

Truck Size and Weight Limits

Freight Rail Policy Stance: Congress should not increase truck size or weight limits.

Why This Matters: Any increase in truck size or weight limits, including 91,000 pound trucks or “Twin 33” foot double-trailers, would foist more costs onto taxpayers because larger trucks would result in greater damage to infrastructure.

Due to concerns about the uncompensated damage trucks cause to our highways, Congress maintains reasonable limits on the size of trucks on the Interstate Highway System – at 80,000 pounds in weight and no more than two, 28-foot trailers for total length. In 2016, the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) released the final results of a comprehensive study examining the impact of increasing current federal truck size and weight limits and further concluded that no changes to federal policy on truck size and weights should be made.

These limits make good sense. The fuel taxes and other highway-related fees that commercial trucks pay fall far short of covering the costs of the highway damage they cause. Any federal program that increases federal truck size limits will further subsidize commercial highway users at the expense of taxpayers, exacerbate deterioration of crumbling infrastructure and disadvantage a critical freight rail industry.

In contrast to trucks, freight railroads offer a sustainable and efficient way to move cargo across the country while operating on privately owned infrastructure they have invested billions into maintaining and upgrading.

Now proponents are pursuing avenues at the state and federal level to increase federal limits on truck weights from 80,000 lbs. to at least 91,000 pounds — a jump of almost 14% in truck weight — while also pushing for Congress to force states to allow double-trailer Twin 33 trucks. Both would lead to more truck freight, which would further stress the nation's deteriorating roads and bridges. At a time when policymakers continue to call for investment into and improvement of the nation's infrastructure, knowingly taking steps to further damage the nation's federal highway system is misguided policy.

At a Glance

More Damage to Highways and Bridges

A 2017 assessment of U.S. infrastructure by the American Society of Civil Engineers gave roads a “D.” The U.S. DOT finds that 91,000 pound trucks would negatively impact more than 4,800 bridges, while Twin 33s would cause \$1.1 billion in immediate damage to bridges on the highway system and \$1.2 - \$1.8 billion in estimated pavement damage per year.

More Trucks

Congress last increased the federal weight limit in 1982. Then, as now, those pushing for longer and heavier trucks said it would result in fewer trucks on the road, but that never happened. In fact, the number of trucks registered in the U.S. and the mileage of trucks traveled has increased by 91%.

More Greenhouse Emissions

Estimates show if just 10% of the freight that moves by Class 7 or Class 8 (the largest) trucks instead moved by rail, annual greenhouse gas emissions would fall by approximately 17 million tons. This is the equivalent of removing around 3.2 million cars from the highways for a year or planting 400 million trees.

More Cost to Taxpayers

Taxes and fees on 80,000 pound trucks only pay 80% of the damage they cause to America's infrastructure. Since 2008, \$143 billion of General Funds have bolstered the Highway Trust Fund to offset this payment shortcoming. Almost one-third of HTF revenues come from general revenues today, not user fees. Any increase would further tip the competitive modal scales.

More Traffic Congestion

More than 40% of urban interstates are congested. Traffic delays and lost productivity cost the American economy \$160 billion a year in wasted time and fuel.

Less Rail Traffic and a Worsened Intermodal Sector

A study concluded that increasing the truck weight limit from the current 80,000 pound weight limit to a 97,000 pound limit could potentially reduce overall rail traffic by 19%. The same study found that diverted freight would inevitably find its way onto the highway, resulting in 8 million more trucks on our roads and bridges — a 56% increase.