

Oppose Longer & Heavier Trucks on Our Nation's Roads

Truck size and weight (TSW) limits should not be changed.

Congress determined in 1982 that commercial trucks operating on the Interstate Highway System should weigh no more than 80,000 pounds. Additionally, in 1991, Congress found that trucks weighing more than 80,000 pounds with two or more trailers (known as "longer combination vehicles," or "LCVs") could only travel on certain grandfathered routes.

Over the years, legislation to increase TSW limits has repeatedly failed because the concerns justifying their original imposition remain valid. Permitting longer or heavier trucks on our nation's roads is simply bad policy and results in numerous problems, including greater uncompensated damage to our nation's highways and bridges; higher taxpayer costs to cover that shortfall; distortion of competition within the freight transportation sector; and more highway gridlock and greater environmental harm. In fact, a [2016 DOT study](#) examining the impacts of increasing TSW limits also concluded that no changes to federal policy should be made.

Increasing TSW limits would exacerbate the trucking industry's underpayment for repairing the damage they cause to our nation's roads and bridges.

Trucks cause the overwhelming majority of the damage to our nation's roads and bridges as compared to other vehicles, and the fuel taxes and other fees heavy trucks pay do not come close to covering the costs of that damage. In fact, the taxes and fees that commercial trucks pay to help maintain our nation's roads and bridges have not been substantially changed since 1993, resulting in a multi-billion-dollar annual underpayment versus the damage they cause.

These huge underpayments mean that repairing the damage heavy trucks cause is often paid for by the general public, not the commercial trucking industry. Since 2008, the Highway Trust Fund (HTF) has received more than \$143 billion in funding from the U.S. Treasury's General Fund in order to cover its revenue shortfalls.

While some proponents of increasing TSW limits support raising these taxes and fees to pay for the additional damage, their current proposals fail to cover existing underpayments, much less the more extensive damage from permitting heavier trucks. Additionally, as discussed in more detail below, increasing TSW limits would cause more freight to be carried by trucks and further the HTF's revenue shortfall to cover the damage caused to our nation's roads and bridges.

Increasing TSW limits would further distort competition in the freight transportation sector.

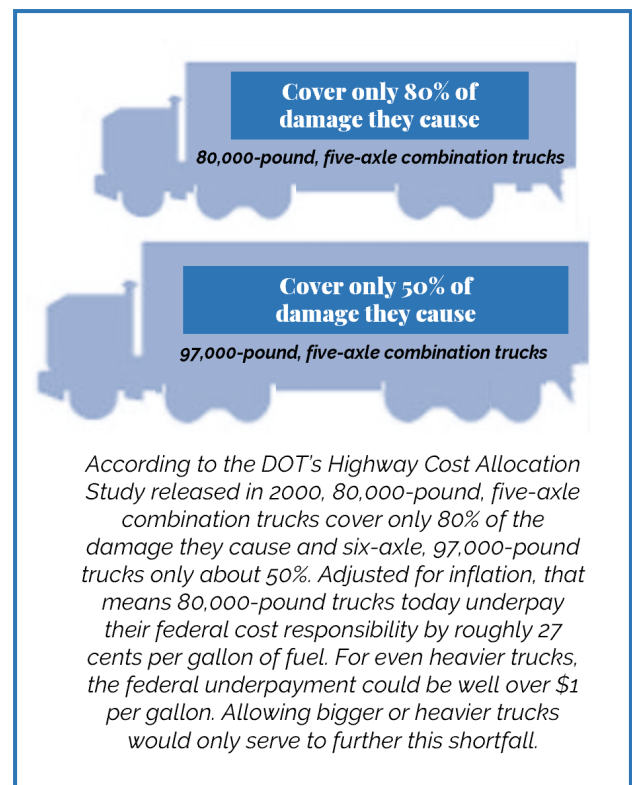
Unlike trucks, America's freight railroads operate almost exclusively on infrastructure that they own, build, maintain, and pay for themselves, and thus the rail industry has continued to pay the increasing costs of maintaining and improving that infrastructure. The Government Accountability Office [has found](#) that underpayments into the HTF by the trucking industry distort the competitive environment within the freight transportation sector "by making it appear that heavier trucks are...less expensive...than they actually are and put other modes, such as rail and maritime, at a disadvantage."

Key Takeaways

- Raising TSW limits would mean higher taxpayer costs to repair greater uncompensated damage to our nation's highways and bridges, more gridlock traffic, and greater environmental harm.
- It is estimated that 80,000-pound, five-axle combination trucks currently only cover roughly 80% of the damage they cause to our nation's highways and bridges and six-axle, 97,000-pound trucks only cover about 50%.
- Adjusted for inflation, 80,000-pound trucks today underpay their federal cost responsibility by some 27 cents per gallon of fuel. For even heavier trucks, the federal underpayment could be well over \$1 per gallon.
- Increasing allowable TSW limits would only increase the underpayment of the trucking industry and further distort competition within the nation's freight transportation sector, significantly impacting rail traffic.
- A 2016 U.S. DOT study examining the impacts of increasing current TSW limits concluded that no changes to federal policy should be made.

Several studies have projected the impact of increasing TSW limits on the competitive balance within the freight transportation sector. A [recent study](#) found that increasing truck weights to 120,000 pounds combined with permitting twin 33-foot trailers would result in an annual diversion of 7.5 million rail carloads and 8.5 million intermodal shipments from rail to trucking. [Another study](#) projected that increasing allowable truck weights from 80,000 to 97,000 pounds could reduce merchandise traffic on Class I railroads by up to 50% and overall Class I rail traffic by up to 19%. Traffic on short line railroads would suffer significantly as well.

Additionally, increasing truck size limits to permit twin 33-foot trailers (around 17 feet longer than a standard combination truck with one 53-foot trailer) on interstate highways from the current industry standard of 28 feet would render some rail intermodal equipment obsolete as some rail flatcars that can carry two 28-foot trailers would be unable to carry more than one 33-foot trailer. This would reduce railroad productivity and make further diversion to trucks more likely. If twin 33-foot trailers became the industry standard, it is almost certain that efforts would then be made to seek increased weight limits.



Increasing TSW limits would cause additional damage to our nation's road and bridges.

Increasing TSW limits would cause a substantial increase in highway life-cycle costs due to accelerated pavement deterioration. Because much of the U.S. highway network was not built for longer or heavier trucks, their widespread use could require massive amounts of new spending to strengthen or replace bridges and pavement, and to widen lanes and shoulders. The state-of-good-repair backlog for our nation's bridges is already in the tens of billions of dollars. Permitting longer or heavier trucks, including the millions of additional trucks that would be added to our nation's already overcrowded highways because of the diversion of freight, would make this backlog much worse.

Increasing TSW limits would cause further environmental and other economic harm.

Greenhouse gas emissions are directly related to fuel consumption. Because railroads are, on average, three to four times more fuel efficient than trucks, a diversion of freight to trucking could increase fuel consumption by hundreds of millions of gallons per year and increase greenhouse gas emissions accordingly.

Freight rail is ahead of other land modes of surface transportation when it comes to limiting its carbon footprint. U.S. freight railroads, on average, move one ton of freight more than 470 miles per gallon of fuel. In fact, AAR analysis of federal data found that if 25% of the truck traffic moving at least 750 miles went by rail instead, annual greenhouse gas emissions would fall by approximately 13.1 million tons.

Railroads also help reduce the huge economic costs of highway congestion. A single freight train can replace several hundred trucks, freeing up space on the highway for other motorists. According to the Texas Transportation Institute's 2019 Urban Mobility Report, highway congestion alone cost Americans \$166 billion in wasted time (8.8 billion hours) and wasted fuel (3.3 billion gallons) in 2017. Lost productivity, cargo delays, and other costs add tens of billions of dollars to this tab.