

# MEMO

- For Your Information**
- Action Required**

**TO:** Travis County Commissioners Court

**FROM:** Steven Manilla, County Executive, TNR  
Deece Eckstein, Coordinator, IGR

**DATE:** Tuesday, February 26, 2013

**RE:** ITEM #28 – Federal Legislation on Truck Weight Limits

## SUMMARY AND IGR RECOMMENDATION

The Coalition Against Bigger Trucks ([CABT](#)) has asked the Commissioners Court to join them in expressing opposition to federal legislation that would raise the truck weight limit on federal highways above the current 80,000 pounds. Such an increase would significantly enhance the wear and tear caused by big trucks to both the federal and to the state and local road networks.

TNR and IGR recommend that the Court express its opposition to such legislation and that members of the Court send the attached letters to Travis County members of the congressional delegation, and adopt the attached resolution.

## BACKGROUND

The current weight limit for trucks on the US highway system is 80,000 pounds (40 tons). According to a government study, one 40-ton truck does as much damage to the road as 9,600 cars. Overweight vehicles pose even greater problems: a study by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) showed that raising the legal limit from 80,000 lbs. to 97,000 lbs. on a 6-axle truck results in 50% more road

damage. Additionally, increasing the legal limit to from 80,000 lbs. to 100,000 lbs. on a 6-axle truck increases the road damage rate by 80%.

Such damage is not limited to the federal highways, of course. These large trucks also travel on state and local road network system, where they impact local safety and road maintenance expenses. The attached memo from Don Ward at TNR describes some of the problems caused by overweight trucks.

On [November 29, 2011](#) the Commissioners Court took a position against similar proposals to change truck weight limits. At that time, the Commissioners Court sent letters to US Senators Kay Bailey Hutchison and John Cornyn expressing:

- a) opposition to [S. 1450](#), by Senator Olympia Snowe (R-Maine) that would permit states to do “demonstration projects” allowing trucks to carry loads up to 100,000 pounds in some circumstances, and
- b) support for [S. 876](#) by Senator Frank Lautenberg (D-New Jersey) that would require states to enforce the current federal limits on truck length and width.

Once again this Congress, legislation has been filed to increase the current limit. [HR 612](#) was filed by Congressman Michael H. Michaud (D-Maine) seeking to increase weight limits from 80,000 to 97,000 pounds. CABT seeks the County’s help in encouraging our congressional delegation to withhold support for the new bill.

In 2012, as [part](#) of the MAP-21 omnibus transportation legislation, the Congress directed the Department of Transportation (USDOT) to undertake a two-year study examining the impacts of truck weights on highway safety, bridge and pavement damage and modal diversion. CABT argues that no congressional action on truck weight limits should be taken until the study is released in 2014.

## **Attachments**

1. Draft letters for Travis County members of the Texas congressional delegation, for approval and signature by the Commissioners Court, February 26, 2013.
2. Resolution opposing increases in truck weights or lengths operating on federal, state and, county and local roads, February 26, 2013.
3. Memo from Don Ward re impact of truck weight limits on Travis County road construction, safety and maintenance issues, November 16, 2011.
4. Coalition Against Bigger Trucks, "Bigger Trucks Are Not Greener Trucks."

Cc: Don Ward



## CABT

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Alexandria, VA 22314  
888-CABT-123  
703-535-3322 (f)  
www.cabt.org

# Bigger Trucks Are Not Greener Trucks

Groups pushing for heavier and longer trucks claim that bigger trucks will help in the fight against global warming. In fact, the American Trucking Associations recommends increasing truck size and weight restrictions as part of its “bold sustainability program.”

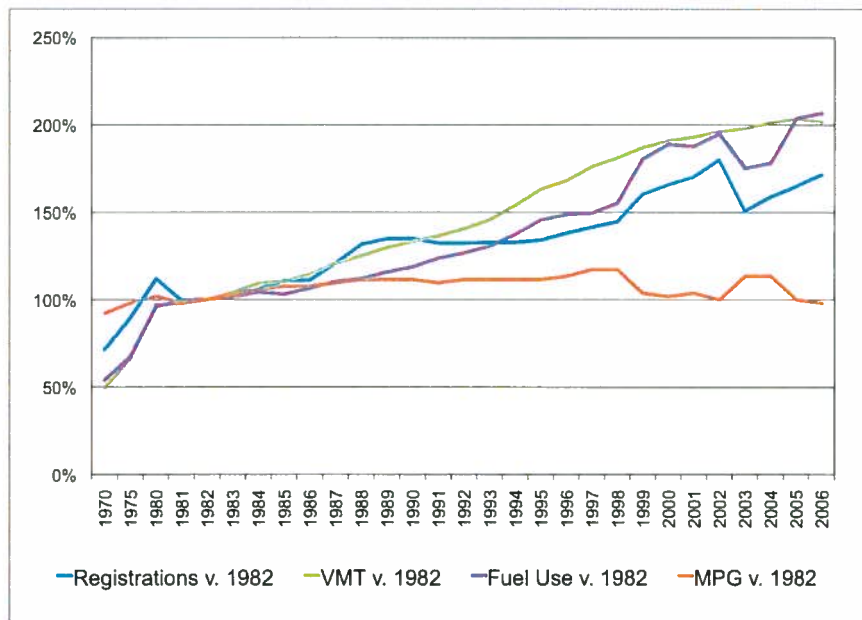
We commend efforts to reduce the carbon footprint of freight transportation, but greenwashing bigger trucks is not a solution. Allowing bigger trucks diverts freight from other, more efficient modes of transportation thereby increasing energy consumption, creating more pollution, and exacerbating existing highway congestion.

## Bigger Trucks Do Not Mean Fewer Trucks

A centerpiece of the trucking industry's new campaign is the assertion that bigger trucks will mean fewer trucks. Research and experience shows that this is false. Truck travel grows after an increase in truck size and weight because the bigger rigs divert freight from other modes.

Since Congress last increased the gross vehicle weight limit in 1982, truck registrations have increased 72%, vehicle miles traveled and gallons of fuel burned by trucks have more than doubled, and average mileage traveled by a truck per gallon of fuel is the same.

Increases in truck size and weight are likely to accelerate growth in truck transportation, not decrease it. As such, allowing bigger trucks would represent a fundamental strategic decision that would shape the future of freight transportation in the United States for years to come.



## Bigger Trucks Mean More Fuel Consumption

As the number of trucks on the road and the miles they drive have increased, so, too, has the amount of fuel consumed by big trucks because heavy truck fuel economy has remained relatively flat. In fact, the transportation sector accounted for over two-thirds of all U.S. petroleum consumption in 2006 and big trucks consume 18.7 percent of U.S. transportation energy.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Transportation Energy Data Book: Edition 27, U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), 2008, Table 1.13, p. 1-17, and Table 2.7, p. 2-9.

Other modes of freight transport are far more efficient. For example, railroads can move cargo nearly four times as far as trucks on a single gallon of fuel. From an energy intensity perspective, rail consumed 11.6 times less energy per ton-mile and waterborne commerce consumed 8.5 times less energy per ton-mile than heavy truck transport in 2002.<sup>2</sup>

Allowing bigger trucks will increase fuel consumption because larger truck configurations are less fuel-efficient and because bigger trucks will divert freight from more efficient modes.

### **Bigger Trucks Mean More Emissions**

Transportation sector emissions from gasoline and diesel fuel combustion generally parallel total vehicle miles traveled.<sup>3</sup> In 2007, transportation accounted for 28 percent of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions and 21 percent of transportation greenhouse gas emissions were from freight trucks.<sup>4</sup> Since 1990, the rate of growth of greenhouse gas emissions from freight sources has been more than twice as fast as emissions from passenger sources, “due largely to the rapid increase in emissions associated with medium- and heavy-duty trucks.”<sup>5</sup> Additionally, heavy trucks account for one third of U.S. mobile source NOx emissions and nearly a quarter of mobile source PM-10 emissions.<sup>6</sup>

Other modes of freight transport emit significantly fewer pollutants, including greenhouse gases, than do trucks. For example, rail emits only one-third the pollutants as trucks per ton-mile.

To reduce the effect of freight movements by truck on air quality, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) recommends reductions in tare weight, aerodynamic improvements, and reduced idling overnight and at pick-up and drop-off locations.<sup>7</sup> (As of 2002, only 6 percent of heavy trucks were equipped with idle-reducing technology.<sup>8</sup>) Allowing bigger trucks would conflict with each of these strategies because bigger payloads require bigger and heavier truck tractors to pull them, longer combination vehicles reduce the aerodynamics of the truck-tractor combination, and increased highway congestion attributed to bigger trucks will increase idling.

### **Bigger Trucks Increase Congestion**

In congested conditions, all vehicles idle and emit pollution into the air. As congestion worsens, so does the amount of idle time.

Big trucks are already major contributors to highway gridlock because they are larger and, more importantly, accelerate more slowly than passenger cars. Thus, trucks have a greater effect on traffic flow than passenger cars. “On level terrain and in uncongested conditions, conventional trucks may be equivalent to about two passenger cars, but on hilly or mountainous terrain and in congested traffic, their effect on traffic flow is much greater and may be equivalent to 15 or more passenger cars.”<sup>9</sup> Bigger trucks would take up even more room on the highway because of their larger size and because of the increase in payload, they would have even greater difficulty accelerating, decelerating, and maintaining speed on upgrades.

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<sup>2</sup> Independent calculations based on data from DOE; Tables 2.16, 5.1, 5.2, and 5.12.

<sup>3</sup> Emissions of Greenhouse Gases in the United States 2007, Energy Information Administration, December 2008, p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> Inventory of Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Sinks: 1990-2007, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), April 2009, p. 2-20.

<sup>5</sup> EPA, p. A-122.

<sup>6</sup> Assessing the Effects of Freight Movement on Air Quality at the National and Regional Level, U.S. Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Office of Natural and Human Environment, April 2005, Table ES-1.

<sup>7</sup> FHWA, Tables ES-5 and ES-6.

<sup>8</sup> DOE, Figure 5.2, p. 5-12.

<sup>9</sup> Western Uniformity Scenario Analysis, U.S. Department of Transportation, April 2004, p. VIII-3.

## RESOLUTION

### **Opposing increases in Truck Weights or Lengths operating on Federal, State and County and Local roads.**

Whereas, \_\_\_\_\_ is concerned for the health, welfare and safety of the State's residents and the conditions of its infrastructure: and

Whereas large trucks already have a fatal crash involvement rate 40 percent higher than passenger cars; and

Whereas heavier and longer trucks are likely to be less safe than those on the road today and make roads more dangerous; and

Whereas more than half the bridges on the National Highway System are more than 40 years old and more than 20 percent are rated as structurally deficient or functionally obsolete; and

Whereas the federal government already subsidizes heavy truck operations nearly \$2 billion each year because their fees do not cover the damage to roads and bridges; and

Whereas heavier and longer trucks would accelerate the deterioration of roads and bridges and put even greater pressure on taxpayers to fund infrastructure; and

Whereas law enforcement officers, safety advocates, state and county governments, truck drivers, and concerned citizens across the country oppose increases in truck size or weight; and

Whereas Congress was so concerned about the safety and infrastructure issues presented by heavier and longer trucks that it instructed the US Department of Transportation to undertake a two-year comprehensive study of truck size and weight; and

Whereas a handful of large trucking and shipping companies continue to press Congress to approve heavier and longer trucks

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY \_\_\_\_\_ THAT \_\_\_\_\_ opposes any legislation at any level of government that seeks to increase truck size or weight and authorizes \_\_\_\_\_ to provide a copy of this resolution to our congressional delegation.

February 25, 2013

Congressman Lamar Smith  
2409 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Smith:

The Travis County Commissioner's Court wishes to express its concern with legislation proposing longer and heavier trucks. As you know the House and Senate reached a bipartisan consensus appointing USDOT to undertake a two-year study to examine the impacts of truck weights on highway safety, bridge and pavement damage and modal diversion.

We are requesting that you do not co-sponsor legislation such as HR 612, which seeks to increase weight limits from 80,000 to 97,000 pounds, until the findings of this study are released in summer of 2014.

Environmental impacts are a concern of ours. As you know I-35 is congested regularly. To reduce the effect of freight movements by truck on air quality, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) recommends reductions in tare weight, aerodynamic improvements, and reduced idling overnight and at pick-up and drop-off locations. I can't say that heavier trucks would have a positive impact on our environment or our infrastructure.

Please consider the folks in your district affected and imagine the impacts of heavier trucks nationwide.

Sincerely,

Hon. Samuel T. Biscoe  
County Judge

February 25, 2013

Senator John Cornyn  
517 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Cornyn:

The Travis County Commissioner's Court wishes to express its concern with legislation proposing longer and heavier trucks. As you know the House and Senate reached a bipartisan consensus appointing USDOT to undertake a two-year study to examine the impacts of truck weights on highway safety, bridge and pavement damage and modal diversion.

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February 25, 2013

Senator Ted Cruz  
B40B Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Cruz:

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