

Home Away from Home: The Evolution and Meaning of American Truck Stops

BY

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Abstract

Truck stops provide a tie to place for mobile, long-haul drivers. Truckers rely on these businesses for necessities and help to shape their form and function with their perceptions and actions. An increasing domination of the industry by chain operations impacts these perceptions. Using interviews and field observations to determine drivers' sense of place, I find that, although feelings regarding truck stops vary, most drivers choose where to stop based on fuel, food, and restrooms.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Although the lifestyle of long-haul truck drivers is often romanticized, drivers themselves say that life on the road is more about finding substitutes for home. Truck cabs provide bunks, for example, and highway rest areas places to stretch sore muscles. Commercial truck stops, however, offer the most complete amenities. In this thesis, I study these oases in order to understand the driver's relationship to the truck stop and what the truck-stop industry is like today.

My research attempts to provide a sense of place of truck stops through the eyes of long-haul drivers. I briefly examine the evolution of truck stops since their emergence in the 1940s, but then focus on the current state of the industry. I inventory the services and supplies truck stops offer and examine the relative roles these various amenities play when the driver is choosing where to stop. By mapping and spatially analyzing the current patterns of chain and independent truck stops I hope to reveal locational strategies and future trends for the industry. Presently, a major divide exists between chains and independents (Petrowski, 2001). Chain truck stops seem to be gaining in popularity amongst drivers, however, and my research sheds light on this process. Finally, I probe for the deeper emotional meaning that these permanent landmarks have for a group of people who otherwise have few ties to place.

In order to write about truck stops and the sense of place drivers have about them, I rely heavily on observations and interviews with professional drivers and employees at truck stops. Many of those were made while traveling with my father, a long-haul truck driver himself, for

two weeks during the summer of 2008. The chain and independent truck stops were mapped from various directories using GIS. I then analyze the maps visually to identify spatial patterns.

Long-haul truck drivers make up a sizeable portion of the work force in the United States. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported 1,672,580 tractor-trailer drivers in 2008, but this number does not include over 165,000 self-employed drivers (Bureau Labor Statistics, 2008).

Understanding the perceptions and attitude towards place of such a large group of people is important in its own right; for “the foundations of geographical knowledge lie in the direct experiences and consciousness we have for the world we live in” (Relph, 1976, p. 4). How these drivers experience and interact with these spaces adds to our knowledge of everyday interactions with space.

The long-haul driver’s sense of place is also important because of the mobile nature of their occupation. People have always had a twofold relationship with mobility, either embracing the freedom and adventure it has to offer or exhibiting skepticism towards those without roots or a grounded home (Relph, 1976; Sopher, 1979; Cresswell, 2006). How home is created or recreated by people is a core interest for geographers and much can be learned from how the long-haul driver perceives these places that may or may not be home substitutes.

Literature Review

The literature for my topic falls under three categories: truck drivers and the trucking industry, business clusters around interstate exits, and sense-of-place studies. Literature in the first group has been abundant since the 1970s when trucking culture initially became prominent (Thomas, 1979). Very little of this focuses on truck stops. The literature on interstate exit morphology and business clustering is much smaller but important in understanding location

strategy and why clustering patterns exist for both the chain and independent truck stops. Sense-of-place studies, almost by definition, are typically done on particular places, but they can also be used to illustrate a shared sensibility for many different locations. I use these studies partly as a guide to interviewing methodology and partly to help pull together experiences at individual truck stops into an encompassing sense of place.

The occupation of truck driving has been studied from several perspectives. The best single scholarly study is by Michael Agar, an anthropologist who has explored the occupation of independent drivers and the politics surrounding their business (1986). Lawrence Ouellet (1994) focused on social relationships of truckers and several other scholars have probed the economics of the business (Harper, 1959; Wyckoff and Maister, 1975; Wyckoff, 1979). A large portion of the literature on the trucking industry has been written for entertainment, but still has scholarly value. *Trucker: A Portrait of the Last American Cowboy*, by Jane Stern (1975), is an interesting collection of pictures, poems, and songs. Although not systematic in approach or methodology, its anecdotes provide insight into how truckers of that time perceived truck stops. More recently, John McPhee has written about his experiences riding along with a driver. His experiences at truck stops highlight an insider/outsider dichotomy that is an important component of these places (2006).

Geography's contribution to the truck-stop literature has focused on interstate exit morphology. Several studies address the form and function of interstate highway exits at various points in time (Lohof, 1974; Norris, 1987, Moon, 1994). These are useful in addressing the issue of truck stop clusters at interstate exits and what this tells us about the popularity of chain truck stops over independent truck stops.

The largest chain operators accounted for sixty percent of the total American truck-stop market in the year 2001 (Petrowski 2001, 56). Although truck stops are locationally limited in that, with few exceptions, they must be near interstate exits, clustering at one exit suggests that these businesses may feed off one another. The economist Harold Hotelling (1929), who first introduced the idea of product clustering, argued that its purpose was to steal product share away from similar businesses. If chain truck stops are clustering together and independents are not, it could mean that chain truck stops are able to attract competitors' business better than independents. Other scholars have used this principle to analyze locations of restaurants, movie stores, and other service-based businesses (Pillsbury, 1990; Miron, 2002).

Sense-of-place studies typically examine the different experiences and emotions attached to a landscape (Tuan, 1974). Perspectives on place can be numerous, of course, and many writers call for voice to be given to various groups (Massey, 1991). Sense-of-place studies also are highly individualistic, varying depending on the subject and researcher. Studies that pertain to my research include those focused on methodology and those few where multiple places are combined into a collective sense of place.

Literature that informs my methodology has been extensively reviewed by Cary W. de Wit (2003). He claims that few sense-of-place scholars have tried to construct strict methodological frameworks. Instead, such studies are fluid, with the researcher adapting methods that fit his/her needs. de Wit's suggestions for approaching interviewees were especially valuable to my research. Reading the landscape, a related activity, is a subject with deep roots in geography (Meinig, 1979, Ryden, 1993). Inferring information about everyday life in this way helps to provide a more complete sense-of-place of truck stops.

Finally, the themes of home and mobility appeared time and again throughout my research. Yi-Fu Tuan and Edward Relph have written about home and place extensively, looking at many examples through time and space (Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1977). Others have focused more on what constructed spaces say about the human connection to home, including J. B. Jackson's study of adobe homes in the American Southwest (Jackson, 1994). I relied heavily on the works of Tim Cresswell and Doreen Massey regarding mobility and place. Cresswell (1996; 2001; 2006) looks at the conceptions of mobility and moralities, which directly informs my study of truck stops. Massey's work emphasizes how we live within places and how they intersect our lives, as well as intersect other times and places (1991). These ideas, too, are critical in interpreting the long-haul driver's sense of place.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of my study pertains to sense of place and product clustering. Sense of place as an understanding of our surroundings was first explored in a systematic manner by Yi-Fu Tuan (1977). In particular, Tuan wrote about the intimate experiences of place and how emotion and perceptions lead to experience. By collecting the emotions and perceptions of the drivers about truck stops, I have tried to apply this thinking to the experience of truck-stop life.

While Tuan informs my theoretical understanding, the model I follow comes from Nicholas Entrikin's *The Betweenness of Place: Towards a Geography of Modernity* (1991). Here Entrikin lays out two aspects of our understanding of place: "We live our lives in place and have a sense of being part of place, but we also view place as something separate, something

external” (1991, p. 7). He goes on to argue that, although place contains elements that are separate from human experience, it also contains things that are essential to this same experience.

Via Entrikin’s structure, I look at truck stops as a series of objects centered around and for the driver. By exploring how truck-stop amenities influence the choice to stop and the difference between services and amenities offered at chain and independent truck stops, I can examine place through the objects found there. By examining the drivers’ perceptions of truck stops and how these places must stand in as a surrogate home, I can see how place is constructed by and for the driver.

My theoretical framework for product clustering is borrowed from Hotelling’s classic work (1929). He argued that differences in price are not the only reason people choose to patronize one business over another. Stores that have unique products and services are able to attract customers from similar stops, even if their prices are slightly higher. Truck stops are unique in their need to be close to major transportation routes, but Hotelling’s ideas can still apply. My thinking is further influenced by the work of Moon (1994) and Norris (1987) regarding how interstate exits are structured economically. As the numbers of businesses at a given interstate exit increase, so does the collective ability to attract motorists. A high amount of competition in a small area tends to push out smaller businesses that are unable to compete. My examination of chain and independent truck stop clustering uses this framework.

Methodology

The cartographic aspect of the study utilizes three truck-stop guides to compile a list of independent truck stops: *The National Trucker’s Service Directory* (2008), The American Independent Truckers’ Association Guide (aitaonline.com, 2008), and Trucker.com’s Truck Stop

Directory (trucker.com, 2008). The *National Trucker's Service Directory* has been published annually since 1987 and lists the amenities and services offered at truck stops along the interstate system. The other two are more recent, online guides. I used the three together to compile a list of independent truck stops, defined as any truck stop not affiliated with another truck stop or fuel company. Because many types of chain truck stops exist, I concentrated on the five most popular corporations according to my field research. These include Pilot Travel Centers, Petro, Love's Travel Stops and Country Stores, Travel Centers of America (TA), and Flying J Travel Plaza. Other chains of varying size exist that I chose not to include because a division existed in drivers' recognition between the big five and the rest. Although this leaves many truck stops out of my analysis, the domination of chain truck stops is evident from my research with the five large companies, making the inclusion of additional chains unnecessary. I used ESRI's ArcMap to plot truck-stop locations using zip codes, and then visual examination to search for clustering patterns at exits.

The qualitative dimension of my study includes interviews and observations. I traveled with my father, a long-haul truck driver stationed out of Regan, Tennessee, for two weeks in the summer of 2008. We traveled through West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, Virginia, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Ohio. This allowed for a broad initial sampling since my father has no fixed routes. Although I did not travel to truck stops across the country, I feel that the interviews were representative because the drivers themselves have traveled extensively.

I also interviewed drivers at truck stops along I-80 in Pennsylvania during the summer of 2008. All together, I conducted thirty-three interviews. Some of these people were forthcoming with names, but others not. To provide as much information as possible, I have cited first and

last names when possible, first names only if no last name was given, and the location of the truck stop in which the interview took place if no name at all was offered. I also used online trucker forums to gather additional information about drivers' perceptions of truck stops.

Besides contributing core sense-of-place material, the interviews helped with the interpretation of my cartographic study. My questions were open ended and unfolding, but based on general talking points and questions that I prepared beforehand. I wanted to know how truck stops have changed since these drivers first entered the business. I also wanted to know how they coped with not having the amenities in the past that are offered today. Regarding why certain categories of truck stops have emerged in certain places, I wanted find out how drivers choose which truck stop to visit. Do they always stop at certain ones? How much do billboards or suggestions by other drivers on the radio influence their decisions? Do they avoid certain truck stops? If so, why? Finally, I wanted to find out how the various truck stops around today fulfill the needs of the driver and how advancements in their cabs have changed how they use the truck stops.

I also interviewed two retired drivers and twelve truck-stop employees. Interviews with retired drivers focused on what truck stops were like in the past. Those with truck-stop employees emphasized how truck stops have changed and how chain truck stops approach serving the driver compared to the practices of independent truck stops.

I did not use a recording device when interviewing because I feared it might deter interviewers from sharing information with me. I kept a notebook during interviews, and then typed up the contents immediately after. I also kept a separate notebook for field observations on physical settings of the different truck stops as well as any unusual or interesting occurrences

while visiting these areas. Those interviews and field observations then shaped my study as I identified reoccurring themes.

In order to make my study as transparent as possible, I admit at the outset that, as the daughter of a truck driver, I have a certain fondness for the occupation. This may open the account to bias, but I try to remain objective. On the other hand, my connection to trucking through my father opened up contacts that otherwise might have been closed. In this sense, I think my personal background aided my research more than it hindered it.

Chapter two looks at the beginning of the truck-stop industry and how the growth of trucking transformed this business over time. Truck stops were originally smaller operations that served a larger proportion of local customers than they do today. Chain truck stops emerged as the interstate highways were built, streamlining their services to focus more on long-haul drivers. These places were sometimes seen as havens for illicit activity and rough characters, and the general population gave them wide berth. In contrast, the truck stops of today are shifting towards a cleaner, safer image that appeals to truck drivers and casual motorists alike. I also examine the iconic image of the truck driver, derived from the period when the necessity for strength and resourcefulness gave the driver a cowboy persona. Today, of course, modern technologies and amenities make the field more accessible to a wide range of people.

The present state of truck stops is the focus of chapter three, particularly the difference between chain and independent operations. The rise of chain truck stops dominate has increased both the size and homogeneity of typical stops. Location provides clues as to the success of chain truck stops over independent truck establishments. Also, an increase in products and

services offered at the larger operations has changed the ways in which the long-haul driver interacts with the truck stop.

Chapter four focuses on how drivers select which truck stops to visit. These choices help to highlight differences between chain and independent truck stops, the role the truck stop plays in the driver's daily life, and what life is like for these drivers while on the road. Fuel, food, and restroom facilities emerge as the most important selection factors.

Finally, chapter five applies the long-haul driver's feelings about and interactions with the truck stop to larger geographical themes of home, mobility, belonging, and the overlapping of place throughout time and space. Instead of a spectrum between home and placelessness, the long-haul driver has different forms of these concepts, in which different places mean different things at different times. The mobile nature of long-haul driving necessitates a re-creation of moral conceptions of space in order to fulfill human emotions while on the road. In turn, this mobility applies moral connotations to the driver, which are represented in the truck stops.

Chapter 2

Evolution of the Truck-Stop Industry

Truck stops came about in response to the growing trucking industry that began early in the twentieth century. Initially roadside service establishments catered to cars and trucks alike, but, as time went on, these stations began to specialize. Some owners saw money to be made in serving the growing trucking industry that was in the process of surpassing the railroads as the primary choice for shipping goods across the United States. In this sense, the history of the truck-stop industry is directly tied to the history of the trucking industry. The changing image of the driver is also important to understanding truck-stop history, for place meaning comes from the people who occupy that place.

History of the Trucking Industry

Goods moved across the United States largely by rail before trucks came on the scene. This system was efficient in many ways, but required the addition of horse-drawn wagons to move goods from the train stations to their final destination. With the invention of the internal combustion engine, people found another form of transportation. Early trucks were not very effective in moving large amounts of goods, however, for they were small and prone to breakdowns. Also, a needed infrastructure of hard-surfaced roads was only beginning to take shape.

Improvements in the gasoline-powered internal combustion engine allowed trucks to gain in popularity in the early 1910s, and some manufacturers sponsored cross-country trips or truck

“rodeos” to publicize the potential (Thomas, 1979). Motor clubs pushed for the improvement of roads and promoted government intervention to provide connectivity and regulation. The Teamsters Union, formed in 1903, also pushed for better road conditions, advancements in truck technology, and industrywide cohesion.

World War I was a great boost for the truck, both overseas and abroad. These vehicles were used to haul ammunitions and supplies across Europe and the government supported technical improvements. At home, trucks hauled war goods from the factories to the trains and found increasing use on the farm (Thomas, 1979). Many of the professional truck drivers of the 1920s got their start driving in the war. These men needed exceptional mechanical know-how and strength because road conditions were still poor and the trucks technologically primitive.

A certain bond had formed among the drivers in World War I, one strong enough so that some veterans claimed to be truckers first and soldiers second (Thomas, 1979). This group of knowledgeable drivers in conjunction with improvements made to both trucks and roadways allowed the long-haul trucking industry to gain momentum. The invention of the diesel engine, power brakes and steering, and the fifth wheel coupling system all came about at this time.

By the 1920s, the growing popularity of the trucking industry prompted the railroad owners to push for regulation. In 1935, Congress passed the Motor Carrier Act, which empowered the Interstate Commerce Commission to oversee the trucking industry (IRS, 2008). By 1941, the government had regulations on weight restrictions and the number of hours drivers could spend on the road without resting. Long-haul trucking was definitely growing, but still remained in the shadow of the railroads. The largest carrier, Roadway Express, had only three percent of the total shipping market (Thomas, 1979). The Motor Carrier Act actually slowed the industry by making it more difficult for new firms to enter the business. Trucking firms had to

prove that they had established specific runs before the act's passage in order to continue driving them.

Few trucks in the 1940s had sleepers in them. Instead, the driver would either bed down in the seat or the company would pay for a motel or arrange other sleeping quarters. Clarence Berton drove for Harriot's Trucking after coming home from World War II and drove a fixed route from East Palestine, Ohio to Chicago, Illinois (Berton, 2008). He slept at a bunkhouse in Chicago that was owned by his trucking company. The bunkhouse was part of a duplex and drivers from both the East Palestine and the Chicago terminals would stay there. To occupy their time, the drivers would play card games or, in later years, watch TV while they waited for their next load to send them home again. If a driver got stuck out on the road and was not able to make it to their bunkhouse or a motel, he was forced to sleep on the seat of his cab.

The trucking industry got its biggest boost in 1956 when President Eisenhower signed the Federal Highway Act. Drivers no longer had to rely on state routes and U. S. highways to get around the country. A new system of restricted-access, divided expressways provided vastly better road conditions and connectivity. Trucks could now travel faster and drivers could often bypass cities, helping them to get more loads from place to place. Trucks were everywhere and had a large corner of the shipping market.

The most memorable recent decade for drivers was the 1970s because of a major truckers' strike. A fuel shortage and high diesel prices had truckers waiting for hours in long lines and the financial and other strains had forced the majority out of business (Wyckoff and Maister, 1975). A shutdown resulted that ran from December 1973 until February 1974. Truckers all over the country blocked roads to vent frustration. Truck-stop owners got involved, too, when drivers asked them to shut down their pumps, which many did voluntarily. Drivers

soon began to block truck stops instead of the interstates because truck-stop owners were less likely than motorists to call the authorities. This procedure avoided entanglements with the police and ensured truckers' business in the future (Wyckoff and Maister, 1975). The drivers were finally able to come to an agreement about fuel costs and called off their strike, but it had a lasting impression on the general public.

The 1980s saw deregulation of the trucking industry with the Motor Carrier Act of 1980. This brought fierce competition into the industry, which greatly increased the number of drivers and firms, but also forced some of the largest companies out of business (IRS, 2008). Many companies were unable to hire union drivers because of the increased cost, so the percentage of nonunion workers rose. This trend of limited regulation has continued to the present day, excluding safety issues such as limits on driving hours and weight. Recently trucking-industry groups have begun a push for environmental regulation. This move may be pre-emptive in nature, so that those involved in the industry may set these regulations before the government steps in (Sheppard, 2008).

Amenities inside the trucks have come a long way. The earliest cabs lacked heating and sleepers in the back; they had wooden boards for seats. Enclosed cabs were not a common feature on trucks until the mid-1920s (Thomas, 1979). The addition of sleepers involved trial and error, including trying to put a berth underneath or beside the trailer. Enclosed sleepers that were located directly behind the cab were nicknamed suicide sleepers because in the case of an accident, it was difficult for the person in such a location to get out.

In the mid-1970s, the largest sleepers measured three feet by eight feet (Thomas, 1979). As their popularity increased, drivers added custom touches to make their cabs more like a home. The top-of-the-line sleeper at the time, Kenworth's V.I.T. package (Very Important Truck) held

a twin mattress in a conventional truck or a full-size mattress in cab-over trucks. The cab also had a full-size closet, 12-volt cigarette lighter, and shelves. Controls for the sleeper were separate from the front of the cab, a feature that helped to make the back feel even more like its own bedroom. A special edition of this truck even offered a taller sleeper compartment and a chemical toilet. “The ‘ultra-luxury and handsome appointments’ that grace the sleeper provide a ‘bedroom on wheels’” (Thomas, 1979, p. 129).

Truck and trailers are constantly improving. Most trucks today come equipped with air-ride seats that make the hours spent behind the wheel more comfortable. It is now standard for the cab to be behind the engine, instead of above it, which makes for a quieter, smoother ride. Sleepers also are much larger than when they were first introduced. Many are large enough to stand up and walk around in; they have shelves and closets for personal belongings. As pioneered by the Kenworth V.I.T., controls for the radio, air conditioning, and heater are usually separate for the sleeper. Inverters, which convert direct current (DC) from the truck’s battery to alternating current (AC), allows the driver to have many of the comforts of home, including coffee pots, televisions, crock pots, hot plates, computers, and telephone chargers. These added comforts play a role in the dependency the driver has with the truck stop. As the cab becomes more comfortable and the drivers have more of the things they need right there, they have less reliance on the truck stops.

History of Truck Stop Industry

Not unexpectedly, the growth of truck stops mirrors that of the trucking industry. Roadside establishments lined America’s two-lane highways as early as 1920. These ancestors of the truck stop were there to serve multiple needs: truck drivers passing through, but also

traveling automobile drivers and local populations. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, truck stops as we know them today began to emerge. They pioneered 24-hour service at the same time as the trucking industry was becoming a viable form of commerce transport (NATSO, 2009).

The Federal Highway Act that enabled construction of 41,000 miles of interstate highways and allowed faster movement of goods and people from coast to coast that created a boom in the truck-stop industry (Pfeiffer, 2006). Independent owners took advantage of the increased traffic to open up businesses, and so did companies such as Amoco, Pure, and Skelly (NATSO, 2009). This latter group constituted the first chain truck stops.

The National Association of Truckstop Operators (NATSO) began in 1960 to further the interests of the growing industry. Today, NATSO represents over 1,070 truck stops and travel plazas nationwide (NATSO, 2009). One of its achievements has been a rating system of trucking firms for use when establishing lines of credit (NATSO, 2009). Before NATSO, collection on bad checks and delinquent accounts had both become big problems. NATSO also published a monthly magazine and acted as the truck stops' representative on Capitol Hill.

In 1975, according to NATSO, approximately four thousand truck stops existed in the United States. Out of those, twelve hundred were "full-facility" stops, as opposed to fuel-only facilities (Wyckoff and Maister, 1975). The distinction between the two is not clear cut, but presumably the chain operators tended to be larger. Wyckoff estimated that over half of truck stop operators were independent at this time with the rest owned or franchised by major companies. Union Oil Company (Union 76) was the largest operator at the time, with over six hundred truck stops (Wyckoff and Maister, 1975).

Although it is not clear when chain truck stops surpassed the independent establishments in popularity, the transition period clearly was the 1970s. Locally owned, usually smaller,

independent truck stops dominated only on two-lane highways, particularly in southern states (Thomas, 1979). Thomas has estimated that local truckers frequented those businesses much more than long-haul drivers (1979). “Trucker Villages,” the other end of the size spectrum, were owned by both corporations and independent entrepreneurs.

The parallel growth of the trucking industry and truck stops can be seen in marketing strategies. Many truck stops aimed their services at fleets, rather than owner-operators, because brokering a deal with a fleet meant more revenue. Moreover, a fleet can place a particular truck stop on its regular schedule, garnering a lot of business for that establishment. In the past, some truck stops would offer fuel at a discounted price to fleets, though most owners would not admit to this practice (Wyckoff and Maister, 1975). Owner-operators struggled to stay competitive.

Over time, truck stops got bigger and more complex, offering more and more services for the drivers. A shift in the industry occurred in the 1990s when Truck Stops of America changed its name to Travel Centers of America. This change reflected a new attitude, an attempt to include the general public in their clientele. The name change also implies a new image. The operators believed that truckers themselves now had changed enough from their legendary rough ways to allow their fueling and eating stations to appeal to a wider range of customers.

Iconic Image of the Driver and the Truck Stop

To understand where the iconic perception of the truck stop of the past has come from, it is necessary to explore the stereotypic persona of the truck driver. These two images go together, each shaping and intricately connected to the other. In part, the atmosphere of the truck stop and the driver’s behavior there has led people to create the stereotypical truck driver.

Inversely, a truck stop is not a truck stop without drivers. It is a place not only created for the driver, but also shaped and made into a distinct place through the presence and association of that driver.

Although it is always difficult to generalize, an abundance of popular articles, movies, and songs allows us to identify common themes and details about what the public perceives (or used to perceive) as a truck driver. This imagery begins with the deep American love affair with mobility (Thomas, 1979; Cresswell, 2006). From the country's beginning, the mentality was to move west and explore new frontiers. Developments in transportation technology, such as the railroad and steamships, were trumpeted and greatly shaped our landscape and way of life. People came to see the ability to move about freely as an essential part of the American spirit. As a result, individuals who had jobs that embodied this spirit of mobility were idealized. Such professions included steamboat captains, train engineers, and most important, cowboys.

Cowboys have been idolized in dime-store novels and on the big screen as brave, tough men who lived a life of romantic excitement. They were feared and respected by people when they blew into town, sweeping women off their feet and having fun before riding off again for new adventure. They were associated with masculinity and virility, virtue and honor. However, they were also associated with numerous vices: drinking, gambling, whoring, and fighting. As a result, conflicting images of morality emerged¹.

¹ Di Salvatore also has pointed out that this iconic image is largely fiction (1995). Cowboys came from many different races, had to answer to a boss, and did work that was both tedious and repetitive. They also were not always welcome in town and were sometimes thought of as seedy characters associated with the wrong side of the law.

The traits associated with the cowboy are the same ones later assumed by the truck driver. Bryan Di Salvatore, for example, uses the term “the Last American Cowboy” when speaking about general perceptions of these drivers:

The phrase was coined as a paean. It meant to conjure youth, vitality, competence, independence. The driver/cowboy of this vision is male. He is white. There he stands, briefly; there he goes, quickly, anywhere he wishes, anytime he wants. His continent is a patch and he knows its every bush and rise and draw. He is tall, sinewy, slim-hipped, wide-shouldered. Capable. Slow to anger, fast to draw. What he knows like the back of his hand, we--mere amateurs, sedan and station-wagon people, sedentary burghers--can only guess at. (1995, p. 20).

Di Salvatore’s phrase has been used to describe truck drivers by outsiders on numerous occasions. It is also an image perpetuated by the drivers themselves through their clothing, music, speech, mannerisms, and personal style (Stern, 1975; Thomas, 1979; Di Salvatore, 1995).

Perhaps the most observable similarity between the iconic images of truck drivers and cowboys is the clothing. Stern claimed that the clothing of the truck driver is identical to that of a cowboy, minus the spurs and chaps (1975). Thomas added nuance when he described a social hierarchy that was associated with the truck drivers of the time (1979). Whereas older truck drivers wore the traditional khaki pants and work shirt of their generation, the accepted “uniform” for most drivers was cowboy boots, tight jeans, plaid, long-sleeve shirts, leather belts with an ornate belt buckle, and a cowboy hat. Few wore all of these articles, but most had on at least one or two items. Thomas also noted an emerging younger generation of drivers who were bringing in the “hippie counter-culture” to the industry, such as facial hair, jewelry, and patches on their denim clothes (Thomas, 1979, p.121).

The image of truck drivers in cowboy boots and big belt buckles is a pervasive one, but no longer particularly accurate. Although many drivers did wear, and continue to wear, clothing of this style, the range of fashion is much more diversified. According to Carol Ball, a former employee of Penn-Ohio Service Plaza, drivers were more dressed up when she began to work there in 1988 (2008). They used to wear work pants or blue jeans, but will now wear anything from shorts and sandals to sweat pants. The latter clothing is frowned upon by veteran drivers and workers in the business (Ball, 2008). While Carol is referring to the clothing of drivers at a recent time, images from Stern's book and interviews with older drivers indicate that, even in the 1960s, more clothing diversity existed than the stereotypes suggest (Stern, 1975; Berton, 2008).

Similarities drawn between the iconic images of the truck driver and the cowboy also include mannerisms and attitude. The gait of the trucker is like that of the cowboy, one in which "the adjustment from sitting to walking doesn't come easy" (Stern, 1975, p. 2). Drivers have a certain demeanor when walking into a truck stop that holds them apart from others. Those who have been in the business a while have a nonchalant way of carrying themselves, often slouched in the corner of a booth or hunched over the lunch counter (Thomas, 1979). Drivers who are new or more unsure of themselves are either boisterous and loud or timid, glancing around the truck stop for an approving nod (Thomas, 1979).

Drivers are sometimes said to resemble cowboys in their aloofness. They are friendly to one other because they see the same things and live the same life, but Stern claims that they know not to get too close (1975). It's as if they are living up to the masculine stereotype of the strong, silent man who does not unload his problems unless they are trivial, such as the weather or the discomforts of the road. Interestingly enough, when a driver calls another driver a cowboy

he often is implying that that person is reckless and showy (Stern, 1975). This is another case when the general public view differs from that of the group being stereotyped.

The iconic image of the driver is also associated with regionality. The same is true of the cowboy, of course, but the regions are different. Drivers are often associated with the South or the Midwest, which can be seen in speech, clothes, attitude, and musical preferences (Thomas, 1979). This idea of a rural background supports the study by Wyckoff and Maister (1975), which found that most independent drivers are from small towns. Some of the iconic clothing items already mentioned can be associated with the South and Midwest as well as the cowboy's West. Country music was often played in truck stops in the past (Ball, 2008). Many of the popular trucking songs have been in this genre, which augments the regional association.

Stern (1979) has argued that the mobility of drivers, which might be expected to produce a melting pot for regional differences, does not work out this way. Instead, driving has enforced regionalism. For instance, drivers from the South will display rebel flags or drivers from Texas will have Lone Star motifs on their shirt or cabs (Stern, 1979). This is contrary, of course, to the idea that drivers all tend to have a Southern or Midwest persona. The display of regional motifs is odd in some ways because many long-haul drivers spend little time in their home states. This is an interesting concept that drivers will associate themselves with larger spatial identifications in order to experience that feeling of home. Two drivers from California could be separated by hundreds of miles at home and have had very different lives growing up, but will nevertheless use their common residency in that state as a way of connecting with place and home.

Morality is another theme involved with the image of the driver. The idea of truckers as outlaws may have originated from some of the associations of the profession with cowboys, but it is certainly bolstered by a long-standing image of the truck stop. These places have often been

described as dens of crime and unsavory behavior. Thelma, an employee of the Penn Ohio Travel Plaza from 1992 until 2003 told me that she had always thought of truck stops as bad places until she began working there (Akins, 2008). Other truck stop employees have mentioned similar feelings (Mary, 2008).

Although dangers of truck stops in the past surely were exaggerated, reasons for this negative association obviously existed. Amphetamines could be found there in the 1970s. They had names like “Reds,” “West Coast Turnarounds,” and “White Crosses” (Thomas, 1979, p. 134). “Bennies” or speed also existed. Drivers who used such pills would often find themselves trapped in a vicious cycle in which they needed to take more in order to come down off their highs. Pills also impaired judgment. Thomas claimed that drivers who used these often became social outcasts (1979), but Wyckoff found that such drug use was much less prevalent than popular attitudes would suggest (1979). Random drug testing by many of the trucking companies has reduced the prevalence of illegal drugs today (Day, 2009).

Prostitutes were another common feature of truck stops in the 1970s, with women using CB radios or going from truck to truck to conjure up business. Sometimes prostitutes would be housed adjacent to larger truck stops (Thomas, 1979). Thomas has written about Trucker’s Valley in Wheeling, West Virginia, where many different establishments existed to fulfill a driver’s sexual and other needs, including a strip club. This is actually a common practice, with larger truck stops either owning surrounding businesses or attracting them to provide needed services. Strip clubs and adult book stores next to truck stops obviously cater to the driver’s loneliness while out on the road.

The image of drug abuse and sexual desires associated with truck drivers may have played a part in perpetuating still another belief: that drivers have below-average intelligence.

Thomas, for example, described the popular image of the truck driver in the 1970s as a “large, slow-moving, dull-witted, muscular, tattooed man with greasy clothes and unshined army boots” (1979, p. 131). He then cited a study where physical and psychological tests conducted on drivers revealed that drivers actually had above-average intelligence compared with the rest of the American population. They were, however, below the mean in “artistic appreciation and musical aptitude,” traits Thomas attributed to long, solitary hours on the road and the only recent ability at the time for drivers to listen to the radio because of noise reductions in the cab (Thomas, 1979, p. 131).

At the other end of the morality spectrum for truck drivers is the image of a religious zealot. Heard on CB radios, painted on the sides of cabs, outlined in the lights of the truck’s grill, and seen as knickknacks in the truck-stop gift shops is evidence of the truck driver as evangelical Christian. Some truck stops actually have chapels, and traveling churches exist where services are conducted inside a semitrailer. Highway evangelists were very popular in the 1970s, and featured a preaching style similar to that in tent revivals. No hard evidence exists to confirm or deny this religious stereotype, but my interviews suggest it is true. If so, one explanation may again be the loneliness of the road. Another is regional, with the drivers simply reflecting the relatively high religiosity associated with the South and the Midwest.

Only a few instances of truck drivers existed in the popular media until the 1970s when, suddenly, trucking culture became mainstream. At least two TV-series existed--“Duel” (1971) and “The Steel Cowboys” (1978)--plus films such as “White Line Fever” (1975), “Smokey and the Bandit” (1977), “Citizens Band” (1977), and “Convoy” (1978). Drivers also received extensive news coverage the decade of the 1973-1974 strike. Popular magazines, such as

Reader's Digest and *Esquire*, also reported on the trucker's life at this time but only in a cursory way (Thomas, 1979).

While drivers and their personalities are definitely part of the iconic image of the truck stop, these establishments were (and are) unique in other ways as well. They are places where the public can truly interact with the trucking culture. Nontruckers learn quickly to differentiate between their space and that of the drivers, for example. Parking lots are dominated by big rigs roaming the aisles, prompting automobile drivers to stay out of their way. Inside, trucker stores sell items that only drivers would have a need for while on the road. Finally, restaurants often informed the casual traveler that this was not their domain with signs such as "Reserved for Professional Drivers."

Other aspects of the truck stop are associated with the place itself. Di Salvatore's image of a truck stop before he started driving was one of overabundant parking spaces, laid out around the corner of a field with a grandmotherly type running a little café (1995). This building was painted red and white and featured gingham curtains and mouth-watering pie. The waitresses, with names like Rhonda and Mary Lou, flirted with the drivers and smoked a lot. After a little experience, Di Salvatore learned that these businesses really were as varied as the different American communities. Some were (and are) urban, dark, and sketchy while others are rural and bright. But today this diversity is fading with the rise of chain operations. Now familiarity replaces variety (p. 31).

Di Salvatore described the truck stops he encountered as their own little communities, complete with security guards (1995). At night, the mood shifts to become more like a dormitory, with hundreds of silent or idling trucks and a few drivers moseying in and out. Di Salvatore described the essential, core services of a truck stop as fuel, food, repair, and vehicle

washing. Many also have showers and convenience stores, and some have drivers' lounges, video game rooms, offices where people can copy, fax, print, and mail paperwork to their headquarters or send money home from their check. At a few places drivers can even renew their licenses, hire an attorney, have their shoes shined, get a haircut, or go to church. Table 1 is a list of truck stop amenities that were common in 1974, according to the National Trucker's Service *Truck Stop Directory* (Wyckoff and Maister, 1975).

Despite all that the truck stops had to offer, Di Salvatore never thought of them as a substitute for home: "But, finally, what even the best truck stops can't offer is much more than a faint--sincere, but faint--simulacrum of home. The temporary citizens of truck stops are not family, they are not even friends" (1995, p. 33). Perhaps because Di Salvatore spent such a short time on the road, the comforts and familiarity of the home he knew might be fresher in his mind than they would be to a veteran driver. These "old pros" might come to see the truck stop as home. Or perhaps he is right in that, no matter how much time the driver spends at the truck stop and how many services it offers, it will never be a substitute for home.

The view of the truck stop as a community is perhaps only evident if one enters that facility from the driver's entrance. Until seen for their uniqueness and versatility of services offered, the public view of the truck stop usually is stagnant, perhaps one like Di Salvatore had until he briefly lived the life. The truck stop is not an iconic image in the mind of the long-haul driver. It is a functional place, one that is always changing and is both different and familiar with every stop.

Chapter 3

Chain vs. Independent Truck Stops

Chain operations now constitute the largest proportion of all trucks stops and are gaining in popularity. The reasons for this ascendancy include technological advancements in the cabs of modern semitrailer trucks, changes in the trucking industry, and the appeal of the facilities and services offered at these major travel centers. The chains have worked harder than independent truck stops to improve their image, and now attract both the professional driver and the casual motorist. This process, leading to cleaner facilities and more services, was aided by the increased capital available to these large corporations.

As the big chain operations grow, the popularity of their “brand” increases as well. When a travel center with strong brand recognition opens up next to an older truck stop, it will invariably attract some of the existing business. Today, a clustering phenomenon of chain truck stops can be seen at many interstate exits, with independent operations more likely to be found farther away from the interstate and competing truck stops. Independent businesses do not have the same type of brand recognition as the chain truck stops and must corner the market in other ways.

Chain truck stops have changed their image to appeal to customers other than truck drivers. Michael O’Connor, the vice president for Travel Centers of America, said that the corporation is trying to change its customer focus. “ ‘We’re moving from a truck stop to a travel center and trying to change our business from 80% truck drivers and 20% motorists to 50-50’ ” (Beckie, 1999).

Just as independent truck stops can be large, multimillion dollar operations or small, hole-in-the-wall places, chain truck stops also vary in size. The country's largest and most recognizable truck stops are Flying J's, Love's, Petro, Pilot, and Travel Centers of America (TA). Pilot has the most locations, over three hundred, but TA acquired Petro in May of 2007 to become the second-largest truck-stop corporation in the United States. Flying J's is the only chain to own its own refinery.

These four (or five) truck-stop groups represent the face of the business in the United States. Drivers recognize that these chains all will have large parking facilities, which is a first necessity when searching for a stop. While the reputation of each chain will differ from driver to driver, as a group these businesses are recognized to have clean facilities along with their spaciousness, making them a top choice for drivers.

It is hard to generalize the differences between chain and independent truck stops. By definition a chain has more than one location and may be owned by either a corporation or private individuals. An independent truck stop has only one location and is owned by private individuals. When referring to chain truck stops for the purpose of this study, the intention is to compare the larger chain truck stops to the smaller, independent truck stops.

Many interviewees, including drivers and truck-stop employees, told me that independent truck stops were definitely on the decline today (Ball, 2008; Sam, 2008; Ben, 2008). Some drivers, such as Norm who was interviewed while stopped at an independent truck stop, said that many of the independent businesses he used to frequent are out of business (2008). The particular truck stop where I interviewed him had only the fuel pumps and convenience store open. A restaurant, hotel, and repair shop that had once been a part of the complex had closed down. I saw this same pattern at several other independent locations.

Dorsey, a truck driver for eighteen years, has noticed a regional pattern to this decline (2008). He believes that the independent truck stops have survived better in the southern states. Dorsey worked out of Montgomery, Alabama, but was laid over in St. Joseph, Missouri, when we talked.

Many drivers have strong preferences for particular truck stops and for chain operations versus independents. These differences are best examined by looking at how the driver makes his choice about where to stop. These choices are often situational and will be explored further in chapter four. First, though, I examine the spatial distribution of the chain and independent truck stops in order to see the differences in number and distribution. These differences give us a better understanding of why chain truck stops are so successful in a competitive market.

Mapping

To examine the dichotomy between chain and independent truck stops, I have mapped the top chains and a large proportion of the independent operators in the continental United States. The numbers total 1,018 and 598, respectively. The 2008 National Truck Stop Directory, from which I pulled most of my data, had a total of 5,924 truck stops. Many of these were not included because of the distinction I have already explained regarding the top five chain companies. Numbers were difficult to obtain on the total number of truck stops in the U. S. According to Manta, an online database containing information regarding small-to-medium sized businesses, 2,290 company profiles are listed under “truck stops and plaza companies” (MANTA, 2009). It is unclear how many different locations exist for the various company profiles. The National Association of Truck Stop Operators claims to represent 1,070 truck

stops, but makes no distinction between chain or independent and does not say if the various truck stops represent a single location or a single company (NATSO, 2009).

Preliminary interviews with drivers and truck-stop employees led me to believe that a clustering pattern would be evident with the chain operations because their brand recognition allows them to draw customers away from existing businesses in the area. If this were so, I believed that the opposite would be the case for independent truck stops. These businesses, which usually have more individualistic appearances because of their lack of branding, should exhibit no clustering pattern because they needed to operate in areas of little competition.

Truck stop locations are unusual in that they are limited largely to interstate exits. Geographer Darrell Norris, in a 1987 study on the form and function of interstate exits, noted that businesses around an exit had an “ordinal arrangement of key establishments” and that this “sorting tends to distinguish major chains from independent operators” (1987). He believed that location of services was primarily determined by time of exit development, but need and financial capabilities of a business were also important. I believe that time of development plays a smaller role in this process today as the financial capabilities of major companies have increased. The larger travel center corporations usually are able to buy up whatever existing businesses they need in order to have prime interstate exit location.

A traveler chooses to stop at a certain interstate exit, according to Norris (1987), with three considerations in mind: whether the stop offers sufficient services to satisfy the driver’s needs, whether the stop has sufficient competition at the site to keep their prices competitive, and how easy it is to get on and off the interstate. The competition factor is more subtle than the other two but critically important to understand truck-stop geography. Interstate exits exhibit a pattern in which businesses try to locate close to the exit and close to similar businesses. As

mentioned before, many smaller, independent truck stops rely heavily on local traffic, rather than long-haul truck drivers (Thomas, 1979; Norris, 1985; Ball, 2008). This suggests that these truck stops may be located slightly farther from the exit since that spot is not their primary business focus and real estate is less expensive a block or so away (Norris, 1985).

Advertising along the highway also plays a role in which businesses are more successful. Blue signs that inform drivers about what services are available at a particular exit are part of the highway logo signing program developed in accordance with the federal 1971 Motorist Information Act. Individual states (and possibly private companies if the management of the signs has been contracted out), have freedom within these guidelines and set basic eligibility and fee requirements so long as they comply with federal standards (Rodgers and Blackburn, 2005). Smaller businesses with smaller advertising budgets, such as independently owned truck stops, may not find it feasible to advertise on these signs. Larger chains, of course, are almost always listed. In addition, some states give preference on these signs to businesses that are closer to the exit. Since the larger chains usually have more capital to purchase such prime sites, this may also hinder an independent business from appearing on the signs (Rodgers and Blackburn, 2005). Similarly, the larger companies are able to afford more highway billboard signage than smaller businesses.

The larger chains have recognized logos to use on the exit signs, which may be more attractive to a driver than a plain-lettered placard for Maggie's Café. The driver knows that truck parking exists at the Flying J even before he gets off that exit, but does not know for sure about Maggie's unless he has been there before, heard of the place from another driver, or can see the building as he gets off the exit. This reality also may prompt the driver to choose the chain over the independent truck stop.

Another advantage enjoyed by chain truck stops is their access to capital through co-branding (Charter, 1997). Two prominent brands--typically that of the truck stop plus a franchise food vendor--will join together in a travel plaza in order to fill a niche in the market. According to Gary Copeland, a manager for Kiel Bros. Oil Co., this has become a prominent feature in the truck-stop business over the last twenty-five years (Charter, 1997). He reported that customers are more likely to stop at a branded travel plaza over an independent one unless they have been to the independent before, would like to try something new, or want to avoid the larger crowds at the branded travel plaza.

The fast food available in most big travel centers arguably appeals to the casual motorist even more than it does to the truck driver. Truckers are more likely to use sit-down restaurant options because of restrictions on driving hours, but will order fast food when they are in a hurry. Both the trucker and the casual driver know what they are getting when they order franchise food from the chain truck stops, which is where the cobranding comes into play. If a driver wants a particular type of fast food that day, he knows which chain travel center has it and will plan his stops accordingly.

If my preliminary finding regarding clustering of chain truck stops is correct, market implications for this phenomenon may explain their success. Geographer Richard Pillsbury has studied how the clustering of chain restaurants in cities and suburban areas has acted to push out independent operations (1990). This is similar to what is happening at the commercial interstate exits. While truck-stop location experts encounter slightly different situations from that of the restaurant people Pillsbury refers to, accessibility and existing customer bases are certainly relevant to both decisions.

Product clustering is the idea that businesses with similar products will cluster around each other in an attempt to take a portion of each other's market share (Hotelling, 1929; Pepall, 1990). Whereas businesses at interstate exits have severe limitations of where to locate, some choice still exists depending on which exit they choose. Again, businesses will tend to locate near similar businesses in order to take advantage of the market that has already been created.

Even when prices are slightly different between two businesses, reasons still exist why a consumer might choose to frequent the higher-priced operation (Hotelling, 1929). In the case of chain truck stops, this might be the ability to receive a free shower or similar incentives, or the desire to pick up fast food rather than sit down to eat. Perhaps, too, it could be the recognition of a particular chain and their reputation of having clean bathrooms. Consumers, which include drivers, often have loyalties for whatever reasons to certain places. So, even if prices may be cheaper at the independent truck stop, the driver may still choose the chain because of their other service preferences.

As brand loyalties grow, a chain truck stop is able to compete in more places and with more businesses. Such a chain can afford real estate at an established interstate exit, for example, where development attracts development (Norris, 1985). The chain can then continue to grow in size and number, allowing the attraction of more business and loyal customers. In this way brand loyalty also causes independent truck stops to decline.

In order to map independent and chain truck stops, I had to define truck stops operationally, including a firm differentiation between a chain and an independent. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, a truck stop is "a facility especially for truckers that is usually by a highway and that includes a diner, fuel pumps, and a garage" (Merriam and Webster Online Dictionary). For the purposes of this study, I considered a truck stop to be a facility that had at

least three services or facilities geared towards truck drivers. Examples of these include large parking lot size, showers, trucker's lounges, and truck repair shop (see Table 1 for a more complete listing). Many truck-stop directories included convenience stores in their listings, but my definition excludes such places.

I found one truck stop directory that listed what services were offered, but this one was limited to operations located on interstates. For truck stops on U. S. and state highways I had to be less precise. I eliminated truck stops from my listing there only if they were associated with a chain fuel provider and, so have no guarantee that the operators located on these highways have at least three services geared towards truck drivers. I took this liberal position because I feel that independent truck stops are more likely to be found on these highways rather than chain truck stops, and would be underrepresented in my total sample if I were to eliminate based on the services criteria.

I decided to include the entire continental United States as my study area because countrywide data are readily available and this would enable me to explore regional variability. This proved to be a daunting task, however, because I needed to check multiple sources for all independent truck stops to make sure that they were not affiliated with any chain operation.

I put the location data into Excel spreadsheets that could easily be transferred into a GIS program. Data for chain truck stops were relatively easy to collect because they all had websites with location information. The particular chains that I chose were based on my preliminary interviews. These five--Flying J, Love's, Petro, Pilot, and TA--are the most popular travel centers and together cover the continental United States extensively. The locations I plotted include truck stops bearing the chain name, plus other truck stops that are associated with the

chain. Some independent truck stops eventually partner with chains but keep their original name.

Several sources in print and on the internet list truck-stop locations. I did not find a source that listed only independent truck stops, so I had to compile my own. I defined an independent truck stop as a truck stop that had no affiliation to another travel center, either by name, such as Roady's, or by a brand of fuel, such as British Petroleum (BP) or Mobil. Eliminating truck stops that are associated with a brand of fuel could potentially exclude independent truck stops. For example, many BP service stations operate as a chain while other truck stops simply get their fuel from BP and operate independently. However, I thought it better to eliminate all truck stops linked to a fuel company in any way in order to avoid overreporting the number of independent truck stops.

The first source I used was the website Trucker.com, a popular locator engine. I included any truck stops that I could not immediately eliminate as a chain so that I could check them in more detail later to be sure that they were not an independent. I then used *The 2008 National Trucker's Service Directory* to crossreference my data. This source listed the services offered at the stops located on interstates, so I used it as described earlier to prune any operators that did not have at least three services oriented towards truckers. I then eliminated stops that had any affiliation with a chain or oil company. If I was unable to locate a truck stop in both directories, I used the online truck stop directory provided by the American Independent Truckers' Association, Inc. Finally, I did a general internet search on individual truck stops if any question remained about whether or not it was an independent.

I used ESRI's ArcMap program to map the independent and chain operations. For addresses I used zip codes, a measure accurate enough for the purposes of this study. When

looking at the maps, however, it should be kept in mind that the symbols do not portray the exact location of individual truck stops.

Findings

Visual analysis of the chain and independent truck stops shows definite clustering for the chain truck stops but little for the independent operations (Maps 1, 2, and 3). This clustering is particularly evident in Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Oklahoma. The independent truck stops, symbolized by blue circles, are rarely seen in clusters and are often found away from the major interstates.

There is discrepancy between the findings and the literature regarding regional variation. The map shows independents to be distributed uniformly across the Southern and Northeastern United States. Thomas, however, suggested that the South has a disproportionate number of truck stops compared to the rest of the country (1979). Both types of truck stops are more common in the East than in the West, which may be attributed to lack of interstates and smaller populations in the latter.

Regional patterns definitely exist among chain truck stops. In particular, Love's shows a concentration of stops in and near Oklahoma (Map 4), which is understandable considering this is where the chain originated. The same thing happened in Utah with Flying J's, where that chain began. Pilot, a Virginia company, is more numerous in the eastern portion of the United States, which has the largest proportion of all the truck stops. The interstate system is more extensive in the eastern portion of the United States, of course, a reflection of greater population and therefore higher truck traffic than the West (Schmitt, 2002).

The clustering of the chain truck stops confirms my earlier speculation that those corporations are able to enter existing markets and take a portion of the customer base from other, earlier truck stops. This ability indicates that brand recognition plays a large role in the chain truck stops' domination of the industry (Petrowski, 2001). Brand recognition for chain truck stops has allowed them to grow in popularity and cobranding makes even more capital available for expansion. This allows for improved facilities, and in turn, attracts more customers.

Chapter 4

Driver Selection of Truck Stops

Differences between chain and independent truck stops are reflected in how the drivers choose where to stop. Both types of truck stops have their appeals, but it is important to keep in mind that drivers and individual truck stops are extremely diverse and hard to categorize. An independent truck stop, such as the Detrioter in Woodhaven, Michigan, has modern facilities with services that include a barbershop and a small movie theatre. Another independent could have nothing more than the bare necessities. So it is important to keep this diversity in mind as I present generalizations pulled from my data.

The top three factors for a driver deciding which truck stop to frequent are food, fuel, and restrooms, much like the daily necessities we get from our homes. This was what I found in my interviews and it was also the conclusion in a study conducted for the National Association of Truck Stop Operators (NATSO) (Beckie, 1999). According to the NATSO report, the first was restroom cleanliness, followed by restroom availability, restaurant cleanliness, quality of food, and, fuel prices. Although this study was able to rank these factors, I found in the field that they are dependent on the situation.

Fuel

First is the issue of fuel. Drivers fuel up only every other day, so its availability does not affect the decision for every stop. Most drivers use fuel cards at the pump, a type of credit distributed by specialized companies, such as Comdata. In the past, a driver would present his

fuel card to a person at the fuel desk, who would then call in to the fuel-card program for verification that the driver could make the purchase. Today this transaction is done electronically. The advantage for trucking companies is that they are able to be billed directly for the fuel, rather than giving their drivers money or producing reimbursements for money already spent. A similar advantage exists for the owner-operator in the fact that he, too, can be billed via a fuel card, rather than having to pay up front.

Drivers used to have to make sure that the truck stops they selected accepted their particular fuel card, so they were restricted by the fuel company's business agreements. Most truck stops today accept all of the major fuel cards, with some exceptions. The biggest example is Flying J's, the third largest travel center in the United States. They have their own line of fuel cards and these are the only fuel cards that they accept. So a driver is limited by where their fuel card is accepted, and if he is a company driver, he does not make the decision about which fuel card to have.

Some drivers pick their stops regardless of whether or not their fuel card is accepted. Tom (2008), a twenty-year trucking veteran, was stopped at a Bosselman's when I interviewed him, despite the fact that his fuel card is not accepted there. This is a regular stop for him along his route because he likes the showers and the employees. However, Harvey (2008), a driver stopped at a Love's truck stop in Alabama, told me that his fuel card is the biggest control over where he stops. His company will only allow him fuel at Flying J's, Love's, or TA.

I would also argue that company drivers are less concerned with the cost of diesel than owner-operators. Most companies do not take fuel prices out of their employee's wages, so the driver is separated from the implications of those costs. Owner-operators, however, pay for their own fuel and are therefore more concerned with finding the cheapest diesel available. From the

interviews I conducted, most drivers are aware of differences in fuel prices from state to state and avoid stopping for fuel around urban areas while costs are almost always higher (96 Truck Stop, 2008). Drivers also will usually stop at an exit with multiple businesses knowing that competition forces fuel prices down.

Chains usually have more fuel pumps available at their stops than the independents. Drivers often will stop at these because they feel they can get in and out faster. Also, many chains have fuel perks, such as so many dollars spent on fuel earns a free shower or a coupon for dinner. Some independent truck stops offer similar perks as well, but these are considerably fewer than the chains.

Although fuel is not the most common reason for a driver to stop, it is the most restricting. Some drivers stop at one or two particular chains on a regular basis because their fuel card is accepted there and it becomes habit. Others will pick a stop despite the fact that their card is not accepted because of other attractive features. Still, chains are the most common stops for fuel. They are most likely to accept major fuel cards, they have contracts with many trucking companies, and they provide a known, familiar setting.

Food

Because the role of food has more personal implications than that of fuel, it is harder to draw generalizations about choices. Differences exist between sit-down and fast-food restaurants, for example, which deal mainly with the driver's personal situation. If he has a layover, he is more likely to choose a stop with a sit-down restaurant. If he is in a hurry, he is more likely to select a fast food restaurant. Some drivers prefer to get out of the truck for only

one meal a day and so like to be able to stretch their legs at that site. Others eat more than one meal a day so fast food suffices.

Advancements in cab design that allow drivers to make more of their own food complicates the eating spectrum. Most drivers have refrigerators in their sleepers and some have hot plates, microwaves, coffee pots, and crock pots. Truck-stop employees tell me that they have seen recent sales increases of their prepackaged food, especially when diesel prices were high in 2008. A push for healthier eating also can be seen in many of the truck stops and in industry magazines, prompting many of the chains to have fresh fruit and vegetables available. This trend is still small, however, and one report claims that, despite the healthy options at truck-stop restaurants, drivers end up with fatty, fried selections because it is comfort food (Wise, 1995). This was my observation as well.

A key difference in food choice is how long a driver has been in the industry. More experienced drivers would often talk to me about stopping at independent truck stops because they knew about their food and it sometimes reminded them of home-cooked dinners. On the other hand, drivers newer to the industry recognize and appreciate knowing the food choices available to them at cobranded chains (Charter, 1997). A driver knows that if he stops at Petro, for example, an Iron Skillet will be there, and very likely a fast-food chain such as Dairy Queen or Church's.

Many of the travel centers partner with fast-food and restaurant chains specifically to draw in automobile travelers (Beckie, 1999). Those motorists are more likely to choose a chain they are familiar with over an independent restaurant, and by marketing these familiar restaurant chains on the highway signs, truck stops are able to attract automobile traffic simply by what type of food they offer. Newer travel centers often have the fast food towards the front of the

building, sometimes with an outside entrance that is oriented towards the car parking lot. This makes them more accessible to the motorist than the truck driver, showing a change in marketing focus.

Drivers usually make their choice of where to stop strategically, often many miles before they get to the exit. So, if a driver is familiar with the partnerships a travel plaza has with particular restaurants, he can make eating decisions far ahead of time. This is a very loose rule, however. I found that some newer drivers like to stop at the independent places because they were more traditional, they liked their food, and/or they would rather support an independent business over a corporation. Some of the more experienced drivers were eating at the chains simply because they liked McDonald's or Wendy's.

Drivers are willing to go out of their way to stop at particular truck stops if they like the food. Sam (2008), a 31-year driver, stops at Flying J's and Petro because of their food, even though they don't accept his fuel card. Because independent truck stops tend to be farther from the exit than the chains, drivers have to make an extra effort to reach them. Sometimes the food is worth it.

Some truck stops have restaurant sections that are reserved for drivers, which allows quick entry and exit. TA truck stops makes this a policy. Waitresses in this section are typically more experienced, with the thinking that this core customer base deserves quality service (Akins, 2008). Another variation in the food "game" is the type of coffee a truck stop has. Drivers usually have strong preferences in this regard and oftentimes are stopping for coffee rather than food.

Restrooms

Restrooms play a big part, arguably the biggest, when a driver is choosing where to stop. This restroom must stand in as a driver's personal bathroom while they are on the road. Because of this, cleanliness is important. I saw instances in both chain and independent truck stops where bathrooms were not clean. That being said, a driver will usually stop at a chain if his sole purpose is to use the bathroom and pick up a coffee.

Chains are more likely to have newer facilities, which means that the bathrooms and showers are apt to be cleaner. Also, chains are more likely to have a larger staff and strict guidelines from corporate headquarters regarding cleaning schedules and supplies that must be available for showers. Some truck stops offer towels and toiletries with their showers, and those things, too, may influence where a driver chooses to stop.

At the larger chains more toilets and shower stalls will be available. This is important, too, because it is not unusual to wait a half hour or longer to get into a shower at a truck stop. Some facilities announce when a shower is available over a loud speaker so the drivers do not have to wait right by the showers. Finally, if a driver does not want to purchase anything from the truck stop but just use their facilities, they are less likely to be detected at a chain truck stop than at a smaller, independent operation. All businesses frown upon people using the restrooms without spending money, but chains are less likely to make an issue of it because more people are present and the restrooms are usually farther from the counter.

Other Factors

Although fuel, food, and restrooms are the most important reasons for drivers to stop, other factors may push their decision one way or another. One of these is habit, especially if a

driver has a set route that they drive every day or week (Orville, 2008). Drivers get to know the facilities and the employees, so a sense of familiarity exists when they arrive at that particular truck stop. Also, some companies have stops that are scheduled, so the driver has to stop at the same establishments every time.

Another issue is accessibility, whether getting to the truck stop or maneuvering within it. Once a driver gets off at an exit, he wants to minimize the driving done in stop-and-go traffic. Right turns are difficult for drivers because of the length of their cab and trailer, so wide driveways or turning lanes are an attraction. Once in the parking lot, drivers like truck stops with ample parking spaces. Some drivers like to back into a parking space so they can sit in their cab and see what's going on in the parking lot. Others like spaces that they can easily pull in and out of without having to back up.

Parking lots can be dangerous. Many drivers spoke to me of having their trucks hit while in a parking lot because of the difficulty in moving around. Parking spaces too small for the extra-long trailers are often targets of hit and runs. Lighting in a parking lot is also an issue. Crime is more rampant in poorly lit lots, so drivers like to find places where they can sleep in their cabs or go inside without worrying about anything getting stolen or damaged. Larger truck stops usually have the most desirable parking situations, which, again, are usually the chains.

Other services at truck stops that attract some drivers are chapel services, movie theaters, arcades, truck washes, garages, barber shops, and trucker stores. Many trucking companies now monitor how long their drivers are on the road, which forces adherence to the laws about maximum driving hours. Simply stated, a driver must rest for ten hours after driving for eleven hours (Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations, 2005). This has prompted truck stops to offer more services to keep the drivers busy on their layovers.

The Bosselman's stop in Des Moines, Iowa, has a "Trucker's Club" that included showers, a barber shop and salon, a lounge area, and a theater. Its downstairs "shopping mall" is comparable to the first floor of a department store, with several different sections that include truck parts, toys, clothes, prepackaged and prepared foods, souvenirs, and more. It also contains a large game room connected to a restaurant. On the premises are several parking areas for truck drivers, a smaller convenience store close to the truck parking, a truck wash, and a repair shop. The manager, Danielle, said that the Driver's Club was intended for truckers, but it was not exclusive (2008). Occasionally motorists getting their cars fixed would take advantage of the facilities.

Restrictions in idling emissions, particularly in California, have prompted truck stops to offer other services for inside the cab. IdleAire is a company that sells in-cab units that provide electrical outlets, TV and Internet services, heating, and cooling. Truckers pull up to these devices in the parking lot and fit a unit into their windows. Whereas many drivers still to prefer to let their trucks idle when they sleep for heat or air conditioning, as more environmental regulations are placed on the drivers, IdleAire units will probably be utilized more.

Advancements in Cab

Although increasing numbers of luxury services are offered at truck stops, more and more drivers are choosing to remain in their cabs when they stop. Technological advancements such as cell phones, Internet cards, powerful inverters, and built-in appliances allow a person to make a home right inside his cab.

Trucking blogs and forums have grown rapidly in the past decade because of the availability of Wi-Fi and Internet cards. Many drivers say that they stay in their cabs to use the

Internet during their down time because of the comfort and privacy it affords. IdleAire units also allow the driver to use the Internet while in the cab. With such technology drivers can do anything from making video calls back home to playing online games and chatting with other drivers. Slingboxes, devices that allow you to access your television at home via your computer while on the road, and websites such as YouTube and Hulu allow drivers even more entertainment while in their truck. Some cabs also have satellite TVs in their cabs.

Drivers are increasingly choosing to stop at Walmart and Target stores for the night and pick up supplies there while out on the road. These parking lots usually have sufficient parking space for the drivers and offer goods at cheaper prices than the truck stops. In the past it was difficult for drivers to frequent places other than truck stops because of the size of their rigs, but as parking lots have become larger for the Super Walmarts and Targets, drivers are changing their habits.

Drivers now are able to cook more in their cabs than they were in the past. Coffee pots, hot plates, crock pots, microwaves, and refrigerators are available in many trucks, either built-in or with the aid of an inverter. An inverter is a device that allows appliances to operate via the truck batteries. Fancier cabs have even more amenities: couches, tables, showers, and toilets. Such expensive models are rarely available to company drivers, but successful owner-operators may invest in them.

Chapter 5

Meaning of the Truck Stop

Beyond the basic issues of truck-stop form and function lies a series of deeper meanings these places hold for long-haul drivers. Truck stops serve as a type of home, fulfilling the driver's needs and representing some sense of familiarity while on the ever-changing road. This idea of the truck stop as home is complex, of course, and related to the basic mobility that shapes drivers and their interactions with other people. A truck stop is also a place that is separate from drivers' experiences, but still shaped by reactions to and interactions with the truckers. Finally, other people contribute to the character of these places, including employees, local residents, and casual motorists. The drivers' responses to all these elements contribute to the meaning of the truck stop.

Drivers' Senses of Home

Geographers have always been interested in the concept of home, the feelings and perceptions that constitute this image and why humans yearn for such a place. If home is associated only with one particular place, does this make any journey the antithesis of home? Do cultural differences exist for what creates a home? Does the concept carry moral implications and, if so, what does that say about the people who live there?

Yi-Fu Tuan (1971) and Edward Relph (1976) have written about home as being set in place. Tuan claimed that home is known by the journey and is defined by going out and seeing what home is not. Relph then extended the thought, arguing that home was "attached to a

particular setting, a particular environment, in comparison with which all other associations with places have only a limited significance” (1976, p. 40). In accordance with these descriptions, the long-haul driver’s home would be the place they return to at week’s end. But is this really true? After all, the driver spends relatively little time in this home compared to his or her hours on the road. Would those four walls under this circumstance embody the same ideas and feelings about home as described by Tuan and Relph? If not, how might these feelings compare to the emotional pull of the cab of the truck or the collective image of the truck stop?

David Sopher (1979) once criticized Tuan’s idea that the journey is what makes one aware of home. Modern people are mobile, Sopher argued, and if Tuan’s interpretation is to be accepted, then we are a homeless group (Sopher, 1979). I suggest that truck drivers have complex definitions of home and that the house at the end of the road is not their only and unvaried version. To a considerable extent, the long-haul driver makes his home within himself, and projects aspects of home onto his or her surroundings, wherever that may be. The cab, where drivers spend most of their time, is the most familiar of these settings, but also the most confining. The truck stop is more expensive, providing the necessities of home, but full of strangers and a definite drain on the wallet. Finally, there is the driver’s house. This is expensive, too, but not as relaxing as one might think. After being on the road so long, and so often, familial tensions can run high, eroding feelings of comfort and stability.

I want to explore the idea of the truck stop as home in more detail. Home is supposed to be familiar, with recognizable smells and sounds. Truck stops are like this, too, with a predictable set of services created with the trucker’s lifestyle in mind and a certain clientele. This familiarity argument suggests that, as chain truck stops become increasingly dominant, their cookie-cutter similarities would comfort drivers and increase the sense of home. In my

experience, however, the opposite is true. The chain truck stops feel less like a home to the drivers than did the smaller, independent operations of the past, mostly because of their sterile nature. This does not mean that the drivers have no feelings of home with chain truck stops, but it is to a lesser degree than with independent, unique establishments.

Home also provides a sense of protection and belonging, a trait I believe the truck stops still provide for drivers. Truckers develop a sense of camaraderie with the other drivers as they wait in line for showers or pass in the parking lot. They understand each other because they live the same lifestyle. Here is a common meeting place, a forum for relaxation and informal discussion. This shared space is what makes it feel like a home.

As the independent truck stops disappear and chains become more uniform, it could be argued that truck stops are becoming placeless. Placelessness, according to Relph, is “the casual eradication of distinctive places and the making of standardized landscapes that results from insensitivity to the significance of place” (Relph, 1976, preface). I do not believe that drivers are insensitive to place. In fact, they confront the distinctiveness of place on a daily basis. Although a Love’s establishment in Alabama has the same look and similar features as one in New Jersey, differences still exist that make each place unique. The employees and drivers’ attitudes, the types of items sold, and the foods featured on the menu exemplify these differences.

The community formed and the iconic image of the truck stop as the driver’s domain are the key factors in making these places feel like home, not the driver’s reliance on them in order to get supplies. Some drivers are attached to particular stops, usually unique, independent establishments. They find it difficult to define this appeal, but say it is less about familiarity and cosmetic differences and more about how the collective truck stop makes them feel.

Mobility

Mobility permits drivers to become aware of differences in places during their travels. This applies to truck stops as much as to topography or climate. Many of these businesses are visited over and over again, leading to a certain attachment. In the past, places associated with mobility have been thought of as placeless, when, in reality, they represent a different type of place (Cresswell, 1996). At truck stops the flow of people represents modernity and it is this social context that constitutes the place, rather than location or form.

As society changes, so does our understanding of what place means (Entrikin, 1991, p. 57). The hallmark of our society is a constant, fast-paced progression, and this trait is best reflected in the places where this mobile lifestyle is carried out. Truck stops are iconic in this sense, with people constantly moving in and out, perhaps never returning and, yet, somehow familiar in what they represent. It is not the individual stops that are important, but rather their collective image that represents how we interact with place in today's world. The most telling aspect of the truck stop is not the taste of Petro's coffee or the location of the bathrooms in Bosselman's, but what these tasks represent to the driver. It is the embodiment of mobility in space at each of those places and this is unvarying no matter how different each operation is.

As mobility has come to represent modern society, it brings in its wake a set of moral connotations. These moralities have changed over time. In the past, mobility was most often associated with lawlessness because of the lack of accountability people had if they were not tied to a stationary group (Tuan, 1975). Drivers are connected to this morality, in that the popular image still persists of them as irresponsible wanderers. In many of my interviews, truck stop employees expressed their apprehensions before working there because of the reputations these businesses had for being dangerous (Akins, 2008; Ball, 2008; Mary, 2008). Some of the illegal

activity found in truck stops is directly tied to the morality of mobility. For example, illegal drugs are used by truckers to stay awake because of the demands of driving and prostitution has a market because of loneliness on the road.

Mobility is also associated with another type of morality embodied by the expansionist idea of American history that correlates freedom and liberty with movement (Cresswell, 1996). “Mobility is often portrayed as the central geographical fact of American life, one that distinguishes Euro-Americans from their European ancestors” (Cresswell, 2001, p. 19). In this sense, truck drivers are remnants of this quest to conquer the frontier. In any given week, a driver might travel to both coasts, crisscross the country, and experience all of the natural and cultural wonders that are to be seen. The truck stop participates in this same morality in the sense that these businesses similarly blanket the country.

Mobility also has social implications for drivers. Cresswell has written that postmodern nomads are unsocial beings, but I disagree in the context of the modern driver (1996, p. 53). Drivers may appear unsocial because of their mobility, but actually build many social relationships despite the restrictions of their jobs. Sedentary people build social networks easily because they can be returned to day after day. Long-haul drivers do not have this advantage, of course, and the solitary nature of their occupation forces them to form social relationships anyway they can. This may be with a truck-stop employee who they see on a semiregular basis or a brief encounter with another driver while eating dinner. These relationships may not be as complex as those formed by people in place, but they exist nonetheless.

Modern lifestyles and placelessness has been associated with a lack of community (Entrikin, 1991). The mobility of drivers does not prevent them from forming communities. Although people perhaps are not recognized in these communities as individuals, they are still

included because of their association with the job. Just as members of any other community are held to certain social standards, drivers are the same at truck stops because they identify with other drivers and thus conform to a certain persona. In fact, the pressures arguably are greater there than if you were more familiar with your neighbors and able to be found in only a single place. Geographer Tim Cresswell has written that “the concept of ‘roots’ connects types of people to particular places” (Cresswell, 2001, p. 16). Roots in the trucking community, not necessarily in location, are what connect drivers. In this sense, it can be said that social relations are the place, not the physical environment. Place is more about attachment to people than the physical landscape (Relph, 1976). It is the function, not the form of the truck stop that is place.

Shaping of Place by People and People by Place

When studying place, a balance must exist between subjective and objective, between theories and individual experiences (Entrikin, 1991). Each individual truck stop adds to the cumulative picture of the meaning of the group, just as does each driver’s experience. When the specific and the general are brought together, a better picture of the truck stop emerges. In the study of place, this enables a balance to be struck between “nomothetic generalizations” and “factual inventories” (Entrikin, 1991, p. 109). This is how the many different truck stops in many different places can be looked at as related. They share a common identity that is directly tied to the driver despite the differences between the places themselves. Relph has claimed that this identity of place is comprised of three things: physical features or appearances, observable activities and functions, and meanings and symbols (Relph, 1976, p. 61).

Although the physical appearances of truck stops differ from place to place, large parking lots filled with trucks are a common identification. Observable activities and functions center on

the driver: filling up with fuel, grabbing a bite to eat, buying supplies, and using the restroom or shower. Some of these functions are performed by motorists as well, but only long-haul drivers have a need for all of these functions. Finally, the driver is the prominent, identifying symbol of the truck stop. The very name of the place links itself to the driver, conjuring up images of fuel desks, showers, lunch counters, and tacky souvenirs. All these items center on and rely on the interaction of the driver with the business.

Truck stops are simultaneously places separate from drivers and ones made up of their experiences (Entrikin, 1991). Like life in general, although we live in place and are a part of place, that place is still created by outside forces. The function of truck stops shows how those spaces were built to cater to the needs of drivers. Although drivers did not design and build these establishments, over time, their experiences have dictated changes. Examples include the availability of showers, creation of truckers' lounges, the presence of garages onsite, and the creation of fuel desks to deal with diesel purchases. Such spaces are separate from the drivers in that they are parts of the truck stop; they are there for driver use, but still a physical part of the building itself.

The drivers have also shaped truck stops without having any affect on its physical form. Entrikin writes about two parts of the concept of place: objects in relation to each other and as the "meaningful context of human action" (Entrikin, 1991, p. 10). It is the community that the truckers have formed through their interactions with the truck-stop employees and other drivers that makes up this context. In this way, the people create meaning. When looking at long-haul drivers' sense of place, then, the individual forms of the truck stops are less important than how the drivers interact with the facilities and people there.

Insider/Outsider

Truck stops allow mingling between the general public and professional drivers. Here drivers are no longer behind the wheel, raised up above motorists on the road to be seen as intimidating, frustrating, and/or awe inspiring. In the truck stop, these two worlds coexist. Both groups are cognizant of this fact and the reality gives the truck stop an insider/outsider dichotomy that is experienced differently by each group.

Both truckers and general motorists have traditionally felt that the truck stop was the driver's domain. The specialized lingo, the country-western music, the items for sale, and the services offered all pointed to the driver as the top of the local social hierarchy or, as a theorist has put it: "Individual images [of place] have been and are being constantly socialized through the use of common languages, symbols, and experiences" (Relph, 1976, p. 57).

A large parking lot means that truckers are welcome and the main focus of the business. "Truckers-only" sections in restaurants alert local residents that, although they may spend time at that truck stop, truckers still get preferential treatment. It is the sense of the trucker as insider that creates the collective image of the truck stop. It is his presence that makes the truck stop what it is, thus identifying a place that represents belonging or not belonging. It creates separate spaces for different groups.

The driver's ease in navigating the truck stop compared to that of the motorist demonstrates a difference in power and feeling of belonging. Even though many chain truck stops are now oriented more towards the motorist in some ways, it is still the driver who looks most at ease. The showers and the truckers' lounge represent places that, although not strictly forbidden, are essentially off-limits to the motorist. Drivers shape the meaning of the truck stop through this display of power and belonging. "Places take on the meanings of events and objects

that occur there, and their descriptions are fused with human goals, values, and intentions” (Entrikin, 1991, p. 11).

Power relations are slightly different at truck stops that have a large local customer base. This is most common at smaller, independent truck stops but is not strictly limited to them. In such cases, local people have more developed relationships with the truck-stop employees, which is most evident in the restaurant. The struggle over belonging is most evident when customers would explicitly call employees by name in order to prove their right to belong there. The control over who most belongs is prevalent, but it is the bond that the local resident and the driver share over the amount of time they both spend in the truck stop compared to the motorist that is the hallmark of their interactions together.

Although I believe that most outsiders would agree that truck drivers are still the insiders in today’s truck stops, many long-haul drivers feel that the chain truck stops are shifting their focus towards the motorist. A common complaint from drivers in my interviews and on various message boards is that these truck stops no longer focus on driver needs (Chris, 2008; Norm, 2008; Ben, 2008). The change in name from “truck stops” to “travel plazas” illustrates this shift in focus, and owners are open in their intentions to change the image (Charter, 1997).

The physical form of newer truck stops illustrates the change in focus. Many operations I visited had the truck parking in the back, usually with a separate entrance and driveway for semis. Sometimes a separate entrance for the drivers also existed in the back. If a driver was only fueling up, he could stop at the fuel desk and then go out the rear doors without ever seeing a motorist in the front. By keeping motorists and drivers separate, I believe the designers of these newer truck stops are trying to make motorists feel safer and more comfortable. If such

motorists no longer feel like outsiders, they will be more likely to visit the particular truck stops that create this new image over others that still feel like traditional truck stops.

Drivers have noticed the increase in motorists at “their” establishments (Chris, 2008). Although this may be simply because more people are on the road today, it could also indicate that these new truck stops have been successful in changing their insider/outsider image. The perception is more important than the actual facts, and some drivers no longer consider themselves the insiders and motorists the outsiders. This perception is not yet the majority view, but it is significant and growing.

Truck stops represent places that are made for drivers and by them. Interactions with various actors there produce meaning. Although different meanings exist, I have focused in this study on the experiences and perceptions of long-haul drivers. These concerns are both applied (as when examining the economic success of chains over independents), and theoretical (as when understanding how place is socially constructed). Together the ideas form a collective sense of place of truck stops, one that sometimes contradicts the popular idea of the trucker’s relationship with these enterprises.

Other studies, as well as my observations, interviews, and mapping, show how chain truck stops dominate the industry. Independents, the source of the iconic image of the truck stop, are falling out of favor because of the convenience the chains offer. These newer facilities are larger, have less wait time, and attract repeat customers with brand recognition. The clustering of the chains at interstate exits supports the economic theory that branding can pull businesses away from neighboring competitors, regardless of price differences.

My interviews revealed the three most motivating factors in influencing drivers' choices of where to stop are fuel, food, and restrooms. Some drivers prefer meals at independent truck stops, but overall the chains had more advantages in each of the categories. Supplementary services, such as truckers' lounges and repair shops, were not nearly as important in influencing drivers' choices as one might assume. Some unique services are offered, however, that attempt to make the truck stop feel more like a home than a business.

Although it could be argued that the eradication of unique, independent businesses leads to placelessness, the social spaces that form in all truck stops refute this idea. Social spaces are as much a part of place as are geometric spaces. Drivers have attached various meanings to truck stops, including ideas about home, mobility, and insider/outsider power relations. Some of these meanings are derived from iconic images that the general public has constructed of truck stops and drivers. However, both groups are much more heterogeneous than these images would suggest.

Truck stops are a form of home for long-haul drivers, a concept that makes us rethink traditional notions of home. Mobility necessitates this projection of home, and conjures different moralities. A dialectic of hero and vagrant is synthesized upon truck stops. It is a place associated with unlawful activity, as well as where casual motorists can interact on the same level with the driver. This interaction stages the spatial representation of insider versus outsider, in which two groups are vying for a place in the truck stop. Truck stops exemplify modern spaces in the embodiment of mobility. No other group is as closely tied to these places as the long-haul driver because the production of space is so closely tied to their social relations. Examining how these social relations construct the space of the truck stop allows us to better understand how modern space is produced and reproduced.

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Table 1. Facilities Offered by Truck Stops according to the National Trucker's Service *Truck Stop Directory* in 1974 (Wyckoff and Maister, 1975).

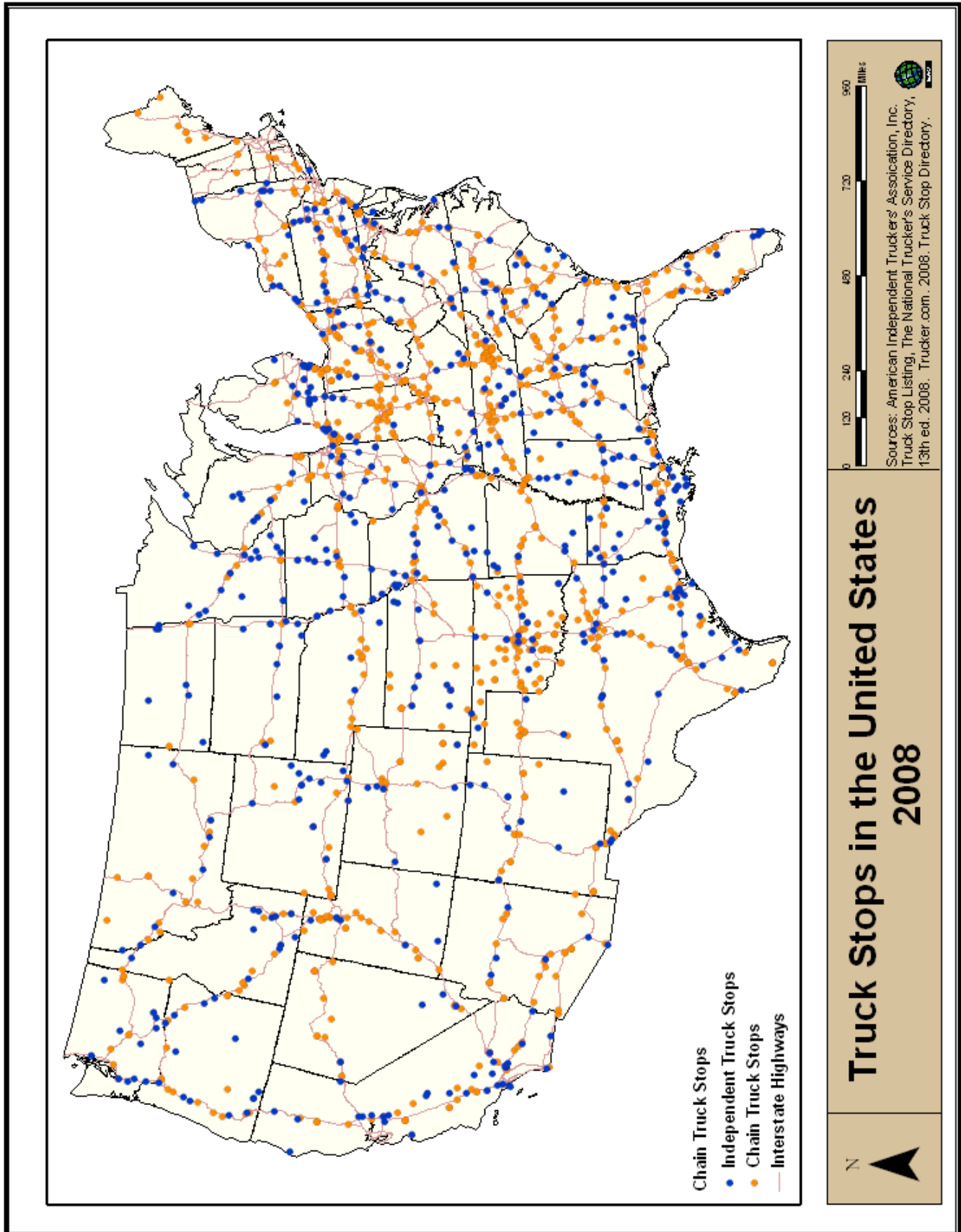
Basic Facilities:

1. Diesel fuel
2. Tire repair facilities
3. Adequate parking
4. Clean restrooms
5. Open accounts for acceptable firms
6. Restaurant on premises or nearby
7. Sleeping facilities on premises or nearby

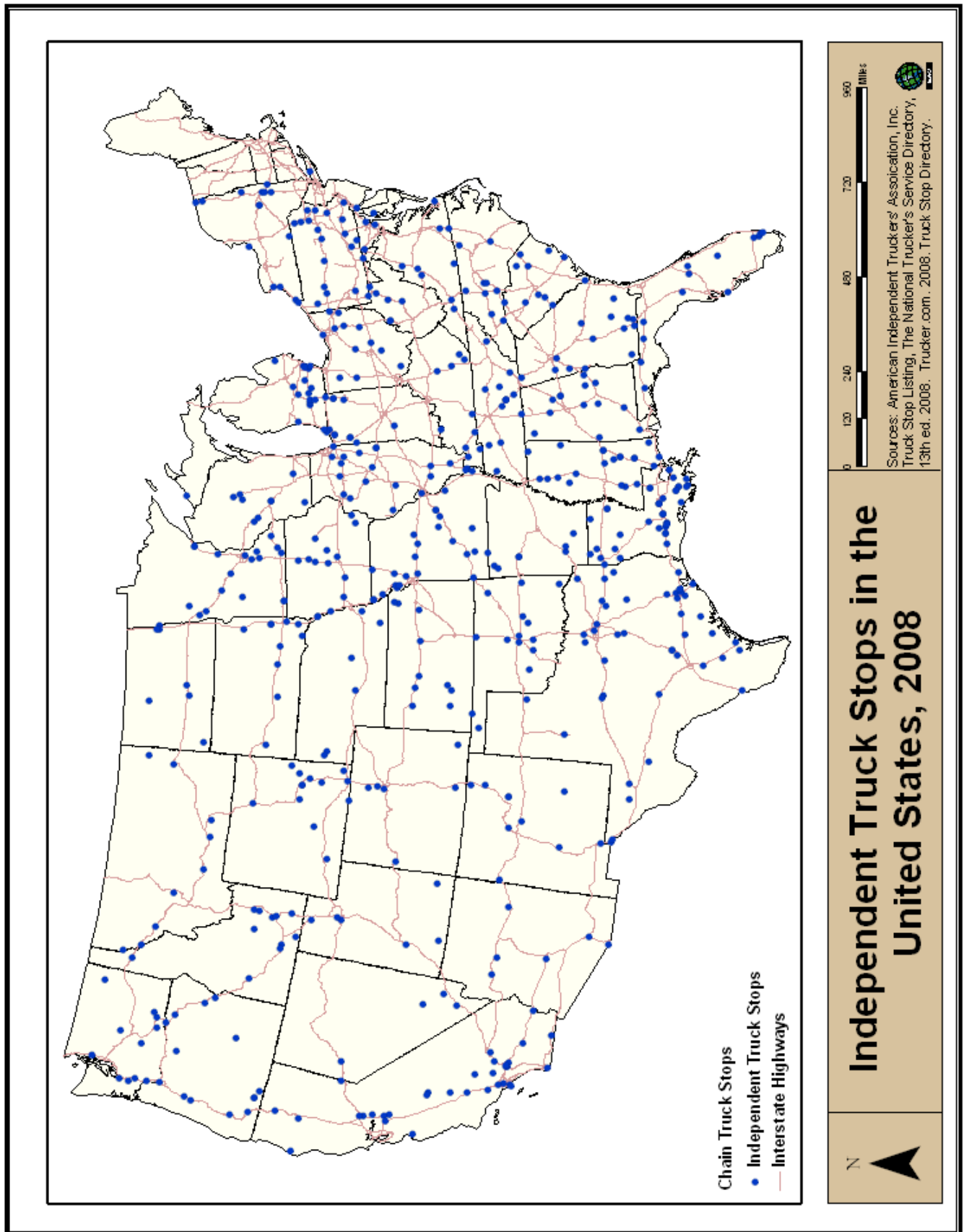
Additional Facilities:

1. Ticket printer pumps
2. Truck lubrication
3. Truck washing
4. Steam cleaning
5. Wrecker
6. Scales
7. Propane
8. Tire bank
9. Warehouse
10. Broker
11. Western Union
12. Teletype
13. Garage: a-on premise; b-nearby
14. Mechanic: a-on premises; b-nearby
15. Ice: a-dry; b-wet; c-blown
16. Showers
17. Shaving facilities
18. TV lounge
19. Barber shop
20. Laundry service
21. Merchandise & clothing for sale
22. Cattle rest within five miles
23. Facsimile transmission service:
 - a-transceiver (fax-check);
 - b-instacom (insta/check);
 - c-graphic scanning (dial-a-check);
 - d-comdata (comcheck)

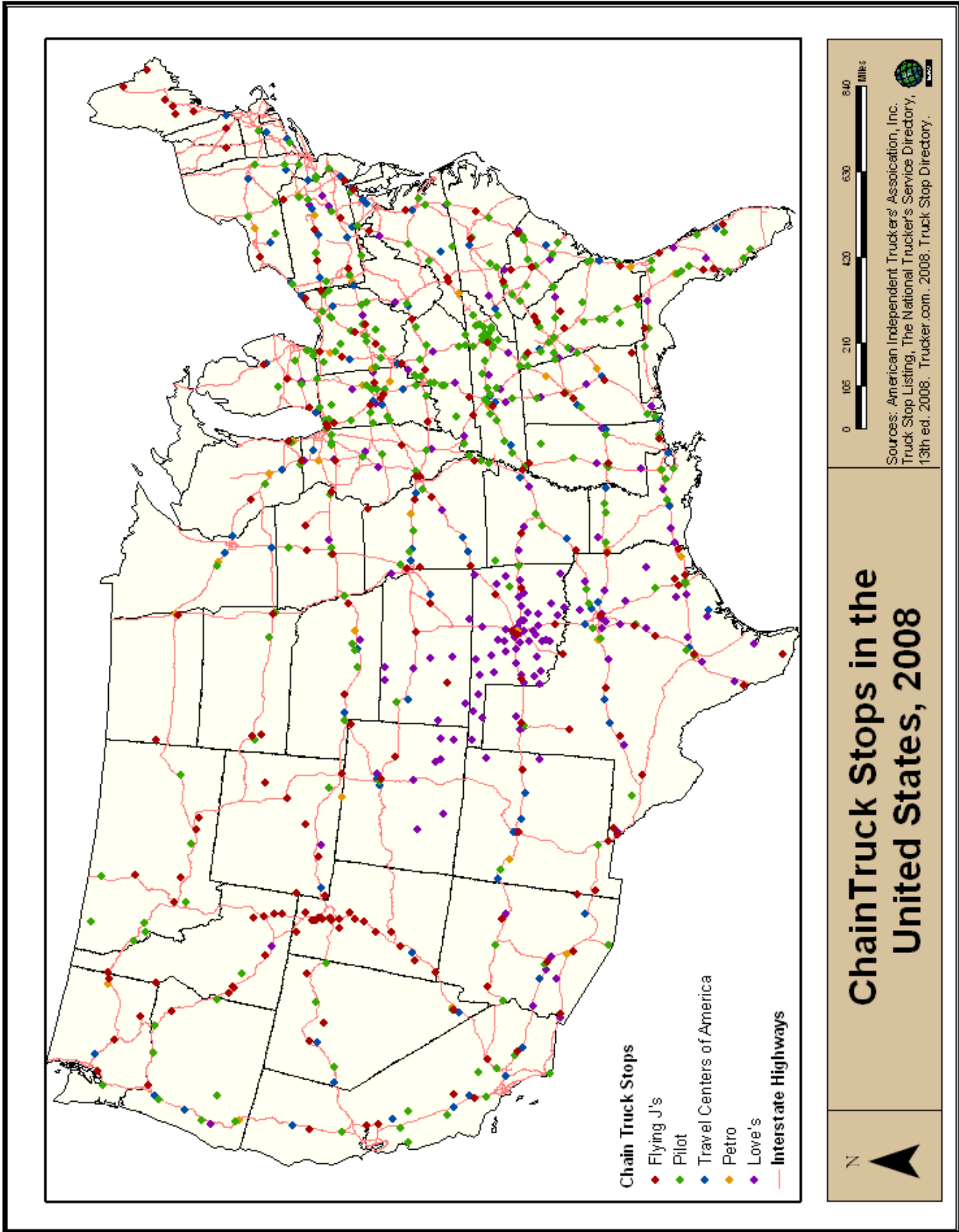
Map 1. Chain and Independent Truck Stops in the United States, 2008.



Map 2. Independent Truck Stops in the United States, 2008.



Map 3. Chain Truck Stops in the United States, 2008.



Map 4. Chain and Independent Truck Stops in the Southern United States, 2008.

