AGENDA ITEM 12

Introduction

At the July 18, 2014 Council meeting, Vice Mayor Burdick requested Council staff provide information on prospective federal legislation that would seek to increase the weight and length of trucks on the nation’s highway system. Accordingly, this agenda item provides a summary review of H.R. 612: Safe and Efficient Transportation Act of 2013 (SETA), which was recently introduced in Congress (see Exhibit 1). If passed, this act would revise current federal legislation to allow increases in truck size and weight limits beyond those that are currently allowed.

Background

Under current federal law there are weight limits for trucks on the Interstate Highway System (IHS), as well as width and length limits on the National Network (a system of approximately 209,000 miles of roads including the interstate system specifically designated in federal regulations). According to the Federal Highway Administration, national maximum weight standards applying to commercial vehicle operations on the IHS are:

- Single Axle: 20,000 pounds
- Tandem Axle: 34,000 pounds
- Gross Vehicle Weight: 80,000 pounds

On February 12, 2013, SETA was introduced as H.R. 612 during the 113th Congress (2013-2014). This bill would raise the federal truck weight limit from 80,000 pounds to 97,000 pounds. The bill would authorize states to allow trucks to exceed the federal weight limits on portions of the IHS within a state if: 1) the vehicle is equipped with at least six axles; 2) the weight of any single axle does not exceed 20,000 pounds; 3) the weight of any tandem axle does not exceed 34,000 pounds; 4) the weight of any group of three or more axles does not exceed 51,000 pounds; and 5) the gross weight of the vehicle does not exceed 97,000 pounds.
Analysis

The proposed legislation is supported by the Coalition for Transportation Productivity, numerous shipping companies, and allied associations (see Exhibit 2). These organizations maintain that the United States now lags behind major competitors in North America, Europe and Asia in the widespread use of six-axle vehicles that reduce their cost of delivery. The coalition asserts that “Providing states with the option to maximize the use of six-axle trucks is an effective and safe way to increase truck productivity and America’s freight capacity while reducing congestion, decreasing fuel use and emissions and improving fleet safety.”

However, a number of organizations oppose the proposed legislation. The Palm Beach County Board of County Commissioners has joined with the National Association of Counties in opposing legislation that seeks to increase truck size or weight limits beyond those in current federal law, because of concerns related to highway safety, infrastructure damage and transportation funding implications of such changes. Information in Exhibit 3 provided by the Coalition Against Bigger Trucks (CABT) highlights the following concerns with the legislation:

- Heavier trucks are more likely to roll over;
- Heavier trucks bring more energy to accidents;
- Heavier trucks are more likely to cause significant damage to bridges; and
- The proposed 97,000-pound six-axle trucks would only pay for about 50 percent of their costs for damages they do to roads and bridges.

Conclusion

A preliminary analysis of allowing heavier trucks on the IHS has identified proponents for and against the proposed legislation. The information provided by the federal government to support changing truck weight limitations does not make it clear that the gains in the freight productivity outweigh the highway safety concerns and additional wear and tear costs to the nation’s infrastructure. However, provisions in Map-21, the Moving Ahead For Progress in the 21st Century Act, require the U.S. Department of Transportation to conduct a comprehensive study addressing differences in safety risks, infrastructure impacts, and the effect on levels of enforcement between trucks operating at or within federal truck size and weight limits and trucks legally operating in excess of federal limits. This report is expected to be completed in November.

Currently, there have been no votes taken on H.R. 612, which was referred to the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, and the House Committee on Ways and Means on February 12, 2013. This could be a significant issue for the region that warrants monitoring and further analysis and recommendations once the comprehensive study of truck size and weight limits is finalized and if the proposal to increase truck weights remains in the proposed bill.

Recommendation

Council should direct staff to continue to monitor the progress of H.R. 612: Safe and Efficient Transportation Act of 2013 and report back to Council when additional information becomes available.

Attachments
H.R. 612

To amend title 23, United States Code, with respect to vehicle weight limitations applicable to the Interstate System, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

FEBRUARY 12, 2013

Mr. Michaud (for himself, Mr. Ribble, Mr. Walz, Mr. Simpson, Mr. Schrader, and Mr. Young of Alaska) introduced the following bill, which was referred to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, and in addition to the Committee on Ways and Means, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned.

A BILL

To amend title 23, United States Code, with respect to vehicle weight limitations applicable to the Interstate System, and for other purposes.

1 Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-
2 tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,
3 SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.
4 This Act may be cited as the “Safe and Efficient
5 Transportation Act of 2013”.

Exhibit 1
SEC. 2. MODERNIZED WEIGHT LIMITATIONS FOR CERTAIN VEHICLES.

Section 127 of title 23, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following:

“(j) ADDITIONAL EXCEPTION TO WEIGHT REQUIREMENTS.—

“(1) IN GENERAL.—Notwithstanding subsection (a), a State may authorize a vehicle with a maximum gross weight, including all enforcement tolerances, that exceeds the maximum gross weight otherwise applicable under subsection (a) to operate on the Interstate System routes in the State, if—

“(A) the vehicle is equipped with at least 6 axles;

“(B) the weight of any single axle on the vehicle does not exceed 20,000 pounds, including enforcement tolerances;

“(C) the weight of any tandem axle on the vehicle does not exceed 34,000 pounds, including enforcement tolerances;

“(D) the weight of any group of 3 or more axles on the vehicle does not exceed 51,000 pounds, including enforcement tolerances; and

“(E) the gross weight of the vehicle does not exceed 97,000 pounds, including enforcement tolerances.
“(2) Special rules.—

“(A) Other exceptions not affected.—This subsection shall not restrict—

“(i) a vehicle that may operate under any other provision of this section or another Federal law; or

“(ii) a State’s authority with respect to a vehicle that may operate under any other provision of this section or another Federal law.

“(B) Increase in axle weight requirement.—A State may authorize a vehicle to exceed the maximum axle weight requirements under any one axle grouping in subparagraph (B), (C), or (D) of paragraph (1) by not more than 2,000 pounds.

“(3) State authorization.—A State seeking to authorize a vehicle to operate on the Interstate System routes within its boundaries under paragraph (1) or to increase the maximum axle weight requirements under paragraph (2) shall do so pursuant to authority provided under the laws of the State.

“(4) Reporting requirements.—
“(A) ANNUAL REPORT.—If a State authorizes vehicles described in paragraph (1) to operate on highway routes in the State in a fiscal year, the State shall submit to the Secretary for the fiscal year an annual report at such time, in such manner, and containing such information as the Secretary may require, including, at a minimum, the following:

“(i) An identification of highway routes in the State, including routes not on the Interstate System, on which the State authorizes vehicles described in paragraph (1) to operate.

“(ii) A description of the operating requirements and gross vehicle weight limits applicable to the vehicles described in paragraph (1).

“(iii) Safety statistics, including estimated vehicle miles traveled data, concerning the vehicles described in paragraph (1).

“(B) PUBLIC AVAILABILITY.—The Secretary shall make all information required under subparagraph (A) available to the public.
“(5) TERMINATION.—The Secretary may terminate the operation of vehicles authorized under this subsection on a specific Interstate System route segment if the Secretary determines that such operation poses an unreasonable safety risk based on an engineering analysis or an analysis of safety data or any other applicable data the Secretary may use.

“(6) WAIVER OF HIGHWAY FUNDING REDUCTION.—Notwithstanding subsection (a), the total amount of funds apportioned to a State under section 104(b)(1) for any period may not be reduced under subsection (a) if the State authorizes a vehicle described in paragraph (1) to operate on the Interstate System in the State in accordance with this subsection or subsection (k).

“(k) VEHICLES LAWFULLY OPERATING ON DECEMBER 31, 2012.—In addition to authority otherwise provided to a State under this section, a State may permit a vehicle with a gross vehicle weight that could have been lawfully operated on the Interstate System in the State on December 31, 2012, to operate on the Interstate System in that State upon the date of enactment of this subsection.”.
SEC. 3. SAFE AND EFFICIENT VEHICLE BRIDGE INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Chapter 1 of title 23, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following:

§ 171. Safe and efficient vehicle bridge infrastructure improvement program

(a) ESTABLISHMENT.—The Secretary shall establish a safe and efficient vehicle bridge infrastructure improvement program in accordance with this section.

(b) APPORTIONMENT OF FUNDS TO ELIGIBLE STATES.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—On October 1 of each fiscal year, the Secretary shall apportion, in accordance with paragraph (2), the sums made available out of the Safe and Efficient Vehicle Trust Fund for that fiscal year to carry out this section.

(2) RATIO TO ELIGIBLE STATES.—The sums made available out of the Safe and Efficient Vehicle Trust Fund shall be apportioned among eligible States in a ratio that—

(A) the total vehicle miles traveled on Interstate System highways by vehicles authorized to travel on such highways pursuant to section 127(j) in each eligible State, as determined by the Secretary; bears to
“(B) the total vehicle miles traveled on Interstate System highways by vehicles authorized to travel on such highways pursuant to section 127(j) in all eligible States, as determined by the Secretary.

“(c) ELIGIBLE PROJECTS.—An eligible State that receives an apportionment in a fiscal year under subsection (b) shall use the amounts of the apportionment for bridge projects eligible for assistance under this chapter that are located on the Interstate System.

“(d) CONTRACT AUTHORITY.—Funds made available out of the Safe and Efficient Vehicle Trust Fund to carry out this section shall be available for obligation in the same manner as if the funds were made available from the Highway Trust Fund (other than the Mass Transit Account).

“(e) ELIGIBLE STATE DEFINED.—In this section, the term ‘eligible State’ means a State that authorizes a vehicle described in section 127(j) to operate on the Interstate System within its borders.”.

(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The analysis for such chapter is amended by adding at the end the following:

“171. Safe and efficient vehicle bridge infrastructure improvement program.”.
SEC. 4. SAFE AND EFFICIENT VEHICLE CHARGES.
(a) In General.—Subsection (a) of section 4481 of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 is amended by adding at the end the following:

"In the case of the use of any highway motor vehicle described in section 127(j) of title 23, United States Code, if that vehicle is used on the Interstate System with a gross weight in excess of 80,000 pounds, in lieu of the rate in the table, the rate shall be equal to the lesser of—

"(1) $100 per year, plus $22 for each 1,000 pounds (or fraction thereof) in excess of 55,000 pounds, or

"(2) $800 per year."

(b) Effective Date.—The amendment made by this section shall apply to taxable periods beginning after the date of the enactment of this Act.

SEC. 5. SAFE AND EFFICIENT VEHICLE TRUST FUND.
(a) In General.—Subchapter A of chapter 98 of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 (relating to the trust fund code) is amended by adding at the end the following new section:

"SEC. 9512. SAFE AND EFFICIENT VEHICLE TRUST FUND.
(a) Creation of Fund.—There is hereby established in the Treasury of the United States a fund to be known as the ‘Safe and Efficient Vehicle Trust Fund’, consisting of such amounts as may be—

*HR 612 IH*
“(1) appropriated to the Safe and Efficient Vehicle Trust Fund as provided in this section, or

“(2) credited to the Safe and Efficient Vehicle Trust Fund as provided in section 9602(b).

“(b) TRANSFER TO SAFE AND EFFICIENT VEHICLE TRUST FUND OF AMOUNTS EQUIVALENT TO CERTAIN TAXES.—There are hereby appropriated to the Safe and Efficient Vehicle Trust Fund amounts equivalent to the taxes received in the Treasury under section 4481(a) which are attributable to the use of any highway motor vehicle described in section 127(j) of title 23, United States Code, if that vehicle is used on the Interstate System with a gross weight in excess of 80,000 pounds.

“(c) EXPENDITURES FROM SAFE AND EFFICIENT VEHICLE TRUST FUND.—Amounts in the Safe and Efficient Vehicle Trust Fund shall be available, as provided by appropriations Acts, for fiscal years beginning 1 year after the date of the enactment of this section for projects eligible for assistance under section 171(c) of title 23, United States Code.”.

(b) CONFORMING AMENDMENTS.—

(1) Paragraph (1) of section 9503(b) of such Code is amended by striking the period at the end and inserting “, and taxes received under section 4481 shall be determined without regard to those re-
received in the Treasury under section 4481(a) which
are attributable to the use of any highway motor ve-
hicle described in section 127(j) of title 23, United
States Code, if that vehicle is used on the Interstate
System with a gross weight in excess of 80,000
pounds.”.

(2) The table of sections for subchapter A of
chapter 98 of such Code is amended by adding at
the end the following:

“Sec. 9512. Safe and Efficient Vehicle Trust Fund.”.

(c) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made by
this section shall take effect on the date of the enactment
of this Act.
February 28, 2013

Dear Member of Congress:

The Coalition for Transportation Productivity is a group of over 200 shippers and allied associations dedicated to giving state governments the ability to allow appropriate interstate access for heavier six-axle trucks. The Safe and Efficient Transportation Act (SETA), recently reintroduced as H.R. 612, would allow states to decide where and when to utilize six-axle trucks with gross vehicle weights of up to 97,000 pounds. Twenty-two states currently allow heavier six-axle trucks on some portion of their state road networks. SETA would allow them to optimize their network by opening select interstate routes to these trucks as well.

The US now lags our major competitors in North America, Europe and Asia in the widespread use of six-axle vehicles that reduce their cost of delivery. Providing states with the option to maximize the use of six-axle trucks is an effective and safe way to increase truck productivity and America’s freight capacity while reducing congestion, decreasing fuel use and emissions and improving fleet safety.

There is a great deal of misinformation being generated about SETA and we offer the following information for your consideration. We also encourage you to visit the CTP website where you will find a broad array of detailed research data from throughout the world supporting our arguments, as well as an advocacy packet with concise summaries of the major findings.

**Facts to Consider about H.R. 612**

**FACT:** H.R. 612 is long overdue. The bill addresses a decades-old limitation that doesn’t account for the transportation innovations of the 21st Century. In 1998, the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) requested recommendations on truck weight reform from the National Academy of Sciences’ Transportation Research Board (TRB). One of TRB’s top recommendations was that Congress establish pilot programs to allow heavier 6-axle rigs on select interstate highways. The Safe and Efficient Transportation Act (SETA, H.R. 612) would finally address this recommendation by giving states the opportunity to utilize heavier, six-axle vehicles on select roads and bridges. It places the decision of where to allow these trucks with state transportation authorities, rather than leaving that decision to Washington.

**FACT:** Congress did not reject the Safe and Efficient Transportation Act in the last Congress. In February 2012, in a complex procedural motion, some provisions of SETA were linked with separate language regarding longer combination vehicles. A substitute amendment replaced this hybrid provision with a Department of Transportation (DOT) study on “truck size and weight.” This study – which will include a review of extensive research from numerous state, international and academic sources – will soon be added to the expansive body of existing literature demonstrating that wider use of six-axle rigs would enable shippers to be safer, greener and more productive. The federal study will help inform states of issues relevant to the use of these vehicles and give guidance for safe implementation.
FACT: SETA trucks leave a lighter footprint on any given stretch of highway than do 5-axle rigs loaded to 80,000 pounds because of the additional 6th axle and its ability to displace weight over four additional tires. This lighter footprint, combined with the need for fewer truckloads to deliver a given amount of freight, would result in reductions in pavement restoration costs for states. The 2009 Wisconsin DOT study concluded that the savings on pavement restoration would exceed any increased cost of bridge repair. Minnesota, Vermont and Maine DOTs, which have examined SETA-like configurations in operation, have determined the additional impact of these trucks on their bridge networks to be minimal.

Regarding bridges, SETA requires an increase in the Heavy Vehicle Use Tax to $800 from $550 per participating truck, which these additional funds to be directed to bridge inspection and maintenance. This 45% increase in the fee is greater than the 33% increase in cargo that can be carried on the six-axle vehicle. In addition, an overall increase in the federal diesel fuel tax has wide support from a number of trucking industry stakeholders. It is Congress that has blocked an increase, not the transportation stakeholder community.

FACT: SETA is not a mandate allowing unrestricted access for these vehicles, but merely allows a state to utilize heavier, six-axle trucks where bridges are capable of carrying the loads.

CTP is fully confident that the engineers and highway experts employed by State DOTs throughout the nation are capable of making informed, data-driven decisions about the appropriate use of these vehicles. SETA won’t put heavier trucks on every bridge but will allow states to develop critical commerce corridors feeding into ports and intermodal facilities and to consider using these trucks on routes that balance economic and infrastructure needs in the state. SETA will also help states prioritize their bridge infrastructure for needed upgrades.

Some argue that SETA will create a patchwork quilt of conflicting state weight limit laws. We already have such a patchwork quilt. SETA will begin to bring some uniformity to the network and put heavier loads on more capable trucks, where they belong.

FACT: Shippers are interested in SETA because it will reduce the environmental impacts of their truck transportation. By improving the ton-miles per gallon of their truck transportation by some 17%, shippers using this configuration will save fuel, reduce carbon emissions and lower the carbon footprint of every item on the truck.

The idea that SETA would lead to more pollutants per ton mile is based on the assumption that railroads will not respond competitively in shipping corridors where they compete with efficient trucks.

FACT: It is wrong to suggest that the public will reject heavier truck weights under the conditions required in SETA. Asking the public how it feels about “bigger” trucks has no application to SETA since those trucks are only heavier, not larger. In 2009, CTP conducted its own poll to explore how people really felt about current weight limit laws and heavier trucks. We found that a majority of the public was quite open to having a fact-based conversation on the issue. When people learn about the benefits in safety and handling afforded by six-axle trucks that are no bigger than today’s five-axle trucks, they are not opposed to those trucks carrying greater weight. You can see a release on our poll here.

FACT: While railroads and trucks compete in some markets, SETA is primarily supported by shippers looking to improve the productivity of their truck transportation by allowing certain products on certain
routes to be moved with fewer truckloads. SETA would be of most use to shippers with short to medium haul business, a market dominated by truckload carriers, not railroads.

Regarding rail diversion, several years ago the Association of American Railroads hired researcher Carl Martland, who produced a study that predicted SETA would result in diversion of freight from rail to truck, if the railroads did not respond by adjusting “terms of service, equipment or rates.” Mr. Martland’s report goes on to suggest on page 18, however, that should railroads respond by reducing rates, diversion would not only be minimal, but that railroads would see a “5% reduction in rail traffic, while trucking would see a 7% reduction in truck miles.” Delivering the same volume of freight with fewer miles of both rail and truck use would seem to be an excellent reason for Congress to support SETA.

Opponents of SETA are really asking Congress to block the introduction of more productive trucks in order to reduce the pressure on the rail industry to offer competitive rates. The fact that SETA might result in a bit of healthy competition in transportation and help solve growing capacity problems is a reason to support it, not an argument against it. Shippers need both rail and trucking to be as competitive and efficient as possible to continue to help US manufacturers, growers and producers remain globally competitive.

**Help ensure the U.S. transportation system is more efficient and safer. Cosponsor H.R. 612 today!**

For these reasons, we urge you to support a thorough and timely DOT study that will guide states to safely implement the Safe and Efficient Transportation Act. We also hope you will cosponsor H.R. 612. Your support will signal to manufacturers, wholesalers, growers and producers throughout your district that you understand the challenges they face and are willing to work on a bipartisan basis to enact much needed improvements in transportation productivity.

Sincerely,

John Runyan
Executive Director
The Coalition for Transportation Productivity
202-543-0032

The Safe and Efficient Transportation Act is supported by the following organizations:
Supporting Associations

Agriculture Transportation Coalition (AgTC)
Alabama Forestry Association
The Aluminum Association
American Beverage Association
American Forest & Paper Association
American Frozen Food Institute
American Iron and Steel Institute
American Soybean Association
American Trucking Associations
Black Hills Forest Resource Association
California League of Food Processors
Council for Citizens Against Government Waste
Colorado Potato Administrative Committee
Colorado Timber Industry Association
Florida Chamber of Commerce
Florida Forestry Association
Florida Pulp & Paper Association
Fresh Produce Association
Food Marketing Institute
Forest Resources Association
Grocery Manufacturers Association
Hardwood Federation
Idaho Grower Shippers Association
Idaho Potato Commission
Illinois Manufacturers' Association
Intermountain Forest Association
International Foodservice Distributors Association
International Dairy Foods Association
Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries (ISRI)
Kentucky Forest Industries Association
Louisiana Forestry Association
Maine Motor Transport Association
Maine Pulp and Paper Association
Manufacture Alabama
Metal Service Center Institute
Michigan Forest Products Council
Midwest Shippers' Association
Minnesota Timber Producers Association
Mississippi Forestry Association
Mississippi Loggers Association
Missouri Forest Products Association
National Association of Chemical Distributors
National Association of Manufacturers (NAM)
National Association of Wholesalers-Distributors
National Black Chamber of Commerce
National Confectioners Association
National Council of Farmer Cooperatives
National Industrial Transportation League
National Lumber & Building Material Dealers Assoc.
National Milk Producers Federation
National Potato Council
National Private Truck Council
National Taxpayers Union
North Carolina Forestry Association
Northwest Food Processors Association
Ohio Forestry Association
Ohio Manufacturers' Association
Oregon Potato Commission
Paper & Forest Industry Transportation Committee
Pulp & Paperworkers' Resource Council
Sheila Stable Food Processors Association
Snack Food Association
Sports Video Group
Steel Manufacturers Association
United Fresh Produce Association
Virginia Forest Products Association
Washington State Potato Commission
Western Growers
Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce
Wisconsin Paper Council

Supporting Companies

A & M Transport, Inc.
Air Products
American Gypsum Company
Anheuser Busch
Anthony Forest Products
Arch Daniel Midland (ADM)
Ball Brothers Produce
Basic American Foods
Bear Trucking, Inc.
Boste Cascade LLC
Boste Inc.
Campbell Soup Company
CEMEX, Inc.
Central Refrigerated Service
Challenger Motor Freight
Chicago Consulting
Claraire Forest Inc.
Coca-Cola Company
Columbia Forest Products
Con-way
Cotton Transp. & Warehousing
CRST International
Dairy Marketing Services, LLC
Dannon
Dean Foods
Deere & Company
Delta Timber Company
Diageo
Evergreen Packaging
Domtar
Flambeau River Papers
Floyd Wilcox & Sons, Inc.
FMC Corporation
Fuel Transport US, Inc.
Georgia Pacific
Glattfeifer
GPU of Idaho
Gray & Oscar, LLC
Green Bay Packaging
H-E-B
The Hershey Company
Home Depot
House Special Services, Inc.
Idahoan Foods
Idaho Forest Group
International Paper
ITS Logistix
James Bug Trucking Company
Koch Companies Public Sector
Kraft Foods, Inc.
Larsen Farms
Lepino Foods
Longview Fibre Paper & Packaging
LP Corp.
Lyondell Bassell Industries
Manuel Huerta Trucking, Inc.
Maverick USA
Maxum Petroleum
Mennel Milling Company
Miller/Coors
Mills Transfer
Minnesota Forest Industries
Modern Transportation Services
MWV
National Frozen Foods Corp
Neiman Enterprises, Inc.
Nestle USA
Nestle Waters North America
Newark Group
New Page
Oldcastle Architectural, Inc.
Oregon Transfer Company
Owens Coming
Philadelphia Reg. Port Authority
Piggypack Consolidators
Plum Creek
Potandon Produce
Potlatch Corp
Praxair
Prestage Farms
R & T Truck, Inc.
Raven Transport Co.
Rayonier
Resolve Forest Products
Rock Tenn
RPM Consolidated Services,
R.R. Donnelley & Sons Co.
Ruan Transport Co.
Safe Handling Inc.
Safeway, Inc.
Savage Services
Schwen Food Company
SC Johnson
Sevelstal
Shipping Matters
Simplex
Sun Glo of Idaho, Inc.
Sunny D
SuperValu Inc.
Sysco Corporation
Taylor Produce, Inc.
Temple-inland
Thomas and Sons, Inc.
Total Transportation Services
Transportation Mgmt Solutions
TransAct Technologies
True Value
Tyson Foods
UPM, Blandin Paper
U.S. Xpress
US Foodservice/Alliant Logistics
Unilever United States
United Aluminum Corporation
Verso Paper
Wada Farms
Werner Enterprises
West Central Cooperative
Weyerhaeuser
H.R. 612: Bigger Trucks, Bigger Dangers

Legislation has been introduced in Congress to raise the federal truck weight limit from 80,000 pounds to 97,000 pounds. This bill, H.R. 612, is nearly identical to legislation that was overwhelmingly opposed by law enforcement, first responders, local elected officials, AAA, and engineers in previous Congresses.

The significant highway safety and infrastructure quality concerns raised by bigger trucks led the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee to vote in bipartisan fashion 33-22 to strip nearly identical provisions from the transportation bill passed by Congress last year and direct the US Department of Transportation to study the safety, infrastructure, modal diversion, environmental, and financial implications of bigger trucks.

This study is due to Congress in 2014, but the bigger truck lobby is pushing ahead anyway. We believe Congress should wait for the results of the DOT study before considering any change to truck size or weight limits.

Below are our concerns about the provisions in H.R. 612.

- The bill would allow trucks weighing up to 97,000 pounds on Interstates – an increase of up to 17,000 pounds per truck – as long as they have a sixth axle.
  - When trucks get heavier, the weight is typically added vertically, which raises the center of gravity making the truck more likely to roll over.
  - Heavier trucks traveling at the same speed as lighter trucks bring more energy into accidents, which must be dissipated in some way. This greater energy can make crashes that would have been minor become major and crashes that would have been major into fatal crashes.
  - Adding the sixth axle does add additional brakes to the truck, but truck brakes are precision instruments that must be in proper adjustment to operate correctly. Nearly 20% of the trucks inspected each year are taken out of service for some issue and by far the most frequent cause of out-of-service violations are brakes. When brakes don’t operate at their full capacity, stopping distances – particularly for heavier trucks – grow quickly.
  - Spreading the heavier load over an additional axle can help mitigate pavement damage in some cases. However, it makes the damage done to bridges significantly worse. Already nearly 20% of US bridges are structurally deficient or functionally obsolete according to the Federal Highway Administration and allowing heavier trucks would make this problem worse.

- The bill would charge heavier trucks a slightly higher fee to fund bridge improvements, but not nearly enough to cover the damage.
According to DOT’s last cost allocation study, 80,000-pound, five-axle trucks only
pay for about 80 percent of their costs. The proposed 97,000-pound, six-axle trucks
would only pay for about 50 percent of their costs.

In its comprehensive 2000 study, US DOT found that the additional bridge costs
could be as high $65 billion – on top of the huge backlog of bridge needs.

- The bill gives states the option to allow heavier trucks, but the real goal is heavier trucks
  nation-wide.

- We’ve seen this before. Bigger truck proponents start by asking Congress to “let the
  states decide.” Then, they pressure states to allow bigger trucks individually.
  Because this checkerboard impedes interstate commerce, they inevitably come back
  to Congress and ask for national uniformity. In fact, some of the groups backing H.R.
  612 claim that an unworkable patchwork exists today and would like Congress to set
  mandatory limits.

- We saw this in the debate last year. In addition to provisions like H.R. 612, groups
  successfully lobbied for expanded use of long double- and triple-trailer trucks as well
  as mandatory provisions that would have forced states to allow longer double-trailer
  trucks and heavier trucks carrying automobiles.
Proposed Bigger Truck Configurations

Triple-Trailer Trucks

- H.R. 7 (112th), the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee’s draft transportation reauthorization proposal, would have thawed the existing freeze on the operation of longer combination vehicles (LCVs) and allowed expanded use of LCVs in states where they are currently route-restricted.

Long Double-Trailer Trucks

- H.R. 7 (112th) would have allowed expanded use of LCVs in states where they are currently route-restricted and would have required states to allow double 33-foot trailers (an increase from the current 28-foot requirement).
- In April 2013, the Chairman, President, and CEO of FedEx Corporation renewed the call for legislation requiring states to allow double 33-foot trailers in testimony before a House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee panel.

Heavier & Longer Single-Trailer Trucks

- H.R. 612 would allow states to raise the maximum weight limit for trucks on Interstates from 80,000 pounds to 97,000 pounds.
- H.R. 7 (112th) would have required all states to allow 53-foot trailers (an increase from the current 48-foot minimum), allowed states to raise the maximum Interstate weight limit to 97,000 pounds, allowed 126,000-pound trucks by permit on 25-mile stretches of Interstate, and required every state to allow 88,000-pound trucks hauling autos.