



Heavy haul & oversize? See [»» OverSizeTMS™](#)

FOR GROWING CARRIERS

# The Small Carrier's TMS Reference Guide

What to look for, and what to ask, when you're comparing systems.



*Building a foundation for a better TMS.*

**START HERE**

## Running a carrier in 2026 shouldn't feel like 2006.

Most small carriers are still cobbling the business together from spreadsheets, WhatsApp threads, paper rate cons, and manual QuickBooks entry. It works—until a busy week, an audit, or a load that falls through the cracks reminds you how fragile it is.

Choosing a transportation management system is supposed to fix that, but it's a confusing market. Plans are often priced for fleets many times your size, feature lists rarely line up cleanly side by side, and it's genuinely hard to tell which capabilities you'll lean on every day and which just look good in a demo.

This guide is a short, plain-English set of questions and comparisons to help you sort it out — the same ones worth putting to any platform you evaluate, FreightCoreTMS included. The answers tell you most of what you need to know.

### **The six things that quietly cost small carriers the most**

Dispatch living in a spreadsheet · invoicing that eats half a day · drivers calling you for every detail · documents scattered across email, folders, and texts · never knowing your real per-load margin · paying enterprise prices for features you'll never use. A good TMS should kill all six. Keep them in mind as you read.

How to use this guide: pages 3–4 are nine questions to put to every vendor, and page 5 is the hidden cost of staying on spreadsheets. Page 6 shows what's included on every plan, page 7 lines FreightCoreTMS up against the names you'll be quoted, and pages 8–9 cover heavy haul — the work most platforms can't touch. The last page is a checklist you can take into any demo.

## THE QUESTIONS

## Nine questions worth asking.

### 1 Are you priced per user, or per truck?

With per-user pricing, the bill climbs every time you add an office seat — so you end up sharing logins and losing your audit trail just to keep costs down.

**What good looks like:** priced per power unit, with unlimited users. You pay for the trucks you run, not the people who help you run them.

### 2 Which features are gated behind a higher tier?

"Upgrade to unlock dispatch" and "premium analytics" are how a low headline price becomes a higher real one. The features you need most are often the ones reserved for a pricier tier.

**What good looks like:** every feature on every plan. Tiers should differ only by truck count and the level of onboarding service—never by which parts of the software you're allowed to use.

### 3 What's the setup fee, and how long am I locked in?

Enterprise systems charge implementation fees in the hundreds—or tens of thousands—and bind you to annual or multi-year contracts before you've run a single load.

**What good looks like:** no setup fee, month-to-month, and a free trial that doesn't need a credit card. If the software is good, it doesn't need a contract to keep you.

### 4 If I cancel, can I take my data—at no cost?

Getting your own data back out can be slow, costly, or barely possible on some platforms — which can make leaving feel like starting over.

**What good looks like:** free, self-serve export of every record (customers, loads, dispatches, invoices, payments, audit log) *and* your documents — right from the settings menu, anytime, no request and no fee. Your data is yours.

### 5 Does it automate the tedious math—or just store it?

FMCSA carrier checks, fuel surcharge, and IFTA mileage done by hand are slow and error-prone. Many "TMS" tools are just databases that make you do the work anyway.

**What good looks like:** live FMCSA verification by MC#/DOT, fuel surcharge auto-calculated from the weekly DOE diesel index, and IFTA mileage captured per state on every load.

## 6 How does invoicing turn into getting paid?

If you're re-keying load data into QuickBooks, chasing PODs, and assembling factoring packets by hand, your cash sits in limbo for 45+ days. The gap between "delivered" and "paid" is where small carriers bleed.

**What good looks like:** branded invoices generated straight from load data, and a one-click factoring packet (invoice + BOL + POD + rate-con merged) that works with any factor—ideally with native submission to the big ones.

## 7 Do my drivers have to install an app?

Force an app install and half your drivers won't do it—then you're back to phone calls. But some drivers genuinely prefer an app. Either extreme costs you adoption.

**What good looks like:** a mobile web portal that works in any phone browser with nothing to install, *plus* an optional native app for drivers who want one. Let the driver choose.

## 8 When something breaks, who actually answers?

Enterprise support means a ticket queue and a tier-1 rep reading a script who has never booked a load. For a small carrier, a two-day wait on a billing bug is real money.

**What good looks like:** direct access to someone who knows the work—ideally the people who built the product—and a roadmap that responds to operator feedback, not a feature committee.

## 9 Does it fit how I run—broker, asset, or both?

Many tools assume you're one or the other. If you broker some loads and haul others—or run any oversize/heavy haul—a system built for a single mode forces ugly workarounds.

**What good looks like:** one quote-to-cash chain that handles brokered *and* asset loads on the same account, with a specialized path available if you run permits and oversize freight.

### One more, free of charge

Ask the vendor to show you the demo using **your** customer book, your lanes, and your real quote scenario—not their canned data. How fast they can do that tells you how fast your onboarding will actually be.

## THE MATH

## Spreadsheets feel free. They aren't.

The reason "we'll just use Excel" is so tempting is that the cost never shows up on an invoice. It shows up in detention you never billed, hours you'll never get back, and cash that sits unpaid. Here's where it hides.

### \$250+

Typical detention revenue lost on a *single* load when the clock isn't tracked and the accessorial never gets added.

### ~6 hrs

A week spent re-keying load data into accounting, chasing PODs, and rebuilding the same margin spreadsheet.

### 45+ days

How long cash can sit between "delivered" and "paid" when invoicing and factoring are manual.

### Detention is the clearest example

Detention is money you've already earned—you just have to catch it. Miss the start time on a handful of loads a month because nobody was watching the clock, and that's real revenue walking out the door over a year. A system that auto-starts the detention clock on arrival and auto-adds the line item after free time expires turns "we forgot to bill it" into money in the bank.

### Then there's the margin you can't see

Without a system, true per-load profitability—fuel, driver pay, tolls, accessories—means building a custom spreadsheet every time. So most carriers don't, and price their lanes on gut feel. Lane-level profitability, cost-per-mile, and RPM in one place changes which loads you say yes to.

Figures above are illustrative ranges meant to show where costs accumulate, not a guarantee of savings. Your numbers depend on your lanes, customers, and how you run today. The point isn't the exact dollar—it's that the cost of "free" is real, recurring, and invisible until you add it up.

## PLANS &amp; PRICING

## Same software. Every tier.

Most platforms dangle a low headline price, then gate the features you actually need behind the next tier up. FreightCoreTMS doesn't. Every plan gets every feature — tiers differ only by how many trucks you run and the onboarding service that comes with them.

### Priced per truck. Unlimited everything else.

Only power units count — tractors and straight trucks. Trailers, jeeps, and boosters are **free**, and so is every dispatcher, billing clerk, and driver you add. Grow your office and your bill doesn't move. Support response is **founder-direct on every tier** — the top plan adds onboarding services, not faster answers.

### On every plan — no exceptions

- ✓ Quote-to-cash workflow, end to end
- ✓ Visual dispatch board, multi-timezone
- ✓ Invoicing, driver pay & settlements
- ✓ Branded BOLs, PODs, invoices, rate cons
- ✓ Driver web portal + native iOS/Android app
- ✓ Customer rate matrix & templates
- ✓ Factoring, fuel-card & load-board sync
- ✓ Customer & carrier CRM + live FMCSA lookup
- ✓ Driver & equipment records + expiry alerts
- ✓ DOE-indexed fuel surcharge calculator
- ✓ Detention clock, auto-start on arrival
- ✓ Notes & full audit log on everything
- ✓ Analytics & lane profitability
- ✓ Unlimited users — all free

<p>SOLO</p> <p><b>\$74</b>/mo</p> <p>1 truck</p> <p>Email support</p> <p>was \$99 · locked for life</p>	<p>SMALL FLEET</p> <p><b>\$219</b>/mo</p> <p>2-7 trucks</p> <p>Priority support</p> <p>was \$299 · locked for life</p>	<p><b>MOST POPULAR</b></p> <p>GROWTH</p> <p><b>\$449</b>/mo</p> <p>8-20 trucks</p> <p>Phone &amp; chat</p> <p>was \$599 · locked for life</p>	<p>ESTABLISHED</p> <p><b>Custom</b></p> <p>21-50 trucks</p> <p>Onboarding + migration + SLA</p> <p>let's talk pricing</p>
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Founder pricing is locked for the life of your account — no annual increases — for sign-ups before Aug 10, 2027. The Established tier's extras are *services* (dedicated onboarding, free data migration, advanced support SLA), never software you'd otherwise have to unlock.

## SIDE BY SIDE

## Built from the bottom up — not scaled down.

Most TMS platforms were built for 200-truck fleets, then bolted on a "starter" plan. Here's how the small-carrier essentials line up against the names you'll be quoted.

	FreightCoreTMS	Tailwind	Truckbase	McLeod LoadMaster
Pricing model	Per truck, unlimited users	Per user / mo	Per truck / mo	Enterprise quote
Setup fee	\$0	\$300+	\$0	\$20k+ implementation
Free trial	30 days, no card	14 days	Demo only	Demo only
Contract length	Month-to-month	Annual common	Annual	Multi-year
FMCSA carrier verification	● Built-in, auto recheck	Add-on	●	●
DOE fuel surcharge (auto)	● Weekly EIA auto-fetch	Manual	Manual	●
Factoring submission	● 4 native APIs + PDF	Limited	Limited	● Select
Fuel card sync	● 4 cards, BYOK	Limited	Limited	●
IFTA quarterly reports	● Built-in	✗	✗	●
Weather-aware dispatch	● NWS alerts / load	✗	✗	Add-on
SMS dispatch & broadcasts	● TCPA-compliant	Add-on	Limited	Add-on
BOL / POD e-signatures	● Built-in	Add-on	●	●
Customer document portal	● No-login links	✗	Limited	●
Audit log on every record	● Built-in	Limited	✗	●
Accounting sync (QBO / Xero)	● Direct OAuth	●	●	●
ELD live tracking	● 3 providers + HOS	Limited	Limited	●
SSO (Google & Microsoft)	● Every plan	✗	✗	Enterprise only
Load board sync	● 7 native	1–2	1–2	2–3
Driver experience	● Web + native app	App install	App install	App install
Built for	1–50 trucks & brokers	All sizes	1–50 trucks	50+ enterprise

Based on public information as of June 2026. "Add-on," "Limited," and "Manual" mean the capability exists but costs extra, is partial, or isn't automated. ● = included · ✗ = not offered. Verify directly with each vendor for your quote.

## IF YOU RUN OVERSIZE

## When the load won't fit the box.

Every other TMS treats a 10-truck oversize fleet like a 10-truck dry-van fleet. Permits, axle weights, route surveys, and pilot-car coordination get left to spreadsheets, action sheets, and text threads — because no general-purpose TMS tracks them. That's the gap **OverSizeTMS** was built to close: the same FreightCore platform, with a heavy-haul operations layer built in from day one — not bolted on as a \$200/month add-on.

**Per-state permit workflow**

Each permit is a first-class record on the load — documents, expiration alerts, multi-state routing — not a note in a spreadsheet.

**Escort rule engine**

Lead, chase, pole, and police rules with per-state defaults for all 50 states + DC, citing the admin-code section so you can verify.

**Per-state legal-limit engine**

Flags loads that exceed posted limits before you file — 11 most-traveled states today, plus FHWA Bridge Formula B nationwide.

**Pilot car + police escort**

Commercial pilot cars and state DPS escorts tracked on the same load — roles, certs, inspection times, Level-1 PDFs attached.

**Route surveys**

Clearances, bridge postings, rail crossings, turning radius, alt route — a record on the load, visible to the driver before roll.

**Axle weight & OSOW class**

Every load auto-classified Legal or OSOW from captured dims + weight. Superload classification built in, not an add-on.

**Don't run oversize? Skip it.**

If you haul dry van, reefer, flatbed, or general freight, FreightCoreTMS is the right product — same codebase, standard-carrier defaults. OverSizeTMS is there the day a permit load shows up, and your data and login carry across.

SIDE BY SIDE

# The features others charge extra for — or don't have.

General-purpose platforms treat permits, surveys, and escorts as bolt-ons, if they support them at all. OverSizeTMS treats them as first-class records on the load.

	OverSizeTMS	McLeod LoadMaster	Truckin' Digital	ITI Trucker
Built for	Heavy haul & OSOW (1-50)	Mixed enterprise	General freight	General freight
Per-state permit profiles	● Built-in	Add-on	✗	✗
Escort rule engine (lead/chase/pole/police)	● 50 states + DC	Manual entry	✗	✗
Permit fee estimator	● Built-in	Manual	✗	✗
Route surveys (clearances, hazards, alt route)	● Built-in	Documents tab only	✗	✗
Pilot car coordination & dispatch	● Built-in	✗	✗	✗
Police / DPS escort tracking	● Built-in	✗	✗	✗
Axle weight & superload classification	● Built-in	Add-on	✗	✗
Pricing model	Per truck, unlimited users	Enterprise quote	Per user / mo	Per user / mo
Setup fee	\$0	\$20k+ implementation	\$0	\$0
Contract length	Month-to-month	Multi-year	Annual common	Annual common

Heavy-haul pricing follows the same per-truck, unlimited-users model — sized for the higher cost and complexity of oversize work:

<p>HOT-SHOT</p> <p><b>\$249</b>/mo</p> <p>1-3 trucks</p> <p>Email support</p>	<p>SMALL FLEET</p> <p><b>\$599</b>/mo</p> <p>4-10 trucks</p> <p>Priority support</p>	<p><b>MOST POPULAR</b></p> <p>GROWTH</p> <p><b>\$1,299</b>/mo</p> <p>11-25 trucks</p> <p>Phone &amp; chat</p>	<p>ESTABLISHED</p> <p><b>Custom</b></p> <p>26-50 trucks</p> <p>Onboarding + migration + SLA</p>
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Based on public information as of June 2026. ● = included · ✗ = not offered. Learn more at [oversizetms.com](https://oversizetms.com).

## TAKE THIS INTO ANY DEMO

## The before-you-sign checklist.

- Per-truck pricing with unlimited users** — you're not penalized for adding office staff or drivers
- Every feature on every tier** — no "upgrade to unlock" walls
- \$0 setup & month-to-month** — plus a no-card free trial
- Self-serve data export anytime** — every record + documents, right from Settings
- Automated FMCSA, fuel surcharge & IFTA** — not a manual database
- Invoice-to-paid built in** — branded invoices + one-click factoring packet
- Driver's choice: web portal or app** — no forced install
- Direct support from people who know freight** — not a script queue
- Handles broker, asset, or both** — with a path for oversize if you run it

## HOW FREIGHTCORETMS ANSWERS

### Built from the bottom up for the 1–50 truck operator.

FreightCoreTMS checks every box on the list above. It's founder-led—built and run by someone with 12 years in transportation, the last 10 in oversize and heavy haul, working nearly every link in the chain. One quote-to-cash record per load, full audit log, priced per power unit with unlimited users, every feature on every plan, and your data exportable anytime. Run oversize? Its sister platform, **OverSizeTMS**, adds permits, escorts, axle-weight and route-survey workflows on the same codebase (pages 8–9).

Unlimited dispatchers, billing staff & drivers on every plan — only power units count. Founder pricing is locked for the life of your account—no annual increases—for sign-ups before Aug 10, 2027. © 2026 FreightCoreTMS LLC. FreightCoreTMS™ and OverSizeTMS™ are trademarks of FreightCoreTMS LLC. Competitor and pricing references reflect public information as of June 2026; verify each vendor for your quote.

### Going live August 10, 2026.

Join the Founder waitlist—lock in pricing for life and we'll spin up your tenant on launch day, with your customer book imported within 48 hours. No credit card, no commitment.

[freightcoretms.com](https://freightcoretms.com)