

# SmartValve a savior

## COMPANY

West Side Transport, Cedar Rapids, IA

## OPERATION

Dry van truckload carrier operates a fleet of more than 500 trucks and 2,000 trailers. The company serves the continental United States through long haul, dedicated and logistics operations.



## CHALLENGE: IMPROVE CUSTOMER SERVICE AND STREAMLINE DISTRIBUTION OPERATIONS

In trucking, sometimes a certain part replacement or maintenance adjustment relates to the truck or trailer—some element of the equipment itself. But for West Side Transport in this case, the problem and fix for it was all about the company's drivers. West Side prides itself on its driver-focused culture. Though it has grown from just a few trucks more than four decades ago to some 511 trucks today, you can still find the company's owner hauling freight "to understand better what our drivers see out there every day," according to West Side.

The trouble with drop-and-hook operations, where drivers deliver a load and pick up their next trailer to haul, can come down to trailer height. If a trailer is resting too high on its landing gear, leaving too much of a gap between the trailer's lower plate and the fifth wheel of the tractor attempting to hook it, the driver will need to get out and crank up the landing gear to lower the trailer.

Even on the "low mode" that lets you crank the landing gear more easily—though with many more turns—it requires effort, especially with a loaded trailer. It's a common cause of back, shoulder and other injuries among truck drivers.

Worse, if a trailer's height is too low and the tractor backing in can't get under it properly with its air suspension dumped, the driver may need to lower the trailer's landing gear and raise the trailer to allow sufficient clearance.

West Side found those kinds of adjustments were both time-consuming and risky to a driver's health and well-being.

## SOLUTION: INSTALL HADLEY SMART-VALVE ON TRACTORS

The Hadley SmartValve is an electronic height-control system that combines a valve manifold, external sensor, and associated electronics into a single unit. West Side Transport launched a trial run of the product in one of its day cab tractors last year. After the trial, Tim Lund, director of maintenance at West Side, decided it ought to be implemented on a larger scale and could benefit drivers in a number of ways.

The SmartValve's claim to fame is that it can raise the tractor's suspension above ride height. So if a driver is backing in to hook a trailer and the trailer is too high, the SmartValve lets the driver boost up the tractor's frame and fifth wheel.

The tractor's air suspension thereby does the hard work. The tractor's fifth wheel will connect with the trailer's king pin properly, and the trailer's landing gear

can be adjusted with the weight of the trailer now taken off it, making cranking much easier and faster.

If the trailer happens to be left too low on its landing gear and the backing tractor's fifth wheel won't slip under the trailer's bottom plate, again the SmartValve's override-height lift of the air suspension comes in handy. The driver can use the tractor's rear axle frame to lift the trailer's weight off the landing gear, which can then be adjusted much more easily.

The first of West Side's drivers to try out the SmartValve was John Poprick, who had previously torn shoulder muscles and required surgery. Poprick said he was "thoroughly impressed" with the difference SmartValve made.

"Without SmartValve, it could take three minutes to crank landing gear," Poprick said. "With it, I go straight to high gear and it takes six seconds," he added, referring to the high-gear, fast-cranking mode to raise or lower trailer landing gear.

SmartValve also helped boost efficiency: Poprick was able to increase drop-and-hook operations from 14 per day to between 16 and 20.

West Side is transitioning its 190 day cab fleet to SmartValves. The company believes the change will attract and retain drivers who'd otherwise be put off by the old trailer-cranking routine. **■ —A.M.**