

GROSS VEHICLE WEIGHT MODERNIZATION



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A number of industries that sustain American communities and fuel the economy—manufacturing, housing, food, and natural resources, amongst others—rely on trucking to move products from state to state and region to region.

The federal government mandated a maximum weight limit of 80,000 lbs. for trucks on Interstate Highways in 1982. States that previously allowed trucks at weights greater than the Gross Vehicle Weight (GVW) limit were allowed to maintain their own regulations via a grandfather clause. Access to Interstate Highways—better built and offering more direct access point to point—remains limited. As a result, heavier trucks spend more time on local roads as a result, as most states allow trucks above 80,000 lbs. through various permits or seasonal and product specific exemptions. On local routes, these heavier trucks spend more time in traffic, contributing to congestion, burning more fuel, and generating more greenhouse gas. This means too many trucks spending too much time passing our schools, home and playgrounds.

Trucks on Interstate Highways are more numerous and less efficient due to current GVW limits as well. Instead of breaking down loads at state borders, industries utilize a larger fleet of less efficient trucks— including many that operate at capacity levels as low as 35%.

Failure to modernize weight regulations for over 30 years means the government has lagged behind innovations and progress in a more global economy. Industry advancements in safety technology now allow trucks of the same size as those carrying 80,000 lbs. to transport freight more effectively and more efficiently.

Many states recognize the inefficiency created by the patchwork of regulations and exemptions route to route and state to state. Currently, 30 states¹ allow modernized truck weight limits on the Interstate Highways within their borders, either through pilot programs or the grandfather clause. Seven states have undertaken weight limit modernization efforts in the last decade. These states cite a desire for safer local roads, parity with neighbors, and economic competitiveness as primary drivers for reform. Not only have modernized weight limits improved the efficiency of trucks on the road, they have allowed these states to deploy modern trucks with best-in-class safety technology—

¹U.S. Department of Transportation “Compilation of Existing State Truck Size and Weight Limit Laws” May 2015. Available at https://ops.fhwa.dot.gov/freight/policy/rpt_congress/truck_sw_laws/truck_sw_laws.pdf

an additional sixth axle for improved breaking and maneuvering—specifically designed to carry a greater load.

Modernizing truck weight limits is therefore not a change of practice, but rather a change in written policy. Following the lead of these states by modernizing America’s truck weight limit will help shift freight off local roads and onto the Interstate Highway system. The logical solution: a national pilot program that will give states the option to raise GVW limits on Interstate Highways for trucks with six axles weighing up to 91,000 pounds.

Trucks with a sixth axle carrying 91,000 pounds are safer and more efficient than the standard 5-axle 80,000 pound trucks that most states permit onto their Interstate roads.²

Data from states that have experimented with recent weight modernization find the six-axle, 91,000 lbs. configuration to:

- Consume less fuel³ and emit less greenhouse gas;⁴
- Minimize congestion on state and local roads;⁵
- Perform better in terms of braking distance and maneuvering;⁶
- Reduce wear on pavement and infrastructure costs;⁷
- And improve efficiency and create savings for American manufacturers that can be reinvested into local communities and facilities.

A national pilot program that will give states the option to modernize their maximum truck weight limits will result in safer, more environmentally friendly trucks causing less congestion in our communities and more effectively contributing to the national economy.

² US DOT Comprehensive Truck Size & Weight Limits Study Technical Reports, Vol. 2 “Highway Safety and Truck Crash Comparative Analysis Technical Report”, June 2015, p. 65

³ American Transportation Research Institute: Energy & Emissions Impacts of Operating Higher Productivity Vehicles http://www.atrionline.org/research/results/environmentalfactors/2008_atri_hpv_1_pager.pdf

⁴ US DOT Comprehensive Truck Size & Weight Limits Study Technical Reports, Vol. I “Technical Summary Report”, June 2015, p. ES 11

⁵ Informa Economics “Heavier Semis: A Good Idea” An Update of the 2009 Study Prepared for: U.S. Soybean Export Council and Soy Transportation Coalition, January 2015 p.13 Available at: <http://www.soytransportation.org/newsroom/SemiWeightLimitStudyFullReport2015.pdf>

⁶ US DOT Comprehensive Truck Size & Weight Limits Study Technical Reports, Vol. 2 “Highway Safety and Truck Crash Comparative Analysis Technical Report”, June 2015, p. 65

⁷ Minnesota Department of Transportation “Minnesota Truck Size and Weight Project” June 2006, p.ES-3