

Keep Federal Truck Size and Weight Limits

ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN RAILROADS

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WHAT SHOULD BE DONE?

Keep existing federal truck size and weight (TS&W) limits.

WHY?

Increasing existing truck size and weight limits would mean **more damage** to our highways and bridges, **more highway gridlock**, and **more harm to the environment**. The taxes and fees that heavy trucks pay are already far less than the cost of the damage that heavy trucks cause. This multi-billion dollar underpayment — which other motorists and the general public have to make up through higher taxes — would become even greater if truck size and weight limits were increased.

Why Were Truck Size and Weight Limits Frozen?

- Truck size and weight limits on federal highways were frozen by Congress in 1991, largely because of concerns about the safety of longer and heavier trucks.
- Under current law, trucks operating on most of the Interstate Highway System can have a gross vehicle weight of no more than 80,000 pounds. “Longer combination vehicles” (LCVs — tractors with two or more trailers having gross vehicle weight of more than 80,000 pounds) are limited to certain highways in 21 mostly western states that allowed such trucks before 1991.
- In the past, some have called for an increase in truck size and weight limits. Past attempts to thaw the freeze have been **overwhelmingly opposed** by the public and Congress. The consensus is that **public safety must not be compromised**.
- In 2003, freight railroads (represented by the Association of American Railroads) and the trucking industry (represented by the American Trucking Associations) agreed to oppose changes in federal truck size and weight limits through September 2009. Some within the trucking industry, however, are now working toward obtaining an increase in existing limits.

Heavy Trucks Should Pay Fully for the Damage They Cause — But They Don't

- The fuel and other taxes and fees devoted to highway construction and maintenance that heavy trucks pay **do not come close** to covering the costs of the damage they cause.
- In fact, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation's Highway Cost Allocation Study, combination trucks weighing 80,000 to 100,000 pounds pay just **half the cost of the damage they cause to our highways**. So for each pothole created by a heavy truck, **only half** of the cost of repairing that pothole is paid for by trucks taxes. The study

found that trucks weighing more than 100,000 pounds pay **even less — only 40 percent of the damage they cause.**

- Who pays for the rest? **Taxpayers do.** The huge heavy truck underpayment means that the remainder of these costs **are paid for by the general public** — not by the trucks that cause the damage. As the Government Accountability Office (GAO) noted recently, “From an economic standpoint, this ... distorts the competitive environment by making it appear that heavier trucks are a less expensive shipping method than they actually are and puts other modes, such as rail and maritime, at a disadvantage.”
- And as the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Commission noted in a 2008 report, this violates a principle of highway taxation, dating back to the creation of the Highway Trust Fund, that “different vehicle classes should be charged in proportion to their contribution to highway investment requirements.”
- **Relaxing truck size and weight limits would make this inequity much worse** because even more freight would be transported by heavy trucks.
- Because many parts of the interstate highway system were not built for longer and heavier trucks, their widespread use could require massive new spending to strengthen or replace bridges and pavement, and to widen vehicle lanes and shoulders.
- Already, nearly 158,000 highway bridges (27 percent of the total) are structurally deficient or functionally obsolete, and some 15 percent of vehicle-miles traveled are on pavements that are rated less than “acceptable.” The already-enormous financial burden of repairs would **rise sharply** if truck size and weight limits were raised.

More Trucks on the Road?

- Increased TS&W limits would lead to **more freight on trucks and less on railroads.** A 1999 U.S. DOT study found that, depending on the scenario, increased truck size and weights would result in a decline in rail revenue of between \$2.9 billion and \$6.7 billion; a decline in rail earnings of 32–46 percent; and a decline in rail car-miles of 4–20 percent. A recent study by an MIT professor found that an increase in truck weight from 80,000 pounds to 97,000 pounds could reduce merchandise traffic on short line railroads by 44 percent and overall short line traffic by 17 percent — likely crippling many short lines.
- Traffic diversion would mean that railroads would have less money to re-invest in their networks. **This would lead directly to reduced rail capacity and poorer rail service.** Remaining rail customers could face higher rates, reduced service, or both.
- Traffic diversion would also harm the environment. Already overcrowded highways would become paralyzed by gridlock. Since railroads are three or more times more fuel efficient than trucks, diversion could increase fuel consumption by hundreds of millions of gallons per year and lead to a corresponding increase in greenhouse gas emissions.

The Public Strongly Opposes Truck Size and Weight Relaxation

- **Americans overwhelmingly oppose bigger and heavier trucks.** A national poll in February 2003 found that 89 percent of Americans oppose triple-trailer trucks. The pollster remarked, “I can think of no other issue ... in which so many Americans are united in their intensity either for or against a particular issue.”