

Trucking Adds 4,500 New Jobs in April, Continuing 7-Month Upward Trend

By Michele Fuetsch
Staff Reporter

The trucking industry added 4,500 new jobs in April, reflecting a national hiring trend in which job growth surged by an unexpected 244,000, according to the latest report from the Labor Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics.

In April, trucking employed 0.35% more workers than in March — 1,272,900 compared with 1,268,400.

The new trucking job numbers for April were not as robust as in February, when 10,000 new trucking jobs were added, but the hiring last month continued a seven-month trend in which year-over-year job growth has strengthened.

Year-over-year growth compares monthly job numbers with numbers for the same month the previous year. Last year in April, for example, total jobs in the trucking industry were down 3%, compared with April 2009.

This April, the total number of trucking jobs was up 2.9%, compared with jobs held in April 2010 — a year-over-year growth percentage not seen since September 2006, said Bob Costello, chief economist for American Trucking Associations.

"If you look at a year-over year change in the numbers, it's accelerating," Costello added, ticking off growth percentages for the past seven months.

Until last fall, trucking was in long-term negative job growth, but in October, the trend reversed, beginning with a slight 0.4% increase in year-over-year growth, Costello said.

Today, trucking's 2.9% gain year-over-year for April outshines other sectors of the economy.

"It's a heck of a lot higher than total nonfarm [employment], which has grown about 1% year-over-year," Costello said. "So, trucking employment is growing faster than employment for the overall economy."

Nationally, overall job gains in April outdid the expectations of economists who predicted in a Bloomberg News survey that about 185,000 new jobs would be created.

Despite the gain in jobs, however, the unemployment rate rose to 9% in April from 8.8% in March, BLS reported.

While job opportunities may have expanded in the private sector, public-sector employees lost jobs as state and local governments, still reeling from the effects of the recession on tax revenue, cut 24,000 jobs.

Other numbers on the unemployment side also are "disconcerting," said Chris Christopher Jr., senior economist with IHS Global Insight, Lexington, Mass.

"The initial [unemployment] claims have sort of binned up quite a bit in the last couple weeks of April," said Christopher, who tracks consumer spending and consumer confidence along with

transportation-sector payrolls. Trucking's job numbers are closely tied to consumer demand, he said, and in that respect, the national economy is sending conflicting signals.

There are welcome strengths in

manufacturing, Christopher said, but unemployment claims are up, food prices have been rising and fuel prices are still high, all of which are affecting spending and the consumer's mood.

"It has changed quite a bit over

the last two months; it's at more depressed levels," he said. "So, it's just a mixed bag, and things are not as good as we thought they would be at the beginning of the year."

But whatever negative signs economists are seeing, Christopher said, are not enough to "derail" the recovery.

Easter spending helped buoy sales indexes, he said, pointing to the International Council of Shop-

ping Centers, which reported that its sales increased 8.5% this April over sales in April 2010, "the highest year-over-year gain since March 2010."

The higher fuel and food prices that caused a "nose dive" in consumer confidence in March, Christopher said, have been offset by the latest payroll tax cut Congress granted American workers as part of a budget compromise with the Obama administration.

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