

2026 WORKFORCE EXCELLENCE AWARD

NOMINATION FORM

Name of Community or Workforce Board:	Hillsboro Economic Development Corporation
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Community Population:	8,257
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PROGRAM SUBMITTED:

Hill College Specialized Transportation Safety & Cybersecurity (STSC) Workforce Initiative

PROJECT PERIOD:

January 1 - December 31, 2025 (ongoing initiative; measurable 2025 results provided)

START DATE:

October 2024 (Truck Driving Academy launch and Frontier Support Logistics partnership)

NOTE:

This program has not been previously submitted for a TEDC Workforce Excellence Award.

Hill College Specialized Transportation Safety & Cybersecurity (STSC) Workforce Initiative

Nominated by the Hillsboro Economic Development Corporation

Overview

No college in North America offers a credentialed training program for specialized transportation: the oversize, overweight, and over-dimensional loads critical to energy, infrastructure, and construction. In 2024, Hill College and the Hillsboro Economic Development Corporation set out to change that. Together with 15 employer partners, they launched the Hill College Truck Driving Academy as the CDL onramp for a broader initiative to build the Specialized Transportation Safety & Cybersecurity (STSC) Workforce Center on Hill College's 51-acre I-35 frontage property in Hillsboro.

Calendar year 2025 was the foundation year. Hill College deployed CDL training, driving simulator technology funded by a Texas Workforce Commission Jobs and Education for Texans (JET) grant, trained 22 students through simulator-integrated CDL instruction, built a dual-campus operating model across Hill County and Johnson County, appointed a dedicated Academy Director, and expanded its employer and advisory network to 15 active participants. These 2025 investments established the CDL pipeline and institutional infrastructure required to support the next phase: in January 2026, Hill College launched its first specialized transportation credentials, including Heavy Haul Driver (LCV I and LCV II), Steerperson, P/EVO, and Route Surveyor certificates. Upcoming cohorts are booked solid, with a target of approximately 80 students trained in 2026.

I. Innovativeness

The STSC initiative represents a fundamentally new approach to transportation workforce development, one that addresses a national industry gap no other institution has tackled.

First-of-Its-Kind Credentialed Program. The U.S. trucking industry generates \$906 billion in annual revenue and moves 72.7% of all domestic freight. The specialized transportation segment commands premium wages (\$85K-\$120K+ for company drivers, \$250K-\$500K+ for owner-operators), yet no college anywhere in North America has offered a formal, credentialed training program for these operators. Hill College is building that program: five stackable certificates aligned with SC&RA industry standards, FMCSA regulations, and NCCER frameworks, all building toward an Associate of Applied Science in Specialized Transportation and Operations Management. The certificate pathway begins with a 210-hour CDL program and advances through Heavy Haul Driver (including Longer Combination Vehicle I and II, and Load Securement), Steerperson, P/EVO High Pole, P/EVO Rear, and Route Surveyor. Each certificate is independently employment-ready with full national portability.

Employer-Embedded Design. Rather than training students and hoping employers hire them, the Academy was built around direct employer partnerships. Fifteen employer partners are co-designing curriculum, committing capital, and guaranteeing hiring pipelines. Over \$1 million in combined cash, in-kind investment, and equipment assets is committed alongside Hill College's \$2.2 million land contribution and \$1 million institutional cash investment.

Simulator-Integrated Instruction. JET grant-funded CDL driving simulators provide structured, repeatable practice for hazard recognition, vehicle handling, and readiness progression before behind-the-wheel training. This improves safety outcomes and reduces early-stage attrition, a critical innovation given that the industry absorbed \$4.1 billion in mega-verdict jury awards in 2024 and insurance premiums have risen 47% since 2014. Insurers now require verified, credentialed training, making formal credentials not just workforce qualifications but litigation defenses and underwriting assets.

Dual-Campus Regional Access. The Academy was designed for multi-campus delivery, extending CDL training and specialized transportation certifications into Johnson County, one of the fastest-

growing counties in Texas (population 210,000+, 3.6% annual growth), where no local CDL training capacity previously existed.

II. Transferability

The STSC model is designed for replication at every level. The employer-embedded partnership structure, the dual-campus delivery system, the simulator integration approach, and the advisory board framework can each be adopted independently by other communities facing workforce shortages in transportation or other high-demand sectors.

The deeper transferability lies in the operating model itself: a community college partners with its local EDC and regional employers to identify a national workforce gap, builds a credentialed training program around guaranteed employment pathways, and uses state and federal grants to fund equipment and capacity. Hill College is already applying this same framework to skilled trades, healthcare, and cybersecurity programs. The lessons learned during the 2025 implementation, particularly around instructor capacity planning, multi-campus coordination, and managing partner pipeline variability, are documented and available to peer institutions.

The specialized transportation credentials themselves are nationally portable and aligned with federal (FMCSA) and industry (SC&RA, NCCER) standards, making the curriculum directly transferable to any community college in any state that sits along a major freight corridor.

III. Community Commitment and Leverage

This initiative demonstrates extraordinary community commitment through multi-sector collaboration and resource leverage at a scale unusual for a rural community of 3,400 residents.

Public-Private Partnership. The Hillsboro EDC and Hill College serve as co-champions. The EDC provides community coordination, employer recruitment, and economic development alignment. Hill College provides instructional capacity, accreditation infrastructure, and 51 acres of I-35 frontage land (appraised at \$2.2 million) conveyed by the Hill College Foundation specifically for this project. Combined with \$1 million in institutional cash and over \$1 million in employer partner commitments, more than \$4 million in capital is committed before any federal grant dollars arrive.

Federal and State Investment Leverage. The TWC JET grant funded simulator equipment for the Academy. Hill College has applied for a \$5 million EDA Disaster Supplemental grant (DR-4781-TX) to construct the full STSC Workforce Center: a 16,000 square-foot training facility and 12-acre specialized transportation range on the Hillsboro I-35 property. An \$800,000 TRUE grant from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board supports the cybersecurity SOC Analyst program within the Center. A \$3.5-4.8 million DOL Skilled Trades Academy grant application (May 2026 deadline) builds on the same employer-embedded model.

Employer Coalition. Fifteen active employer partners, representing hundreds of millions in annual revenue and tens of thousands of active driver positions, are designing curriculum, committing equipment, providing instructor expertise, sponsoring tuition, and guaranteeing hiring pathways. Partners include Universal Logistics Holdings (NYSE: ULH, \$1.85B revenue), Bennett Transportation Group, Landstar, GE Vernova, Skeeter Emergency Vehicles, Ace Doran Hauling & Rigging, and nine others. This is an industry-driven initiative housed at a college, not a college program looking for industry validation.

Intergovernmental Coordination. The initiative coordinates across city (Hillsboro EDC), county (Hill County emergency management co-location in the planned STSC facility), regional (Workforce Solutions, Heart of Texas Council of Governments), and state (TWC, THECB) levels. Hill College's taxing district spans 14 ISDs across a four-county service area.

IV. Measured Objectives

The following measurable results were achieved during January 1 - December 31, 2025:

Individuals Trained:

- 22 unduplicated students completed CDL simulator-integrated training, establishing the CDL onramp that feeds directly into the STSC specialized transportation credential pathway.

Workforce Infrastructure Built:

- Launched the Hill College Truck Driving Academy with a recurring cohort delivery model across two campuses (Hillsboro and Johnson County).
- Deployed CDL driving simulator equipment and integrated it into the instructional sequence for readiness progression before behind-the-wheel training.
- Appointed a dedicated Academy Director (Jeff Vaughan) to provide operational leadership and accountability.
- Built dual-campus operating systems for centralized enrollment, cohort scheduling, simulator access controls, and multi-site coordination.
- Grew the advisory and employer partnership network to 15 active participants across the transportation, energy, and manufacturing sectors.
- Expanded Johnson County delivery capacity, creating regional access to CDL training where none previously existed.

Monetary Investment Leveraged:

- TWC JET grant investment in CDL simulator equipment for the Academy.
- \$5 million EDA Disaster Supplemental grant application submitted for construction of the full STSC Workforce Center (decision expected Q3 2026).
- \$800,000 TRUE grant from THECB secured for the cybersecurity SOC Analyst program.
- Over \$4 million in combined capital committed before federal funding: \$2.2M land (Hill College Foundation), \$1M institutional cash, \$1M+ employer partner investment in equipment, vehicles, instructor expertise, tuition sponsorship, and paid internships.

2026 Acceleration (Early Indicators):

- Launched five specialized transportation certificates in January 2026: Heavy Haul Driver (LCV I, LCV II, Load Securement), Steerperson, P/EVO High Pole, P/EVO Rear, and Route Surveyor.
- Upcoming 2026 cohorts are booked solid with a target of approximately 100 students trained, representing a significant acceleration from the 2025 CDL foundation year.

V. Secondary Benefits

National Industry Impact. The BLS projects 237,600 annual truck driver openings against a shallow, aging driver pool (average age 47-49) with no systematic replacement pipeline for specialized operators. The 2025 CDL foundation and 2026 launch of specialized transportation credentials positions Hillsboro as the only community in North America producing credentialed heavy haul operators, steerpersons, P/EVOs, and route surveyors through a college program.

I-35 Corridor Economic Competitiveness. I-35 carries over 10,000 trucks per day, accounts for 30% of all Texas truck vehicle-miles traveled, and supports \$1.2 trillion in annual USMCA trade. Heavy truck driver job postings in the region grew 71% year-over-year in early 2025. Demand for specialized operators is accelerating under the CHIPS Act, IIJA, and wind/solar buildout. Training these operators locally strengthens the supply chain infrastructure that employers throughout Central Texas depend on.

Johnson County Growth Alignment. Johnson County's population exceeds 210,000 with 3.6% annual growth (Burleson alone has grown 21% since 2020). Hill College currently serves less than 1% of that population. The Academy expands the institution's presence in this high-growth market, converting population growth into workforce development capacity.

Tax Base and Wage Impact. Specialized transportation operators earn \$85K-\$120K+ as company drivers and \$250K-\$500K+ as owner-operators, well above the regional median income. Each trained operator who remains in the community generates sustained tax revenue and household economic activity. The STSC Workforce Center itself, a \$7.3 million facility on 51 acres of I-35 frontage, will become a permanent economic asset for the City of Hillsboro and Hill County.

Model for Broader Workforce Expansion. The employer-embedded model pioneered through the STSC initiative is being replicated across Hill College's workforce portfolio in skilled trades (HVAC, welding, construction), healthcare (CNA, medical assistant), and cybersecurity. The STSC has become the operational proof-of-concept for Hill College's strategic plan targeting 6,500-7,100 students by 2031.