WHITE PAPER

Iran Impact on the Trucking Industry

What It Means for an Investor or Fleet Owner

How fuel spikes, shipping disruption, and freight-market volatility reshape risk, margins, and opportunity in U.S. trucking

April 2026

Market Commentary • Not Investment Advice

A. Executive Summary

The U.S. trucking industry is confronting its most severe fuel-cost disruption since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022—and in some respects, this one is worse. The 2026 Iran conflict, which began with U.S. and Israeli strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities on February 28, has effectively closed the Strait of Hormuz, suspending roughly 20% of global crude oil and liquefied natural gas supply. Brent crude, which sat near $65 per barrel in mid-2025, has surged past $100 and briefly touched $119 per barrel. The International Energy Agency has called this the largest supply disruption in the history of the global oil market.

For trucking, the transmission mechanism is immediate and painful: higher crude means higher diesel. The national average retail diesel price has climbed from approximately $3.62 per gallon a year ago to $5.43 per gallon as of April 1, 2026—a 50% year-over-year increase. In California, diesel has reached $6.43 per gallon. FTR Transportation Intelligence recorded the largest one-week diesel price increase ever, at 96.2 cents per gallon, eclipsing even the March 2022 spike following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

This fuel shock is landing on a trucking industry that was already at an inflection point. The 2022–2025 freight recession—widely described by multi-decade veterans as the worst downturn in trucking history—eliminated thousands of small carriers and owner-operators. Capacity has contracted to multi-year lows across all three major equipment types (dry van, reefer, and flatbed). Spot rates, which bottomed near $1.65 per mile in November 2025, had already begun recovering to roughly $2.01 per mile by February 2026, and the contract-to-spot spread had narrowed to just $0.11 per mile.

The diesel surge is accelerating this capacity tightening. DAT Freight & Analytics reports that available truck postings across all three equipment types fell to their lowest Week 13 counts in at least ten years of data. ACT Research estimates that diesel costs have added $0.25–$0.30 per mile to carrier operating expenses in recent weeks. Carriers that survived the freight recession on thin margins now face a sudden spike in their largest variable cost—right as conditions were supposed to improve.

The critical divide is between operators who can recover fuel costs and those who cannot. Large carriers with contract freight and automatic fuel surcharge clauses—names like J.B. Hunt, Schneider, and Werner—are substantially insulated. Their surcharges adjust weekly to the Department of Energy's published diesel price, covering the majority of fuel-cost increases. Small fleets and independent owner-operators on the spot market typically receive no formal fuel surcharge. Industry analysts estimate that small operators are recovering, at best, half of their incremental fuel costs through rate negotiation. The rest comes straight out of margin.

For investors, the picture is nuanced. This is not a market that uniformly punishes trucking assets. Instead, it is a market that accelerates a Darwinian separation between well-managed, well-capitalized operations and marginal ones. Fleets with strong customer contracts, disciplined dispatch, above-average fuel efficiency, and adequate working capital are positioned not only to survive but to capture market share as weaker competitors park trucks or exit

entirely. Fleets without those advantages face severe cash-flow pressure and, in many cases, the risk of failure.

The core investor takeaway is this: the Iran conflict does not make trucking a bad investment. It makes sloppy trucking a dangerous investment and disciplined trucking a more valuable one. For investors with the ability to underwrite fleet quality—management capability, contract structure, cost controls, and capital reserves—this environment creates opportunity. For investors relying on passive exposure to generic capacity, it creates risk.

B. Why Iran Matters to U.S. Trucking

The connection between an armed conflict in the Middle East and a trucking company's profit margin in Ohio may not be immediately obvious, but the chain of causation is short and direct.

Oil Comes First

Iran controls territory on one side of the Strait of Hormuz—the narrow waterway through which approximately 20% of the world's crude oil and a significant share of global LNG supply transit. When the conflict began in late February 2026, Iran moved to restrict tanker traffic through the Strait, and retaliatory strikes on regional energy infrastructure forced Gulf producers to curtail output and suspend exports. Goldman Sachs Research estimates that the risk premium alone has added roughly $14 per barrel to oil prices, and a full, sustained closure could reduce global oil flows by approximately 11 million barrels per day after accounting for pipeline alternatives and strategic reserve releases.

Oil Drives Diesel

Crude oil is the primary input for diesel fuel production. When crude rises, diesel rises, typically with a lag of one to two weeks and sometimes with an amplifying effect depending on refinery utilization and regional inventory conditions. The current conflict has pushed the national average retail diesel price from $3.62 per gallon a year ago to $5.43 per gallon—a jump that has occurred in a matter of weeks rather than months.

Diesel Drives Trucking Margins

Fuel is the second-largest operating cost in trucking, typically comprising 20–25% of total cost per mile according to the American Trucking Research Institute. Unlike labor (the largest cost), fuel prices can change by 40–60% in a matter of weeks. A $1.00-per-gallon increase in diesel, at an average fleet fuel economy of 6.5 miles per gallon, adds approximately $0.15 per mile to operating costs. Over 100,000 miles per truck per year, that translates to roughly $15,000 in additional annual operating expense per truck—a figure that can erase operating profit for a marginal carrier.

Ocean Shipping Disruption Touches Domestic Freight

The Strait of Hormuz closure does not only affect fuel prices. It disrupts global container shipping, reroutes vessels, increases transit times, and creates unpredictable surges in import volumes at U.S. ports as backlogs clear. For truckers serving port drayage, intermodal, or import-distribution lanes, this creates both demand distortion and operational inefficiency—loads arriving in bunches, chassis shortages, and congested container yards.

Geopolitical Risk Becomes a Fleet-Management Issue

When diesel jumps 50% in a few weeks, it is not a story for the foreign-policy desk. It is a P&L event. Fleet owners must immediately reassess route profitability, fuel-purchasing strategy, surcharge recovery, customer pricing, driver pay stability, and cash flow adequacy. Investors must reassess whether their fleets have the management capability and financial resilience to operate in a high-cost, volatile environment. This is why Iran is a trucking story.

C. Immediate Effects on the Trucking Industry

1. Diesel Price Spikes and Margin Compression

The diesel price increase from $3.62 to $5.43 per gallon (a 50% year-over-year increase as of April 1, 2026) is the most impactful immediate effect. For a truck burning approximately 15,000 gallons per year, the incremental fuel cost is approximately $27,000 per truck annually at current prices—assuming no change in miles driven. For a 10-truck fleet, that is $270,000 in additional annual fuel expense. Operating ratios, which were already stretched for many carriers after the prolonged freight recession, are being pushed well above 100% for operators who cannot raise rates quickly enough.

2. Fuel Surcharge Behavior by Brokers and Shippers

Fuel surcharge recovery is the single most important variable separating carriers that survive fuel spikes from those that do not. In the contract market, most large shippers and third-party logistics providers (3PLs) use fuel surcharge schedules tied to the DOE's weekly retail diesel price. These schedules typically assume fuel efficiency of 6.5–7.0 miles per gallon and begin surcharging above an embedded base fuel cost of $1.00–$1.50 per gallon. For carriers with contract freight, surcharge recovery can approach 80–95% of incremental fuel costs, depending on the quality of the surcharge table and the carrier's actual fuel efficiency. In the spot market, the picture is far less favorable. Spot rates are generally quoted all-in, with no separate fuel surcharge. While spot rates have risen from roughly $2.01 per mile in February to higher levels in March, industry analysts note that the rate increases have not kept pace with the magnitude of the diesel spike. DAT's principal analyst estimates that small operators are lucky to recover half of their additional fuel costs through spot-rate negotiation.

3. Spot Market Versus Contract Market Implications

The spot-contract dynamic has shifted meaningfully. Coming into 2026, the contract-to-spot spread had already compressed to about $0.11 per mile as the freight market rebalanced. The diesel spike is likely to further compress or even invert this spread, as spot rates rise sharply in response to tightening capacity and fuel costs, while contract rates adjust more slowly through quarterly or annual renegotiation cycles. Carriers locked into below-market contract rates without adequate fuel surcharges face margin erosion. Carriers with access to the spot market may benefit from rising rates—but only if their operations are efficient enough to remain profitable at current diesel prices.

4. Cash Flow Pressure on Small Fleets and Owner-Operators

Cash flow, not profitability on a per-load basis, is what kills small trucking companies during fuel spikes. Diesel must be purchased daily, but freight invoices are typically paid on 30–45-day terms. When diesel jumps $1.80 per gallon in a matter of weeks, a five-truck fleet faces an immediate cash outlay increase of roughly $1,400 per week per truck—$7,000 per week for the fleet—long before revised rate increases flow through in receivables. Factoring companies

(which advance payment on freight invoices at a discount) become critical lifelines, but their fees compound the cost pressure.

5. Equipment Repositioning and Routing Inefficiencies

Rising fuel costs magnify the cost of deadhead miles (empty return trips) and suboptimal routing. A carrier that was tolerating 15% deadhead miles at $3.60 diesel may find that those empty miles are now consuming an additional $3,500 per truck per year at $5.40 diesel. Smart dispatch—optimizing loaded-mile ratios, triangulating freight, and avoiding long-distance repositioning moves—becomes significantly more valuable in a high-fuel environment. Fleets with sophisticated dispatch technology and strong broker or shipper relationships for backhaul freight have a measurable cost advantage.

6. Impact by Equipment Type

The fuel impact is not uniform across equipment types. Refrigerated (reefer) units face an amplified burden because they consume diesel for both traction and temperature-control units, effectively increasing total fuel consumption by 15–25% compared to dry vans on the same lanes. Flatbed operators benefit from the fact that flatbed spot rates have risen in 12 of the past 13 weeks and are at their highest level since August 2022, providing better rate cover for fuel increases. Dry van capacity, the largest segment, has tightened significantly, with truck postings at 10-year lows. Auto-hauling carriers face additional exposure because vehicle production and distribution volumes are sensitive to macroeconomic conditions, and rising fuel costs add to consumer vehicle prices. Final-mile and last-mile delivery services, which operate shorter routes with more stops, may see proportionally lower fuel-cost increases per delivery but face margin pressure from fixed delivery pricing structures.

D. Investor View: Who Wins, Who Gets Hurt

Fleet Type	Fuel Recovery	Pricing Power	Cash Resilience	Overall Risk
Owner-Operators	Very Low	Very Low	Very Low	**HIGHEST**
Small Fleets (1–10)	Low–Medium	Low	Low	**HIGH**
Mid-Size Fleets	Medium–High	Medium	Medium	**MODERATE**
Large Carriers	High	High	High	**LOWER**
Turn-Key / Managed	Varies	Medium–High	Medium	**MODERATE**

Independent Owner-Operators

Most exposed. They buy fuel at retail, negotiate rates individually, have no leverage with shippers, and operate on razor-thin margins. Many are on the spot market where fuel surcharges do not exist as a separate line item. The prolonged freight recession already drained reserves. The diesel spike could force many to park trucks or exit permanently, which is exactly what the capacity data is beginning to show.

Small Fleets (1–10 Trucks)

Vulnerable but not uniformly so. Those with dedicated or contract freight and negotiated fuel surcharges fare meaningfully better than those running primarily spot. The differentiator is management sophistication: fleets with fuel-card programs, dispatch optimization, and customer relationships that allow them to pass through costs will survive. Those operating reactively are at high risk.

Mid-Size Fleets

Better positioned. They generally have formal fuel surcharge programs, some fuel-purchasing leverage, and the ability to shift capacity between lanes. However, they may be locked into contract rates negotiated before the spike and face lag in renegotiation. Those with mixed spot-contract portfolios can redirect capacity to higher-paying spot freight during the transition.

Large Asset-Based Carriers

Best insulated. J.B. Hunt, Schneider, Werner, and similar carriers operate with automatic fuel surcharge mechanisms, fuel hedging programs, high fleet fuel efficiency, and significant working capital reserves. They also have the scale to negotiate fuel purchasing at or near wholesale. Rising fuel costs can actually benefit large carriers by forcing marginal competitors out, tightening capacity further, and strengthening the pricing environment for their contract renewals.

Turn-Key or Managed Fleet Investment Models

Risk depends entirely on the quality of the management layer. Investors in well-managed, turn-key fleet operations benefit from professional dispatch, fuel management, and customer diversification. Investors in poorly managed or overly leveraged models face the same downside

as small fleets. Due diligence on the operating partner’s fuel strategy, surcharge recovery rate, and contract mix is essential.

E. SWOT Analysis

Owning or Investing in a Trucking Fleet During Iran-Driven Energy Volatility:

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
• Trucking remains essential—freight must move regardless of fuel prices • Capacity contraction following the 3-year freight recession favors surviving carriers • Fuel surcharges on contract freight provide a built-in recovery mechanism • Rising rates improve revenue per truck per week for well-positioned fleets • Asset values for late-model, fuel-efficient equipment are holding or rising • Barriers to entry increase during volatility, reducing new competitor formation	• Fuel is the largest variable cost and cannot be fully controlled • Cash-flow lag between fuel purchase and freight-receivable collection creates liquidity risk • Small operators lack fuel-purchasing scale and surcharge negotiating power • Equipment financing costs remain elevated with higher interest rates • Driver retention costs rise when profitability is uncertain • Spot-market operators are exposed to rate-fuel timing mismatches
OPPORTUNITIES	**THREATS**
• Market-share capture as weaker competitors exit or park trucks • Spot rate increases may outpace fuel cost increases in specific lanes • Acquisition of distressed assets (trucks, customer books) at favorable prices • Contract renegotiation leverage improves as capacity tightens • Specialized freight (reefer, hazmat, flatbed) commands premium rates during disruption • Import-surge freight at ports creates high-value drayage and transload demand • Investors can enter at better valuations as marginal operators seek capital or exit	• Sustained oil prices above $120/bbl could push diesel beyond $7.00 in some regions • Macroeconomic slowdown or recession could reduce freight volumes while costs remain high • Shipper resistance to surcharge pass-throughs could create a recovery gap • Conflict escalation could trigger broader economic disruption beyond energy markets • Insurance costs may increase due to broader economic and supply-chain uncertainty • Political or regulatory responses (fuel rationing, speed restrictions) could constrain operations • Prolonged conflict could accelerate shipper mode-shifting to rail where possible

F. Scenario Analysis

The following three scenarios are designed to help investors and fleet owners plan across a range of outcomes. As of early April 2026, the situation remains highly fluid.

Scenario 1: Conflict De-escalates Quickly

In this scenario, a diplomatic resolution or ceasefire is reached within weeks. The Strait of Hormuz reopens, though some Gulf production facilities require weeks to months to restart. Oil prices retrace toward $70–80 per barrel. Diesel drops back toward $3.80–$4.20 per gallon by mid-summer.

- **Diesel direction:** Declining. National average returns toward $4.00 by Q3 2026.
- **Freight rates:** Spot rates may soften slightly but remain above 2025 levels due to structural capacity tightness.
- **Broker/shipper behavior:** Shippers push for rate relief. Brokers resist, citing ongoing capacity constraints.
- **Investor risk level:** LOW. Quick de-escalation validates pre-conflict recovery thesis.
- **Fleet owner strategy:** Lock in contract renewals at current rates while leverage is high. Rebuild cash reserves.
- **Passive investor strategy:** Favorable entry point. Recovery fundamentals intact plus pricing momentum.

Scenario 2: Conflict Remains Prolonged but Contained

In this scenario, hostilities continue for several months. The Strait remains restricted but some oil flows resume via pipeline alternatives and strategic reserve releases. Oil oscillates between $90 and $120 per barrel. Diesel stabilizes in the $4.80–$5.50 range nationally.

- **Diesel direction:** Elevated but stabilizing. Regional variation remains significant.
- **Freight rates:** Continued upward pressure. Contract renegotiations favor carriers. Spot rates remain high.
- **Broker/shipper behavior:** Shippers accept higher rates and surcharges to secure capacity. Broker margins compress.
- **Investor risk level:** MODERATE. Operating costs are high, but so is pricing. Execution quality determines outcomes.
- **Fleet owner strategy:** Focus on fuel efficiency, surcharge discipline, and customer retention. Avoid overleveraging for expansion. Right-size fleet to profitable freight only.

- **Passive investor strategy:** Underwrite carefully. Invest only in fleets with demonstrated surcharge recovery, strong contracts, and adequate working capital. Avoid single-truck or purely spot-dependent operations.

Scenario 3: Conflict Escalates Further

In this scenario, the conflict widens, energy infrastructure sustains significant damage, and the Strait of Hormuz remains closed for months. Oil surges past $150 per barrel. Diesel exceeds $7.00 per gallon nationally. Macroeconomic recession becomes likely. Freight volumes decline even as costs remain extreme.

- **Diesel direction:** Severely elevated. $7.00+ nationally, $8.00+ in California and the Northeast.
- **Freight rates:** Rates spike initially but may decline if a recession reduces freight demand. The worst outcome is rising costs on falling volumes.
- **Broker/shipper behavior:** Shippers cut discretionary shipping. Brokers face margin collapse. Load volumes decline.
- **Investor risk level:** HIGH. Even well-run fleets face pressure. Capital preservation becomes the priority.
- **Fleet owner strategy:** Defensive posture. Park unprofitable trucks. Focus exclusively on contract freight with strong surcharges. Reduce overhead. Preserve cash.
- **Passive investor strategy:** Wait. Do not deploy new capital into trucking until the macro picture stabilizes. Protect existing positions by ensuring management teams are taking defensive action.

G. Operational Strategies for Fleet Owners

Fuel Surcharge Negotiation

Review every active customer contract for fuel surcharge language. Ensure surcharge tables are current and indexed to the DOE weekly diesel price. Renegotiate any contracts with embedded fuel assumptions below $3.50 per gallon. Where possible, move from flat surcharge percentages to sliding scales that provide better coverage at higher price points.

Customer Mix Adjustments

Shift freight allocation toward customers offering the best surcharge recovery and shortest payment terms. Reduce exposure to customers who refuse surcharges or pay on 45–60-day terms. In a high-fuel environment, payment speed matters as much as rate level.

Dispatch and Lane Optimization

Every deadhead mile now costs approximately $0.83 in fuel alone (at $5.43 diesel and 6.5 mpg), up from $0.56 a year ago. Invest in dispatch optimization, backhaul planning, and load-matching technology. Target loaded-mile percentages above 85%. Avoid long-haul repositioning moves unless rates compensate fully for fuel and driver time.

Fleet Right-Sizing

Park trucks that cannot be run profitably at current diesel prices. This is not defeat—it is discipline. Running unprofitable trucks burns cash and erodes the fleet's overall financial position. Better to operate eight profitable trucks than ten money-losing ones.

Fuel Card and Purchasing Strategy

Use fuel-card networks that provide discounts at high-volume truck stops. Monitor regional price differentials and route through lower-cost fuel corridors where practical. Consider locking in fuel prices through forward-purchase agreements if the fleet is large enough to negotiate them.

Preventive Maintenance Discipline

Fuel efficiency degrades with deferred maintenance. Properly inflated tires, clean air filters, current engine tuning, and aerodynamic devices (trailer skirts, boat tails) can improve fuel economy by 5–10%. At $5.43 per gallon, a 7% improvement in fuel economy on a truck running 120,000 miles per year saves approximately $6,200 annually.

Factoring and Working-Capital Planning

If cash flow is strained by the gap between fuel purchases and receivable collections, use invoice factoring selectively. Factoring fees of 2–3% are expensive but far less costly than missing fuel payments or payroll. Establish factoring lines before they are desperately needed. Also consider fuel-advance programs offered by some factoring companies and load boards.

Contract Freight Versus Spot Freight Mix

In a rising-rate, high-fuel environment, the optimal mix shifts depending on fleet capabilities. Contract freight with strong surcharges provides stability and predictable cash flow. Spot freight offers higher rates but no guaranteed surcharge recovery. A 60/40 or 70/30 contract-to-spot mix gives stability with upside exposure. Purely spot-dependent operations are the most vulnerable.

Driver Retention and Payroll Stability

Drivers are the most critical and hardest-to-replace asset. In volatile markets, maintaining consistent pay and home time is essential to prevent turnover. Driver replacement costs range from $5,000 to $12,000 per driver. Investing in retention during fuel volatility is far cheaper than recruiting replacements in a tight labor market.

Protecting Cash Flow

Build a minimum cash reserve of two weeks of operating expenses per truck. This means fuel, insurance, payments, and driver pay. At current diesel prices, a 10-truck fleet should target a minimum cash reserve of approximately $80,000–$100,000. This reserve provides a buffer against rate delays, fuel spikes, and unexpected maintenance.

H. Investor Strategies

For investors evaluating trucking as an investment during geopolitical turmoil, the following framework applies:

What to Ask Before Buying Into a Fleet

- What percentage of revenue is contract freight versus spot freight?
- What is the fleet's average fuel surcharge recovery rate as a percentage of actual fuel cost increases?
- What is the fleet's current operating ratio, and what was it at different diesel price levels?
- What is the average age and fuel efficiency of the equipment?
- What are the fleet's top five customers, and how concentrated is revenue?
- What is the fleet's average days sales outstanding (DSO) on receivables?
- Does the fleet use factoring, and if so, at what cost?
- What is the driver turnover rate, and what is the current driver pipeline?

Key Numbers That Matter Most

- **Revenue per truck per week:** A healthy for-hire truckload operation should target $4,500–$6,500 per truck per week at current rate levels. Below $4,000 is a red flag.
- **Operating ratio:** Below 95% is strong. Between 95% and 100% is survivable. Above 100% means the fleet is burning cash.
- **Fuel cost as a percentage of revenue:** Should be 25–30% at current diesel prices for an efficient fleet. Above 35% indicates poor fuel efficiency, excessive deadhead, or inadequate surcharge recovery.
- **Loaded-mile percentage:** Above 85% indicates good dispatch. Below 80% indicates significant inefficiency.

KPIs to Stress-Test

Run the fleet's P&L at three diesel price points: $4.50, $5.50, and $7.00 per gallon. If the fleet is unprofitable at $5.50, it is not investable in the current environment. If it is profitable at $5.50 but fails at $7.00, understand the escalation scenario and ensure there is a defensive plan.

Contract Terms That Reduce Downside

- Fuel surcharge clauses indexed to DOE weekly diesel with no cap
- Quarterly rate-reopener provisions tied to market benchmarks
- Minimum volume commitments from shippers
- Payment terms of 30 days or less
- Accessorial charges for detention, layover, and fuel-stop fees

Evaluating Management Quality

In a volatile market, management quality is the single most important variable. Look for operators who can articulate their fuel strategy, show current surcharge recovery data, demonstrate load-optimization practices, and explain their cash-management approach. Operators who respond to fuel questions with vague reassurances rather than specific numbers are a warning sign.

What Makes a Fleet Investable During Fuel Volatility

- Demonstrated fuel surcharge recovery rate above 80%
- Contract freight comprising at least 50% of revenue
- Operating ratio below 98% at current diesel prices
- Equipment average age under 4 years with above-average fuel efficiency
- Cash reserves covering at least 2 weeks of operating expenses
- Diversified customer base with no single customer exceeding 25% of revenue
- Strong driver retention rate (below 50% annual turnover for the for-hire market)

Red Flags

- Fleet is 100% spot-market dependent with no fuel surcharge agreements
- Equipment is older than 6 years with below-average fuel economy
- Operating ratio exceeds 100% at current diesel prices
- Owner cannot explain fuel strategy or surcharge recovery rate
- Revenue is concentrated in one or two customers
- Fleet is highly leveraged with balloon payments or tight covenants
- No cash reserve and full reliance on factoring for weekly operations

I. Key Metrics to Watch

- **DOE weekly retail diesel price:** The single most-watched number. Published every Monday by the EIA.
- **Brent crude and WTI crude oil prices:** Leading indicators for diesel. The spread between crude and diesel (the crack spread) indicates refining margin and potential for diesel-specific price pressure.
- **Average fuel surcharge recovery:** Track what percentage of diesel increases are being recovered through surcharges. Industry-wide, this is estimated at 60–70% for contract carriers and 30–50% for spot carriers.
- **Operating ratio:** Revenue minus operating expenses, expressed as a percentage of revenue. Below 95% is profitable. Above 100% means the operation is losing money.
- **Revenue per truck per week (RPTW):** The primary measure of fleet utilization and pricing effectiveness.
- **Loaded miles versus deadhead miles:** The ratio of revenue-generating miles to empty repositioning miles. Higher loaded-mile ratios indicate better dispatch.
- **Days sales outstanding (DSO):** How quickly the fleet collects on invoices. Lower DSO means faster cash conversion and less reliance on factoring.
- **Maintenance cost per mile:** Rising maintenance costs on older equipment compound fuel-cost pressure.
- **Spot rate versus contract rate spread:** Indicates market direction. Compression or inversion signals a tightening market.
- **DAT load-to-truck ratio:** Measures relative supply and demand. Currently at four-year highs, indicating tight capacity.
- **Tender rejection rates:** The percentage of contracted loads that carriers refuse. Rising rejection rates indicate capacity scarcity and give carriers leverage.
- **Import volume indicators:** Container volume data from major ports, particularly Los Angeles, Long Beach, Savannah, and the East Coast, signals changes in freight demand.
- **Carrier authority revocations and new applications:** Track net carrier formation. Rising revocations and declining new applications signal further capacity exit.

J. Recommended Graphs and Visuals for the Downloadable PDF

Chart 1: Oil Price Trend vs. Diesel Price Trend

Chart type: Dual-axis line chart. Data: Brent crude ($/barrel) on the left axis and U.S. national average retail diesel ($/gallon) on the right axis, weekly data from January 2025 through April 2026. Insight: Shows the direct correlation between crude oil movements and diesel at the pump, with the transmission lag and the amplification effect visible during the March 2026 spike.

Caption: Crude oil and diesel prices move in tandem, but diesel spikes can lag crude by 1–2 weeks and are amplified by refinery margins and regional supply conditions.

Chart 2: Diesel Price vs. Estimated Cost-Per-Mile Increase

Chart type: Bar chart or stacked area chart. Data: Diesel price per gallon at $3.50, $4.00, $4.50, $5.00, $5.50, $6.00, and $7.00, mapped to estimated additional cost per mile (assuming 6.5 mpg baseline). Insight: Illustrates how quickly fuel costs per mile escalate at higher diesel prices and why even modest diesel increases have outsized margin impact.

Caption: At $5.43 diesel, fuel cost alone approaches $0.84 per mile—roughly double the cost at $3.50 per gallon.

Chart 3: Spot Rates vs. Contract Rates Under Fuel Stress

Chart type: Dual-line chart. Data: National average dry van spot rate and contract rate per mile, weekly, from October 2025 through March 2026. Insight: Shows the compression of the contract-to-spot spread from $0.39 to $0.11 per mile, and the acceleration of spot-rate increases beginning in March.

Caption: The contract-to-spot spread has compressed dramatically, signaling a tightening market where carriers increasingly have leverage.

Chart 4: Fuel Surcharge Recovery Gap by Fleet Type

Chart type: Horizontal bar chart. Data: Estimated fuel surcharge recovery rate (as % of incremental fuel cost) for large carriers (85–95%), mid-size fleets (60–80%), small fleets (40–60%), and owner-operators (20–45%). Insight: Visualizes the core vulnerability gap—small operators absorb disproportionate fuel cost increases.

Caption: The fuel surcharge gap is the primary driver of small-fleet failure during diesel spikes. Operators recovering less than 50% of fuel increases face acute survival risk.

Chart 5: Scenario Matrix

Chart type: Three-column comparison table or infographic. Data: Summarized scenario parameters (diesel direction, rate behavior, investor risk) for de-escalation, prolonged conflict, and escalation. Insight: Gives investors a quick-reference framework for decision-making across possible outcomes.

Caption: Scenario planning allows investors to size risk and calibrate strategy regardless of which outcome materializes.

Chart 6: SWOT Summary Graphic

Chart type: Four-quadrant matrix with color coding (green, red, blue, gray). Data: The SWOT analysis content from Section E. Insight: Provides a scannable, at-a-glance summary of strategic position for investor presentations and fleet-owner planning sessions.

Caption: The SWOT framework shows that the current environment creates both clear risks and actionable opportunities for disciplined operators and informed investors.

K. Final Conclusion

The Iran conflict has injected severe energy volatility into an already-transitioning U.S. trucking market. Diesel prices have risen 50% year over year. The Strait of Hormuz remains restricted. Global crude oil prices are elevated and uncertain. The macroeconomic outlook has deteriorated. For trucking investors and fleet owners, this is a moment that demands both clear thinking and decisive action.

But the core question every investor should ask is not whether this is a bad time to be in trucking. It is whether this environment separates good trucking from bad trucking—and it does, decisively.

Operators with strong fuel surcharge recovery, contract freight, disciplined dispatch, efficient equipment, and adequate working capital will not only survive this period—they will come out stronger. Capacity that has exited during three years of freight recession is not coming back quickly. Capacity that exits now due to diesel stress will further tighten the market. The operators who remain will have better pricing power, better customer relationships, and better competitive positioning.

Investors who understand this dynamic can use the current environment to identify high-quality trucking assets at more favorable entry points, underwrite management teams that have demonstrated resilience, and build positions in an industry that is structurally tightening.

The Iran conflict does not make trucking a worse investment. It rewards better operators and better investors. The question is not whether to invest in trucking during fuel volatility. The question is whether you are investing in the right fleet, with the right management, at the right terms.

For serious investors and fleet owners, the answer is clear: discipline wins. The operators who control costs, recover fuel, manage cash, and serve customers well will define the next chapter of this industry. Everyone else is playing a game they are likely to lose.

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— End of White Paper —