

THE TECHNICIAN SHORTAGE IS A WORKFORCE EMERGENCY

What the auto repair trade looks like in Northwest North Carolina — and what we can do about it.

Prepared by Lucas Underwood, L&N Performance Auto Repair | Vision Northwest North Carolina | Pathways to Employment Panel

12.8 yrs Average age of a U.S. vehicle (record high)	100M+ Lines of code in a modern vehicle	~37,000 Annual U.S. auto tech shortfall (grads vs. need)	9,000 vs 71,000 NC trades/transportation grads vs. annual openings
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THE REALITY ON THE GROUND

- **The car has changed.** Today's vehicle has more lines of code than an F-35 fighter jet, 50–100+ electronic control units, and 90%+ of new vehicles ship with at least one advanced driver-assistance system (ADAS). Diagnostic work is now software work.
- **The workforce is aging out.** The average technician is 40 years old. Retirements are outpacing replacements. BLS projects roughly 70,000 auto-tech openings every year for the next decade.
- **The cost is rising.** Average vehicle repair and maintenance costs rose 43.6% from January 2019 to January 2025 (BLS). Americans will spend \$435 billion on repair and maintenance this year.
- **Rural NC is exposed.** In the High Country WDB region (Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Mitchell, Watauga, Wilkes, Yancey), a working vehicle isn't a luxury — it's how people get to work, to school, to the doctor, and how a region rebuilds after Helene.

THE WAGE STORY WE'RE TELLING WRONG

Public conversation about technician pay lumps every tier into one bucket. That's why "auto mechanic" reads as a low-wage job — it isn't. The trade has tiers, and the upper tiers are skilled, technical, and well-paid.

Tier	What They Do	NC Annual Pay	Public Perception
Porter / Lube Tech	Oil changes, lot prep, basic service	\$28K – \$40K	"Mechanic" — drags the public average down
B-Tech / Mechanic II–III	Brakes, suspension, general repair	\$46K – \$61K	Invisible
A-Tech / Master	Full diagnostics, electrical, drivability	\$67K – \$80K+	Invisible
ADAS / EV / Diesel Specialist	Calibration, hybrid systems, heavy duty	\$80K – \$100K+	Doesn't exist in the public mind

WHAT'S ALREADY WORKING IN NORTH CAROLINA

- **CCC&TI's Automotive Systems Technology program.** The host of this event already runs an advanced automotive program serving Caldwell and Watauga counties. Programs like CCC&TI's are well-positioned to align with emerging frameworks like AVTECC (Advanced Vehicle Technology Education and Credentialing Coalition), which is piloting competency-based credentialing nationally — requiring technicians to demonstrate ADAS, EV, and advanced diagnostic skills hands-on, not pass a written test. That is what modern shops need.
- **NC Automotive Apprenticeship Program (ASTA).** Registered with the NC Department of Labor. Open to high school seniors. Apprentices earn an hourly wage, paid tuition, and graduate with an associate degree, apprentice certification, and Journeyman's Card — at no cost to them. Costs the participating shop nothing beyond ASTA membership.
- **Industry-specific dealer pipelines.** Ford ASSET (Guilford Tech), GM ASEP and Toyota T-Ten (Forsyth Tech), Hendrick Automotive Group apprenticeships, and GCADA Registered Apprenticeship all offer paid, debt-free pathways from high school directly into careers.

WHAT THIS PANEL SHOULD WALK AWAY WITH

- Stop lumping porters and lube techs in with master technicians when we talk about wages publicly. The trade looks like a low-wage job because we describe it that way.
- Tell rural high school students that a debt-free pathway already exists in North Carolina that pays them while they learn and lands them in a \$60K+ career by their early 20s.
- Treat the auto repair shop the way we treat the hospital and the school: as critical regional infrastructure that disasters like Helene depend on.

Sources: S&P Global Mobility (2025); U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics OOH (May 2024); NADA Workforce Initiative; TechForce Foundation 2024 Supply & Demand Report; Auto Care Association 2026 Factbook; AAA Cost of ADAS Repair (2023); NC Department of Commerce; NC Community College System (2026); Salary.com (NC tier data); Alliance for Automotive Innovation; ASTA / NC Automotive Apprenticeship Program; CCC&TI Automotive Systems Technology; AVTECC.