" Nearly half of the drivers, 46 percent, thought that opportunities within the industry were either poor or very poor (Figure 2). Conversely, 41 percent felt opportunities were good or very good. Thus, a greater proportion of drivers sense a lack of opportunity than those that feel there is opportunity for advancement.

A much higher percentage of these non-union company drivers have a better perception of the opportunities for advancement than the sample as a whole. They also had a greater desire for advancement as well.

Drivers were much more optimistic about opportunities within their present company. Fifty-nine percent felt that the opportunities for advancement ranged from good to very good within their present company (Figure 3). This is significantly higher than



the perception of the opportunities in the industry and may be related to the specific companies which were surveyed and may not be representative of all drivers in the industry. Even with this positive perception, 31 percent still perceived opportunities to range from poor to very poor. It is obvious that drivers, as most people, desire some form of a career path and a majority feel that such a path is lacking in the industry and over a third feel it is absent within their company.

The study also found that there was a strong correlation between the age of the driver and the importance of opportunities for advancement. The younger drivers ranked this more important to them, but drivers of all ages placed a great deal of importance on these opportunities. Sixty-nine percent of the drivers who were between the age of 21-30 indicated it was very important; 67 percent for drivers 31-40, 61 percent of drivers 41-50, 54 percent of drivers 51-60, and 33 percent of drivers 61-70. This is not surprising, but it does however have significant implications for the industry since the younger age groups are the most likely source of new drivers entering the industry.

There was also a strong positive correlation between the desire for drivers to become more integrated into the company and their desire for opportunities for career advancement. Drivers were asked if they were interested in getting involved in other aspects of the business in **addition** to driving. These included sales, training, customer relations, recruiting, group leader of drivers, safety, equipment purchases, maintenance and repair, and cost reduction goals. Drivers were asked to indicate their preference as very interested, somewhat interested, slightly interested or not interested for each of the categories. Drivers who expressed that career advancement was very important to them

also were the same drivers who indicated the greatest and the strongest interest in getting involved in other aspects of the company, in **addition** to driving. This would suggest that although drivers like the job of driving they would like to be challenged by other aspects of the business and become more integrated into the company.

A further verification of the data and respective conclusion on career advancement was developed by correlating the expressed desire for career advancement opportunities and the ranking of job attitude factors. These motivation factors are working conditions, interpersonal relations, **advancement**, the work, supervision, company policies, recognition for achievement, responsibility, achievement, and salary and benefits. In the overall ranking of these job satisfaction factors, those that ranked advancement very high, first through fourth (out of ten), were the same individuals by in large, who ranked opportunities for advancement very important. This provides for a great deal of confidence in the data and derived conclusions. Additionally, advancement was ranked fifth overall in the job satisfaction factors.

A follow-up question on how drivers defined career advancement was also asked (Figure 4). Drivers were asked to identify what advancement meant to them by choosing from a variety of job attributes and responsibilities. Increased pay was most frequently selected--2,193 responses--followed by more regular schedule, and home more often. The fourth most frequently selected attribute was "move through a driver classification system based on personal performance." The high ranking of this factor is consistent with the drivers' expressed desire for opportunities for career advancement. It is also ranked nearly as frequently as being home more often and a more regular schedule.

A subsequent question was asked regarding the drivers opinion of a five-step classification system based on personal performance and responsibility and rewarded with pay, fringe benefits or recognition (Figure 5). Nearly half of the drivers strongly favored such a system and 82 percent either strongly favored or favored such a system. The results of this question support the earlier conclusions. Furthermore, only 4 percent opposed such a system. This is very consistent with what drivers had earlier defined career advancements as to them. The results of this question also correlated well with the job satisfaction factor of advancement, and involvement with other business aspects of the company. As in the whole area of career advancement, drivers indicated a very strong preference for such a system.

Other factors which were analyzed were level of education, and overall satisfaction derived from driving. There was a strong preference for some form of advancement among all levels of education and regardless of the amount of satisfaction they derived from driving.

## SUMMARY

The results of the study indicate a strong desire for some form of career path (advancement) by drivers. A challenge for the industry will be to define the job of driving in a way which provides this. Differing pay scales, better schedules, and bringing drivers home more often could be a means of differentiating one driver from another.

Furthermore, developing a means for integrating the driver into other aspects of the business provides companies with an avenue for adding responsibility to the job. The successful development of a system of advancement could be one way of mitigating some of the negative aspects of the job. Additionally, such a system could be utilized to increase the contribution that drivers can make to the goals of the company. Such a system could be developed to improve the value of the driver to the company and reward drivers for making that contribution. But more importantly, it would provide drivers with one of the important elements of life, a future.

For further information contact Julene M. Rodriguez or Gene C. Griffin, Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute, P. O. Box 5074, Fargo, ND 58105.



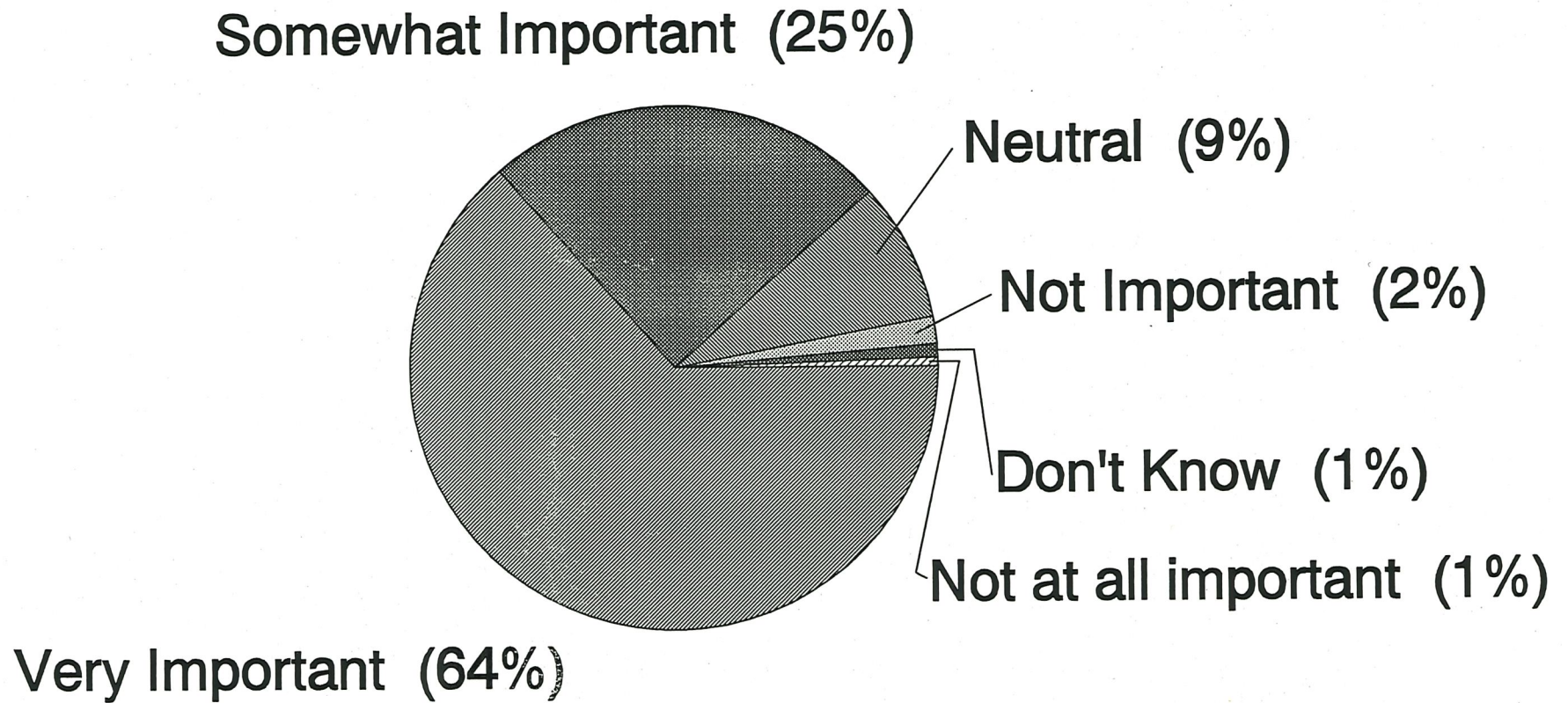
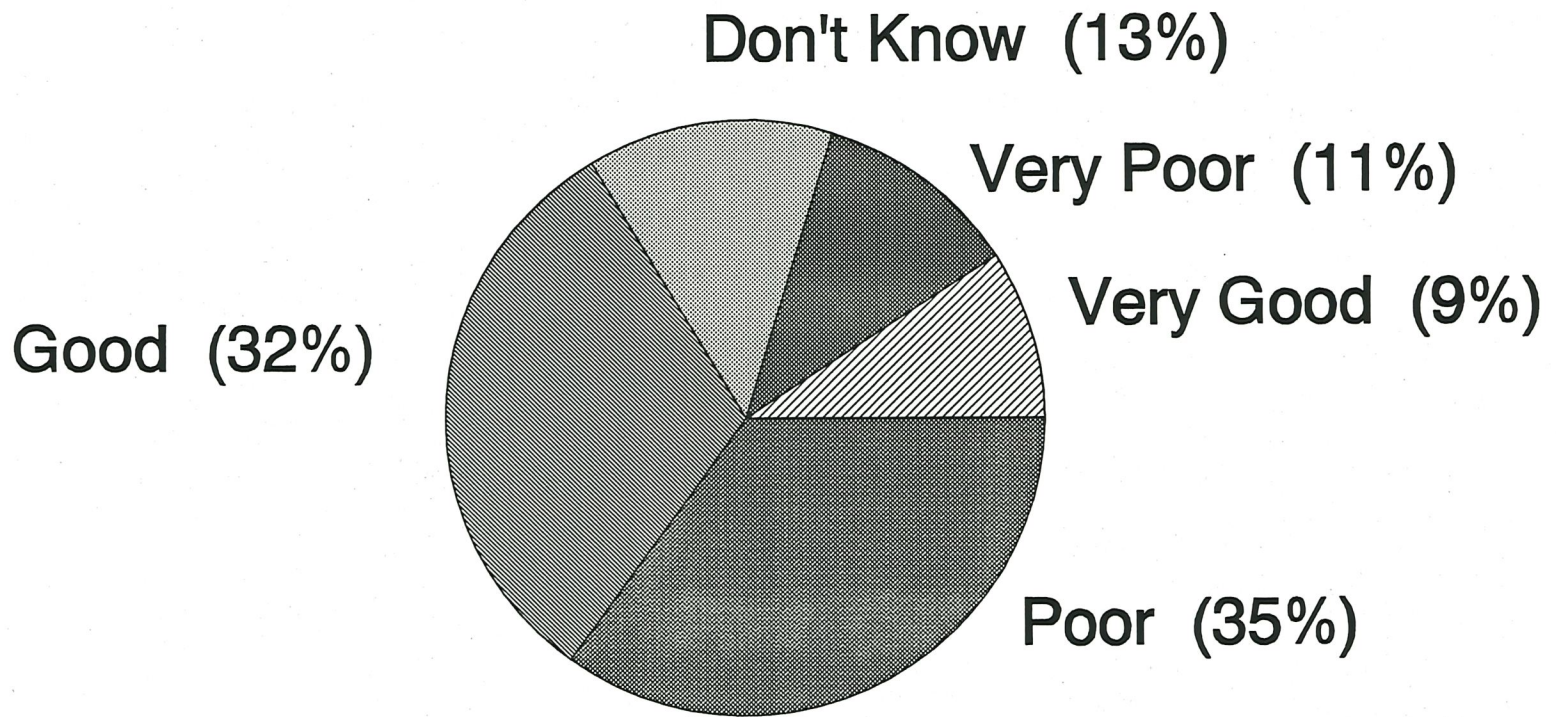


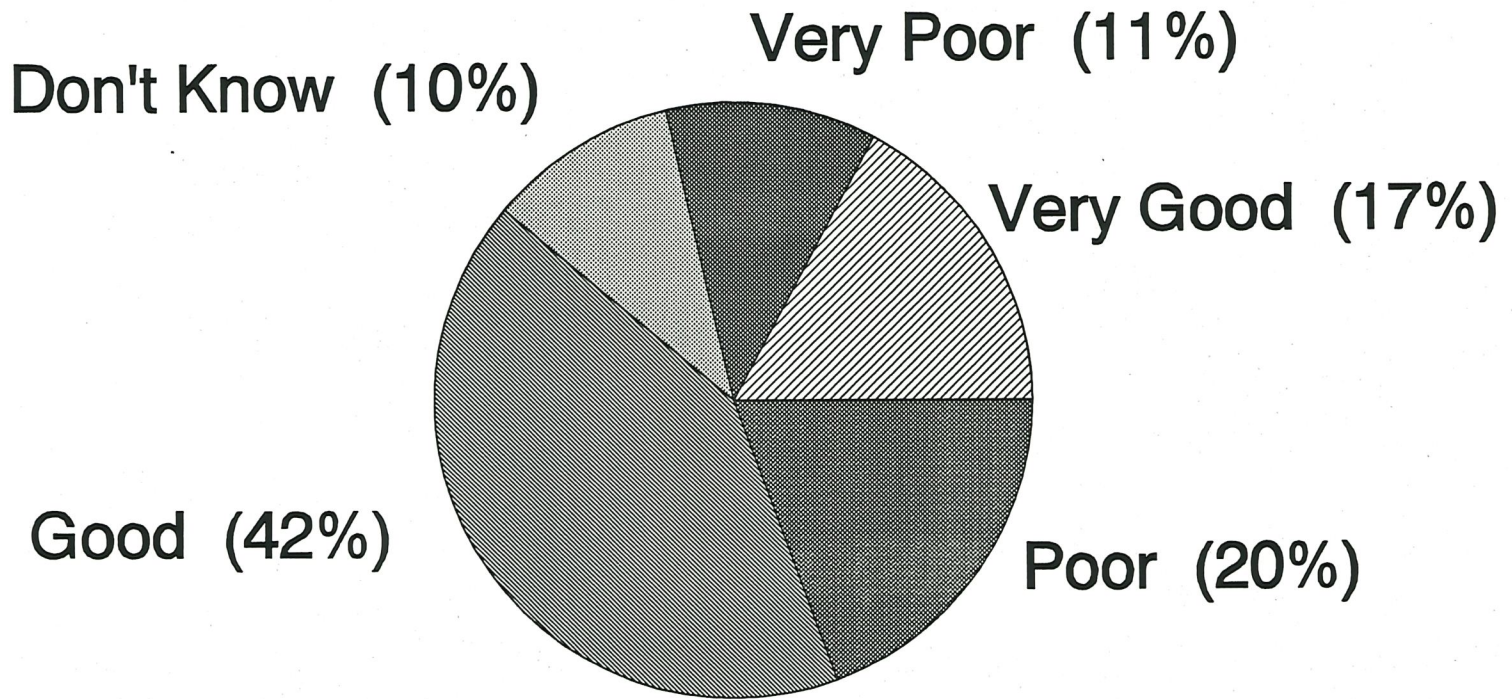
Figure 1. How important to you are opportunities for career advancement?



**Figure 2.** In general, how are the opportunities for driver advancement within the motor carrier industry?

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**Figure 3.** In general, how are opportunities for driver advancement within your company?



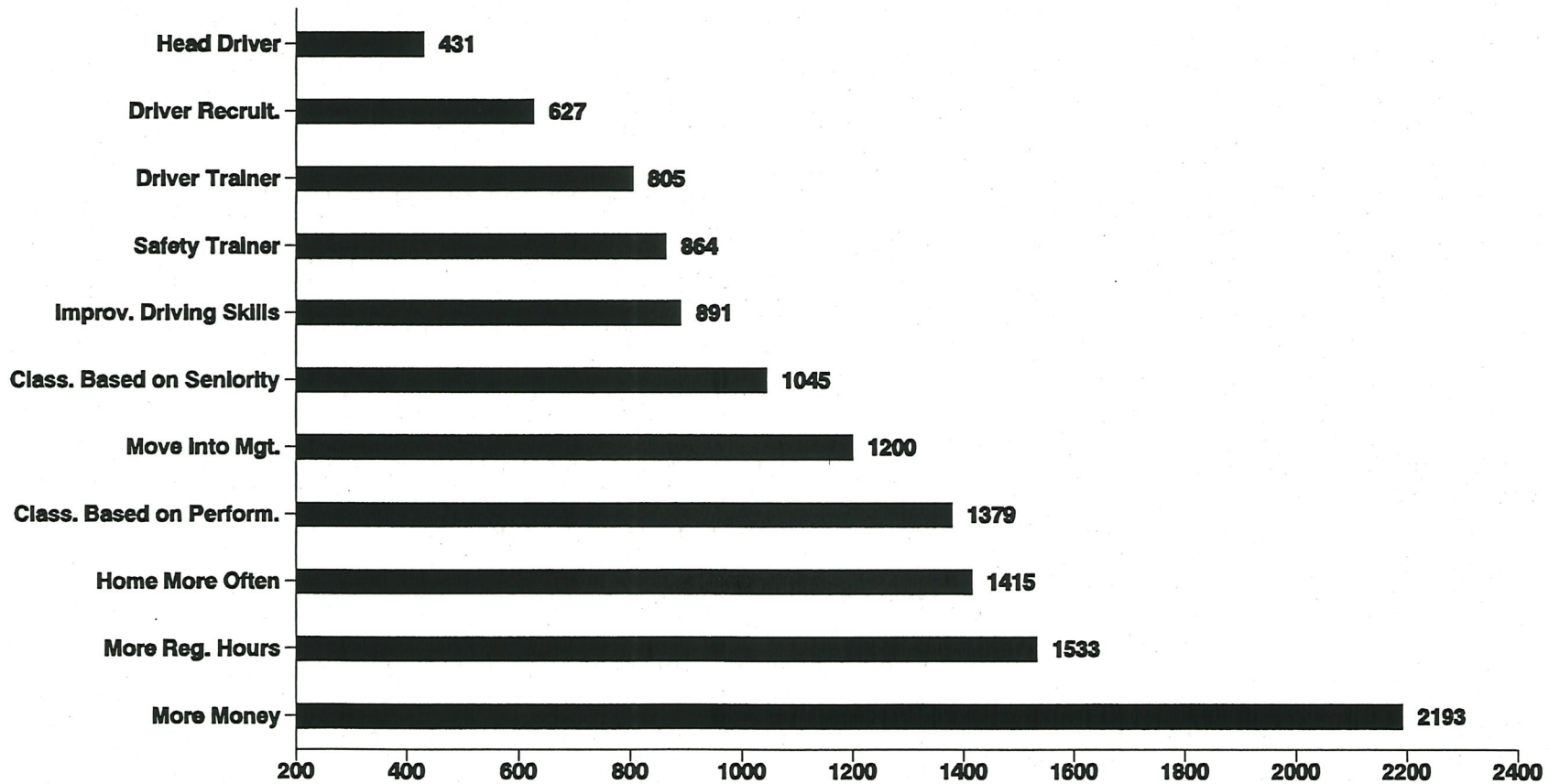


Figure 4. What is your definition of career advancement for drivers? (Circle all that apply)

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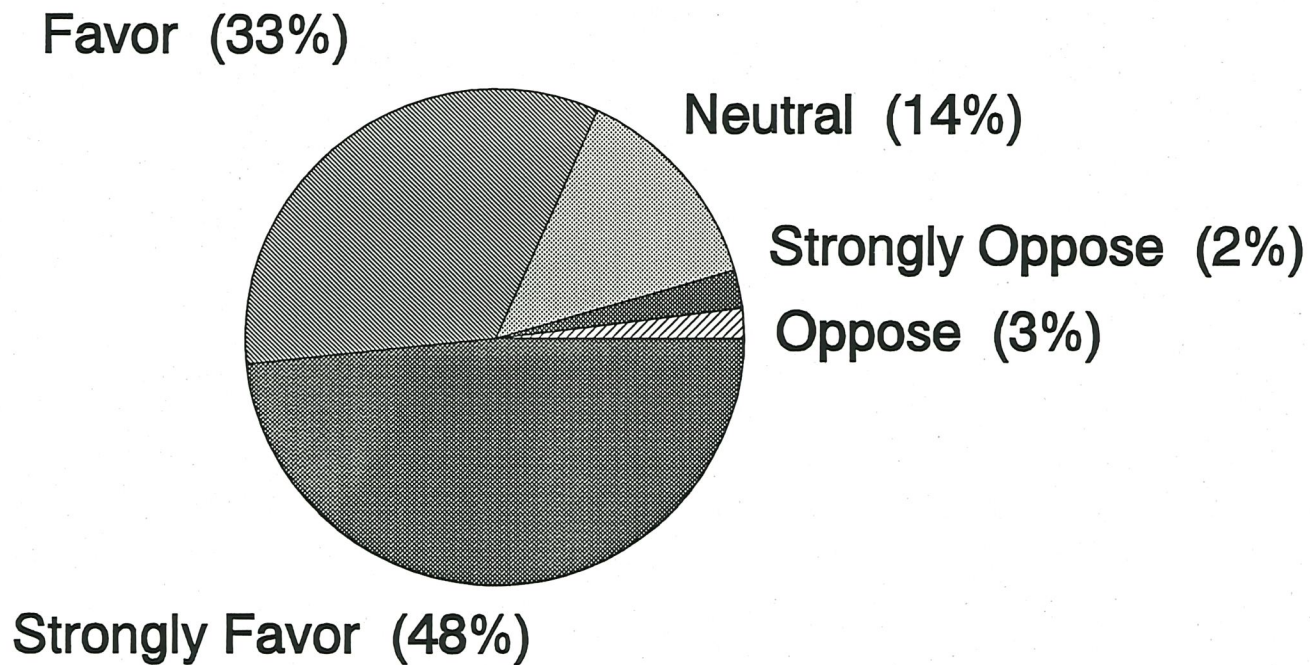


Figure 5. A classification system would be one method of providing for advancement as a driver. One possible system could be (1) apprentice, (2) certified, (3) advanced, (4) senior and (5) master drivers. Such a system would allow advancement as skills and job performance improved and as additional responsibilities were added. In return, this could be rewarded with additional pay, fringe benefits and recognition. Would you favor or oppose such a system?