



Asset Tracker Guide

Choosing the
right tracker for
every asset

Four questions for finding the right tracker for every asset in your fleet

Fleets are losing money on missing assets every day. The costs come from replacing the assets themselves and the time spent looking for them.

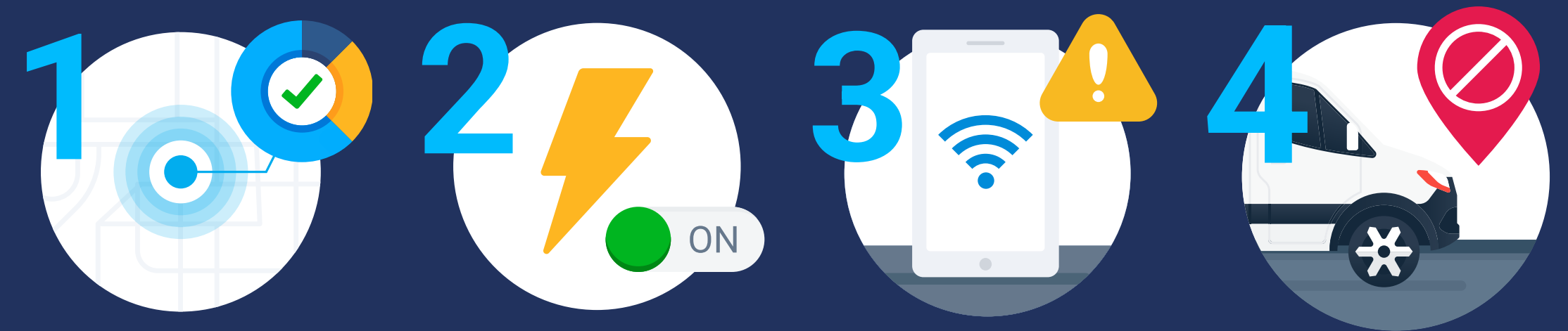
Incorporating asset trackers into a fleet is a strong step towards creating a more efficient and accountable business. However, asset trackers are not a one-size-fits-all solution. Some provide utilization data, others are designed to work in remote areas. Choosing the wrong tracker can be a costly and frustrating mistake.

By equipping every asset with the same tracker, you might end up paying for features that cannot be used, or you could miss out on functionality that impacts your bottom line.

For example, if a fleet manager only chooses a base model, they risk missing out on critical maintenance data that can shorten the lifespan of the asset. Or a customer relationship can be negatively impacted by a billing dispute because an invoice for rental equipment was based on an estimate instead of usage-based data.

Rather than deploying the same tracker across every asset, fleet managers should evaluate what each requires. Avoiding a mismatched solution starts with understanding the asset and its overall purpose before selecting the tracker. The right fit depends on the answer to four key questions:

1. Do you only need location, or could utilization data add value?
2. Is the asset powered or non-powered?
3. Does the asset operate off-grid or in areas with limited cell coverage?
4. Does the asset travel independently from a vehicle?



Each question applies across the fleet, and the combination of answers determines which type of tracker is best suited for each asset.

This guide walks through the questions and helps fleets match the right tracker to the right asset.



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CHAPTER 1

Do you only need location, or could utilization data add value?

Asset trackers are often viewed solely as location devices, but the right tracker can also capture utilization data – operational signals like engine hours, ignition state and runtime that show how an asset is being used, not just where it is.

The question is whether that data drives a decision for each asset. Some require it as a core part of how the business operates – for customer billing, maintenance scheduling or procurement decisions. For others, location is enough.

Examples where utilization data is needed



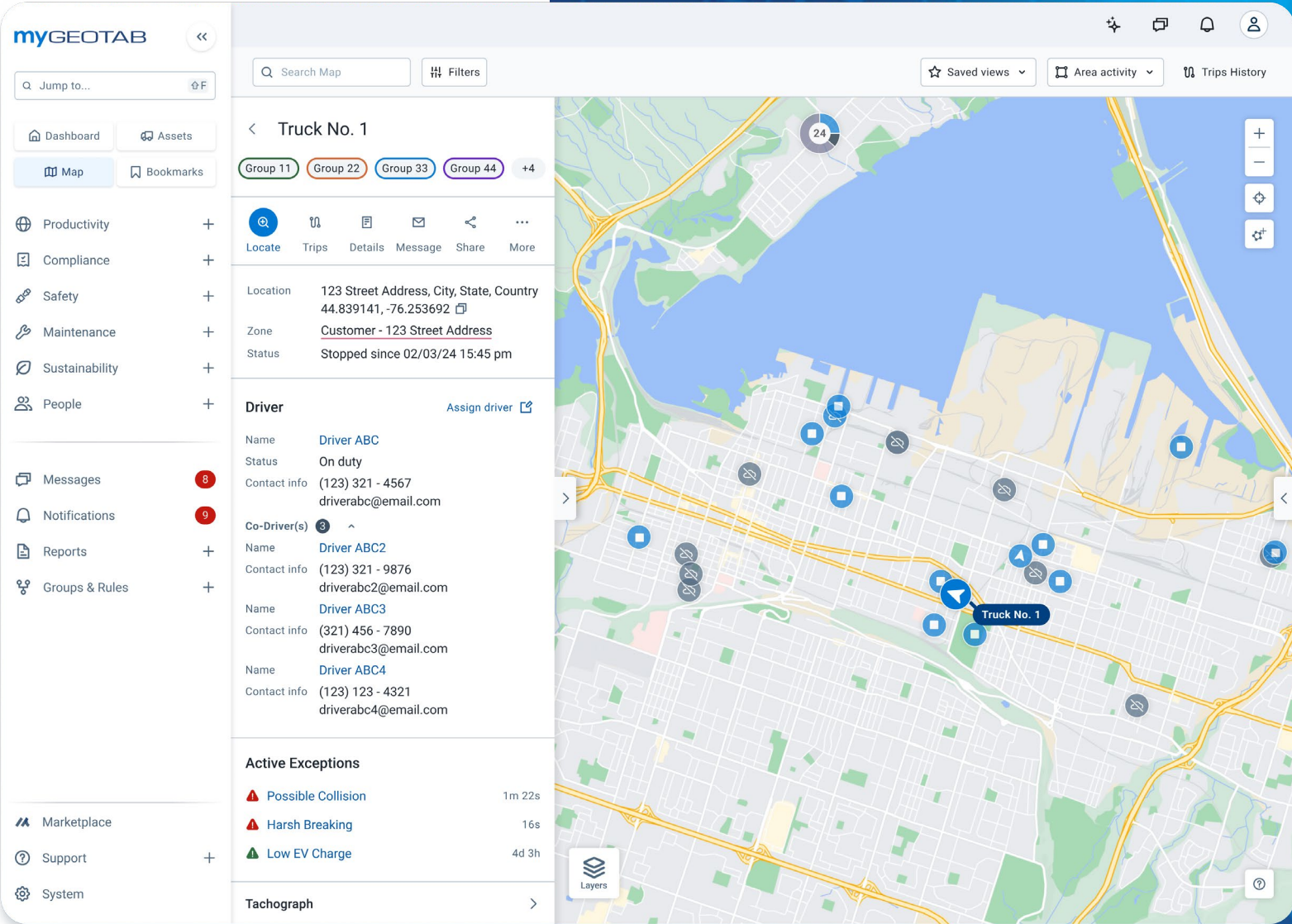
Usage-based billing

Utilization data gives fleets a clear record of how an asset was actually used, which is essential for accurate usage-based billing. It captures key operational signals that reflect real-world usage:

- Virtual hubometer readings document trailer mileage
- Refrigerator unit (reefer) engine hours capture runtime on temperature-controlled units
- Ignition state confirms when powered equipment was operating versus sitting idle

For rental and vocational fleets where revenue depends on asset usage, that level of visibility helps support invoicing and ensures customers are billed accurately.

Without this verified utilization data, fleets must rely on manual readings or estimates. Charges are no longer tied directly to how assets were used, which can result in under-billing or could create friction with customers through disputes.



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Maintenance scheduling

Many fleets service equipment based on a calendar: every 90 days, every six months, etc., regardless of how the asset has been used. The issue with the approach is that an asset's wear doesn't follow a set schedule. For example, a transport trailer on continuous shifts and one that sits idle for weeks can land on the same service date, even though one has done ten times the work of the other.

Utilization data, such as engine hours, closes that gap by tracking how much an asset actually runs and separates active operation from idle time. Service then follows real demand instead of an arbitrary date, shifting maintenance from a fixed schedule to a predictive one built on actual wear.

Without these insights, every service date becomes an assumption, and a miss in either direction carries a cost. Service too early and the fleet incurs unnecessary cost in parts, labor or downtime. Service too late and heavily used equipment risks operating beyond safe limits, increasing the chance of a failure in the field.



Idle asset identification

For powered assets, confirming their location isn't the only thing that matters, fleet managers need to know if it is being used. A rented generator collecting dust at a job site for weeks without being fired up is still accounted for, but it's not producing value. What's worse is that an additional asset might be rented or purchased for another job, even though this one is actually available.

By monitoring utilization data, fleet managers can get accurate reporting from the field. An underutilized asset can be reassigned to a site that needs it or returned to the yard, and a manager unsure whether equipment is free can see what is available instead of guessing.

The cost of getting this wrong is not based on a single asset, but on a pattern that can repeat across the fleet. When managers cannot confirm what is actually free, they make allocation decisions on incomplete information and default to caution. They hoard equipment that is currently available rather than coming up short on a future job. What looks like a prudent precaution is quietly driving up the fleet's operating costs.



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The cost of not having the right data

If it runs, it earns. If it sits, it costs. It’s a simple phrase that will lay the foundation for the answer to this question. If you have a powered asset, a fleet manager should be reviewing its utilization data. Without this capability, they are risking leaving money on the table either by absorbing additional costs or losing future revenue by upsetting customers.

Geotab’s GO Anywhere Plus is an asset tracker that provides comprehensive data, enabling improved operational efficiency, accurate billing and optimized resource allocation. It is the right choice for powered assets where utilization data directly drives revenue, maintenance and resource decisions.

However, if all that is required is location and movement data, the Next Gen GO Anywhere tracker is the more economical choice. This asset tracker was designed for prioritized reliability, while remaining low-cost for a better return on investment.

Example: A carrier fleet operating without utilization data

Trailers live two separate lives: connected to a tractor and moving freight, or sitting in a yard waiting for the next load. A reefer hauling temperature-controlled freight provides a good example of how much visibility a carrier loses without utilization data.

The trailer might be on the road for two days and then sit at a customer’s facility for another day before being picked up. During that time, the carrier has limited visibility into how long the trailer actually ran, when it was released by the receiver or the latest hubometer mileage.

This leads to several issues:

- Detention is difficult to bill for because the carrier cannot prove when the trailer was actually released
- Manual hubometer reads delay billing cycles and leaves room for disputes
- Reefer engine hours are estimated or pulled manually, leading to inaccurate billing on temperature-controlled loads
- If maintenance is scheduled by calendar rather than runtime, service may be performed too early or too late

For a carrier fleet, utilization data connects asset activity to billing, maintenance and dispatch decisions. Without it, teams are forced to rely on assumptions instead of real operating data.



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CHAPTER 2

Is the asset powered or non-powered?

Of the four questions, this one is the most straightforward: how is the tracker going to be powered? A powered asset has its own power source, and the tracker can be wired into it. A tracker on a non-powered asset will rely on battery power alone.

Typical powered and non-powered assets

Example powered assets

- Flatbeds
- Generators
- Compressors
- Welding machines
- Yellow iron (loaders, skid steers, excavators, etc.)

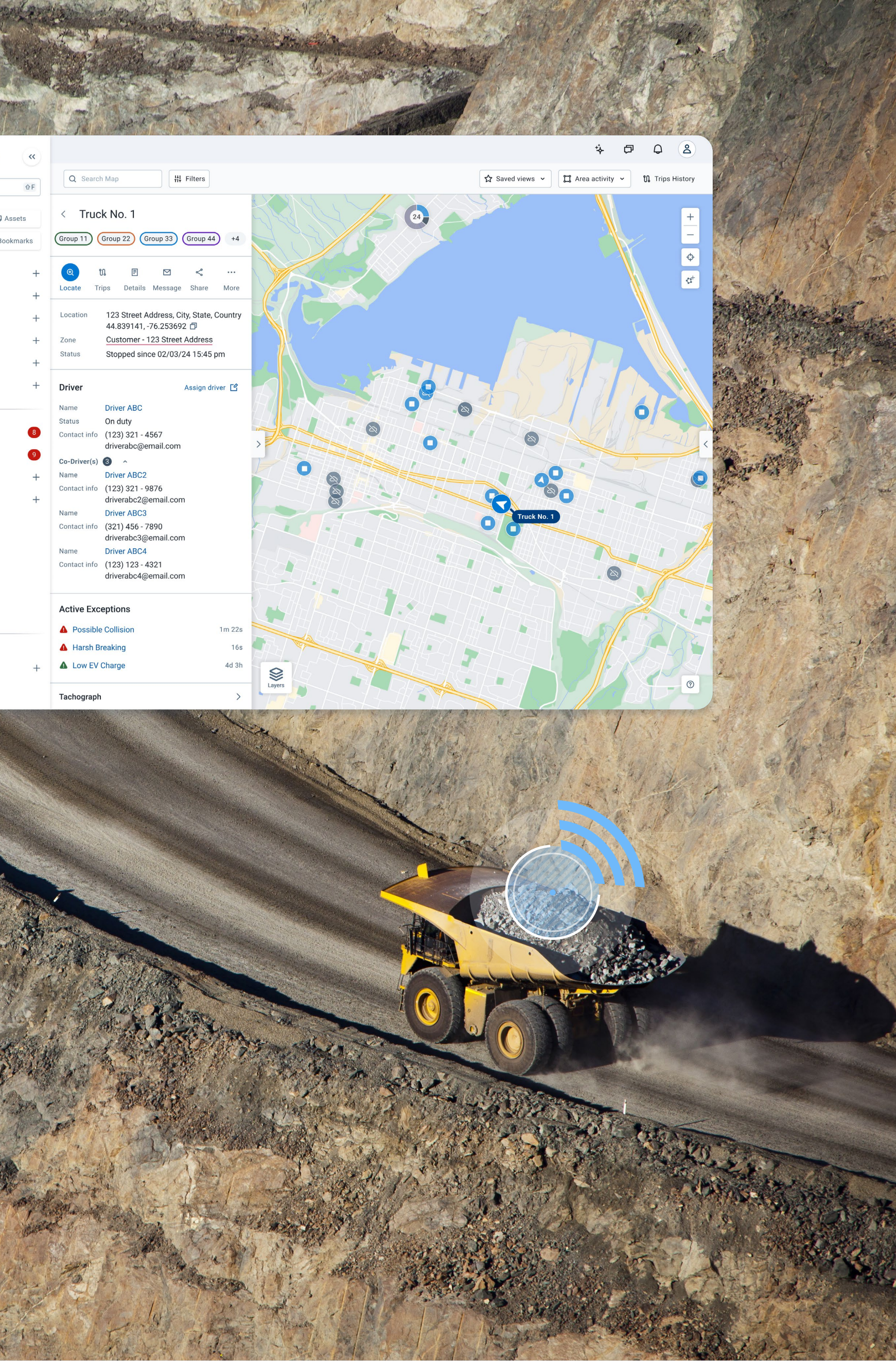
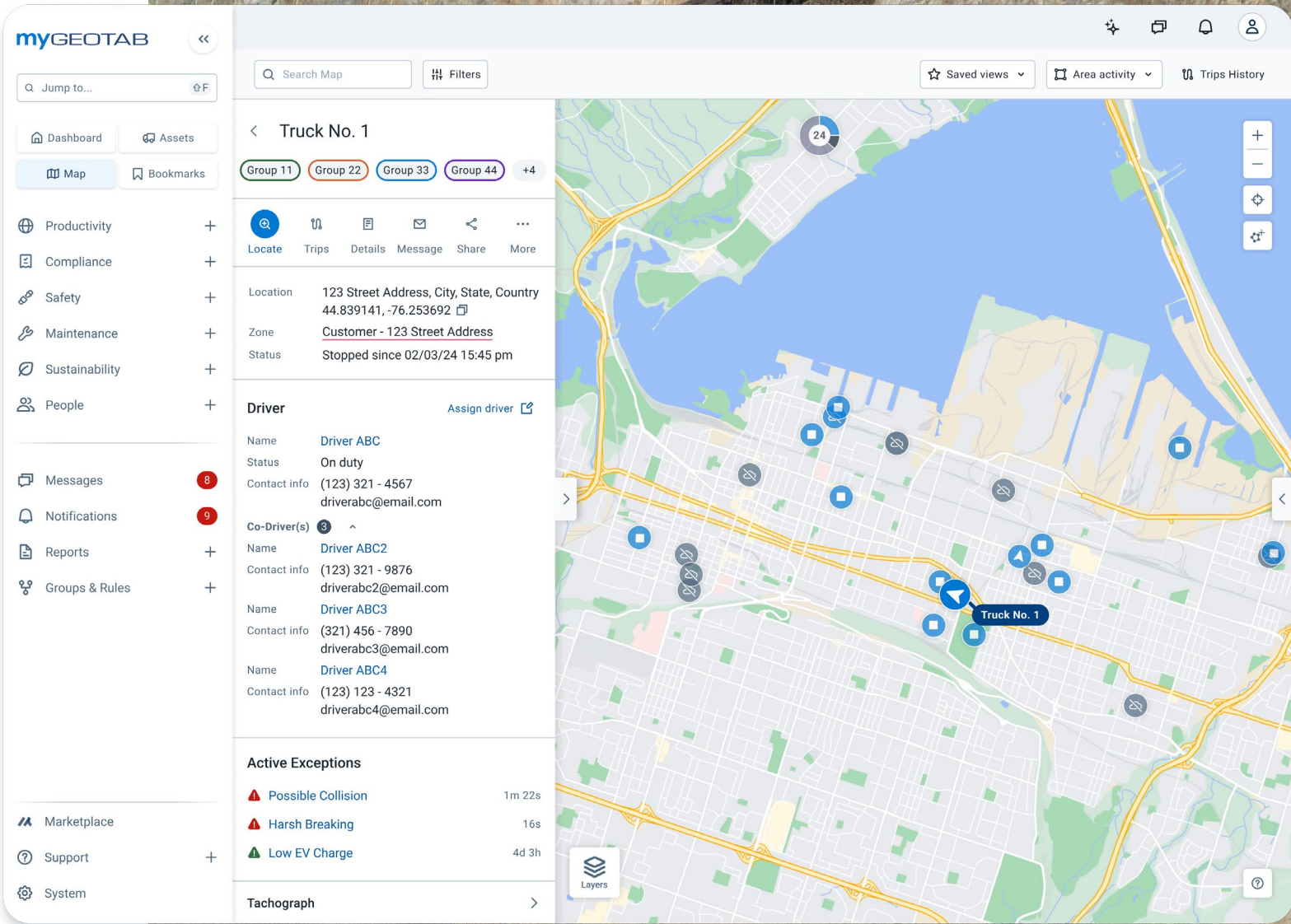
Example non-powered assets

- Dry van trailers
- Roll-off bins
- Temporary fencing or signage

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What is the cost of choosing the wrong asset tracker?

Trackers hardwired into the asset typically cost more because they pull operational data the asset produces while running, like engine hours, ignition state and inferred hubometer readings. This capability is covered in the previous question, though it is still relevant here. These more advanced trackers could be used on a non-powered asset, but you are paying for features that are not applicable. When scaled out across an entire fleet, this results in a significant and unnecessary expense.

Geotab's GO Anywhere Plus offers a hybrid solution for powered assets. The tracker can be wired into the asset for continuous power during operation, then automatically switch to battery power when the asset is not in use. By combining wired connectivity with a field-replaceable battery, it delivers always-on reliability with real-time tracking when powered and dependable backup coverage when it's not.

For non-powered assets, the Next Gen GO Anywhere tracker offers an easy-to-install, cost-effective solution with a battery life of up to 10 years. By attaching one of these trackers, fleets replace manual yard checks or searches with real-time location visibility.

Example: A rental company with a mixed inventory

Rental companies typically manage a mix of powered and non-powered assets in their yards. Generators and yellow iron sit alongside trailers or roll-off bins. Each asset type produces different data and the tracker should match what the asset can report.

A wired tracker on a non-powered asset won't capture engine hours or ignition state since there's no power source to connect to. For a mixed inventory, the right approach is to ask what each asset type produces, then choose the tracker built to capture it.



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CHAPTER 3

Does the asset operate off-grid or in areas with limited cell coverage?

The entire purpose of using an asset tracker is to have visibility. Unfortunately, some fleets find out the hard way that this is easier said than done.

Cellular networks are the default for telematics, but they only cover where the towers reach. The Federal Communications Commission's **broadband deployment** data documents significant rural and remote coverage gaps across the US. When assets operate outside cellular coverage areas, reporting gaps occur, and assets that remain entirely within those areas may have no visibility at all.

Coverage gaps appear in the many places assets are located:

- Remote job sites in the mountains
- Gravel pits and mining roads
- Agricultural fields
- Long-haul routes through rural corridors

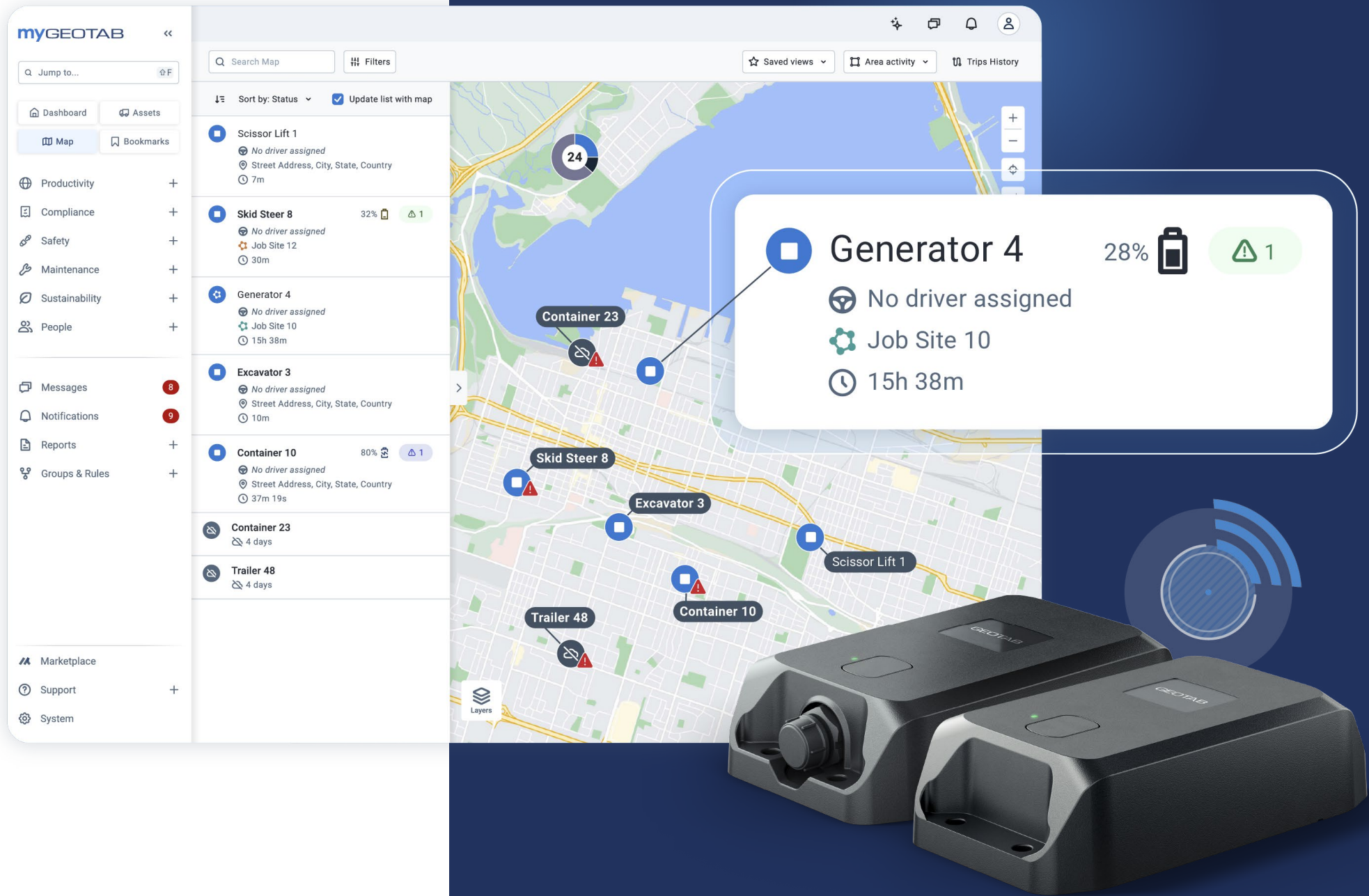
Maintaining visibility with satellite

For assets that will be operating off-grid in remote locations, fleet managers should consider a tracker with satellite capabilities. In addition to the cellular connectivity, GO Anywhere Plus trackers are capable of connecting via satellite* as a fallback in remote locations.

*Satellite connectivity available through select carrier partners.

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The consequences of blind spots

Lost visibility with assets poses a number of different concerns. If theft occurs in a remote area, a fleet manager won't know until someone on the site reports it. By this time, the asset is likely long gone with little hope for recovery. Also, now they need to scramble to replace the equipment and since this is a remote location, it is that much more of a hassle.

These gaps in data additionally present issues in terms of utilization data. If the connection is lost, this can create maintenance and billing issues as the asset's usage isn't being monitored properly.

The worst aspect of all of these costs is the time delay. It could be weeks before a fleet manager becomes aware of an issue, compounding the effect.

Example: The logistics of a vocational fleet working off-grid

Consider a company working in the natural resources sector, such as mining. Due to the logistics of moving assets to these off-grid locations, equipment is often left at the site for extended periods of time.

This creates multiple risks:

- Maintenance schedules for powered assets are not followed because the utilization data did not reach the fleet manager
- Missing or stolen assets are not reported for weeks or until an audit is done
- Costly downtime while waiting for replacement equipment to arrive
- Replacement equipment is more expensive, as getting it to the location has additional costs

Time is at a premium when working in remote locations, which makes any disruption that much more expensive for a fleet. Maintaining visibility is critical to keeping projects on schedule and assets accounted for.



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CHAPTER 4

Does the asset travel independently from a vehicle?

The final thing to consider is whether the asset stays with a vehicle or if it's intentionally left at a job site. This applies to both larger equipment as well as small tools, and in both scenarios, fleet managers need to have visibility. However, the level of visibility required will differ greatly and the cost needs to match the need.

When an asset operates independently from a vehicle, the case for giving it its own tracker is obvious. What is often overlooked are the assets that are expected to stay with the vehicle. The assumption is that the vehicle's tracker is enough. In reality, equipment gets moved, borrowed or left behind. None of these common incidents are captured by the other tracker.

Example assets that stay with the vehicle

- Drills or small tools
- Ladders
- Portable generators

Example assets that are left on site

- Trailers parked at customer sites
- Heavy equipment (woodchippers, backhoes, etc.)
- Lighting

Balancing the cost of the asset tracker with the asset itself

For more expensive assets, fleet managers will want to use a cellular-enabled tracker. The choice between GO Anywhere Plus and Next Gen GO Anywhere will depend on the answers to the previous questions. For smaller assets, there is an additional option.

Geotab supports Bluetooth beacon tracking, providing expanded visibility of small assets and tools. These durable trackers can be linked to a specific vehicle or driver and set to trigger an alert if the asset is left behind. Various beacons are available on [Geotab Marketplace](#).



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Example: The costs of a field service fleet missing equipment

Picture a typical day for a field service fleet. A technician rolls up to a customer's house for a scheduled repair, only to realize they are missing a tool. Maybe it was left at the last site, maybe a colleague “borrowed” it or it was stolen. Regardless, now the job needs to be rescheduled, and the technician has to spend more hours tracking down the equipment.

This results in multiple costs:

- The technician wasted billable hours going to the site without the equipment they needed
- The fleet will pay the “Lost Tool Tax” as time is spent looking for the asset
- If the asset is truly lost, the fleet has to pay the cost for a replacement
- Ongoing theft can result in increased insurance premiums
- Future revenue can be lost from an unhappy customer

A single instance of this scenario is not going to be the end of the world, but it can easily become an expensive systemic issue. The only way to protect against this is to make sure that every asset can be tracked individually.



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What changes once equipment tracking fits the fleet?

The fleet manager's day looks different once the right tracker is on each asset. The platform shows status, location and utilization across every asset, so the day runs on real-time information. Trailers that returned overnight appear in their assigned slips, equipment still at job sites can be located, and the morning calls to crew leads about missing equipment are a thing of the past.

Over time, the biggest change is what disappears from the fleet manager's day. The recurring questions about where assets are and what they are doing stop. The phone calls, the yard walks, the guesswork, all replaced by a glance at the dashboard.

What changes across the operation

- Billing disputes get settled quickly with runtime, mileage and geofence records on each invoice
- Maintenance moves off the calendar and onto actual runtime
- Idle equipment surfaces in reports instead of sitting unnoticed at a job site
- Site managers stop hoarding backup units and duplicate rentals come off the books
- Assets working in remote areas report back without waiting for someone to physically check them
- Small tools and equipment have a last known location, so the “lost tool tax” stops compounding

Take the final step

You've answered the four questions. Now put them to work. Use the [Asset Visibility Gap Checklist](#) to document your answers for each asset in your fleet and match the right tracker to the right piece of equipment.



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About Geotab

Geotab is a global leader in connected operations, video telematics and AI-powered insights. Trusted by more than 100,000 customers – from small and mid-size fleets to Fortune 500 enterprises and public-sector organizations, including the U.S. federal government – Geotab connects approximately 6 million vehicles and assets across all seven continents, processing 100 billion data points daily. Serving industries including transportation and logistics, construction, energy, utilities, field services, and beyond, Geotab's open platform and partner ecosystem unify safety, compliance, and operations in a unified system, powering smarter, more connected operations. With ISO/IEC 27001:2022, SOC2, FIPS 140-3 and FedRAMP authorizations, Geotab is able to meet the highest standards of data security, backed by strong customer support. Our mission: a safer, more efficient, and more sustainable world in motion.

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